



Dao Cao Dai: A Socio-historical Analysis of a Syncretic Vietnamese Religion  
and Its Relationship to Other Religions

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Dissertation submitted to the University of Dhaka for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Archbishop Duc Tran Quang Vinh, Chief of the Caodai Army, whose life-long unending contribution and the highest price he paid for the religion and his community influences millions of people in all ages of the Caodai world in particular.

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation Cao Dai religion is presented as one of the best examples of the outcome of Western and Asian acculturation occurred in the South of Vietnam down through the centuries. Thus, the current research makes it plain that Caodaism to a certain extent tends to be viewed as an outstanding example of a harmonious synthesis of both cultural as well as religious blends in the history of world religions. First to be considered is the fact that this research focuses Vietnamese socio-historical context with a view to gaining more comprehensive understanding of its significant role the way it played in the process of fostering the emergence of Caodaism in the South of Vietnam beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At this point, this research work tends to explore Vietnamese social milieu in order to identify diverse deeply embedded cultural roots that actually served as a strong base for syncretic origin of Caodaism. As scholars view, with very few exceptions, the Vietnamese have a long established unique tradition of religious tolerance and thereby the religious amalgam is found to be very common among them. This century old tradition of religious tolerance and harmony in fact helped Vietnam to be a meeting place of religions and cultures. Therefore, more than a thousand-year old process of absorbing foreign elements and thereby its social integration has created a profound sense of Vietnamese identity. We have thus far discussed and evaluated about how Cao Dai religion emerged and it continued assimilating all borrowed elements into its own in the matrix of such a distinct Vietnamese socio-historical identity. At the same time, a further attempt is made to consider how the Cao Dai followers have kept undergoing a complex and syncretic religious life; and why the adherents never bother whether their religion is in greater peril of syncretism.

In analyzing some reasons for this, present thesis explores the situations of continuous contact of Cao Dai religion with previously established traditions in Vietnam and addresses

the approach how Caodaism blends and systematically internalizes borrowed elements in association with the elements of Western and other Eastern thoughts for its subsequent development. Consequently, Caodaism appears to be a new panorama and finds expression in a distinctive social system. This is, in a broad sense of the phenomenon, the unique syncretistic approach of the religion which has very smoothly incorporated, amalgamated and even adopted diverse elements locally in a sort of holistic mode.

The study claims that these hybrid characteristics of the religion allow Caodaists to overcome a sense of cultural inferiority by establishing cultural equality with the West and the East. However, as the Western and Eastern traditions had been dominant streams to Caodaism, it was natural to have their impact upon the new religion. Thus, the present research also deals with a good effort in exploring philosophical understanding of Caodaism, its faiths and morals in order to assess Caodaism's relation with the religions of Semitic and Indian origins.

The conclusion drawn in relation to the study presented in this dissertation is that it may be pointed out that the central theme of Cao Dai syncretism is actually the way in which Caodaism approaches all borrowed elements from a refreshed and new viewpoint. Therefore, we can deduce from established arguments that the themes dealt with in the syncretic doctrine of Caodaism are the new versions of the themes of the older ones which have been transparently assimilated into Caodaism. It is to this comprehensive understanding that researcher hopes to contribute.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I have been blessed to meet a lot of wonderful people who I have learned a lot about Cao daism from. Most importantly, I am grateful to Rev. Tran Quang Canh, the Honorable President of the Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, California, for graciously sharing his views on different areas of my study and answering my questions. He has always been supportive of my career goal and who worked actively to provide me with every useful support to pursue that goal. This work would not have been possible without his assistance and the financial support of the Cao Dai Overseas Missionary. My special thanks also go to the highest body of Cao Dai Tay Ninh branch for the approval and making my visit to Vietnam possible. That was how the Language and Cultural Study at Vietnam National University provided me a unique setting for the study of Cao Dai religion in the matrix of Vietnamese culture. Special thanks are due to Cardinal Thuong Tam Thanh, Chairman of the Sacerdotal Council, Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See, for inspiration and for occasions when he offered a listening ear and gave me sound advice.

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Many of the persons I met for this study openly received me in their homes and freely shared their personal experiences and impressions during my field trip to Mekong Delta in the South of Vietnam and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I have received assistance and cooperation from many people throughout the Cao Dai world and in the academic world in my research for this dissertation. It is impossible to list them all here but I hope that they know how grateful I am for their help. They all were truly generous with their time and knowledge.

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Before I close I remember my beloved father Md. Matiur Rahman, a Freedom Fighter of the Bangladesh Liberation War, who always spoke to me on "Honesty is the best policy" and taught me from my childhood to do all good deeds in my life.

## SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

We confirm that, to the best of our knowledge, the research work entitled “Dao Cao Dai: A Socio-historical Analysis of a Syncretic Vietnamese Religion and Its Relationship to Other Religions” has been carried out and the dissertation is prepared under our direct supervision and the dissertation represents the original research work of the candidate.

All such materials that have been obtained from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Mohammad Jahangir Alam declare that this dissertation titled “Dao Cao Dai: A Socio-historical Analysis of a Syncretic Vietnamese Religion and Its Relationship to Other Religions” is my own work carried out under the joint supervision of Professor Kazi Nurul Islam and Dr. Fazrin Huda, Department of World Religions and Culture of the University of Dhaka and has been generated by me while in candidature for a research degree at this University. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

I confirm that either none of this work has been published before submission or parts of this work have been published.

June 25, 2019

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

This thesis proposes an acculturation process based on Vietnamese socio-historical context in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its significant role the way it influenced Caodaism to have evolved as a syncretic religion. This is how Caodaism emerges on the basis of an interaction between the Western *spiritualism* and Eastern *spiritism*;<sup>1</sup> while it proceeds from the blending of the *Great Traditions* of the East and the West.<sup>2</sup> This research work, in fact, explores Vietnamese social milieu in order to identify diverse deeply embedded cultural roots that actually served as a strong base of Caodaism. At this point, the researcher's aim, therefore, is to focus the acculturation process through which Caodaism has emerged and thereby developed as an outstanding example of a harmonious synthesis of both cultural as well as religious blends in the history of world religions.

### 1.2. Research Questions

In order to address the current problem (i.e., issue or dilemma) from socio-historical perspective, the researcher has made an attempt to explore the background of major and minor cultural

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<sup>1</sup> If the concept of *spiritism* is assessed in the light of the historical development of religion it is assumed to be derived from animism as a developed form. For a more detailed discussion of *spiritism*, see D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1965), pp.96-97.

Though Caodaism is characterized to be a true form of Vietnamese Spiritism it actually proceeds from an interaction of Western Spiritualism and Eastern Spiritism. As Gobron views, message came either from the Supreme Being or from both Western and Eastern Superior Spirits. See Gabriel Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism: Reformed Buddhism, Vietnamese Spiritism, New Religion in Eurasia*, (Xuan Thai, Tu-Hai: Saigon, 1950), pp.14-15,167.

<sup>2</sup> Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism,(called *tam giao*-three great teachings), Christianity (Hinduism, Judaism and Islam are also included in this group.)

elements that are responsible to have functioned behind the emergence of Caodaism as a syncretic religion. At this point, the researcher tends to ask two guiding central questions and several associate sub questions in his study. In his *Research Design* Creswell recommends a researcher to ask one or two central questions followed by no more than five to seven subquestions.<sup>3</sup> As Nicholas William views, a research problem can be based on a central question and some associated subquestions. The simplest way, he argues, is to set up a research problem by asking a question.<sup>4</sup> As the question, according to him, might be quite abstract in nature,<sup>5</sup> it will require to be broken down into several sub-questions. Thus, this research problem can be expressed on the basis of two central questions and four associated sub questions.

#### Central Questions

1. How did the Vietnamese socio-historical and religio-cultural settings promote syncretism in Cao Dai religion?
2. To what extend assimilation process acted in a Vietnamese social milieu where Caodaism rose and developed?

#### Associated Sub-questions

1. What moves and motivates this religion and its adherents?
2. What intellectual and spiritual genius work here?
3. What does Caodaism illustrate about the role and process of syncretism?

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<sup>3</sup> See John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (London, Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003), p.106.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas William, *Research Methods: The Basics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.32, and Creswell, *op.cit.* p.103

4. How Caodaism has expanded into a harmonious synthesis of diverse religions without losing the best of its spiritist origins?

### **1.3. Context of the Study**

From socio-historical perspective, religion is found to be an important element within nearly all cultures that has become the hallmark of a full cultural system in course of a long period of time. Therefore, the religious life of a society still remains central within its culture and values almost all over the world. Religious culture, for example, as an integrated complex, includes a voluminous features ranging from ideas, ideologies and organizations to dress and diet.<sup>6</sup> Thus, an entire range of values, norms, and attitudes, according to McGuire, derives from religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Each religion follows more or less the same outline in view of allowing a high level of consistency in contents and approaches. In addition, each religion is oriented toward viewing its socio-historical background, ideologies, and practices. By means of that all contribute toward constructing deep structures that govern people's world view and life-style as a whole. The same is equally true for Vietnamese religion and culture indeed. The Vietnamese have a long established unique tradition of religious tolerance<sup>8</sup> and thereby the religious amalgam is found to be very common among them. Presumably, this century old tradition of religious tolerance and harmony helped Vietnam to be a meeting place of religions and cultures.<sup>9</sup> In order to enrich their culture they had, in fact, borrowed Chinese beliefs, culture, institutions, ethics and even

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<sup>6</sup> Pritibhushan Chatterji, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, (Calcutta: Niharika-Niketan, 1971), p.46.

<sup>7</sup> McGuire, Meredith B., *Religion, The Social Context*, (ITP: Boston, London, Melbourne, 1997), p.16.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief account of the issue, see *The Religions of Vietnam*, MACV Office of Information APO 96222, Command Information Pamphlet 11-67, April 1968 (available at: <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/r/religions-of-vietnam.html#intro>. Retrieved February 13, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> For a good discussion, see the address given by Professor Eric J. Sharpe to the 5th Caodaist Convention in Australia, held at Women's College, University of Sydney, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1989. at <http://www.daotam.info/sharpe.htm>. Retrieved June 10, 2017.

calligraphy but resisted China's efforts to control their country. As the Vietnamese are not passionately spiritual like the Chinese, they venerate scholars<sup>10</sup> rather than priests, seeking harmony in the present rather than salvation in hereafter. Thus, they put a premium on ethics rather than on faith, and they blend elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, their three pillars of wisdom, with animism, superstitions, various forms of magic, idolatry and, above all, ancestor worship. But China failed to assimilate the Vietnamese, who retained their ethnic singularity despite their receptivity to Chinese innovations.<sup>11</sup> The reality was that they would rather repeatedly challenge Chinese domination with random battles down through the centuries (208 B.C.to 1426 A.D.)<sup>12</sup> until they were thoroughly beaten and were no more deceiving themselves with the idea that they could win if they would try it some other time. In that situation, they always attempted tactful position so as to broaden their movements and stress Vietnam's customs, practices and interests that differed from those of China. Similarly, they had absorbed the influence of the French for about a hundred year but rejected their domination too.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, more than a thousand-year old process of absorbing foreign elements and thereby its social integration has created a profound sense of Vietnamese identity. In the matrix of such a distinct Vietnamese socio-historical identity Cao Dai religion emerged in the early twentieth century. It is argued that Cao Dai religion has been historically structured by the doctrines of *Three Great Teachings*<sup>14</sup> from China as well as a strong tradition of the Vietnamese spiritism. In fact, it continued assimilating all borrowed elements into its own since the late third decade of the last century. Its organizational structures, modes and objects of worship and prayer, rituals

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley, Karnow, *Vietnam A History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 294.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp.109-116.

<sup>13</sup> With a dramatic victory over the battle of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam obtained her Independence from the French with a high cost in 1954. For a fuller discussion about an end to the French domain in Vietnam see Martin Windrow, *The French Indochina War 1946-1954*, (Osprey Publishing: Great Britain, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Tam Giao (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism)

and ceremonial objects<sup>15</sup> correspond to the elements of three great teachings, Vietnamese folk tradition and Catholicism. Now before we proceed with any further discussion it is necessary to be acquainted with Caodaism, a syncretic Vietnamese indigenous religion.<sup>16</sup> The term “Cao Dai”<sup>17</sup> literally means a "Roofless High Tower or Palace" where Cao Dai God is believed to reign over the Universe. Here, the “Roofless High Tower” signifies the ultra-absolute highness of God’s position. The same term “Cao Dai” actually serves as the name of Cao Dai God and it is believed to be one of numerous names of the One-God in Caodaism. As regard to God’s symbolic position, God is higher than any summit, broader than any space and more enduring than all time.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in a logical manner, the followers of Duc Cao Dai are called the Caodaists. The official name of this religion is “*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*”<sup>19</sup> meaning: The Great Way of

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<sup>15</sup> Objects of worship before God’s Altar, the adherents use lamp (symbolizing the Universe Monad is originally borrowed from Taoist and Confucian system of thought), fruits and flowers (representing the Chinese supposition of Yin and Yang), a cup of tea (representing the Yin again), three glasses of wine, a cup of pure water (symbolizing the Yang), two candles (concept, symbolizing solar and lunar lights i.e., the male and female energies derived from thousand years old Chinese concept via Taoism and Confucianism) and a vase for five sticks of incense (symbolizing Buddhist *shila*-purity, *dhyana*-meditation, *prajna*-wisdom, *djnana*-superior knowledge and *apavagar*-karmic liberation). For a good discussion of *Yang* and *Yin* see Karl Ludvig Reichel, *Religion in Chinese Garments*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1951), pp.14-29; and for objects of worship see *The Outline of Caodaism: The New Religion in the Orient*, (California: The Holy Mother Temple of San Jose, 2002), pp.51-55. Cao Dai belief in an occult world resembles the oldest Vietnam’s religious systems, encompassing beliefs in a supernatural world that is full of deities and spirits. See Tai HH. *The Asia Society, Vietnam: essays on history, culture, and society*. New York: 1985. Religion in Vietnam: a world of ghosts and spirits. From the Catholicism Christ is included in Cao Dai pantheon alongside Buddhas, Geniis, and other Superior spirits. From this source Caodaism adopted the church structure. For details see Werner, Jayne Susan, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Viet Nam*, (Yale University Southeast Asia Studies: New Haven, Conn, 1981), pp.53-54.

<sup>16</sup>Jeremy Jammes, “Caodaism and Its Global Networks: An Ethnological Analysis of a Vietnamese Religious Movement in Vietnam and Abroad”, *Moussons* 13-14, 2009, 339-358. (available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271285163\\_Caodaism\\_and\\_its\\_global\\_networks](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271285163_Caodaism_and_its_global_networks). Retrieved June 12, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> See Cao Dai Tu Dien (Cao Dai Dictionary), at <http://www.daotam.info/books/CaoDaiTuDien/>. Retrieved August 12, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of God and His highness, see *The Outline of Caodaism*, 2002, pp.82-83.

<sup>19</sup>Gabriel Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism: Reformed Buddhism, Vietnamese Spiritism, New Religion in Eurasia*, (Xuan Thai, Tu-Hai: Saigon, 1950), pp.42, 43. For good discussion also see <https://sites.google.com/site/caodaismmeditation/english-version;> <https://sites.google.com/site/caodaismmeditation/Home/encyclopedia-of-caodaism>. Retrieved October 21, 2017. In the Cao Dai Dictionary “*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*” is translated as Third Amnesty of God in the

*Third Universal Salvation* or *Third Revelation of the Great Way* or *Third Amnesty* (period in which pardon granted by God) of God in the East. The fundamental objectives of the Third Amnesty suggest the unity of all religions.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it designates a period of intense religious activity where the unity of God and Humanity is awaited and thereby a great way of salvation for human beings is ensured. It should be mentioned that two other amnesties existed before the third one. The previous amnesties saw the rise and development of all major and minor religious traditions both in the East and the West. In consideration of the wide field of human failures over the last two revelatory periods, Cao Dai theology reaffirms the establishment of the Third Revelation of the Great Way in the East.<sup>21</sup> In this context, the advent of Cao Dai religion, as the model of the Third Amnesty, is believed to be a fortunate circumstance for the salvation of humanity and the unity of all religions belonging to two previous periods.<sup>22</sup>

Now a question may arise: How did this new ideology start in Vietnam? The answer must quest for a Vietnamese socio-religious and historical perspective for giving a proper exposition of it. The rise of nineteenth century Spiritualism<sup>23</sup> re-awoke the religious life of Europe and the spirit

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East, *Third Revelation of the Great Way*, and *The Great Way of Third Universal Salvation* (available at: <http://www.daotam.info/books/CaoDaiTuDien/>. Retrieved October 21, 2017.

<sup>20</sup>Trung Van Trang, ed., *The Teachings of the Great Way*, (Tay Ninh: The Sacerdotal Council of the Holy See, 1959), pp. 31-33.

<sup>21</sup>In the Third Period, through a divine message revealed in April, 1926, God makes it clear that He will no longer hand out the true teachings to the earthly powers with a view to fulfilling His divine mission. For a good discussion see *The Collection of Divine Messages / Thanh Ngon Hiep Tuyen*, (the message revealed in April 24, 1926 and compiled in 1968) *Volume 1*, p.18.

<sup>22</sup>Since the creation of Mankind, the great way of God has been shown in the three different epochs: First Epoch includes Buddhism (Pre Sakya Muni), Taoism (Pre Lao Tze), Christianity (the Abrahamic tradition up to Moses), Geniism (covers all indigenous religions of the West and East), Religion of Humanity; Second Epoch includes Buddhism (Sakya Muni), Taoism (Lao Tze) Christianity, Islam, Giniism (continues) and Religion of Humanity (Confucianism); while the Third Epoch indicates Caodaism. *The Outline of Caodaism; The New Religion in the Orient*, California: the Holy Mother Temple, San Jose, 2002) p. 17.

<sup>23</sup>For a good discussion see David K. Nartonis, "The Rise of 19th-Century American Spiritualism 1854–1873", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2010, 49 (2):361–373. at [http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/nartonis\\_size\\_of\\_spiritualist\\_community.pdf](http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/nartonis_size_of_spiritualist_community.pdf). Retrieved November 05, 2017.

of European Spiritualism was carried to Vietnam during the rule of French Cochinchina. Consequently, in colonial Vietnam, the age-old tradition of Asian divination<sup>24</sup> and Taoist mediumship<sup>25</sup> came under the influence of European Spiritualism. Later on, the meeting of Eastern and Western traditions caused an evolutionary leap in the spiritual quest of humanity and on its final stage resulted in a new form of Vietnamese Spiritism (Cao Dai Spiritism) in southern part of Vietnam. Thus, in the Third Amnesty, in accordance with Cao Dai theology, a strong communication link was established between Heaven and Earth i.e. between God and human beings where God speaks to humanity directly.<sup>26</sup> It was through this spiritual link, as the Cao daists believe that God granted His Third Amnesty directly to Ngo Van Chieu (first disciple of God) in the year 1919, who worked for the service of criminal investigation department of the Cochinchina Government. After a six year intensive worship of Duc Cao Dai, he is said to have been assigned this new divine mission and became the first disciple of God. Indeed, through him, as all Cao daists believe, God announced His new religion as the Third Universal Amnesty to the Vietnamese in particular and thereby to all the peoples of the world in general. As it is also called the Third Revelation of the Great Way, it comes into existence from contemporary revelation in the early twentieth century and that revelation is believed to have attained through

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<sup>24</sup> Practices of astrology and augury (a sign of what might happen in the future) imported from Indian Chinese traditions, for a good discussion see Charles Burnett, "East (and South) Asian Traditions in Astrology and Divination as Viewed from the West", *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*, Presses universitaires de Vincennes 35 – 2013, pp.285-293 (Available at: <file:///C:/Users/Tanni/Desktop/extremeorient-293.pdf>. Retrieved November 05, 2017.

Suzuki Kentaro, "Divination in Contemporary Japan: A General Overview and an Analysis of Survey Results", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1995, 22/3–4, pp.249-266 (Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/276406/Divination-In-Contemporary-Japan>. Retrieved November 05, 2017.

<sup>25</sup>In spiritualism, mediumship involves cooperative communication between a human medium and spirit personalities, often during a spiritual session (séance) with a view to receiving spiritualistic message. Taoist Spirit Medium or Ji-Tongor Tang-Kiis a person that has been chosen by a particular Taoist God, as the earthly vehicle for divine expression (available at: <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mediumship>, <http://taoistsorcery.blogspot.com/2012/07/taoist-spirit-medium.html>. Retrieved November 08, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the content, see TNHT 1968 p. 23.

series of séances (spiritualistic sessions) via mediums. Historically speaking, this new religion is deeply rooted both in Vietnamese and Chinese culture. And thereby, it may not be in any absolute sense a new ideology, for on the one hand its basic tenet-monotheism<sup>27</sup> corresponds to Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahai conviction and on the other hand, the spiritist sources and its doctrinal characters are in agreement with Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism etc. Therefore, monotheistic, polytheistic tendencies and the primitive notions of divinity work together within the belief system of Caodaism.<sup>28</sup>This is how Cao Dai religion has become an outstanding example of a working syncretism. Since this religion is born of spiritism and afterward expanded into a harmonious synthesis of all religions,<sup>29</sup> it assimilated all borrowed elements very quickly without losing the best of its spiritist origins. In this process the newly originated tradition such as Dao Cao Dai did not uproot the indigenous traditions but was invariably assimilated into a kind of homogeneous tradition which itself is called a synthesis of great teachings. Therefore, Dao Cao Dai, in the same way, makes its presence more crucial to the present academic world. Perhaps, its potential influence arising from greater understanding and appreciation of rich religious and cultural traditions of Vietnam is yet deeper and even more long-range that makes new academics more curious and interested in studying Caodaism from different contexts alongside socio-historical perspective.

#### **1.4. Literature Review**

Since the present study explores the role played by the process of acculturation in the emergence of Caodaism as a syncretic religion, the researcher has already reviewed a good numbers of

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<sup>27</sup> *Monotheism* is a belief in one God who is believed to possess all traits of perfection. See Abdul Matin, *An Outline of Philosophy*, (Dhaka: Adhuna Prakashan, 2006), pp.288-89.

<sup>28</sup> The Cao Dai adherents believe in the Mother Goddess and various types of spirits alongside One Supreme Being.

<sup>29</sup> See Gobron 1950, *op. cit.*, p.15.

Vietnamese, South Asian, and Western sources to gain an insight into the key concepts of the current study. For developing a thoughtful understanding on the topic, the researcher tends to consider a number of historical and contemporary documents. By analyzing some of those scholarly literatures, the researcher has found that it has received different levels of attention at different stages of development by scholars and researchers.<sup>30</sup> These scholarly works have attempted to advance researcher's knowledge of Caodaism and thereby clear idea of religio-cultural syncretism from the different points of view. The research indicated a wide range of data (mostly in Vietnamese version) on Cao Dai religion. In fact, the inquiry was basically made on the basis of some Western and Vietnamese scholars with expertise on Vietnam. It is important to mention here that almost all of the scholars focused Caodaism's role in the recent history of Vietnam as a socio-political, politico-religious movement or a political problem for its previous involvement with social, administrative, political and economic activities.<sup>31</sup> Their preliminary findings show a lack of data on Caodaism and in that connection suggests further research in this particular field. Presumably, except Gabriel Gobron, attention of Western scholars to Caodaism had been called following the Second World War. In the West such scholars as Bernard Fall and

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<sup>30</sup> In the earlier stages of Western scholars' engagement with Cao Dai research starts with Gabriel Gobron, and in particular, his decades-long (1930-1948) outstanding works on Caodaism and service to this religion played a pioneering role in creating great interest among the Western as well as Vietnamese scholars. Consequently it has come to be an increasingly important issue of interest to Bernard Fall (1955, *Vietnam Witness, 1953-1956*, 1966), Nguyen Trung Hau (*A Short History of Caodaism*, 1956), Gerald C. Hickey (1964), Phan Van Tam (*Lich su co but Dao Cao Dai/ The History of Caodaist Spiritism*, 1967), Buttinger (1968), Nguyen Long Thanh (*Duc Ho Phap va duong loi chinh tri/ Ho Phap and the Political Line*, 1973, and *Nhin lai 50 nam lich su Dao Cao Dai/ Reviewing 50 Years of Cao Dai History*, 1974), Victor Oliver (1972, 1976), Jayne Susan Werner (1976, 1981) and so on. Their huge collection of impressionist works on Caodaism still captures the attention of new academics.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Lloyd Oliver, *Caodaism: A Vietnamese Example of Sectarian Development*, Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1972, p.1., Jayne Susan Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Viet Nam*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies: New Haven, Conn, 1981, p.28., Jessica Miranda Chapman, *Debating the Will of Heaven: South Vietnamese Politics and Nationalism in International Perspective, 1953-1956*, Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2006, p.35.

Gerald C. Hickey's work on Caodaism (Fall: 1955 and Hickey: 1964), in fact, opened the gateway to further research on diverse aspects of Caodaism. Thus, Cao Dai study may be said to have begun with Gobron. The volume of major importance on Caodaism in Western language is Gabriel Gobron's *History and Philosophy of Caodaism: Reformed Buddhism, Vietnamese Spiritism, New Religion in Eurasia* (1950). After a period of research and study beginning in 1930, Gobron discovered Caodaism. In addition, his lectures, articles and observations on this new tradition succeeded one another and in fact constitute an authentic message from the beyond. As a noted Vietnamologist, Fall's work on Caodaism rigorously analyzes its dominant role over all other groups including the Viet Minh.<sup>32</sup> In Victor Oliver's *Caodaism: A Vietnamese Example of Sectarian Development*, (1972), he bases his treatment on a survey of the sectarian movement of the religion as a socio-historical force. The year 1976 saw two brilliant contributions to Caodaism, different from each other. Oliver's second work on *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society* (1976), contains rich materials which furnishes some picture of Caodaism's roots of origin, gradual development and the significant role in influencing Vietnamese social and political movements. Jayne Susan Werner's Ph.D. dissertation on *The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement* (1976) analyzes the origins and growth of Caodaism as a syncretic religious movement. Her major focus on the topic sketches a vast political context in which she shows how Caodaism arose with its considerable political influence on Vietnamese politics over a fifty year period. Werner wrote her book *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Viet Nam*, (1981). The author combines a sociological analysis of the fundamental social conditions of the

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<sup>32</sup>Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society*, Pierre Rondot, Leiden: Brill, 1976, p.3

genesis and development of the movement and its cultural dimensions. Stanley Karnow's, an American historian and journalist, epoch-making *Vietnam: A History* (1983) offers a chapter on the "Heritage of Vietnamese Nationalism" that has been very helpful for a background study of the current research while from another chapter entitled "American Mandarin" provides the researcher with some rare information on Caodaism. A leading Russian Cao Dai scholar, Sergei Blagove has crowned his life's work with a brilliant contribution to Caodaism entitled *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement*, (1999) and *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism and Its Leap into Modernity*, (2001). In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an Australian scholar, Chris Hartney's works on *A Gift to Australia: Caodaism and the First Caodaist Temple of Australia* (2000), *A Strange Peace: Dao Cao Dai and Its Manifestation in Sydney* (2004), and *The Divine Path to Eternal Life*, (2004), alongside some important journal articles and conference papers well represent this new Vietnamese syncretic religion. An American scholar, Jessica Miranda Chapman's work on *Debating the Will of Heaven: South Vietnamese Politics and Nationalism in International Perspective, 1953-1956* (2006) has aroused more discussion by its challenge as a political movement. The major Vietnamese sources on Cao Dai history, philosophy and theology are Tran Thai Chan's two volumes on the history of Caodaism, Nguyen Thanh Xuan's *Caodaism: History and Religion (Dao Cao Dai Hai Khia Canh Lich Su va Ton Giao)*, Tran Van Rang's *Portrait of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac (Chan Dung Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac)*, three volumes of Cao Dai Dictionary (*Tu Dien Dao Cao Dai*), the Sacred Texts of Caodaism offer sufficient information to the current research. More importantly, [www.daotam.info](http://www.daotam.info) Centre for Studies in Caodaism, Sydney, Australia covers a wide range of literatures such as online full text books, articles, images, audio visual in English, French, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese that provides the researcher with sufficient information on the history, organization, philosophy and

practice of Caodaism. All of these works, therefore, give insights and information that are valuable for a better understanding of the current research.

Finally, in preparation for the author's research in Vietnam and Bangladesh, specific reading is done from social, political, philosophical, and anthropological perspectives that present a very good theoretical framework for the analysis. As Wallace views, there is such a vast amount of descriptive literature which normally combines the presentation of new data on a particular movement with some form of theoretical analysis.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the scope of this dissertation, with its major emphasis on Cao Dai syncretism and its relationship to other religions of the East and West, provides a valid justification for continuing research on Caodaism.

## **1.5. The Concept of Acculturation**

To proceed, we should answer the question: What is acculturation? This task is by no means an easy one because the definitions of acculturation are actually a legion. However, a good number of scholarly views on acculturation suggest that acculturation is a multidimensional concept which includes several factors. Many scholars are found to have made important contributions to our understanding of acculturation from social perspective. Here is a sampling: For Jessica McCallister, the base word of acculturation is "culture". There is a tremendous diversity of cultures around the world. Thus, a good understanding of culture can lead to more understanding of the factors associated with the theory of acculturation. Thus, the term 'acculturation', according to McCallister, is the act of transition. Transition leads groups of individuals or groups of people to acculturate or adapt new cultural tools such as behaviors, values, customs, and languages. She has shown four major factors associated with acculturation: language, immersion,

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<sup>33</sup>Wallace, Anthony F. C. "Revitalization Movements" *American Anthropologist*, 1956 58 (April), 264-281.

assimilation, and integration.<sup>34</sup> According to Christine Serva, the acculturation process creates a diverse and, complex society. This is actually the result of the continuous interactions of cultures. Acculturation is happening everywhere, all of the time, in some form. In the past, as Serva mentions, acculturation was viewed as a process of one culture taking on characteristics of a more dominant culture. Modern theorists have a different take on things. Many see communities as a combination of the various cultures that make up the region. Instead of a melting pot where all cultures become the same, these scholars describe society as a mosaic of different cultures, each with qualities that influence one another over time in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways.<sup>35</sup> Paul N. Lakey, in his research paper “Acculturation: a Review of the Literature”, quoted the Social Science Research Council (SSRC, 1954 Formulation) defining acculturation as: “...culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors”.<sup>36</sup> The concept of acculturation, though it cannot tell us much about any particular process or factor of acculturation, is applicable to the various forms of acculturation. It makes it clear that acculturation is a complex phenomenon, involving diverse factors or types of process such as language, assimilation, integration, syncretism, immersion, substitution, and origination. However, this research work examines the roles of two acculturation factors which occurred in

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<sup>34</sup> McCallister, Jessica McCallister, *Acculturation: Definition, Theory and Examples*, 2015, at <https://study.com/academy/lesson/acculturation-definition-theory-examples.html> Retrieved June 06, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Christine Serva, *Acculturation Processes: Substitution, Syncretism*, Serva, 2014, at <https://study.com/academy/lesson/acculturation-processes-substitution-syncretism-addition-deculturation-origination.html> Accessed June 06, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Paul N. Lakey, “Acculturation: a Review of the Literature” in *Intercultural Communication Studies*, XII-2, 103-118, 2003, at <https://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/10-Paul-N.-Lakey.pdf>, Retrieved April 15, 2018.

Vietnam down through the centuries and created a ground for the emergence of Caodaism as a syncretic religion in the early 19th. They are syncretism and assimilation.

### **1.5.1. The Concept of Syncretism**

Contact between different cultures often results in one culture's borrowing traits from another. This process of mixing cultural traits often affects religion as well as other parts of culture. Thus, numerous examples of religious syncretism i.e., the mixing or blending of religious beliefs and practices, result from contact between different religious traditions. This kind of change can be viewed as a kind of adaptation to the broader social environment in which a religion exists. Cao Dai community in and outside Vietnam illustrates a clear role of syncretism in producing their religion. Caodaism as a harmonious synthesis of 'Three Great Teachings', and 'Five Branches' in fact illustrates the process of syncretism that brought together Asian and Western religious symbolism in Vietnam. Therefore, the common religious attitude about the beliefs and practices is found to be assimilated into Cao Dai religion ranging from objects of beliefs to hierarchical organization. In fact, syncretism has been common among most religions. In other words, the attitude that rejects the beliefs and practices of other religions is common among Western religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But this is, according to R.H. Crapo, is not the norm among human religions. He argues that such an exclusivist approach seems to develop in the religions of state societies where the secular government claims to be the sole legitimate legal authority.<sup>37</sup> Examining standard reference works on sociology of religion, anthropology of religion and cultural anthropology reveals definitions of syncretism with subtle differences of meaning. Richard in his paper has surveyed different definitions of syncretism in order to provoke discussion of the issue on the basis of current scholarship. According to him, there may

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<sup>37</sup> Crapo 2003, *op. cit.*, P.261.

be a totally different approach to the external criticism of syncretism which many may have felt vaguely, but which Mark Mullins has expressed more clearly. As he quotes Mullins, Mark Mullins in the *Dictionary of Asian Christianity* mentions that syncretism is usually understood as a combination of elements from two or more religious traditions, ideologies, or value systems. In the social sciences, this is a neutral and objective term that is used to describe the mixing of religions as a result of culture contact. In theological circles, however, it is generally used as a pejorative term to designate movements that are regarded as heretical.<sup>38</sup> Richard has further presented S. R. Imbach's view regarding the issue. He argues that Imbach is clearly in accord with Mullins, but he seems to have noted the centrality of the concept of "religion" in this definition. However, as Imbach in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* views, syncretism is a process by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. It is the union of two or more opposite beliefs, so that the synthesized form is a new thing. It is not always a total fusion, but may be a combination of separate segments that remain identifiable compartments.<sup>39</sup> Before laying out the case for this observation, Richard has noted further comments on syncretism. As he mentions, in a major work on syncretism and dialogue, Andre Droogers laid out a basic definition that is again rooted in assumptions about religion and which brings together elements of the two previously cited definitions. As Andre Droogers views, syncretism is a tricky term. Its main difficulty is that it is used with both an objective and a subjective meaning. The basic objective meaning refers neutrally and descriptively to the mixing of religions. The subjective

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<sup>38</sup> Richard 2014, *op. cit.*, pp.209-215; See also Mark R. Mullins, "Syncretistic Movements," the *Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, (ed.) Scott W. Sunquist, Grand Rapids (MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp.809–810.

<sup>39</sup> For a good discussion see S. R. Imbach, "Syncretism," In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker,1984), pp.1062–1063.

meaning includes an evaluation of such intermingling from the point of view of one of the religions involved. As a rule, the mixing of religions is condemned in this evaluation as violating the essence of the belief system. Yet, as will be shown, a positive subjective definition also belongs to the possibilities.<sup>40</sup> D. A. Hughes in *Inter Varsity's New Dictionary of Theology* points out a major problem with the broad use of syncretism as including a positive sense of borrowing from other religious traditions. Syncretism is also used in a broader sense to describe the process of borrowing elements by one religion from another in such a way as not to change the basic character of the receiving religion. It is questionable, however, whether such a broad definition is helpful, since it makes every religion syncretistic to some extent.<sup>41</sup> The positive sense of syncretism, as H. L. Richard puts, certainly "makes every religion syncretistic to some extent," but one could also argue that every religion is syncretistic even in the negative sense. The issue, of course, is what one means by "religion." The lack of discussion of that term in these various definitions is troubling at best and perhaps empties their points of any clear meaning. Scrutiny of paradigms for religion and world religions are the focal point of this paper.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, for this initial discussion of syncretism, Scott Moreau presented a carefully nuanced definition in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*. Syncretism is blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another. Traditionally among Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements. He argues that syncretism of some form has been seen everywhere the

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<sup>40</sup> Richard, *op. cit.*, pp.209-215; See also Andre Droogers, "Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," *In Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, edited by Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom, Rein Fernhout and Anton Wessels, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp.7-25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Also see Hughes, D. A. "Syncretism," *In New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 670.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

church has existed. In addition, for him, eliminating the negatives of syncretism is easily accomplished.<sup>43</sup> It should be mentioned that Moreau, by avoiding talk related to essences of religions, was able to acknowledge both positive and negative syncretism in every church, and his further discussion of those points in the article referenced is highly recommended. In his article, Boubakar Sanou views that religious syncretism is frequently referenced in the Bible.<sup>44</sup> In his paper, he shows syncretism as a worldwide religious challenge. His clarification comes in agreement with Michael Pocock's view. As he observes, "all peoples and religions exhibit syncretism".<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Sanou argues that no religion is immune from the influence of syncretism. Syncretism is considered as a threat among Christians and an outside element of Western Christianity indeed. In other words, strictly monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam hold the same position and urge the adherents to immune their religions from the influence of syncretistic elements. On the contrary, as a syncretic origin of a Vietnamese religion, Caodaism borrowed elements from different faith traditions and assimilated them into its own. In addition, the Cao Dai followers have kept undergoing a complex and syncretic religious life. Therefore, the adherents never bother whether their religion is in greater peril of syncretism. Sanou concerns with a brief but succinct history of syncretism given by Andre Droogers and Sidney M. Greenfield. As they assume, syncretism was first used by Plutarch to describe the temporary coming together of the quarreling inhabitants of Crete in the face of a common

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Also see A. Scott Moreau, "Syncretism," In *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by A. Scott Moreau, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 924–925.

<sup>44</sup> For a further clarification see Boubakar Sanou "Religious Syncretism as a Worldwide Mission Challenge: A Biblical and Missiological Response", *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* (AAMM), Vol. 8, pp.131-49 (Available at: [https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/Asia\\_Africa\\_Journal\\_Of\\_Mission\\_And\\_Ministry/2013/8.pdf](https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/Asia_Africa_Journal_Of_Mission_And_Ministry/2013/8.pdf) Retrieved April 05, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Pocock, "Introduction: An Appeal for Balance" In *Missiology and the Social Sciences: Contributions, Cautions and Conclusions*, edited by Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1996), pp.7-18.

enemy. The Greek word (*synkretismos*-union, from *synkretizein*-to unite) from which the English “syncretism” is derived refers to people joining together, in this case in battle. Erasmus later employed it metaphorically to refer to an agreement between people with seemingly disparate opinions. The new reference centered on ideas and beliefs. Seventeenth-century theologians then gave it a negative connotation by using it for what to them was the undesirable reconciliation of Christian theological differences. Syncretism for them became a threat to “true” religion. To this negative judgment a more neutral view was added in the second half of the nineteenth century when students of the history of religions began to use the word to acknowledge the mixing of religious elements from diverse sources, including Christianity that had occurred and continue to take place.<sup>46</sup>

## **1.5. 2. The Concept of Assimilation**

The concept of assimilation is viewed in diverse ways. For some scholars assimilation and acculturation are synonymous.<sup>47</sup> They hold that more often assimilation has included acculturation. Although assimilation is often characterized as a process of acculturation it is, however, distinguished from acculturation. Rather it exists as an independent socialization process. Assimilation, according to a widely quoted point of view: “Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons or groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life”.<sup>48</sup> As a concept in American sociology,

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<sup>46</sup>Andre Droogers and M. Sidney Greenfield, “Recovering and Reconstructing Syncretism”, *In Reinventing Religions: Syncretism and Transformation in Africa and the Americas*, edited by Sidney M. Greenfield and André Droogers (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp.21-42.

<sup>47</sup> Brewton Berry, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 217; Robert Bierstedt, *The Social Order*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill,1957), p. 176.

<sup>48</sup> Robert E. Park, and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 2d ed. (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1921), p. 735.

assimilation has had various meanings such as unilateral, partial (e.g., who tend to be bicultural rather than marginal); individual and group assimilation.<sup>49</sup> Vander Zanden distinguishes unilateral assimilation, the process in which one group relinquishes its own beliefs and behavior patterns and takes over the culture of another, from reciprocal fusion, in which a third culture emerges from the blending of two or more cultures, and, also, from various intermediary levels of assimilation.<sup>50</sup> Gordon views the assimilation process and its sub-processes as a matter of degree, but complete assimilation would cover seven variables: change of cultural patterns to those of the host society; large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of the host society on the primary group level; large-scale intermarriage; development of a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society; absence of prejudice; absence of discrimination; and absence of value and power conflict.<sup>51</sup> This conceptual scheme provides the most satisfactory criteria yet proposed for measuring assimilation and for determining to what extent it is taking place. Thus, to understand syncretic developments in Cao Day belief system and in particular, its organizational structures and ritual practices, this is necessary to examine the process of assimilation. In addition, the assimilative approach of Caodaism will provide explanations for current developments and inspire to new understandings. Indeed the reciprocal assimilative approach of Caodaism turns it into a *melting pot*<sup>52</sup> that helped it borrow elements from its surroundings and incorporate them into its own. Assimilation, thus, plays a vital role in influencing Caodaism being a syncretic religion.

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<sup>49</sup> Robin M. Williams, Jr. *Strangers Next Door: Ethnic Relations in American Communities*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 303–304.

<sup>50</sup> James W. Vander Zanden, *American Minority Relations: The Sociology of Race and Ethnic Groups*, (New York: Ronald Press, 1963), p. 269.

<sup>51</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> The history of the “melting pot” theory can be traced from J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur’s 1782 volume, *Letters from an American Farmer*, through Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis of 1893 concerning the fusion of elements into a composite one. For a good discussion see E. Digby Baltzell, ed., *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, (London: Transaction Publishers, 1991), p.219.

## 1.6. Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to return to the original and functioning condition of Dao Cao Dai and thereby explore some major socio-historical facts of the early twentieth century. Thus, in the current research those factors are taken into serious consideration to analyze how Cao Dai religion got on with a particular group in a common socio-historical and cultural tradition in Vietnam. In addition, the researcher aims at exploring diverse aspects of Caodaism in order to address proper grounds on the basis of which all borrowed elements are assimilated into its own. From this point of view it is assumed by the researcher that he needs a detailed knowledge of new religious movements<sup>53</sup> alongside the old traditions. This is due to the fact that the syncretistic features of Caodaism cannot merely be understood by the old religions (that in great part make it up) but much modern contemporary new religious movements outside Vietnam should be taken into proper consideration for the quest of its emergence and reasonable relation to other religions. Therefore, this research needs to give considerable spaces to insights into particular personalities and their contributions, especially socio-political and religio-historical, to understand the world view<sup>54</sup> and deep dynamics<sup>55</sup> of this religion. In addition, to look into this syncretic religious life of Cao Dai community, it also needs a proportionate attention to all

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<sup>53</sup> The term new religious movements refer to religious alternatives, unconventional, and quasi-religious religious movements, See Ronald Enroth (ed.) *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, (Madison: Inter Varsity Press, 2005). The term covers many types of religious movements and groups that are considered to be syncretistic re-creations of preexisting religious traditions. See Encyclopedia.com available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/new-religious-movements-overview> Retrieved February 18, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Apocalyptic vision (especially as described in the Bible or another text) and millenarian expectations are embedded in Cao Dai world view. In the *Third Revelatory Era*, the mission of the new revelation indicates a leap between the intolerable present and the perfect future leading to the Primordial unity. See Sergei Blagov, *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement*, Moscow: The Institute of Oriental Studies, 1999, pp.23-25.

<sup>55</sup> Diverse roles of the Tao (concept borrowed from Taoism and blended in with Caodaism) as *deep dynamics* function behind Cao Dai secular as well as religious life. For a good understanding See Nguyen Trung Hau, *Discussion on the Tao: Questions and Answers*, (trans.), San Jose: Ban The Dao Hai Ngoai, 2010, available at: [www.daotam.info](http://www.daotam.info) Retrieved 19, 2018.

aspects of its manifestation in the way how this complexity of Dao Cao Dai has developed on the basis of various cultural and religious elements of preexisting religious traditions and thereby enriched its different aspects through an assimilative process.

### **1.7. Importance of the Study**

The present research offers a new insight into the process of assimilation in order to explore social origin of Caodaism as a syncretic religion of modern Vietnam. In fact, Dao Cao Dai occupied a crucial position in the field of academic study of religion in the mid-twentieth century, and thereby it has become a considerable issue of further research for both the western and the eastern scholars in the present time. Although most of the previous works on Caodaism have attempted to explore the role of Caodaism as a political or socio-religious movement, in fact, these works focus a little on how and to what extent assimilative stress on Vietnamese social milieu became an effective tool in the development of Caodaism. In the case of the current research, this is one of the chief reasons which grows interest and creates a great scope to pay a close attention to the process of assimilation which includes an account of Cao Dai religion's interactions with Vietnamese old traditions and its relation to other religions. Dao Cao Dai as a complex amalgam of Vietnamese religions, the social and historical impact of those religions have become central to be analyzed in order to understand the origin and development of Cao Dai religion and its adherents' sense of identity.<sup>56</sup> Though substantial literature, texts and documents are available on the origin and development of Caodaism, these works are not sufficiently enough to examine the effectiveness of the function of assimilation or revealed the

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<sup>56</sup> The real title that constitutes a sense of identity for a true Cao Dai adherent is a *servant* for all sons of God who is bound to serve all living creatures. See Nguyen Long Thanh, *The Path of a Cao-Dai Disciple: An Outline of Cao-Dai Religious Life*, TayNinh, 1970), pp.66-69.

importance of the strategic use of socialization process in the emergence of Caodaism. On the contrary, such works mostly consider the history of the origin of Caodaism as a political problem from the socio-political perspectives. By avoiding traditional approaches this study demonstrates how syncretism, as major tool of assimilation, played a vital role in the socio-historical context of the emergence of an indigenous Vietnamese religion like Caodaism.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the present research will have a scope to gain access to all data collected during the field study of the researcher in Vietnam and Cambodia from 2012-2013. The following cases, for example, create a good scope in order to make this study fruitful and valid:

- the living experience for an extensive period of time about the Caodai Community and integration with their social groups,
- a good understanding of the setting and the nature of Vietnamese social structures, its traditions, values and norms of behavior,
- a good scope to be trained up in Vietnamese language, culture, and religion with a view to understanding all observational experiences in terms of the Caodaists' concepts, and their religio-cultural setting, and
- the supports of the local informants in collecting data during the field study around the Mekong delta area.

This thesis, therefore, will be an important source for future researchers as well as useful reading for students, academics and scholars seeking to understand Caodaism as a pure syncretic religion and its relationship to other religions with a new insight from the socio-historical perspective.

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<sup>57</sup>Oliver 1972, *op. cit.*, p.1.

## 1.8. Research Methodology

A methodology indicates a way to study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying research problem systematically along with the logic, assumptions and rationale behind them.<sup>58</sup> More clearly, as a body of procedures, methodology makes the choices for a researcher about the cases he tends to study the method of data collection, the pattern of data analysis etc. in planning and executing a research work. In order to conduct this research work the researcher has adopted the qualitative method because of its nature and subject matter.<sup>59</sup> In this section the data collection and data analysis method, field techniques, participant observations library research and research limitations to gain an insight about the whole procedure of this research.

### 1.8.1. Role of the Qualitative Method

As research problems differ for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies, the particular type of problem actually varies depending on the approaches.<sup>60</sup> For the current research work qualitative methods are adopted in order to address the problem so that it can be understood by exploring a concept or phenomenon. The strength of qualitative studies could be found in research which is descriptive, exploratory and stresses the importance on the context and the subject frame of reference. In addition, the qualitative approach mandates close attention to the historical detail in an effort to gain a new understanding of cultural and historical

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<sup>58</sup>M. Nurul Islam, *An Introduction to Research Methods*, (Dhaka: Mullick and Brothers, 2008), p.4.

<sup>59</sup>David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), p.23.

<sup>60</sup> Creswell 2003, *op. cit.*, p.74

phenomena.<sup>61</sup> The researcher, therefore, has adopted this method in order to conduct this piece of research work. Indeed, this present thesis aims to reveal all major elements borrowed from previously established religions and properly address the unique approach of Caodaism in assimilating them into its own. Although qualitative research is exploratory, the approach is not totally inductive as the researcher has to depend on the perspectives such as participant observations and field study. For such a very practical reason it is essential to present a detailed view of the subject matter. This is in fact the first study of its kind in Bangladesh. Since no other study of this type has been undertaken by anyone or any organization the researcher has preferred to adopt the qualitative method.

### **1.8.2. Methods of Data Collection and Data Analysis**

As the approach of the current research is qualitative, the following methods are adopted to serve the objectives and aims of this research. In this research study, the researcher has used secondary sources as a method of data collection. Therefore, it is important to mention that this research work mostly depends on secondary sources that will be thoroughly followed by analysis, assessment and evaluation. In addition, the researcher has maintained the field techniques, attended the participant observation and taken photographs and video images. In that case he has taken help of his eyes and other senses, pen and paper.

In general, with a view to analyzing data the researcher relies on non-numerical and unquantifiable elements. Here the researcher does not need to adopt any numerical technique in analyzing facts (or information) as information is considered qualitative in nature. Thus,

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<sup>61</sup> Fazrin Huda in her doctoral thesis *Public Diplomacy and Emergence of Bangladesh* cited DM. Mertens, p.64. For a good treatment see Mertens, *Research Methods in Education an Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), pp.8-9.

according to the nature of the present study, the researcher has adopted analytical method. This is the reason, the researcher has intended to use facts and information (from available sources) and analyze these in order to make a critical evaluation of the materials (already collected).<sup>62</sup> The method of data analysis will be concerned with explanation of the status of some factors on the basis of times and circumstances which can serve the current purpose in adding knowledge to related areas of exploration and explain all important aspects from social and historical perspectives. In addition, on the basis of research design, the researcher has adopted exploratory method. As exploratory studies do not attempt to offer final and conclusive answers to research questions, the researcher only aims to explore his research area.<sup>63</sup> The table below characterizes structure, methodology, hypothesis and findings of the current research:

<b>Exploratory Research</b>	
<b>Structure</b>	Loosely structured in designing
<b>Methodology</b>	flexible and investigative in methodology
<b>Hypotheses</b>	Do not involve testing of hypotheses
<b>Findings</b>	Findings will be topic specific and will not have much relevance outside of researcher's domain

Documents to be used in this study will be subjected to the same careful types of criticism employed by historians and sociologists. Finally, it should be noted that throughout the entire research project there will be an earnest endeavor to protect the confidentiality of all data had already been collected.

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<sup>62</sup>Types of Research Methods according to the nature of the study, available at: [https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-types/#\\_ftnref4](https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-types/#_ftnref4) Retrieved October 20, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> See Ibid.

### **1.8.3. Participant Observation**

With a view to using facts or information already available and analyzing these for making a critical evaluation of the materials, the researcher exposed himself to Cao Dai community and their culture during his stay in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> He had several occasions to participate in different events and thereby could observe diverse aspects of Cao Dai life and culture. He attended the programs on different occasions and several ceremonial rites in Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh. Observations were made of two major anniversary celebrations.<sup>65</sup> While he was staying in Tay Ninh he closely observed the Holy See. He had quite a good opportunity to attend daily and monthly prayer services in the Great Divine Temple<sup>66</sup> and visited the practice centers for ritual servants and musicians. He observed as the devotees were performing their rituals through and in worships and prayers in accordance with the command given by the ritual officers. Funeral and memorial rites were seen at different Cao Dai Temples. Caodai ceremonial music and the chanting of prayers were also recorded. When visiting Cao Dai homes or offices, vegetarian food was always served.

### **1.8.4. Field Study**

After the researcher had completed his language program he went into field study for two purposes. First, he made efforts to expose him to Cao Dai communities and their culture in order to learn and develop his idea in the specialty area. Second, the researcher's goal was to increase his interaction with the community people and contact reliable informants in order to collect data

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<sup>64</sup>During the period of Feb 03, 2012-Dec 14, 2012 and Mar 03, 2013- Nov 19,-2013, the researcher stayed in Vietnam. He studied Vietnamese language and culture under the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix 1, p241.

<sup>66</sup> Toa Thanh Tay Ninh Holy See, see Appendix 2, p.246.

mostly from secondary sources. However, during the last six months<sup>67</sup> in Vietnam, the researcher's headquarters were in Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh while his field study was made to the following areas:

1. Phu Quoc, the largest island of Vietnam located off the Cambodian coast in the Bay of Thailand (Siam) is widely believed to be the birth place of Caodaism. Ngo Van Chieu, the first disciple of God, is believed to have had a vision of the Divine Eye and he was permitted by God to worship the Divine Eye as a symbol of Cao Dai Spirit. The Quan Am pagoda (reconstructed in 1961 by Chieu's adepts)<sup>68</sup> was the center of his regular mediumism practices during his three years of Phu Quoc period from about March 1, 1920-Jul 1924 alongside his administrative duties. Thus, the Quan Am pagoda, Dong Duong (the district headquarters) and site of Chieu's former residence have become a historic and religious center for Cao Dai pilgrims who belong to the Chieu Minh Dan sect<sup>69</sup> in particular. In addition, the newest and most popular Thanh That (Cao Dai local Temple affiliated by Toa Thanh Tai Ninh-the Great Divine temple) established in 2008 (2 days).
2. Can Tho City, the site of the central temple of Cao Dai Chieu Minh Tam Thanh Vo Vi (3 days).
3. Ben Tre, the city where the Toa Thanh Ben Tre, Cao Dai Ban Chin Dao, the second largest Cao Dai organization, has their holy see (1 day).

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<sup>67</sup> From Jun 01, 2013 to Nov 19, 2013

<sup>68</sup> See Blagov 1999, *op. cit.*, p.8.

<sup>69</sup> Following the inaugural ceremony of Cao Dai religion in 1926, Ngo Van Chieu, the first disciple of Cao Dai God, established the Chieu Minh Dan sect. See Gobron, 1950, pp.156-57. A detailed study of the current issue is made in chapter two.

4. My Tho, the City where Cao Dai temple like many other Cao Dai Thanh That affiliated with Toa Thanh Tay Ninh is located ( 1 day).
5. Phnom Penh, the capital City of Cambodia where the first Cao Dai foreign mission was established by Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac and the Cao Dai temple of Tay Ninh branch is located near the Mao Tse Tsung Boulevard (6 days).
6. Other Cao Dai congregations located in the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh (several meetings) alongside a temple located in a remote village (1 day). It is important to note that all of the major Cao Dai organizations have representatives in Tay Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City. This was a convenience for it was not always necessary to visit the central offices of the various sects when seeking information. During his field trips the researcher was able to collect a wide range of secondary sources alongside some documents and rare information.<sup>70</sup>

### **1.8.5. Library Research**

Indeed, researcher's previous study on Cao Dai religion helped him look for all possible relevant holdings and thereby create opportunity for his further research. Therefore, before going to Vietnam, the researcher investigated the resources on Southeast Asia and East Asia (Chinese thought and culture in particular) at the library of the Department of World Religions and Culture and the Central Library of the University of Dhaka. In Vietnam, researcher visited the libraries of the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies, Department of Anthropology and History of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities during he was staying in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>71</sup> He

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<sup>70</sup> See Appendix 3, p.247.

<sup>71</sup>The researcher enrolled in an Intensive Vietnamese Language Course under the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City from Feb 03, 2012-August 2013.

did his library works in the Tay Ninh General Science Library while he was staying there for couple of months.<sup>72</sup> In addition, during his field study to various Cao Dai centers requests were made for materials, official magazines, biographies, histories, religious texts, commentaries and any other relevant publications. The researcher collected a huge number of literatures on Vietnamese religion and culture, especially on Caodaism from Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh.

### **1.8.6. Research Limitations**

The researcher faces an obstacle and a major challenge in conducting the current research. First, as the Cao Dai religious organizations are still under the close surveillance of the government's law and administrative oversight for their previous occasions (involvement with political and military activities), the researcher had to encounter a major difficulty in the case of asking for some particular types of documents. Second, being most of the collected literatures on Caodaism is in Vietnamese, with English as secondary language sources, researcher, therefore, has to depend on the secondary language sources. But when necessary researcher seeks help for translation by establishing effective contact with key Cao Dai adepts living in both Vietnam and USA via e-mails.

## **1.9. Organization**

This dissertation contains seven chapters that are partly interconnected and partly independent. **Chapter One** gives a brief description of the religion and presents data on the basis of literature review how religious syncretism took place in Vietnam and created such a social milieu in matrix of which Caodaism had its origin. It equally sheds light on the methodology and data analysis including the role of the qualitative method, participant observation, field technique,

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<sup>72</sup> See Appendix 4, p.253.

library research, and research limitations. **Chapter Two** traces the ground of the emergence of Caodaism and the epoch-making role of three legendary figures of the early years of the movement in establishing a distinct community in the South Vietnamese society. In this chapter a socio-political approach is also made with an emphasis on the growth of Cao Dai sectarianism and its reunification i.e., the act of coming back to the divine model of *Primordial Unity*. **Chapter Three** explores the socio-historical factors of Western and Asian Acculturation in Vietnam to address and understand the elements borrowed by Caodaism. In **Chapter Four**, an in-depth study is made to clarify syncretic features of Caodaism in terms of its organizational, hierarchical, and ritual structures. **Chapter Five** tends to examine the historical and philosophical discourse of Cao Dai relativism and its relation with other religions of the world. **Chapter Six** will demonstrate the future prospects of Caodaism in building a harmonious and peaceful world as the ‘Third Universal Amnesty of God’. **Chapter Seven** includes the findings and conclusion of this research work.

## Chapter Two

### A Socio-historical Overview of Caodaism

This chapter explores diverse historical facts and the socio-political condition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century French Cochinchina in order to trace the proper ground based on which Caodaism emerged as a syncretic religion as well as a socio-political movement. An in-depth analysis from socio-historical and political contexts, therefore, helps consider multiple sources of the origin of Cao Dai religion; evaluate the epoch-making role of three legendary figures of the early years of the movement with a view to understanding the religion's formative years in Cochinchina (1926-1941) as well as its subsequent developments in various parts of Southern Vietnam; and determine its syncretic nature- occult syncretic religion or syncretic religious movement. The analysis in this study is built around the chronological nexus after giving firm roots of Caodaism in Vietnamese and Chinese culture. Overall, this study attempts a preliminary clearing of the ground, the Caodaist history.

#### 2.1. Origin: the Roots and the Social Milieu

The origin of Cao Dai religion lies in its historical necessity when Vietnam was passing through a critical period in which the masses suffered greatly from injustice. The roots of Cao Dai religion go back a long way though it emerged at the end of the first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century in a full-fledged European colony,<sup>1</sup> called French Cochinchina or French Colony.<sup>2</sup>The totality of surrounding conditions and circumstances of the South of Vietnam both directly and indirectly affects the growth of Cao Dai religion. With regard to this

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<sup>1</sup>After 1870, Europe began a concerted search for markets in Asia and Africa. This process led to European imperialism in Africa, Asia and Oceania...Colonialism, as near synonym of imperialism, refers to the political, social, economic, and cultural domination ... See, Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed.( London: The McGraw-Hill Company, Inc. 2000), p.388.

<sup>2</sup> French colonialism had two phases. The first began in the early 1600s. The second came late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the French manifestation of a more general European imperialism...However, compared with Great Britain, where the drive for profit led expansion, French colonialism was spurred more by the state, church, and armed forces than by business interests. Indochina fell fully under French colonial control in 1893. See Ibid.

common phenomenon, it may be relevant to present Daljeet Singh's critical view: "No doubt, the environmental situation and the social milieu in which a religion arises do have their impact on its growth and the problems it seeks to tackle. Yet, it is very true that the perceptions, the internal strength, and the ideology of a religion are fundamentally the elements that give it substance and direction, and shape its personality".<sup>3</sup> The emergence of Cao Dai religion occurred at a time when several developments had come to a head. Fighting for its existence, it had been able to build up its position so that it could not easily be eradicated by its opponents. Cao Dai philosophy, based heavily on the Minh Sects of Chinese origin, derived from a synthesis of the world's major religions: Confucianism (*Nhon Dao*), Geniism (*Than Dao*)<sup>4</sup>, Christianity (*Thanh Dao*), Buddhism (*Phat Dao*), and Taoism (*Thien Dao*). Though its theological roots were primarily in age-old Chinese and Vietnamese traditions, the Cao Dai's emphasis on uniting these disparate world religions stemmed from the intimate contact between the East and the West brought on by colonialism, and more generally from modern innovations between the full range of peoples and religions of the world.<sup>5</sup> According to Janet Hoskin, religious innovation always struggles against an established order that attempts to absorb or suppress it, but in a colonial context this struggle took on additional implications. Spirit message became a way to talk back to the state, and also a way revitalizes older religious traditions with infusions of grace that freshen earlier ideals, dogmas and rules.<sup>6</sup> "Despite its idiosyncrasies, as Werner views, the Cao Dai was in fact an important political and social movement generated by the colonial context of 1920s

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<sup>3</sup>Daljeet Singh, *The Sikh Ideology*, (New Delhi: Guru Nanak Foundation, 1984), p.1.

<sup>4</sup>As one of the five major branches of the Great Way (Dao Cao Dai), Geniism embraces Chinese, Egyptian and Greek beliefs. See Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac's view cited in Blagov's book, *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement*, p.17.

<sup>5</sup>For a good discussion see Jessica Miranda Chapman, *Debating the Will of Heaven: South Vietnamese Politics and nationalism in International Perspective, 1953-1956*, Ph.D. thesis, Santa Barbara, University of California, 2006, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup>Janet Hoskin, "Gazing at the Left Eye of God: Esoteric and Exoteric Visions in the Expansion of Caodasim", *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers from 1970 through 2011*, (California: Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, 2012), pp.239-266.

Vietnam”.<sup>7</sup> During the early period of the Christian era particularly, the effects of Chinese culture were perceived abroad in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. As one of the foremost world civilizations, China was creating a new synthesis of cultures in Chinese Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Historically, Chinese Buddhism arrived in Vietnam during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian era while Taoism and Confucianism came to Vietnam long before the advent of Buddhism. As Taoism and Confucianism were not missionary religions they did not proselytize to convert followers the way Buddhism could very radically reorient the Vietnamese societies. At the same time a new amalgamation of cultures in Vietnamese Buddhism started to be visualized. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century substantial migrations occurred under the influence of a growing colonialist world economy, and in consequence European culture and religion (French in particular) is to be found in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao. Cao Dai religion seems to be a new orientation of the previous religions or systems of thought that developed in Vietnam during the course of the “second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (1925-1940) as a new religious movement referred to by its pioneers as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Era of Salvation, or simply the last Universal Amnesty of God. Intellectually, many concepts and ideologies were radically reoriented by Cao Dai religion within its own ideological sphere. No doubt, the environmental situation and the social milieu in which a religion arises do have their impact on its growth and the problems it seeks to tackle. Yet, it is very true that the perceptions, the internal strength, and the ideology of a religion are fundamentally the elements that give it substance and direction, and shape its personality. A systematic inquiry into the features of a religion and the structure of its society in a distinct area is needed to study and interpret its origin and development from the historical perspective. By this method individual features of a particular religion and its surroundings can be identified. At the same time, it is possible to become familiar with the structural elements of the society. Historically, a society appears as

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<sup>7</sup>Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.36.

<sup>8</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), p.105.

a conglomeration of groups and institutions of infinite variety is also an integrated whole. The more closely a social configuration is scrutinized, the more its complex and composite character is realized, even in the case of apparently simple societies.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, different groups are seen in a society. They may be transitory or permanent, fluid or organized, homogeneous or heterogeneous, large or small. Indeed, they vary in origin, structure, and meaning. Although the origin and behavior of groups depend on religious motivation, the development of religious concepts, rites, and institutions depend upon the necessities, desires, and ideals of social groups. This part is primarily concerned with the real influence of the socio-historical background on Cao Dai religion, but it also reviews, on the other hand, the effects of politics upon this religion. As clear evidences of interrelationship and interaction between religion and society is marked there is a scope to consider how the possible social issues influenced the growth and development of Cao Dai religion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The function of sociology of religion refers the interrelationship and interaction of religion and society as its subject matter. The analysis of the definition of sociology of religion suggests that religion and society are independent, separate elements which may interact each other. In his book *Readings in the Sociology of Religion* Joan Brothers analyzes Joachim Wach's views regarding the matter that for Wach religion is an integrating factor in human society, expressing itself in myth, dogma, cult and religious grouping.<sup>10</sup> It now may be asked how, from the complex structure of Southern Vietnamese society, the process of the origin of Cao Dai religion can be understood. As Vietnamese Spiritism is concerned, the relationship between religion and society is closely allied to the theological concept of natural and supernatural.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it may be assumed that like major religions of the world Cao Dai religion has developed its own distinctive orientation toward all aspects of social life.

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<sup>9</sup>Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>Joan Brothers, ed., *Readings in the Sociology of Religion*, (London: Pergamon Press, 1967), pp. 29-31.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p.50.

Sociologically speaking, a new faith creates a new world in which old conceptions and institutions may lose their meaning. The preaching of a new faith is addressed primarily to one group of people which may be more or less homogeneous. In culturally higher differentiated societies the background of converts is often very heterogeneous.<sup>12</sup> At this point Wach raises question: How did the integration of a homogeneous group take place? Since we are concerned with the integration of Cao Dai religious group, the social conditions which favor or hinder it, and the means which were available for it, we might properly ask to what extent the different types of social factors contribute to the integration of Cao Dai community. In case of Cao Dai religion, it is not difficult to find borrowed elements which will be characterized as identical because it shares the same cultic ties. After Cao Dai religion emerged on the basis of sound Vietnamese traditional folk beliefs, it absorbed a great deal of *Tam Giao* (three great teachings of Vietnam), and reformed Buddhism or Confucianism or Taoism, the resultant blend, may remain for centuries a powerful integrating factor in the Vietnamese life. Many religious groups are seen to have their roots in popular expressions.<sup>13</sup> If the social construction of Cao Dai religion is taken into consideration from historical perspective, at least since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there still has been a strong connection between organized and popular forms of religion in Vietnam. This connection was taken for granted largely because, at the time of the origin and growth of Cao Dai religion especially since the mid-1920s, the official declaration of the new faith (1926) and its organization had successfully achieved politically legitimated cultural dominance throughout Southern Vietnam. Without questioning the social construction of Cao Dai religion can be identified as an official or organized form of religion like Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Bahai Faith. Thus, the notion of religious syncretism (the blending of diverse cultural elements into one religion) that was used to imply unauthenticated or

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<sup>12</sup> Wach, *op. cit.*, pp.35-36.

<sup>13</sup> McGuire, *op. cit.*, p.112.

contamination has been proved to be wrong and invalid by recent anthropological study. In contrast to this idea, modern critics argue that syncretic process is considered foundation of religion in contemporary anthropology. Indeed, through identifiable historical processes, official religion is linked with social and religious elites and nonofficial with the uneducated and superstitious masses. But in the light of recent scholarship this assumption is rejected for two reasons. First, the sacred/profane dichotomy may create a misleading conception of religious life. A second reason is that the difference between official and nonofficial religion<sup>14</sup> is not an essential quality of religion but is rather the result of a concrete historical process in which certain social groups used their power and authority to privilege certain forms of religious practice over others.<sup>15</sup> Religious groups may vary dramatically in relation to their social environment. Thus, it is assumed that religious groups orient themselves differently to their social environment. Some have loose boundaries and relaxed authority structures while others have clear-cut boundaries and rigid authority structures. Some religious groups are in conflict with the rest of the society while others are socially comfortable and thoroughly integrated into the larger society. The reality is that all religious groups change over time. Some become more stable, while others become more volatile. Some grow or stabilize or decline. Some become more strident in their dissent while others become more quiescent. Historical cults also have loosely defined boundaries. Because of the pluralistic tolerance among historical cults, the groups coexisted-indeed flourished-alongside the churches. Part of the historical strength like Roman Catholicism, Cao Dai religion may be due to its flexibility in absorbing and , often, co-opting these cults existed in Vietnamese traditional culture down through the centuries. By absorbing local popular cults as optional

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<sup>14</sup>Official religion is a set of beliefs and practices prescribed, regulated, and socialized by organized, specifically religious groups. Whereas non official religion is a set of religious and quasi-religious beliefs and practices that is not accepted, recognized, or controlled by official religious groups. Non official religion is sometimes called “common” or “folk” or “popular” religion. For sources on official and non official religions, see McGuire, *op. cit.*, pp.96-108.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. pp.108-9.

devotions, Cao Dai church was able to build organizations that went beyond familistic, localistic, or cultic barriers. By placing the altars<sup>16</sup> and transforming spirits into mediators for the whole congregation, the Pope (spiritual pope) shifted the balance of social order in the Cao Dai community. Furthermore, the cult of Vietnamese Spiritism enabled Cao Dai religion to absorb and transform pre-Cao Dai pagan elements of indigenous cultures. This gradual consolidation of Cao Dai religion shows how it has become assimilated into the characteristic boundaries of Southern Vietnamese societies.

The roots of Cao Dai religion are tightly linked with Vietnamese traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices that are mostly transmitted orally down the centuries.<sup>17</sup> For a long time Caodaism, with its strange mixture of Sino-Vietnamese tradition and to some extent Christian elements, remained the religion of a marginalized minority. Its Sino and Christian background is not just historical but essential. Therefore, Caodaism is constantly reminded of its links with religions of Chinese and Indian origin. For Thomas E. Dutton, Caodaism combines important elements to harmonize the otherworldliness of the Indian tradition with the worldliness of the Chinese.<sup>18</sup> With regard to its roots, as the historian R.B. Smith notes, Caodaism finds its roots in the “secret societies” (*hoi kin*) inspired by the local settlements of the Chinese *Heaven and Earth Association* (*Thien dia*). In addition, he also views it to be the direct product of Chinese or Sino-Vietnamese religious sectarianism, called Minh (meaning light in Chinese, discussed elaborately in chapter four).<sup>19</sup> Despite its direct links with Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, Caodaism developed independently within the pure Vietnamese milieu. The Caodaists needed to communicate using Vietnamese

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<sup>16</sup>See Appendix 5, p.255.

<sup>17</sup>Jeremy Jammes, “Divination and Politics in Southern Vietnam: Roots of Caodaism”, *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, (California: Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, 2012), pp296-297.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas E. Dutton, Caodaism as History, Philosophy, and Religion, *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, (California: Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, 2012), P.17.

<sup>19</sup> R. B. Smith, “An Introduction to Caodaism, 1. Origins and Early History”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (2):335-49.

terminology and patterns of thinking. Most certainly, the religion of any people develops over time; and so it has been for the Vietnamese. To understand Vietnamese religion today, it is important to have a historical knowledge of how Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity were introduced into Vietnam, how they interacted with the native tradition and how together with native spiritism, they fundamentally shaped the subsequent Vietnamese religious landscape. Historically speaking, over the centuries, new ideas, ritual practices, and beliefs have emerged; some have then disappeared, some quite ancient, while others have persisted to this day. In today's increasingly interdependent world, it is vitally important that different nations and cultures understand one another. Many westerners have acquired some understanding of Vietnam. Vietnamese culture is a complex amalgam of old and new, and because Vietnam's various religions have been central to the development of this culture, they serve as windows to the Vietnamese people's sense of identity. Cao Dai religion began as a minority sect in the matrix of Vietnamese Spiritism and three *Great Teachings*<sup>20</sup> and in its spread to cultural settings; it gradually consolidated its position, achieving an effective monopoly of legitimacy under French administration in Cochinchina. Thus, it may be argued that the reason for Caodaism's initial success was due to a confluence of religious traditions such as Taoist spiritism, Buddhist concepts of salvation and reincarnation. As Hoskins argues, "while Confucianism can be described as an ethical system, Taoism as a metaphysical one and Buddhism as a Philosophy of self-realization, what Caodaism added to the mix was a more personal form of monotheism or polytheism".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>*Tam Giao*-this concept of three greatest teaching was previously established in ancient China. In ancient China, people seemed quite indifferent toward the differences in commandments and doctrines of different religions. Because of this, Taoism, Buddhism and *ru jiao*- Confucianism, which were dubbed as the "three greatest beliefs", were all able to constantly grow in strength and influence while melting into one another. For good discussion see Feng Lingyu and Shi Weimin, translated by Li Zhurun, *A Glimpse of the Chinese Culture*, 2001, p.137.

<sup>21</sup> Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, "From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Divinities in the Caodai Pantheon", *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers from 1970 through 2011*, California, 2012, pp.182-197.

## 2.2. History of the Legends: Three Pioneers

It is known that some early Cao Dai leaders<sup>22</sup> were very well versed in both Asian classics and western spiritualism. Notably Ngo Van Chieu, the first disciple of Caodaism, Le Van Trung, its first acting pope, and Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac<sup>23</sup>, its longest-reigning leader and defender of the law or religion, appeared to be very prominent leaders in Cao Dai history. In fact, the question of spiritual knowledge was also prominent in their minds. The characteristic notes of Cao Dai religion is seen to have synthesized to transform the persistent chord held by Ngo Van Chieu into the long and unique melody introduced by Le Van Trung and Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac. Cao Dai philosophy may be considered as an intellectual symphony of these three pioneers though there is consonance as well as dissonance among major ideologies they developed within Cao Dai religion. Contrary to Le Van Trung and Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac's popular stance of propagation and proselytization of the religion, Ngo Van Chieu took the tough initiative of the renunciation of life and society. His esoteric stance is more akin to that of the strict rules of the Taoist doctrine<sup>24</sup> while another two leaders' exoteric stance is more akin to the missionary activities of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Baha'i Faith. Indeed, the movement of *Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* began with Ngo Van Chieu. It gained momentum in Le Van Trung and finally, reached its climax in Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac.

### 2.2.1. Ngo Van Chieu (1878-1932)

A young Chasseloup-Laubat (A French College in Saigon)-educated man was indeed very pious who took his religious duties very seriously. He was inspired by Chinese spiritual traditions from his childhood that made him seriously interested in religion. As Sergei Blagov holds, Chieu could prove his religious zeal when he was just a 10-year-old boy. He was said

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<sup>22</sup>See Appendix 6, p.256.

<sup>23</sup>In Caodaism "Ho Phap" is a title equivalent to the "Giao Tong". Ho Phap and "Giao Tong" are of equal rank, both equivalents to the catholic Pope. See Thanh, *op. cit.*, p.45.

<sup>24</sup>Blagov, *New Religious Movement*, p.7.

to buy a small book of prayers and worship Confucian deity Quan Thanh De Quan.<sup>25</sup> Since 1902, as Blagov confirms, he became a passionate reader of the French spiritist writer, Camille Flammarion (1842-1925).<sup>26</sup> No doubt Flammarion's spiritist writings left a profound impact on his mind and soul to the extent. Indeed, Ngo Van Chieu began to gain his expertise power both in learning and the use of European spiritist techniques.<sup>27</sup> At such a young age, he understood with certainty that spiritism is a fundamental reality. Consequently, at the young age of thirty-nine, he was already a man of remarkable scholarly and spiritual achievements. At a certain stage he became very ardent and serious in his pursuit of spiritual knowledge after he had come in touch with spiritism in 1902<sup>28</sup> when he visited Minh Thien temple (a Taoist Temple) at Thu Dau Mot<sup>29</sup> to attend a séance for seeking help for his ailing mother. On that occasion he received a spirit message directing him to lead a religious life. Thereafter, together with other mediums he started holding séances in his village named Tan An located near Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in Southern Vietnam. It is said that he could assume the appearance of a Great Spirit through his séances held in Tan An.

Ngo Van Chieu worked for the criminal investigation department of the Cochinchinese government as an administrative officer in Saigon. Later on, he was transferred to Phu Quoc Island, (the largest Island of Vietnam off the coast of Cambodia in the Gulf of Siam). He led

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<sup>25</sup>Duc Quan Thanh De Quan who (called Quan Cong) is the famous Chinese Image of a war hero and figure of profound loyalty. He is the High Spirit who guided the establishment of Cao Dai Religion for early Cao Dai followers through spiritual mediumship. See Tuy Ngoc Trinh, *A Brief Introduction to Caodaism*, available at: <https://www.daotam.info/booksv/abitcaodaism/caodaism.html#1.Introduction%20to%20Caodaism>, Retrieved 12/12/2017.

<sup>26</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Nicolas Camille Flammarion was a French astronomer who studied double and multiple stars, the moon and Mars. He wrote popular books on astronomy, as well as novels. For more source see Short Biography of Camille Flammarion, available at: [https://todayinsci.com/F/Flammarion\\_Camille/FlammarionCamille-Bio.htm](https://todayinsci.com/F/Flammarion_Camille/FlammarionCamille-Bio.htm), Retrieved December 12, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Ryang, "Cao Dai: Religion of Many Spirits", *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, pp.169-176.

<sup>28</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.7

<sup>29</sup> Thu Dau Mot is the capital city of Binh Duong Province, Vietnam and is located 20 km north of downtown Ho Chi Minh City, on the left bank of the Saigon River.

a life of great wisdom, adjusting to the strict rules of Taoism. The isolated island turned to be a very favorable place for him to lead an intensive religious life. He would hold regular séances with the help of young mediums from 12 to 15 years of age with a view to evoking the Great Spirits (*Cau-Tien*) from whom he received the necessary instructions for his spiritual growth from time to time.

Presumably, it was after he moved to Phu Quoc Island that Duc Cao Dai (God) started to completely dominate the life of Chieu. At a certain stage of his long spiritist practices during his residence on Phu Quoc, Chieu received revelations from a Great Spirit who identified Himself as Cao Dai.<sup>30</sup> Rightly after being acquainted with Duc Cao Dai, Chieu became a total vegetarian on February 8, 1921 and obeyed Cao Dai's directive. Legend has it that he had a vision of a Divine Eye on Phu Quoc Island.<sup>31</sup> That vision, as all Caodaists hold, prompted him to become the first disciple of God as well as the first Caodaist and to grant the Caodaists and the rest of the human beings in the world freedom of religion. At the same time, that vision might have led him to adopt the Eye as the divine manifestation of Cao Dai God. He asked Cao Dai for permission to worship Him in tangible form and in reply God ordered him to make His representation in the form of a symbolic eye. In this regard, Cao Dai gave him a revelation of the Divine Eye which became the symbol of the new religion.<sup>32</sup> Though there are those who say that use of this symbol was borrowed from Victor Hugo's "eye of conscience" but the "Divine Eye", according to Caodaism, is the image of the Universal and Individual conscience that represents God Himself indeed.<sup>33</sup> Since then the Caodaists worship the Divine Eye as the symbolic representation of their God (Duc Cao Dai) which denotes

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<sup>30</sup>At the Quan Am Tu Pagoda on Phu Quoc Island in 1920, Cao Dai finally revealed himself to Ngo Van Chieu as the "Supreme Being of the Universe." See *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, p6.

<sup>31</sup>From Quan Am pagoda, overlooking the Gulf of the Siam, Chieu is reportedly told to see a vision of the sun half-rising from the sea, with the moon above that, the morning star above that, and at the zenith, a human eye surrounded by radiant beams. See *Ibid.* p.6.

<sup>32</sup>See Appendix 7, p.258.

<sup>33</sup>Holy See of Tay Ninh, *The Outline of Caodaism*, p.22.

vision and omnipotence. Being sufficiently encouraged and confident he kept conducting series of spirit sessions.

After six years of his administrative duties on Phu Quoc Island, he was recalled to Saigon in 1925. And after returning to Saigon, he organized his friends who were interested in spiritism and collected converts to the new religion. He taught the mediums in the group how to facilitate their spiritualistic séances in the proper manner and thereby get all expected answers. He participated with them, happy to make use of mediums particularly and possessed of unusually powerful fluid. From the period following his conversion to Cao Dai religion, religion of God, he decided to initiate a new form of belief system more responsive than what existed in his times. To the needs of piety, a new system of thought which would help the believers draw closer to God (Duc Cao Dai) both in heart and in mind. It should be noted that in mid of the year 1925 (*At Su'u*-year of Buffalo)<sup>34</sup>, another little group of Vietnamese officials kept themselves busy by practicing spiritism in every evening. After a long term patience and practice, they finally got results. They put their questions to the spirit in verse or prose and thereby received surprising answers. Their ancestors would appear to talk of family affairs and give counsel. These sensational revelations made them think of the existence of an occult world. Through their regular practice of spiritism, one of the spirits became noticeable for his high level of moral and philosophic instructions. This spirit signed him under the pseudonym "AAA" (the first three letters in Vietnamese alphabet). He did not want to reveal himself regardless of the earnest request of his hearers. Other officials joined the small group of the unskilled spiritists. Thereafter, the spiritist meetings became more

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<sup>34</sup> In Vietnam, each year is "sponsored" sequentially by one of the twelve animals of the Vietnamese zodiac: the rat comes first, then the ox or buffalo, followed in order by the tiger, cat, dragon, snake, horse, goat or ram, monkey, cock, dog, and lastly, the pig. Of these animals one is mythical (the dragon) and four (rat, tiger, snake and monkey) are wild, shunning contact with humans. Seven are domesticated. Every twelve years, the sponsorship reverts to the same animal. The years 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012 are dragon years. Available at: <http://thingsasian.com/story/vietnamese-zodiac> Retrieved January 15, 2018. See Appendix 8, p.259.

serious and regular. On Christmas Eve, the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1925, the guiding Spirit, who remained nameless for a long time, revealed himself as the Supreme Being named Cao Dai Thuong De to teach truth to Vietnam in the following words:

“Rejoice this day. It is the anniversary of my coming to Europe to teach my doctrine. I am happy to see you. O my disciples full of respect and love to me. This house will have all my blessings. Manifestations of my power will inspire even greater respect and love in my regard...”<sup>35</sup>

From that day on, Duc Cao Dai initiated His disciples in the new doctrine. It is important to mention that under the leadership of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, the second leader of the cult, a quite separate prominent group of spirit adepts would also hold regular séances<sup>36</sup> at various homes in Saigon where many other adepts joined the group. By the end of 1925 the Pho loan<sup>37</sup> group collected more mediums and they still held séances separately. It is reported that Duc Cao Dai directed the Pho loan group to seek directions from Ngo Van Chieu and underwent his spiritual guidance. They were further informed that God assigned Chieu to

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<sup>35</sup>Divine Teaching of the Jade Emperor announces the names of the twelve disciples on the Christmas Eve in 1925. See *The Collection of Divine Messages* (Thanh Ngon Hiep Tuyen), Volume 1. This announcement of Cao Dai Thuong De is cited by Tran Van Rang: “Dem nay, 24 December, phai vui mung vi la ngay cua Ta xuong tran day Dao ben Thai Tay (the continent of Europe)...See Trang Van Rang, *Chan Dung Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac*, (San Jose: Ban The Dao Hai Ngoai, 2011), p.43. Rang mentions the names of the 12 disciples of God in his book according to the order of the divine message, are 1. Ngo Van Chieu, 2. Vuong Quan Ky, 3. Le Van Trung, 4. Nguyen Van Hoai, 5. Doan van Ban, 6. Vo Van Sang, 7. Ly Trong Qui, 8. Le Van Giang, 9. Nguyen Trung Hau, 10. Truong Huu Duc, 11. Pham Cong Tac, and 12. Cao Quynh Cu. See *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>36</sup> As Chris Hartney remarks, “Caodaists claim the séance as a new technology of revelation that makes their religion different to all other religions. It is a guide for the religion. It is the process that makes decisions both official and certain. It is the process by which the religion sanctifies its changes and its development”. See Christopher Hartney, “Caodaism: A Few Main Facts on History and Philosophy”, Presentation at IARF 1999 World Congress, Vancouver, Canada 31, July 1999. Séance is a method where humans communicate directly with Spirits. The séance or direct communication with the spiritual realm is, as it was, the latest in “religious technology”. And Caodaism is structured directly by séance messages; mostly communicate with God and other Divine Spirits. See *Various Papers*, p.110.

<sup>37</sup>In his book, *A Gift to Australia: Caodaism and the First Caodaist Temple of Australia*, as Christopher Hartney notes, “Werner explains the term as pho meaning to assist and loan the phoenix - a reference perhaps to the bird carved on the top of the corbeille a bec or séance writing instrument”, at <https://www.daotam.info/gifttoaust.htm> Retrieved January 20, 2018.

lead them in the séance practices. The Pho loan adepts, under the leadership of Pham Cong Tac and Le Van Trung, met Ngo Van Chieu in January 1926. Chieu accepted them and shared all doctrines and rituals with the new adepts he learned from Duc Cao Dai during his three years of intensive discipleship of God on Phu Quoc Island. He taught the new adherents a simple ritual of chanting prayers and the presentation of offerings to Duc Cao Dai. From that time on a ritual of a four time daily prayer became mandatory for the disciples: 6:00 am, 12:00 noon, 6:00 pm, and 12:00 midnight. All the rituals are performed in front of the altar, above which is the all-seeing Divine Eye of Duc Cao Dai. On January 27, 1926 they held the first séance under the direction of Ngo Van Chieu at his house on Bonard Street in Saigon (modern Le Loi Boulevard, with which it connected via the square in front of the Ben Thanh Market, District-1, Ho Chi Minh City). For the next three months they practiced spirit communication and worshiped Cao Dai under his directions. This harmonious relationship did not last long. A great dispute occurred between the leaders of the Pho loan group and Ngo Van Chieu over the promulgation of the new religion. The result of this disagreement was that Chieu separated from the Pho loan. With a few followers he dedicated himself to the pursuit of personal holiness through a life of quiet asceticism.

### **2.2.2. Le Van Trung (1875-1934)**

Born in 1875 to a peasant family, Le Van Trung spent his childhood life in Saigon-Cho Lon province. His extraordinary talent and hardship allowed him to gain entry to a prestigious academia, the Chausse-loup-Laubat College in Saigon where he graduated in 1893.<sup>38</sup> He reportedly joined the administrative service soon afterwards, and advanced by the normal stages until 1905. His multifaceted talents and high ambition did not permit him to settle his career for the first job. Therefore, in that year, he entered a business enterprise and when it

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<sup>38</sup> Blagov, *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement*, p.10.

succeeded he resigned his government position for good. Later on, he was elected to the Council Colonial Cochinchina and following this was chosen by the authorities to serve on the *Conseil Superior de l'Indochine* (Council Superior of Cochinchina-Southern Vietnam). But ultimately, he is reported to have resigned from this position in 1925.<sup>39</sup> On January 11, 1926, he is said to have converted to Caodaism.<sup>40</sup> Before entering the priesthood, he was a politician famous for his public service. On April 22, 1926, he was divinely ordained as Dau Su (Cardinal) with Caodaist name Thuong Trung Nhut.<sup>41</sup> On November 22, 1930, His Holiness Giao Tong (Pope) Li Po (the Spiritual Pope) granted him the title Giao Tong Huu Hinh (the Earthly Pope). That is why Caodaists call him the Acting Pope (Giao Tong) of Caodaism until his demise in 1934.<sup>42</sup>

With regard to Trung's first involvement with Cao Dai séances Sergei Blagov points out two different versions. According to one version, he was taken to a séance at Cho Gao (located in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region) in June 1925 by his friend and relative, Nguyen Huu Dac who was also a friend of Ky's brother. The other version tells how Le Van Trung was introduced to a séance by his relative, who was a member of the Minh Ly sect (Taoist sect), and how the spirit of Li Po predicted a spiritual future for him: whereupon he gave up his alleged opium addiction overnight.<sup>43</sup> As Gobron mentions, Ly Thai Bach (Li Tai Po) manifested in the séance meeting and at the same time announced to him his future religious mission. That experience changed his life indeed. Following the message he immediately submitted to the realm imposed by the new faith. Moved by grace, Trung without hesitation, sustained by his faith, had the courage to cease smoking opium and follow a vegetarian diet.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p.10

<sup>40</sup>Blagov, *Vietnamese Traditionalism*, 2001, p.21.

<sup>41</sup>Divine Teaching regarding organizing the heavenly appointments and oaths, April 22nd and 23rd, 1926, see *The Collection of Divine Messages-Thanh Ngon Hiep Tuyen* (TNHT), 1968 p.15, Volume 1

<sup>42</sup>*Encyclopedia of Caodaism*,

at: <https://sites.google.com/site/caodaismmeditation/> Retrieved February 10, 2018.

<sup>43</sup>Blagov, *op cit*, p.11.

He also left his business enterprises in order to consecrate himself entirely to religion.<sup>44</sup> Historically speaking, Le Van Trung officially engaged in Caodaism through the Pho Loan group right after its establishment in July 1925. This group began with His Holiness Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, Cao Quynh Cu and Cao Hoai Sang when all of them were officials at the French institutions in Saigon and at the same time they would conduct séances with a view to receiving spirit messages.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, they started to get result since July 1925 when they could establish a contact with a spirit they knew named Vuong Thi Le who had died in 1918. She was the daughter of Vuong Quan Ky's<sup>46</sup> elder brother. Finally, in August 1925 anonymous AAA spirit reportedly appeared in their séances while the spirit of Li Tai Po<sup>47</sup> is reported to have appeared approximately at the same time. On December 15, 1925 AAA Spirit proclaimed Himself Cao Dai Supreme Being.<sup>48</sup> Being a close friend of Ky's older brother, Le Van Trung often attended these séances. As Blagov mentions, Cao Quynh Cu's wife notes that on January 11, 1926 Trung came to her house to see her husband (Cao Quynh Cu), one of the first three members of Pho Loan group. He wanted officially to become a disciple of Cao Dai. On January 18, 1926, under the instruction of Duc Cao Dai, His Holiness Pham Cong Tac and Cao Quynh Cu made a return visit to Trung. Tac immediately informed Trung about the divine will. He was very glad to listen attentively and showed interest and

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<sup>44</sup>Gobron, *History and Philosophy op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 10

<sup>46</sup>Vuong Quan Ky-one of the twelve disciples of Cao Dai

<sup>47</sup>Li Po or Li Tai-po (705-762 A.D.) On the night of the poet's birth his mother of the family of Li had dreamed of Tai-po Hsing, the Great White Star, which in the West is called Venus. So the child was named Li, meaning plum, and surnamed Tai-po, which is to say The White Star. At ten he had mastered all the books of Confucius, and was composing immortal poetry. At twelve he went to live like a philosopher in the mountains, and stayed there for many years. He grew in health and strength, practiced swordsmanship, and then announced his abilities to the world. All in all, the 30 volumes of delicate and kindly verse which he left behind him warrant his reputation as the greatest poet of China. "He is the lofty peak of Tai", explains a Chinese critic, "towering above the thousand mountains and hills; he is the sun in whose presence a million stars of heavens lose their scintillating brilliance". Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1954), pp. 705,5,11. Ly Thai Bach, more commonly known as Li tai pe, the Chinese Homer, author of a literary revival under the 13<sup>th</sup> Tang dynasty (713-742), a fervent Taoist, see Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*,

<sup>48</sup>Blagov, *Vietnamese Traditionalism, op. cit.*, 2001, p.21.

respect to the proposal. They had a friendly meeting and discussion over the matter. He agreed to celebrate a séance at his house without any hesitation. After that Mr. Le Van Trung decorated his house, set up an altar, bought incense, lamp, flower, tea, and alcohol thoughtfully to welcome Duc Cao Dai and Cao Dai revealed himself to Trung.<sup>49</sup>

According to Blagov, in January 1926 Trung together with Pho Loan members met Ngo Van Chieu with a view to launching joint séances under Chieu's instructions. And they successfully started their joint séances under Chieu's direction on 27 January, 2016. It is reported that On February 12, 1926 or on the eve of the lunar New Year (*Binh Dian*-Tiger) the official name of the new faith-the Great Way of the Third Universal Salvation (*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*)-and the Supreme Being (*Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat*)-were announced.<sup>50</sup> As Caodaists believe, it was God, the Great Master who sent Trung together with early Pho Loan members close to the Phu Chieu (Pope), who had to guide them in the religious way as an elder brother.<sup>51</sup> The faithful agreed to disclose the new religion with the French authorities and signed a petition. The document had 247 signatures that is said to have included Ngo Van Chieu. As Phu Chieu (Pope Chieu) used to live in solitude and intended to keep continuing the state of seclusion he had avoided the influx of adherents. Thus, he decided to keep himself free of this great religious movement from then on. In that particular situation, it is believed that Le Van Trung was named by the Great Master to replace him.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, the earnestness of Le Van Trung together with other pioneers soon attracted them to an increasing number of adherents. Here Blagov notes that it was Le Van Trung who outlined the petition of 7 October 1926 to the Governor of Cochinchina, La Fol appealing for the official recognition of Caodaism as a religion.<sup>53</sup> As Blagov further mentions, according to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>50</sup> Blagov, *op cit*, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Gobron, *op cit*, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, *op cit*, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Blagov, *op cit*, p.11.

the decree of 1873, Trung made his request because official authorization was needed for establishing new religious community. The French accepted the application and the Governor announced to Trung his intention not make official decision before observing the development for a certain period of time. Noticeably, as an experienced and influential person, Le Van Trung handled the situation very well. He became one of the leading personalities in the growing Cao Dai movement, proclaiming the messages on his missionary journeys, in different parts of Cochinchina, and keeping in touch with local congregations, advising them on both theological and practical issues. After the departure of Ngo Van Chieu, Le Van Trung began to assert administrative leadership over the fledging movement. Under Trung's directions the new group sought to expand their religion by holding séances in the suburban and rural areas. By May 1926, Le Van Trung sought government permission to open "oratories" (chapels used for worship, sermon and propagation) in east and central Cochincina. Though the Cao Dai leaders and adherents waited on the decision of French authority for the legal recognition of their religion until 1939, they could officially inaugurate their religion with a vivid ceremonial display on November 18, 1926. The participants include French officials, military officers, civilian administrators, reputed 50000 followers and curiosity seekers from home and abroad.<sup>54</sup> There is no record about whether Ngo van Chieu, the first convert to the religion, attended the formal inaugural ceremony. French attitude to Cao Dai religion may have been the result of political considerations. They may have considered that Caodaism was apparently too strong to be eradicated and that it would be wiser to tolerate it and use it to promote the unity and stability of Cochinchina. This helps Caodaism to develop as the first national religion of Vietnam. The spread of Caodaism was also helped by the political and cultural situation at that time. Caodaism spread quickly. In the 1920s-1930s, Cao Dai communities existed in most of the urban as well as rural centers in

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

Southern Vietnam. In the beginning Vietnamese as well as foreign scholars considered it to be a Buddhist sect or reformed Buddhism.

### **2.2.2.1. The Prominence of Le van Trung**

Le Van Trung, one of the first twelve God's disciples, was very instrumental in the establishment, development and expansion of Caodaism. Le van Trung together with Nguyen Ngoc Tuong launched the Cao Dai movement. The Cao Dai movement continued to spread to neighboring provinces and districts with small oratories being opened. It was under the leadership of Le Van Trung, who was empowered by God to Quyen Giao Tong-Acting Pope.<sup>55</sup> By 1930 many Caodai followers had moved in and settled on the property in Tay Ninh, responding to an appeal from Le Van Trung. It is recorded that Trung's appeal was even placed in the press.<sup>56</sup> Certainly from that period on, there was a steady growth in the popularity of Caodaism.

### **2.2.3. Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac (1890-1959)**

Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac (1890-1959), one of the pioneers and an ardent and courageous leader of Cao Dai religion. Born at Tan An (now Long An) June 21, 1890<sup>57</sup>, he quit the world and its sufferings at Phnom Phen, Cambodia, May 17, 1959.<sup>58</sup> In his 20s he worked for the French Cochinchina Customs Department with diligence and honesty. Even though studious and hardworking he was a simple man who would love nature. His natural charisma was evident to his friends even while reciting poems or just playing music. His natural competence led him to study many areas and contemplate esoteric ideas including the future of his country and the welfare of the people, especially since the government of the day was

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<sup>55</sup> Van, *op. cit.*, p.8, 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.265/66.

unstable and authoritarian; two adjectives that guaranteed fear and unrest in the general population. As time wore on he became a spiritual leader with political skills making him a great patriot while at the same time he strove to find ways to liberate the nation from its many parasitical invaders.

Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac experimented with the practice of séances through table tipping at a house in Darras Street near the Thai Binh Market (Saigon) in 1925. He is the one who brought out the spirits and was the maintainer of the laws of the New Religion (Ho Phap). He appeared to have been a superb organizer and became involved in large-scale organization and proselytism. In April, 1926, he became the Ho Phap or defender of the faith or spirit medium. At a time he was the leader of the Spiritual and Temporal Realms or Secular Realms and Pham Cong Tac together with Giao Tong (Acting Pope) of Cao Dai religion, Le Van Trung began the rapid expansion of the new religion. One source indicated that he could very successfully influence several thousand followers and was most active in the geographical area around Tay Ninh. On November 12, 1935, the Council of the Faithful (Popular Council) and the Sacerdotal Council<sup>59</sup> elected Tac as leader of the Tay Ninh sect. Thereafter, the Holy See in Tay Ninh became deeply involved in politics and defense under his dynamic leadership. His management led the Holy See to affluence and temporal wealth. The Tay Ninh sect under him threw its support behind the French and was able to function openly. Having maintained their peace with the French, he consolidated his political strength to attempt to form a nationalist government. At the same time he admired and recognized the contradictory but vital role of Bao Dai, the Khai-Dinh, the Emperor of Vietnam and Ho Chi

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<sup>59</sup>Sacerdotal Council is one of the three councils (Popular Sacerdotal and High Councils) by which the Holy See is governed. Sacerdotal Council (*Hoi Thanh*) is composed of Priests (Giao Huu), Bishops (Giao Su), Archbishops (Phoi Su) and Principal Archbishops (Chanh Phoi Su). This Council examines the plans made by the Popular Council.

Minh in the liberation of the Vietnamese people while calling for reconciliation between the Nationalists and the Communists.

But situation did not favor him for long time, because French Colonial forces started to suspect the aims of Pham Cong Tac regarding the freedom of the Vietnamese people. The nationalist parties, for instance, were burning with anger and hatred at that time. But fortunately, with his far sighted policy and brilliant planning he was able to calm the nationalist parties. Pham Cong Tac was the most powerful living person of the legislative body in Tay Ninh and renowned holder of that position as well as being a brilliant diplomat and statesman. When fighting broke out in Saigon, he managed to avoid a military confrontation between the Caodaists at Tay Ninh and Vietnam's Prime Minister Diem's national army. As a result he was able to concentrate on defending the Holy Land and ensure happiness for all Cao Dai followers. He was an architect of the construction of both the concrete and spiritual forms of the Cao Dai religion. The area of the Holy Land, for example, was planned and conceptualized single handedly. For example, a perfect shape to the organizational and doctrinal framework of Caodaism manifests his excellence. He was very aware of foreign scholars and appreciated the interests of those intellectuals in recognizing the universality of Cao Dai Religion. His holy mission was served by some worthy scholars when they represented Caodaism firstly, at the International Spiritualistic Congress of Barcelona in 1934; secondly, at the World Congress of Religions, London, 1936; thirdly, at the International Spiritualistic Congress of Glasgow, 1937; and at the World Congress of Beliefs in Paris, 1939. His successful pursuits of universality and a wide range of applicability of this religion are the result of his active efforts and hard work. The legacies that he left behind embody many extraordinary works, all of them stand out showing the integrity of his religious life and he remains the most significant religious-political figure in

the first half of the twentieth century. Politically ambitious Ho Phaph's reforms embodied a totally new idea: that the Cao Dai religion can be compatible with politics.

Being an eminent spiritualist and religious leader, a tireless inquirer in the world of the Spirit and spirits, naturalist, nationalist, revolutionist, architect and teacher, Ho Phap was a curious man and himself a curiosity. A Great soul by his overflowing intellectual generality and universal approach, he was an ardent Philanthropist. He was curious indeed but receiving the divine messages through séance: when he thought to have discovered a spiritual beauty, a philosophical or religious truth, he liked to make it known and shared by others at once. He would not hesitate to fight always with passion against those, who in his eyes, wanted to put the light under a bushel. It is in this way that he organized Dao Cao Dai and spread it in and out of Vietnam and also in this way that he fought to his last breath, praying for his illumination. Ho Phap, a great intellect, philanthropist, architect, was above all a great heart. After a long painstaking spirit practice and discovering of divinity,<sup>60</sup> Ho Phap became a convinced propagator, a well informed and one of the authentic imitators (accredited by divinity) of Cao Dai religion in the history of world religions. Séance practices, religious sermons and organizing skills applied in giving a new shape to third universal amnesty of religion, succeeded one another. He speaks frankly about the reforms and transformations of present society of which he antiquates the corruption and degeneration to mediocrity. Through séance practices he would seek again and again for God as much as God seeks him with a view to envisaging the fusion the kingdom of God and the cosmic home into an immense fraternal Temple, synthesis of both. This is the way he could attain the highest metaphysical truth. We are still approaching this harmony of the mystic overcoming the fault and incomprehension of some the dogmatics, as of others, the rationalists. Therefore, the appearance of kingdom of God and the "cosmic home" are expected though a long time to

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<sup>60</sup> For a detailed study see Tran Van Rang, *op. cit.*, pp.22-90.

come. The philosophy of the Ho Phap is crammed with just, enthusiasm and elevated ideas on education to be given, on liberty to be respected and spirituality etc. His approach is then more serene, sober and harmonious. As the defender of Cao Dai religion, Caodaists are used to defend Ho Phap to protect the exploited from exploitation. Besides his philosophical and spiritual merits the contributions of Ho Phap constitute a strong hold of governance based on the “Holy See” in Tay Ninh Province. Therefore, the spiritual presence of Ho Phap in anthropomorphous form in and out of Holy See still defends manias, vices and misunderstandings. Without controversy, Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac appeared to be a great philosopher and theosophist who could express himself without constraint even esthetically, and without any trace of social hypocrisy. Thus, the being which exist in him free him from constraints, injustices imposed by life social individual, collective economic injustices and religion political prejudices. Indeed, the mystic power he retained would lead him to the quest for God and justice. Therefore, the messages he received prove that Ho Phap is now among the pioneers of Dao Cao Dai who are successful and satisfied. The social and economic injustice, the oppressions of the rich against the poor and the wrong of one and the other are strong handled in various activities of Ho Phap. This must be said the present posthumous contributions of Ho Phap surpass the psychological case and to some extend serve as the testimony of metaphoric forces. Cao Dai followers have reason to believe that Ho Phap was one of the inspired mediums of spiritism. It is spiritism that led Ho Phap toward Caodaism. Being real theosophies and influenced by romanticism, the proper leadership of Ho Phap expended Caodaism into a harmonious synthesis of all religions without losing the best of its spirits origin or of its Buddhist formation. Due to the great leadership quality he extended his role to that of propagandist of the new religion. It is efforts, his meditations, his intensive practice of mysticism merited more and more. The spirit character of the military genius of

Ho Phap seems to be demonstrated by Jean of Arc (c. 1412–1431)<sup>61</sup>, for he is competent to judge concerning inspiration through the luminous analysis of the theories of spiritism. That which inspired Ho Phap also inspired in the orient one of the great literary, political, esthetic and religious movement which we put under the general term romanticism. One of the four spirit mediums, chosen by God to original, preaches His gospel in view of reforming the *Third Alliance*.<sup>62</sup> What is curious to us that: he was we add today, in order to make Cao Dai complete, the synthesis of previous two amnesties are called for in terms of the principle of the third amnesty. His works seems to be finished when he left the earthly life for the eternal orient, but with administration of the present Cao Dai world, his value as the defender of religion is confirmed. Ho Phap like victor Hugo, was during his lifetime a practicing spiritualist, he communicated with spirits by means of a table and automatic writing.

### **2.3. The Religious, Social and Political Conditions: The Early Period**

Historically, it is remarked that the Vietnamese were no less aggressive toward their neighbors. Following the triumph over the Mongols, they reportedly turned southward and conquered Champa (the Indianized kingdom of central Vietnam) by 1471. History tells us that the seesaw conflict prolonged on through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and took forty thousand lives of its inhabitants. After being exhausted by their campaigns against Champa, the Vietnamese again fell prey to China under the unified Ming dynasty. Its brief

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<sup>61</sup> Martyr, saint and military leader Joan of Arc is believed to have acted under divine guidance and led the French army to victory over the English during the Hundred Years' War. She was canonized as a saint on May 16, 1920, and is the patron saint of France.

<sup>62</sup> As per Cao Dai doctrine, God divides his revelatory periods into three great phases. In each of the phases God declared his universal amnesty or salvation for humanity and through these amnesties God wanted a universal alliance among all the peoples and races. In these first two phases, the peoples and races of the world failed to serve the purpose of God's mission. Following the second amnesty of God, the third revelatory period renewed the cycle of intolerance, violence and thereby destruction. As the third and final amnesty of God, Caodaism calls for the *Third or the Final Alliance* among all religions major and minor or great and small. Thus, as the Third Alliance, Caodaism also claims to be the synthesis of all religions as its teachings show the way for overcoming intolerance of the earlier periods. See See Blagov, *op cit*, p. 16-17; Dutton, *op cit.*, p.17; Three-fold Revelation, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caodaism>, Retrieved March 20, 2018.

rule over Vietnam is considered to be the harshest in its history.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter the Chinese dictators began to force Vietnamese peasants to mine for gold and other ores, cut rare woods and grow spices, all to be exported to China along with elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, pearls and precious stones. At the same time, they drastically imposed Chinese culture, confiscated Vietnamese literature and compelled schools to teach in Chinese, suppressed Vietnamese cults and permitted only the worship of Chinese deities. In addition, they decreed Chinese dress for women, prohibited men from cutting their hair and even outlawed betel nut, the Vietnamese equivalent of chewing gum. They created an administrative grill, issuing identity cards to families, partly to control them and partly to streamline tax collection.<sup>64</sup> But the Vietnamese were always united to defend themselves against all aggressions. In reality, the key to Vietnamese power lay in the force and spirit of Vietnamese nationalism. Presumably, a long and tortuous series of conflicts and accommodations gave the Vietnamese a profound sense of their own identity and a strong feeling of nationalism. Vietnamese communities, thus, developed a strong collective spirit and mobilized their villages as a unified chain of separate links to fight against foreign intruders. Their country's frequent wars, according to Stanley Karnow, infused in the Vietnamese a readiness to defend themselves. In his book, *Vietnam A History*, he wrote a chapter on the Heritage of Vietnamese Nationalism where he characterizes some Vietnamese historical lady figures<sup>65</sup> as very tough and uncompromising warriors. This spirit of Vietnamese nationalism continued

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<sup>63</sup>Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>64</sup><http://vietnam.jannalongacre.com/religion/buddhism/quan-yin-quan-am/>. Retrieved March 25, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> 1. A titled lady, Trung Trac, avenging the murder of her dissident husband by a Chinese commander, led the first major Vietnamese insurrection against China. She and her sister, Trung Nhi, mustered other restive nobles and their vassals, including another woman, Phung Thi Chinh who supposedly gave birth to a baby in the middle of the battle yet continued to fight with the infant strapped to her back. They vanquished the Chinese in A.D. 40 and with the Trung sisters (who are also called Hai Ba Trung- Trung sisters in Vietnam) as queens, set up an independent state that stretched from Hue into southern China. But the Chinese crushed in only two years later, and the Trung sisters committed suicide- in aristocratic style- by throwing themselves into a river. 2. Trieu Au, the Vietnamese equivalent of Joan of Arc, fought for Vietnam's independence against China in the third century A.D. Defeated at the age of twenty-three, she committed suicide. She is still worshipped as a sacred figure. For details See Karnow, *op. cit.*, pp.109-38.

down the centuries until the reunification of two Vietnams in the year 1975. Throughout such a long heritage of Vietnamese nationalism, a variation is also marked among the different nationalist movements. As A. L. Basham views that the nationalist movement was at once a reassertion of traditional values and symbols against alien intrusions and itself an alien, modern, untraditional phenomenon.<sup>66</sup> Though he analyzed this characteristic of nationalist movement in Indian context it is applicable for Vietnamese context too. This paradox is found embodied in the different brands of nationalism represented by such figures as Pham Cong Tac, Ngo Dinh Diem (1901-1963)<sup>67</sup>, Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) and others. Any nationalist movement in a colonial situation is bound to have both a negative and positive aspects. The negative aspect is the determination to expel the foreign rulers and achieve self-government; the positive aspect is the concept of the sort of nation which should emerge from the struggle for independence. In negative terms the Moderates aimed at moving slowly towards self-government for Vietnam. The Extremists became increasingly assertive from the 1890s onward, and demanded self-government more rapidly than the Moderates did, and without the latter's concern for gradual preparation. The Extremists' aims in term of the sort of Vietnam they wanted are very clear cut as those of the Moderates.<sup>68</sup> He shows how they took uncompromising stance during the war against the Chinese. However, from the beginning, the Vietnamese were obsessed with matters of unity and cohesion, and the importance of keeping the territory together. The Vietnamese were excellent organizers and administrators. They understood the importance of respecting local customs and ethnic identities. Thus, the territory could be kept under their control by 1975. Among the Vietnamese individuals, independent thinking flourished. As Ho Chi Minh notes, "The Vietnamese people deeply love independence, freedom and peace. But in the face of United

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<sup>66</sup>A. L. Basham, ed. *A Cultural History of India*, (Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 1975), p. 391.

<sup>67</sup> 1st President of the Republic of South Vietnam since 26 October 1955 – 1 November 1963

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.392.

States aggression they have risen up, united as one man”.<sup>69</sup> People could worship the traditional gods, or could develop personal, philosophical views about the world, life, and human nature. The Vietnamese are found to have adopted many kinds of gods and goddesses in Chinese characters and religions of both Indian and Chinese origins. There was a high degree of religious tolerance throughout Vietnamese societies. Vietnamese religion has its own characteristics. Religion in Vietnamese society is characterized as Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Caodaism and ancestor worship. According to Dutton, it is an intermingling of all the various religious and philosophical influences that have reached the shores of Vietnam down through the centuries. As he further remarks, “Vietnam itself is a synthesis of races, religions, and cultures. The most enduring influence has been that of the Chinese, but Indian and Western thought have also left their mark on Vietnam.”<sup>70</sup> In fact, the religion practiced by most Vietnamese is essentially a cult of the spirits. Many of the social rituals performed in the villages adopt different ways with a view to communicate these spirits. The practice of religion in Viet Nam revolved around specific spirits and divinities that are thought to influence every action and event in the universe, including life and death. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism are imported from the outside. There is nothing especially about Vietnamese about it. Indeed, religion in Viet Nam has a genuine and original Vietnamese contents that include magical conceptions and practices i.e., Shamanic or animistic in character.<sup>71</sup> Some aspects of original Vietnamese cultic practice predate the introduction of Chinese and Indian religions which developed over the centuries under the popular class rather than the Chinese oriented upper class. Although the Vietnamese religious and magical system borrowed a great deal from Chinese mythological figures and combined

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<sup>69</sup> Available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=Ho+Chi+Minh+&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab> Retrieved March 27, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, p.15.

<sup>71</sup> Performances of shamanic rituals or ceremonies in religion that are characterized with five major categories such as soul loss, spirit possession, object intrusion, witchcraft or sorcery, and taboo violation. For details, see Crapo, *op cit*, pp.212-23.

elements from three major Eastern religions, it assimilated all aspects where all borrowed elements fit into Vietnamese existing conceptions. Thus, to see Vietnamese religion as nothing more than foreign importation would be a mistake. But Cao Dai religion, for example, a religion of Vietnamese origin has borrowed many elements from both Eastern and Western religions but it incorporated all aspects and gave them specific Vietnamese meanings. In this regard, Dutton clarifies that as a synthesis of many religions, Caodaism is truly a Vietnamese phenomenon. There is nothing new in Caodaism except that it is uniquely Vietnamese. It is a way of looking at things, of harmonizing all the conflicting demands made upon the individual.<sup>72</sup>

In the case of Vietnamese perspective, social conditions were in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary state. Historically, the French conquered the six southern Vietnamese provinces of the Nguyen imperial dynasty in the 1860s. By 1883 the Nguyen Gia Long code<sup>73</sup> was replaced with French civil code which completely altered the system of justice and politics in Vietnamese society.<sup>74</sup> Following the social changes, the pro-royalists (pro-monarchists) and restorationists (Confucian scholars) started to lead anti-French movements in 1885 and continued till 1925.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps, the French could understand all possible threats to their regime and therefore, quickly felt the necessity of French law over there in Cochinchina. Thus, in their quest for order and stability, the French developed legal codes. Northern Vietnamese

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>73</sup> The usage of kinship terms in the *southern* portion of Viet Nam appears to be closer to Chinese kinship terminology, while Chinese-inspired legal *codes* also appear to have had more of an impact in the *South* during the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) and the legal code was named after the first ruler of the Nguyen dynasty, Gia Long (1802-1819). See Jayne Susan Werner, Daniele Belanger, (ed.), *Gender, Household, State: Doi Moi in Viet Nam*, (New York: South Asia Program Publications, 2002), pp.17-19.

<sup>74</sup> Karnow, *op. cit.*, p.126.

<sup>75</sup> Revolts led by scholar-gentry figures loyal to the Vietnamese throne harassed French troops and challenged the imposition of French rule. Following the First World War, however, the will to revolt died out in Cochinchina, at the same time the society at large was being taken over new social and economic forces. For details, see Jayne Susan Werner, *The Cao Dai: The Politics of A Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement* (Cornell University, Ph.D., 1976) p.1

scholars are reported to have viewed the period from 1885-1925 as a distinct era in modern Vietnamese history. Social cohesion in the village was also undermined by changes. Village cohesion disintegrated because households were dispersed and the practice of village religious cults declined. The pre-twentieth century village, which controlled its own budget and ran its own affairs according to oral custom, lost much of its vitality and purpose. Traditional social institutions for mutual aid and collective worked disintegrated under the pressure of colonial laws. Gap between rich and poor started to be engulfed in the western part of Cochinchina. The traditional mandarinate totally disappeared; colonial administrative system started; and education system was developed in the matrix of French curricula and thereby managed by Frenchmen and French-speaking Vietnamese officials. Overall, the colonial system brushed off the traditional Vietnamese infrastructure and gave a completely French appearance to the society. As a result, incidence of civil disorder and violence rapidly increased. Major outbreaks of peasant violence and protest occurred in 1908, 1913, and 1916 and had been brutally repressed each time.<sup>76</sup> Though the French was threatened with insurgencies led by the pro-monarchists, they confronted each of the challenging situations at every turn and thereby strengthened their position in Cochinchina. History tells us about a fundamental change in the economy and society during 1920s. This is true that the commercialization of rice cultivation, rubber production and banking changed Vietnamese economy from a static agrarian state to one revolutionary situation with capitalist features by the 1920s. In reaction to the effects of colonial rule, new forms of anti-French movements including communist and nationalist ones and new socio-economic forces emerged in Vietnam. The new socio-economic forces are actually found to have reacted favorably to French rule.<sup>77</sup> In reality, though the new class of bourgeoisies had a free and reciprocal

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>77</sup> A new class of Vietnamese landowners, merchants, and administrative officials had appeared which reacted to French rule in a way different from the scholar-gentry of the nineteenth century. This new class exhibited many features of a “bourgeoisie” (and could be properly called a landed bourgeoisie);

political relationship with the French domain in Cochinchina, they did not lose their feelings of nationality. At the same time great social and political changes were occurring in the society. Alongside the economic and social changes, class changes took place in the society but more specifically political development shook Cochinchina in the 1920s.<sup>78</sup> All these first modern political parties emerged in Viet Nam which were committed to bring an end to French regime in Cochinchina through a revolution. It is at this socio-historical juncture, as Werner shows in her research, that a new religious mass movement, the Cao Dai religion appeared in Cochinchina. This movement swept across Cochinchina i.e., the southern third of Vietnam in the late 1920s and 1930s. The mass conversions to the Cao Dai across the decades were stimulated by conditions of widespread poverty, the degeneration of traditional institutions, and the prevalence of social unrest among all social classes. It was banned in Tonkin (Northern Vietnam) and Annam (Central Vietnam) until the mid-1930s but later spread to some extent the northern protectorates.<sup>79</sup> This period marks the triumph of the Cao Dai faith. It is the epoch in which the new faith converted a huge number of peasants estimated 600,000 in about 750 villages and established over 80 Cao Dai temples throughout Cochinchina region by 1934, only 14 years after it was founded. A new society was born. Following the World War I under the leadership of Bui Quang Chieu and Nguyen Phan Long, Vietnamese upper class people founded the constitutionalist party (1923). Alongside several reform movements the politics of urban reform movement started in Cochinchina with a view

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it had grown as a result of the new economic opportunities afforded by the colonial presence in land-owning, money-lending, commercial enterprises, and importing and exporting, particularly after the turn of the century. See *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Political parties espousing ideological and social goals were founded for the first time. The Constitutionalist Party was founded in 1923 by landowner Bui Quang Chieu and journalist Nguyen Phan long. The Nationalist Party, founded in 1923, was modeled after the Chinese Kuomintang, funded by wealthy Vietnamese and advocated a violent overthrow of the French. Ho Chi Minh's Viet Nam revolutionary Youth league founded in 1925 in Canton, China, and organized the same year in Saigon, quickly gathered support among intellectuals, teachers, salaried urban white collar, and manual workers. See *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

to mitigate the gradual strength of French rule. The ultimate mission of the Constitutionalist movement was to achieve maximum politico-economic benefits. In order to make their mission a great success, the Constitutionalists maintained a regular cooperation with the French regime. Cao Dai religion was the target of the new advertising campaign for the Constitutionalists. They worked for the propagation of Cao Dai religion through their diverse agents. History reports that two founding leaders of the movement converted to Cao Dai religion and would regularly visit Cao Dai temples. They, indeed, engaged in Cao Dai religion to serve their political purpose. They put a great deal of effort into the progress of Cao Dai religion and thereby help collect converts peasant class. In fact, the new religion grew in strength after the Constitutionalists made a great effort in contributing the growth of this religion. In reality, some of the reformist leaders found great interest in Cao Dai philosophy. But at a certain stage, the French police accused the reformists of being interested in the religion only for political cause. After revealing an unprecedented opportunity in Cao Dai religion, the reformists started to encourage the peasants to embrace this religion for political reasons. At the same time, the French, actually, started to pay a close look to Cao Dai religion when it showed all clear signs of emerging a people's movement of a considerable size in 1927. Alongside reformists, leader of revolutionary movement in the south took initiative to promote Caodaism for the same purpose. Although Le Fol, the Governor of CochinChina welcomed the advent of Cao Dai religion in 1925, Governor General Pasquier considered it to be a great threat to his regime and in 1930 he imposed restrictions to stop its further spread. In contrast to this situation, the Paris based very prominent Cao Dai contacts presented this issue in the national assembly so that they force the colonial government to stop its arrests and lift the restrictions. It took them several years to get the result and finally in 1930, Cao Dai religion got back its freedom to collect followers in the three regions of Viet Nam- CochinChina, Anam and Tonkin with the understanding the

would not lead to any political activity.<sup>80</sup>It notes that the pioneers of this religion were neither reformists nor revolutionary leaders; rather they totally avoided colonial politics.

It is easy to fit Cao Dai religion neatly into the patterns of Vietnamese traditional societies. It is deliberately connected with three great teachings of Vietnam. In addition, the Cao Dai spirit pantheon was essentially Taoist in conception, but it contained a number of European literary and historical figures, including Victor Hugo and Joan of Arc, as well as Jesus Christ. Leaders of the sects claimed that Caodaism was a blending of Eastern and Western elements. Cao Dai dignitaries claimed the religion as the “great synthesis of the five branches of the Great Path,” that is, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and the Vietnamese cult of the spirits. Moreover, Caodaism incorporated many European, particularly Roman Catholic features.<sup>81</sup>The very nature of Cao Dai religion is of spirit origin (essentially, born of spiritism). This is a particular form of Vietnamese spiritism. This is documented as a syncretism of three Great Teachings. A distinguished feature of this religion is that its leaders were from the Vietnamese upper class and had been educated in French schools. Most of them worked in the colonial bureaucracy. Therefore, many western scholars consider the Cao Dai movement primarily as a political problem. It’s religious, cultural, and organizational features are interesting as they help shed light on the character of the movement. In comparison to all contemporary religious movements, Cao Dai religion was arguably the most successful movement of the last century.

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-71.

<sup>81</sup> The Cao Dai priesthood is divided into the grades of “Priest,” “Bishop,” “Archbishop,” and “Cardinal” and the provincial organization of the sect was modeled on the Catholic Church as well as on the French colonial administration where most of its dignitaries worked. See Ibid. p. 12.

## 2.4. The Schisms: Extension of Cao Dai Church

The Cao Dai sect is a religious society of modern Vietnam, in agreement with other religions, and possesses undoubted claims on the interest of national unity and integrity of Vietnamese history. This claim is based partly on the remarkable homogeneity of their doctrines and customs, which present many resemblances to those of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Taoism etc. Larger and smaller communities of Caodaists or the followers of Duc Cao Dai are to be found in almost every important parts of southern Vietnam. Especially they are numerous in Tay Ninh, a north-western province of Ho Chi Minh City; and owing to the influence of their wealth, they take a prominent place. They do not, however, present a compact mass, but are divided into twelve branches. Cao Dai is believed to have initially chosen twelve leading disciples and from the original Tay Ninh group created twelve major sects. Though, there is dispute with regard to the actual number of original sects. As Oliver remarks, “When Ngo Van Chieu asked for confirmation and divine approval of the initial group of Caodai disciples, the séance message named thirteen men and those who have attempted to identify the twelve divinely appointed sects have differed in their analysis”.<sup>82</sup> The sectarian orientation thrives on a sense of opposition. Sectarian movement, sociologically speaking, is often the result of authority dissolution within the community of a certain faith. Sectarian collectivities could adopt a cultic stance by accommodating to the larger society and consolidating their position to achieve monopoly legitimacy. The failure of the propagation undermines the authority of key leaders and eliminates a major basis for group’s distinctiveness. Sectarian groups are very precarious because dissent and deviance are difficult to maintain in the face of opposition. The quality of leadership, commitment and recruitment processes, social control, and ideology enable sectarian groups to become more stable. The relationship of the sectarian group to society

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<sup>82</sup> Oliver, *op cit*, p.84.

promotes the establishment with sectarian stance. The group may withdraw physically from the rest of the community or it may migrate to a more favorable environment. It may defend itself by regulating members' contact with the group's leaders and absorbing members from the society so totally that outside influences cannot affect them. Such isolation may intensify the group's sectarianism. Established sectarian groups can effectively develop boundaries-physical, ideological, or symbolic-between themselves and the mainstream religion. To understand the varieties of religious sectarianism as they change in time helps us analyze their internal dynamics and their relationships with the mainstream religion in a totalistic society during the French rule. At the same time, established sectarian groups appear to be somewhat more accommodated in some aspects than new sectarian movements. A sectarian stance toward society depends partly on how society relates to the religious group.<sup>83</sup> Cao Dai history provides examples of about 50 groups arising as sectarian movements and becoming some of them established as sectarian movements. It is important to mention that there is not a theological protest against the parent group (the Tay Ninh Church). Thus, a sociological interpretation is called for the understanding of Cao Dai sectarian movements. Cao Dai sectarianism began immediately before the religion was publicly inaugurated. The inauguration ceremony, indeed, gave rise to the Cao Dai religious reform movement, to the crystallization of Pho loan group, and to conservative Cao Dai group of Ngo Van Chieu. The division resulted in the formation of two radically different schools of Dao Cao Dai. One is called the "exoteric"-Pho do (to ferry across, to help other) while the other is called "esoteric"-Vo vi-inaction.<sup>84</sup> The former emphasizes the propagation of Cao Dai messages to win converts and change the world. The later one emphasizes self-cultivation of inner life by progressive eradication of the inferior self. By 1935, the Pho loan group which had founded

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<sup>83</sup> Charles L. Harper, and Bryan F. Le Beau, "The Social Adaptation of Marginal Religious Movements in America," *Sociology of Religion*, 54, 2:171-192, 1993.

<sup>84</sup> Blagov, *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism and Its Leap into Modernity*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.2001).

Cao Dai religion in Tay Ninh province, 90 km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, nine years earlier had split into four different groups. Approximately 50 Cao Dai sects, organizations and groups had been formed by 1945. In dealing with such complex subject, a number of points must be understood before any meaningful inquiry can be undertaken. These clarifications follow some of them in greater details in this thesis. What are the Causes of Cao Dai Diversity? Since all most all of the Caodaists ultimately derive if not heretically, then certainly culturally, religiously, and tradition-wise-from one common source, obviously there can be only two factors which could have produced these differences. The first is a variance in the development among the Caodaists themselves within Tay Ninh Holy See, and the second, the exposure to disparate French influences. Why is there Intra-Community Variance? Here again, the two factors just mentioned will be found responsible for much of this variance. Both the internal developments and the rate and quality of external influences absorbed may be found to be disparate within different parts of the same local Cao Dai community, depending on such variables as religious observance. Which were the major external influences upon the Cao Dai Minds? Of the many encounters the Caodaists experienced in the course of their history since 1926. Some outstanding in salience and lasting in the influence they exerted on the development of the Cao Dai minds. The first was the encounter with the French from the day of inaugural ceremony of the religion (1926) down to the Ho Phap's exile (1941). The second great encounter was with the South Vietnamese moderate nationalist government. If, as we have just indicated, the Cao Dai mind has absorbed so many disparate influences from the French colonial Cochinchinese environments. In looking for an answer to this question we can get some help from Vietnamese history and culture which could go back more than a thousand years that is already mentioned above. However, it is important to note that in 1945, Tay Ninh Holy See took the initiative in working for the unification of all "chi" (branches) and all "phai" (sects).

It should be mentioned that His Holiness Pham Cong Tac, the Ho Phap at Tay Ninh, and his active delegate at Saigon, His Eminence Tran Quang Vinh, Phoi Su (Archbishop), wished for Union for Synthesis and Communion toward its true and only actual points of Caodaist radiance. Finally, they were reduced to 12 major groups through a Caodaist Union in around 1950. The split in the church became permanent. An interesting subject in itself is how a religious group or organization comes into being. In case of Cao Dai sectarianism, Victor L. Oliver in his *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society* characterizes sectarian groups on the basis of their major goals activities. He argues that those Cao Dai groups which are primarily oriented towards religious concerns and maintain a full-scale program of ritual activity are considered sects. Thus, according to Oliver, all groups are not actually sects, rather they are considered to be small organizations.<sup>85</sup> Now some questions from socio-historical perspectives may arise: What bring people together? What attracts them to the new group? What keep them away from the central organization? What holds them together? What shapes their organization and collective direction? What socio-historical factors contribute to the formation of a new religious group? What factors promote or inhibit its success, and how does the developing religious group interact with its larger social environment?

In fact, all groups, large or small are reported to have claimed to have emerged as a result of séance directives. Some believe that this sectarianism was divinely ordained and initiated to propagate the religion more rapidly. Therefore, the process of sectarianism as a divine policy within the church itself is inevitable. At this point, the Tay Ninh, the largest and original mother organization has never agreed with this opinion rather has declaimed against all groups breaking away from its organization and declared the followers as non Caodaists. As Oliver observes that between these two extreme views the Caodaists take a variety of

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<sup>85</sup> Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society*, p.83.

positions concerning Cao Dai sectarianism. In contrast to this strong stance of Tay Ninh sect, all Cao Dai disciples are found to have considered themselves members of Cao Dai religion whether they belong to an official group or not. Though there is a great divergence among the Cao Dai sects and organizations, their structure, rituals, calendars, and scope of development they follow the same Cao Dai philosophy and doctrine. In this regard, there is actually no basic difference among the sects or groups or organizations. As the primary reasons for the development of Cao Dai sectarianism, Oliver views that Cao Dai religion as an extremely syncretic system of thought allows members of other faiths to participate in Cao Dai religion without abandoning their own religious practices. Since the initial stage of this religion, adherents from a variety of religious, political and social backgrounds amalgamated their previous beliefs to new Cao Dai precepts created a fertile ground for sectarianism. Oliver's critical analysis of collected data on the basis of historical reports, newspaper accounts, biographies, government investigations and interviews refers to some factors relating to the development of Cao Dai sectarianism. Theological fatalism and social fatalism are also responsible for creating favorable ground for Cao Dai sectarianism.<sup>86</sup> Before further discussion we should take the following questions into our consideration and search for the major causes of how and why government involved with the process of Cao Dai sectarianism: Why Cao Dai temples were closed and leading personnel imprisoned by the government in the early and late 1930s? Why did the Caodaists join their hands with the Japanese and pro-independence movements to fought the French from 1941-1946? Why did the Caodaists take sides for the French against the Viet Minh during 1946-1952? Why did they divide themselves in their allegiance toward the Ngo Dinh Diem government since 1954-56? Indeed, alongside most of the revolutionary as well as reformist movements, the French and finally the Ngo Dinh Diem government in the south sought to accommodate the Caodaists

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<sup>86</sup> For a good discussion see Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.85.

with a view to gain their political support. Cao Dai religion with its community organizing process gradually grew in strength and expanded quickly in the south that appeared to be a great threat to the French rule. Here, report says that the French deliberately attempted to break apart of the central organization of the religion and spontaneous response of the followers by provoking the growth of rival sects.<sup>87</sup> At a certain stage, a hostile relation developed among the top religious leaders of the Tay Ninh sect. In 1933, Le Van Trung (acting Pope) and Pham Cong Tac, (the defender of the religion) accused Nguyen Tuong and Le Ba Trang, the two cardinals of working for the French and under this suspicion they were fired from their responsible positions. By contrast, another version of Tay Ninh critics says that the cardinals would know about the intelligence efforts of two leaders that linked with the Vietnamese independence movement. If both cases are true it evidences that the leaders were divided into two groups such as pro-French and patriotic anti-French. In Feb 1971, Oliver took an interview with Mrs. Cao Quynh Cu, one of the initial three Pho Loan mediums.<sup>88</sup> She informed that they were revolutionary at heart. The biography of Pham Cong Tac presents him as a revolutionary figure from his youth.<sup>89</sup> In addition, the French identified some well-known Vietnamese nationalists in the 1930s. They also discovered the fanatically nationalist approach of the séance messages in the late 1930s. These two cases led the French to take drastic action against the Tay Ninh leaders including two excommunicated cardinals. All suspected leaders were sent into exile in Madagascar and both the leaders of Ban Chinh Dao and the Tien Thien were imprisoned. The imprisonment of two leaders does not support that they separated from Tay Ninh under French sponsorship. In contrast to this judgment

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<sup>87</sup> Oliver's personal Interview with members of the Tay Ninh Legislative Branch, January and March, 1971: Nguyen Trung Ngon, a Caodai newspaper editor and son of a member of the initial College of Mediums at Tay Ninh, relates that his father, Nguyen Trung Hau, was "invited" by the French to establish a new sect for the express purpose of further dividing the religion and providing competition against Tay Ninh. Ngon claims the French offered his father material assistance to build a temple and establish his sect. Ngon also stated that during Ngo Dinh Diem's era, Diem actually did this, forming a new organization for the purpose of dividing the allegiance of Caodai believers.

<sup>88</sup> Among others are Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac and Cao Hoai Sang.

<sup>89</sup> *Tieu-su Duc Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac*: 16-17.

they might have broken their commitment with the French that resulted into their imprisonment. If it is not the reality the split had happened because of personal rivalry.<sup>90</sup>This situation led the two cardinals to establish a new sect. The formation of the Ban Chinh Dao sect in Ben Tre province in the year 1934 might have been a part of the French secret plan leading to their desired achievement. This is how, in the second phase, the process of sectarianism started within the central organization and Tay Ninh sect split in two. Cao Dai spiritual principles do not allow any discord, confusion, and division for material gain. Did the founders of all sects go against the principles and violate them through the establishment of their sects? At this point the followers of all sects have a chance to show evidence of support on behalf of division. What is this evidence? People belonging to different sects make claims to the origin of their sects as a result of séance directives.<sup>91</sup> The anti-French sentiment among the Caodaists also does not support the accusation of being involved with French plot in splitting the central organization. But Oliver provides a clear case of evidence relating to the government direct involvement in contributing the development of Cao Dai sectarianism within the religious community.<sup>92</sup> That was actually a joint project. The Republican Socialist Party (formed by a number of former Cao Dai military officers) deliberately collaborated the government of Nguyen Van Thieu (03 September, 1963-21 April, 1975)<sup>93</sup> with a view to gaining support of the Cao Dai laity. Did the role of Cao Dai military officials negate the spiritual principles of religion? The answer lies in their role they played in creating further problems for Tay Ninh on behalf of the government. Secretly, they influenced the officials and asked them to take sides and give support to the various factions involved. Consequently, a deepening division within the Tay Ninh hierarchy developed. That was an agreement between the government and the military officials to perform together an

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<sup>90</sup> Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.87-88.

<sup>93</sup> Nguyen Van Thieu (1923-2001) was the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the last President of the Republic of South Vietnam.

illegal and subversive act against the principles of religion. There are more background data of joint conspiracy with Cao Dai affairs contributing to sectarianism within the sects for the same purpose. Unity crisis, leadership crisis, disloyalty to the spiritual principles, false excuse of séance directives, distrust and suspicion led the faithful violating the vision of Cao Dai religion. The way sectarianism developed within Cao Dai religion and let it split in about 50 groups actually represents a break-away of the faithful from the commitment of Cao Dai God. The integration process of Cao Dai religion finally helped Cao Dai adherents see the religion united and functioning as constructive force. Though the possibility of schism within the religion was predicted by the prophetic scriptures a renewal of unity is confirmed. The universalism of Caodaism corresponds to the level of integration process in large measure than any other existing religion (Pham Cong Tac). The reconciliatory potential of this religion affirms such an act of combining into an integral whole. In one of his research papers “Caodaism as History, Philosophy and Religion” Thomas E. Dutton shows, on the basis of several French sources, that the division of the movement into sects was more result of personal rather than doctrinal difference.<sup>94</sup> According to Gerald Hickey, most Caodaists consider themselves Caodaist first and are not averse to attending ceremonies and rituals at the temples of other sects.<sup>95</sup> As Dutton concludes, “Caodaists attempt to brush off the division of Caodaism into twelve sects as an insignificant factor saying that the twelve sects are similar to the twelve Disciples of Christ—a rather bizarre comparison to say the least”<sup>96</sup>

## **2.5. Cao Dai Church during the Lifetime of Ho Phap**

The early years of Cao Dai religion were marked by internal conflicts over the movement’s political future. In that situation Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac often found himself in conflict with the religious and political leaders of his day. This is due to the fact that Cao Dai religion,

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<sup>94</sup> Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, *Various Papers*, p.9.

<sup>95</sup> Gerald C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1964), p.293.

<sup>96</sup> *Various Papers op. cit.*, pp.9-10.

especially the Tay Ninh sect had to pass through a great crisis during the last decades of French colonial regime. But interestingly absorption and adjustment, indeed, proceeded smoothly, in the case of Cao Dai religion. By the 1930s, when hatred towards the French and pro-royalist patriotism was widespread, Pham Cong Tac emerged from a bitter power struggle within the Cao Dai ranks and ascended to the position of Ho Phap at Tay Ninh. He was a nationalist at heart, and quickly moved the movement in a steadily more anti-colonial and anti-communist directions. Tac possessed a remarkable skill for issuing indirect anti-French statements that appealed to Vietnamese nationalists without alarming colonial administrators. If one looks at the Cao Dai church, one must consider the life-long contribution of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac to Cao Dai religion and its community on the basis of four main dimensions. These four identities and function could be defined as follows: - the gnostic, the esoterist whose intellectual and spiritual work is situated in his sermons (*Loi Thuyet Dao*)-the revivification of the Vietnamese intelligentsia who has devoted many efforts to fostering a greater understanding of the intellectual roots of the Vietnamese nationalism,- the intellectual and spiritual pedagogue whose teachings have aimed at and contributed to providing a cohesive religious framework for Cao Dai world and others,-and finally, the interpreter of Cao Dai religion for both the Eastern and the Western audiences. From a most fundamental standpoint, these four dimensions of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac's personality and work are essentially connected. He, thereby, has established himself as a pivotal figure in Cao Dai history in particular and in Vietnamese nationalist movement in general. However, since the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, special ways of spirit communication and thereby interaction developed among some early Cao Dai spiritists. They would regularly practice Spiritism with a view to receiving spiritual directives. At the outset, they were surprised by the result of their trials. Consequently, they kept this process continue with more enthusiasm that finally led them to establish a new religion-*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* (The Third Great

Way of Universal Salvation). Indeed, the specific conditions of time and place shaped the nature of these contacts, since they developed in the context of French colonial regime, its expansion and exploitation. Despite the limitations and distortions created by this situation, a new religious movement with significant social integration was beginning to develop. The inauguration ceremony took place in Tu Lam Tu pagoda<sup>97</sup> located in the village of Go Ken, five kilometers south of the town of Tay Ninh. But ultimately the Caodaists had to leave Go Ken pagoda and find a new place by March 12, 1927 in the village of Long Thanh, just four kilometers north of the Tay Ninh town, to build their Great House of Worship (Toa Thanh) of their own with funds.<sup>98</sup> During the period 1926-1927 the Caodaists occasionally used Buddhist pagodas to organize séances. Cao Dai religion gained more than 20000 adepts in less than two months, and half a million by 1930.<sup>99</sup> Though Cao Dai religion, according to Chapman, began with a small amount of peasant support around Saigon-Cho Lon, by 1928 it gained quite a good number of followers to persuade leaders to establish a Holy See at the village of Long Thanh in Tay Ninh province.<sup>100</sup> Why did Cao Dai leaders choose Tay Ninh province as the Holy See of their religion? In her doctoral thesis *The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement*, Jayne Werner shows that some major strategic factors helped the leaders select a site in Tay Ninh province for the Holy See: land was less expensive than the rice cultivated areas of the Mekong delta; they wanted to avoid close observation of colonial authorities; as the province is in close proximity to Cambodian border, the leaders attempted to convert potential Cambodians to Cao Dai faith; they assumed a great prospect of annual congregation of a huge number of Cao Dai pilgrims in the Holy See. These factors, according to Werner, indeed, stimulated Cao Dai leaders to purchase a

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<sup>97</sup> See Appendix 9, p.261.

<sup>98</sup> A fund estimated at 30,000 piasters donated by Madam Lam Thi Thanh, a businesswoman from My Tho, who was rewarded by becoming the first woman to hold high office in the Caodaist hierarchy See Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>99</sup> Blagov, *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement*, p.13.

<sup>100</sup> Chapman, *op. cit.*, 37.

large area in Long Thanh village just 4 km north-east of Tay Ninh town. As it was isolated from the mainstream of colonial society, first and foremost, especially for strategic reasons, the province has been an ideal location for the Cao Dai Holy See and after all a solemn place for the Cao Dai pilgrims. The Vietnamese who lived in Tay Ninh in the late 1920s were mostly recent arrivals. The economy of the province was underdeveloped. Most of the population of Tay Ninh appears to have comprised landless agricultural workers and poor peasants. A peasant's livelihood, for example, had to be supplemented by work elsewhere. Following the arrival of Cao Dai religion and its establishment, over the decades the inhabitants of Tay Ninh province must have fought against jungle and forest to turn this vast wilderness into fruitful soil. The arrival of Cao Dai religion in Tay Ninh province showed signs of favorable conditions for its success. The wealthy leaders created jobs and provided social services to an area of underemployment, poverty, and economic instability. The facilities were open to all. As a consequent, Tay Ninh peasants would come to the Holy See to seek employment before and after 1930 and they could often find jobs there. The Holy See and the Cao Dai organization in the province became a focal point for cultural and well-ordered life in Tay Ninh soon after they were established. The Cao Dai Church was well run and offered a shelter serving as a place of safety and economic security. One of the early aims of the Holy See was to establish a collective livelihood for Cao Dai followers, based on economic self-sufficiency. Cao Dai leaders promoted collective farming and other communitarian forms of economic activity, including handicrafts and small-scale manufacturing, to provide for the needs of those who lived at the Holy See. Adherents felt appreciated to donate one tenth of their income. The Holy See ran school for the children of Cao Dai followers and offered evening instruction for the adults to learn to read and write. Pham Cong Tac in particular promoted Cao Dai economic and social activities. In 1934, he formed a society called the *Pham Mon* (society of Pham) to supervise the collective farming

of corn, peanuts, and sugar cane.<sup>101</sup> By the mid-1930s, the sect had acquired at least 770 (220 acres inside and around the compound while four hundred and forty additional acres in the neighboring villages) acres of land, some of which had been cleared and was producing crops. In 1932, peanuts, pineapples, vegetable gardens, rubber trees, and other items were planted in around 135 acres area of land. A very active and volunteer work force was formed by laborers-adherents, pilgrims, or others who spontaneously would donate one tenth of their income.<sup>102</sup> Province chief Vilmont estimated that in 1931 there were 1000 paid or volunteer Caodaist workers who lived inside or just outside the walls of the Holy See.<sup>103</sup> This evidence actually supports that peasants from the neighboring villages would come to the Holy See to seek their jobs. Work facilities in the Holy See drew attention the peasant class and led them to settle down in the villages surrounding the Holy See. The increasing number of the converts to Cao Dai religion started to live in nearby villages and at the Holy See area. The peasant Caodaists in the nearby villages reportedly lived in simple mud-thatch houses. In comparison to the villagers, followers lived in the Holy See area developed a good Caodaist social unit called *Thai-binh*\_(peace). Each of the household would maintain domestic altar that corresponds to the altars used by Vietnamese Catholics<sup>104</sup> to the Governor of Cochinchina in 1935, Cao Dai adherents' altars were divided into three parts, the middle part for the Cao Dai cult, with the two side altars for worshipping the ancestors of the families of the wife and husband. He noted this altar was the same type used by Catholics in Viet Nam.<sup>105</sup> From June 1927 to May 1928, Pham Cong Tac was in Phnom Penh to assist the Cao Dai leaders there to establish an office for foreign relations. He succeeded in invoking the spirit of Nguyen Tam Chon Nhon (Victor Hugo) many times for direction. On this account

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<sup>101</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, pp.162-63.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>103</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 169

<sup>104</sup> Pham Cong Tac, letter to Governor Pierre Andre Michel Pages (1934-1939), Tay Ninh, 20 May 1935, *ACM/Paris, Indochine NF*, Carton 273, Dossier 2413, cited by Werner, see *Ibid*, 170.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

this office was placed under his spiritual realm while Cao Duc Trong acted as head of the Cao Dai Phnom Penh branch. Pham Cong Tac gained control of the Tay Ninh group after Le Van Trung's death. In 1935 he was elected head of the Tay Ninh organization. From this time on there was a gradual change in the politics of the Tay Ninh movement. It became more interested in political and social issues. As Tac's goals and politics reportedly did not correspond to those of many of the other leaders, his own group of mediums and friend (Cao Hoai Sang) left him and gave up his activities. On the contrary, many others would treat Ho Phap with profound respect and thereby characterize his personal identity as a charismatic leader. However, the development and spread of Cao Dai religion was not always smooth. Between 1931 and 1933 there was much internal conflict and rivalry among the Cao Dai ranks, regarding in various splinter groups and centers being formed in the name of Cao Dai. The death of the Cao Dai Superior, Le Van Trung, in 1934 was a sad loss to the Tay Ninh group. Upon Le Van Trung's death, Ho Phap became leader of the Tay Ninh Holy See. The Holy See was not completely secured for the Cao Dai adherents for some time. Situation actually created him a politico-religious leader who, for the sake of the Holy See and the followers' security, raised an army to deal with outside threats. Cao Dai religion was far from unified until 1949. Loyalties were split among several groups and sub-groups. Finally, the great council of Tay Ninh had elevated Pham Cong Tac, as Trung's successor. This new job reflected both the faith and support of the followers for his challenging works assigned with Cao Dai religion both at home and abroad. From the time Ho Phap took the charge he embarked on restructuring campaign to establish a firm and comprehensive foundation for Tay Ninh organization. He also set up an internal security force known as *Bao The Quan* for the Holy See. In an effort to expand the Cao Dai religion he sent emissaries to various parts of Vietnam to recruit followers. Moreover, he successfully established a strong community in Tay Ninh. The new community engaged in a variety of economic, social, and spiritual

activities. To serve as a spokesperson and propagation for Tay Ninh Cao Dai activities a magazine called *Duy Tam* (Idealism) was circulated. By 1936-the tenth anniversary of Cao Dai religion- the Tay Ninh complex, popularly known as the *Thanh Dia* (the Holy See) began to attract followers from far and wide.<sup>106</sup> Ho Phap duly became a fear and fury to the colonizing French on account of his messianic cult and popularity. As Ho Phap magnified his promulgation, the French paid more attention to his organization and were fierce to stop its activities. In summer 1937 Duc Ho Phap made another trip to Phnom Penh for the opening of the Great temple and a Chapel dedicated to Quan Am (the Goddess of Compassion and Mercy).<sup>107</sup> This occasion was attended by about 40000 Cambodian and Vietnamese converts. The significant success of the Office of Foreign Relations caused some disquiet from the French and local authorities. Ho Phap continued the promotion of Cao Dai religion onto a wider world stage. Thus, he delegated Gabriel Gobron, a first Cao Dai overseas convert, to attend the World Congress of Religions, London (1936); and the International Spiritualistic Congress, Glasgow (1937) to represent the applicability of a new religion.<sup>108</sup> At the outbreak of World War II in Europe the French found further reason to keep a close watch on Ho Phap who now directed a group of nearly two million. The governor of Cochinchina, Veber brought him to the Correction Court on charge of display of swastika.<sup>109</sup> Even though he was

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<sup>106</sup> Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*, *op. cit.*, p.175.

<sup>107</sup> Available at <http://vietnam.jannalongacre.com/religion/buddhism/quan-yin-quan-am> Retrieved October 08, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Van, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>109</sup> Tran My Van compared this symbol with the Buddhist symbol of the mirror. See *op. cit.*, p.16. The symbolism of the mirror in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism has been made the subject of special investigations. The uses of the mirror are classified under three categories: Firstly, the mirror as a metaphor of the mind found primarily in the literature of the Yogacara School. Secondly, the mirror as a simile for the emptiness of all phenomena which true nature is likened to reflections in a mirror, a notion prevailing in the Madhyamika School. And thirdly, the mirror is found to be used in divination. For an excellent discussion about the concept of the symbolism of mirror, see Yael Bentor, "On the Symbolism of the Mirror in Indo-Tibetan Consecration Rituals", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* Vol. 23, No.1, (Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1995), pp. 57-71.

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acquitted, the swastika was banned. In reality, this was due to his reported involvement with the Phu Quoc (Restoration of Vietnam) campaign under the auspices of Prince Cuong De.<sup>110</sup> Ho Phap continued to share Cuong De's dream of independence for Vietnam with the help of the Japanese one way or other. From 1940 onwards the Cao Dai also found itself at odds with the Communist Party of Indochina.<sup>111</sup> From late 1940 when the Japanese made more inroads in Vietnam, a curfew was placed on Cao Dai activities together with close watch on visitors to Cao Dai complex by French security forces. Soon after, a French raid took place. Various items were indeed loaded taken and loaded on the trucks. They were eventually returned to Ho Phap.<sup>112</sup> The visit of three Japanese diplomats to Tay Ninh Holy See in May-June 1941 must have triggered the French's final act which was to arrest Tac once and for all. On the night of 4 June 1941, the French secret Police forced entry into the Holy See and captured him. On July 11, they presented them at other Cao Dai temples to make more arrest. Five high ranking dignitaries were taken to a jail in Saigon. On 27 July, all the Cao Dai leaders, including Ho Phap, were taken to Saigon's seaport. A merchant ship was waiting there to transport them, together with a further twelve Vietnamese political prisoners, a far way to Madagascar. When the French had clear proof of his direct involvement in politics that could be great threat to their establishment and stability they decided to exile Tac. In this context, Oliver argues that because of Caodaism's political role after Tac took over the leadership, he was exiled to Madagascar from 1941-46.<sup>113</sup> However, they disembarked at Nossilave Port (Noay Leva Port) and were immediately taken to Nossilave Comores jail (Noay Leva Comores prison) in the north of Madagascar. There they joined another group of eleven Vietnamese prisoners, most of who belonged to the Communist party. At the outset, Duc Ho

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<sup>110</sup> It was no surprise that Ho Phap supported Cuong De, who remained an icon of Vietnamese nationalism though he was living in Japan. Other leaders of the various Cao Dai branches also supported Cuong De by joining the pro-Japanese nationalist movement. For detailed information, see *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>111</sup> For a good discussion on the Communist Party of Indochina (CPIC), see Van, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.101.

Phap and the five dignitaries were kept under virtual house arrest.<sup>114</sup> In late 1942, the prisoners were transferred to the Voutrouzou prison farm in southern Madagascar. In 1943, the farm came under the guard of a British officer. The atmosphere became even more relaxed and the prisoners were better treated.<sup>115</sup> During this time, by using their knowledge of the French language, Duc Ho Phap and the other dignitaries succeeded in spreading their faith among other prisoners. Apparently communication between Ho Phap and his Cao Dai groups back at home was virtually impossible, due to distance strict French control. In absence of its leader, a new chapter for the Cao Dai movement began. In collaboration with the Japanese a Cao Dai army under the leadership of Archbishop Tran Quang Vinh<sup>116</sup> emerged. During early 1942 more raids were launched against various Cao Dai oratories. Consequently, the Caodaists moved their base over the Cambodian border. Most of the Caodaists maintained pro-Japanese stance in the hope that Japan would eventually liberate Vietnam. This was due to their harsh experiences under the French. During early 1942 more raids were launched against various Cao Dai oratories. Consequently, the Cao Dai moved their base over the Cambodian border. In this situation, with a view to saving the religion, life and country, Bishop Tran Quang Vinh led the Caodaists into a collaborative venture with the Japanese on the basis of a plan of mutual benefit.<sup>117</sup> Cao Dai army joined the Japanese during the 8 March coup (1945) that ended 80 years of French rule. Following the demise of the Japanese in Vietnam, a significant setback befell on the Cao Dai from both sides: communist Viet Minh and the French. In the face of total collapse of the organization, in consultation with some Cao Dai dignitaries, Vinh agreed to enter an alliance with the French in exchange for the total release of Cao Dai dignitaries and soldiers and most importantly for the return of

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<sup>114</sup> My Van *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> *Biography: His Holiness Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac* trans. Khai Tam Quach Minh Chung, available at: <http://hocday.com/inh-tn-thnh-933-woodside-dr-holland-mi-49424-tiu-s-c-h-php-phm.html?page> Retrieved December 15, 2017.

<sup>116</sup> The father of Rev. Canh Quang Tran, the current President of the Cao Dai Overseas Missionary

<sup>117</sup> For details, see Van, *op. cit.*, pp, 19-20.

Pham Cong Tac. The Cao Dai within Vietnam agreed to cease fighting the French authorities in exchange for the prompt return of their leader. In mid-1946 Ho Phap was allowed to go home. Finally, the good news was confirmed to Tran Quang Vinh that Ile de France (a French Ship) arrived in Vung Tau<sup>118</sup> with Ho Phap on board. Interestingly, Ho Phap was cordially and sincerely welcomed back by the French authorities, who had earlier exiled him. It was at the residence of the Province Chief of Vung Tau that Tran Quang Vinh briefed Ho Phap about Caodai development during his absence. He also gave him two important documents: the Cao Dai Report 1941-1945 and the Treaty of 6 June 1946. Vinh recorded that Ho Phap expressed his understanding and approval of what had been done so as Caodaism and peace could be re-established during the tumultuous time. Using his weeklong stay in Saigon Ho Phap met some French authorities seeking their firm commitment to religious freedom for his followers, at the same time affirming his agreement to the terms of the June Treaty. In the late 1946 Ho Phap returned to his headquarters in the most turbulent time. This was due to the political and military confusion following the sudden capitulation of the Japanese Army. The return of the French colonial masters and the increasing power of the Communist made the situation worse. There was agitation, conflict of interests, and division among the many political, religious and social groups. Against this background, Ho Phap's direct involvement in the political arena, in fact, concerns with the safety of his followers. Indeed, in his eyes both the French and the communists were evils. In addition, Ho Phap understood that following the abdication of Emperor Bao Dai, the Communist Party under its skillful leadership of Ho Chi Minh would take more advantage using the nationalist's patriotism. Thus, in balancing the options for Vietnam from internal perspective, he had to choose the lesser of two evils. In this regard, he demanded, in his letter to the French Foreign Minister, more efforts to bring a peaceful solution to Vietnam. In this context, he supported Emperor

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<sup>118</sup> Vung Tau is a city in Southern Vietnam. It is 125 km (about 77 miles) from Ho Chi Minh City.

Bao Dai against the militant Viet Minh. His choice of the Bao Dai solution in this context suggests more negotiation, less actual fighting, and bloodshed. Furthermore, his immediate aim was to see a more united Vietnam under a kind of constitutional monarchy that could restore more rights, equality, and peace to the Vietnamese.<sup>119</sup>Pham Cong Tac was pleased with his effort in fostering a peaceful solution for Vietnam, as an agreement known as the Elysee Agreement (signed at the Elysee Palace on March 8, 1949) was concluded between Emperor Bao Dai (1912-1997) and French President Vincent Auriol (1884-1966). Under its terms, Vietnam was granted independence as an Associate State within the French Union. Between 1950-1954, Ho Phap's position as a politician, statesman and policy maker was at its height, judging from his political activities within Vietnam and overseas. His efforts were all for the sake of accelerating an independent and unified Vietnam as already set forth in the Elysee Agreement. His extensive involvement in the politics of the time can be seen, partly, as a commitment to good deeds as expected of all Cao Dai adherents: that is, to serve the earthly life which includes self, family, society, country and humanity.<sup>120</sup>On 29 March 1950 he visited Phnom Penh on behalf emperor Bao Dai with a view to discussing the security and peace issues with King Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012) which was of common concern to both countries. To foster more unity among different nationalist and religious groups, he made a special visit to Ha Noi (18 October 1950) to meet their leaders. He keenly acknowledged the necessity of collaboration between the Northern and Southern population to advance the national agenda. Pham Cong Tac continued to place much faith in the Cao Dai Army to help bring independence and peace to Vietnam. In this context, it is not surprising that Pham Cong Tac suggested the Cao Dai Army could provide a model for the International

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<sup>119</sup>Van, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Army and act as an 'agent for Universal Peace.'<sup>121</sup> The defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu (1954), and their direct negotiation with Ho Chi Minh at the international Conference in Geneva deeply concerned Ho Phap over the future of Vietnam. He led a Cao Dai delegation to Paris to have direct audience with the President of France, Rene Coty, to request French sincerity in returning Vietnam's independence. And at the same time on the eve of Geneva conference he met Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong, representing Ho's government, and urged him to firmly object to any treaty which would bring division to the country. But Cold War condition did not allow an undivided Vietnam. In effect two zones were created: North Vietnam to be administered by Ho's government in Ha Noi and South Vietnam by Bao Dai's government in Saigon.<sup>122</sup> Without waiting for the promised unification election to take place, Ho Phap decided to press on with his own version of a united Vietnam. His priority is to achieve political stability of South Vietnam in the first instance. Thus, upon his return from France, Ho Phap immediately established the United Front of Nationalist Forces (*Mat Tran Thong Nhat Toan Luc Quoc Gia*) to unite all religious-oriented political groups and to consolidate the Southern position to deal with the North. Unfortunately, Ngo Dinh Diem directly disputed Ho Phap's approach considering the issue as a challenge to his own power base. This was the beginning of the rift between Ho Phap and Diem. In 1955, due to the cold war atmosphere and against the backdrop of human sufferings, he travelled to both South Korea and Taiwan to promote Caodaism as an agent of international peace. Finally, he travelled to Tokyo to bring the ashes of Prince Cuong De, who passed away in 1951, back to Tay Ninh Holy See. According to the Colonial report, Cao Dai religion was widespread in other parts of Cochinchina though no other part was as dominated by the Caodaists as Tay Ninh province. During the expulsion of Ho Phap (1941-1946) and the French Viet Minh war

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<sup>121</sup> Pham Cong Tac, *Loi Thuyet Dao Cua Duc Ho Phap*, ( Tay Ninh, 1970), p.24; Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do, *Loi Thuyet Dao Cua Duc Ho Phap*, p.14), Cited by My Van, see, Van, *op. cit.*, p.25.

<sup>122</sup> My Van *op. cit.*, p.25; Karnow, *op. cit.*, p.118.

(1941-1953), the Caodaists settled in and around the Holy See particularly for security reasons. It is reported that the last three provincial chiefs maintained a healthy relationship with the Cao Dai leaders with a view to giving them administrative freedom in the Holy See. In addition, this is of mutual benefits to the government of South Vietnam and to the Cao Dai establishment. In 1936 and 1938, under the leadership of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, major changes were made in the organizational structure.<sup>123</sup>

The overall status of Tac is pro-nationalist and at the same time anti-communist and anti-French. Alongside other leaders, Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac reportedly competed with President Ngo Dinh Diem's (1955-1963) brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu for control of Vietnam's non-communist independence movement.<sup>124</sup> But the overwhelming American support after Ngo Dinh brothers did not allow Tac and other leaders to win the race. In June 1954, Emperor Bao Dai appointed Diem prime minister of the South Vietnam. The powerful Cao Dai and other politico-religious movements still dominated roughly one-third of South Vietnamese countryside and an equivalent percentage of the population. Cao Dai sect together with Hoa Hao formed "states within a state" exerting total control over the residents of their autonomous zones. This is true that as a nationalist politician, Tac had an unconditional commitment to hold positions of power in South Vietnam's government. Washington officials ultimately supported Diem over these sect representatives based on rigid moral perceptions of legitimacy and virtue, rather than any measure of real power or popular support. US officials dismissed sect leaders as too selfish, child-like, irrational, and impetuous to be true nationalists. The very term "nationalist", when applied to Vietnam has come to take on a positive, almost heroic overtone. Nationalism in Vietnam as elsewhere, can be at once both ideological and clannish, both romantic and violent. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh, Ngo Dinh Diem, Pham Cong Tac, and other sect leaders and their organizations can each be

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<sup>123</sup> Oliver, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-54.

<sup>124</sup> Chapman, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

described in those terms.<sup>125</sup> Cao Dai appeal extended well beyond the limits of religion, and indeed much of its popularity can be attributed to the economic and political benefits the organization offered to its adepts. As result of his leadership, urban reformist politicians began to view the Cao Dai sect as an extraordinary vehicle for spreading their political influence and economic interests among the peasant masses. Thus, as Hue Tam Ho Tai notes, the early 1930s was a watershed time for Cao Dai religion. Traditionalist Cao Dai peasants in the 1930s tended to be poor and living in marginal areas relatively sheltered from the impact of the colonial state, as opposed to peasants in areas exposed to the full brunt of colonialism, who were much more likely to support communist political parties and organizations. The Cao Dai sect competed with the Hoa Hao and ICP for the same constituency, and attracted significantly more adherents than any other peasant group, up until its decline in the 1950s. “Of the three major mass movements in southern Vietnam during the colonial period,” Werner views, “the Cao Dai were the best organized and most successful”.<sup>126</sup> According to Tran Quang Vinh, one of the early military leaders of the movement, Cao Dai officials aimed not only to expel French colonialists, but to establish their sect as the primary ideological and administrative force within Vietnam. The organizational structure of the Cao Dai “is that of a modern state,” claimed Tran. “It does not lack ambitions which, however, remain within the realm of possibility: to make Caodaism into a religion of the State, into the national religion of Vietnam.”<sup>127</sup> With the outbreak of WWII, Cao Dai leaders migrated towards more explicitly anti-French modes of nationalism, and allied with the Japanese and other pro-independence movements against the colonial regime.<sup>128</sup> According to David Elliott’s work on communist activity in My Tho, the Cao Dai greatly strengthened its position during the Japanese

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp.1-6.

<sup>126</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.1.

<sup>127</sup> Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.40.

<sup>128</sup> Oliver, *op.cit.*, p.85.

occupation, and used the opportunity to recruit soldiers for its own army.<sup>129</sup> The French colonial administration reacted to Cao Dai insubordination by closing the Holy See at Tay Ninh and deporting Pham Cong Tac and several of his aides to Madagascar.<sup>130</sup> After the Viet Minh gained power through the August revolution in 1945, Cao Dai forces joined them to fight the return of the French. However, Cao Dai leaders vigilantly resisted Ho Chi Minh's strong pressure to integrate their troops into the Viet Minh Army, and the tenuous Cao Dai-Viet Minh alliance turned out to be the short-lived. In spring 1946 French troops captured Tran Quang Vinh and the entire religious leadership of the Cao Dai sect, thus forcing Vinh to sign an agreement with the French in June 1946. He pledged to surrender Cao Dai troops in exchange for the release of sect dignitaries and the return of Pham Cong Tac from exile. On 8 January 1947 the Cao Dai signed an additional military convention with the French High command promising "loyal collaboration" and respect for French laws and authority. In return, the French promised to arm and fund the Cao Dai force.<sup>131</sup> This alliance with the French and later with Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, during the Franco-Viet Minh War actually enabled the Cao Dai sect to establish an unprecedented degree of independence from the colonial state. During this time, French officially recognized the Cao Dai religion, granted it religious freedom, allowed the Holy See to be put back in use, and encouraged the sect to pursue military expansion. It is not surprising, then, that the Cao Dai, along with the Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen, emerged as the major supports of the French-controlled Saigon government between 1947 and 1954.<sup>132</sup> The sect leaders aimed to establish themselves as the successive

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<sup>129</sup>David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Volume 1) (London: M.E. Sharp, Inc., 2003), pp.70-71.

<sup>130</sup> Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.41.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>132</sup> It is important to note that it was Pham Cong Tac who initially seized the opportunity to assert himself as the leader of Vietnam's non-communist independence movement. The Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen politici-religious sects and their affiliated political parties were by far the most influential. They owed their dominance in part to Bao Dai's patronage and generous French subsidies. In September 1953, Pham Cong Tac led the three sects in revolt against the official Vietnamese delegation currently negotiating with France. In September 1953, Tac joined together with Ngo Dinh

leaders of the non-communist Vietnam through Franco-Viet Minh negotiations. On May 1954 Pham Cong Tac and Binh Xuyen leader Bay Vien formed a new nationalist organization under Bao Dai's direction. The Nationalist Salvation Front constituted the latest, but by no means the last effort to unite Vietnam's most powerful non-communist religious and political groups under one canopy. In Diem's consideration, the Nationalist Salvation Front might have appeared to be a great threat to his government. Slowly, the tension and stress in his face dispersed. As Stanley Karnow in his *Vietnam A History* mentions, "now Diem, facing the challenge of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Bin Xuyen factions, tightened the circle around himself to his family and close friends, as he always would under pressure".<sup>133</sup> In this situation, he decided to take drastic action against all politico-religious groups. He persuaded Cao Dai General Nguyen Thanh Phuong to adopt a position against Tac. Pro-Diem Cao Dai general agreed to exhaust Cao Dai dissidents in Tay Ninh while the army dealt with the Binh Xuyen for the same purpose. On the night of 5-6 October he invaded the Holy See to disarm the 300 man papal guards and arrest Pham Cong Tac's two daughters on charges of corruption and exploitation of the people. A few days later Phuong completed his coup against conventional Cao Dai authority by proclaiming the Ho Phap deposed.<sup>134</sup> Pham Cong Tac clung to his position at the Holy See until February 1956 when the approach of government troops forced him to flee to Cambodia. He did not fail to perceive that the French and Nguyen Dinh Diem hated him and only bided their time to destroy him. In addition to

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Nhu to organize an unofficial Congress for National Union and Peace. On 4 September the Cao Dai Defender held a press conference announcing the congress and proclaiming, "The hour has come to realize the great union of all parties and nationalist elements in view of achieving the independence of our country". Under Pham and Nhu's direction, representatives from the sects met with several other nationalist leaders to discuss plan for independence and future leadership. In fact, Vietnamese nationalists were not so much aware of the consequences of their actions (Ambassador Heath's view cited by Chapman), see Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>133</sup> Karnow, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>134</sup> Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 179. in her dissertation Chapman refers to Frances R. Hill, "Millenarian Machines in South Vietnam", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13:3 (July 1971), 335). See Chapman, *op.cit*, p. 39.

this activity in politics, Ho Phap desired for the national integrity i.e., a united Vietnam. His days of labor for the Cao Dai religion, his community and of course for his country were very long. He, therefore, kept himself available to his aides for his community and country at all hours. Finally, in the political sense Ho Phap had failed even after his huge contribution to building a united and independent country. In another sense he had accomplished one of the greatest tasks in Cao Dai history. Within three decades till his death (1959) Cao Dai Church was reunited and the new faith had spread throughout Southern Vietnam including Cambodia. Overall, his effort to accommodate Cao Dai religion to contemporary culture of Vietnam rightly earned him the title of the “defender of religion” (Ho Phap) and a host of others followed his lead.

## Chapter Three

### Acculturation in Vietnam and the Emergence of Caodaism

In this chapter, Cao Dai religion is presented as one of the best examples of the outcome of Western and Asian acculturation from the Vietnamese context.<sup>1</sup> The current chapter mainly concerns how this religion has appeared as a harmonious synthesis based on the most enduring interaction between the contemporary Vietnamese folk traditions and the significant role of Asian and Western thoughts in influencing Vietnamese society. In situations of continuous contact with previously established traditions (all imported from the outside) including Vietnamese traditional folklore, Cao Dai religion blends elements from them in association with the elements of Western and other Eastern thoughts for its subsequent development. As a new tradition, therefore, the Cao Dai religion gradually and very systematically internalized all blended elements within itself. Thus, to understand this process of acculturation, it is important to explore some sources of its borrowed elements in the first section of this chapter and evaluate them in the light of the religious features of Caodaism in the next sections of this chapter. We may now comfortably turn our attention to the subject matter of the current chapter in order to explore how Caodaism intermingled with Vietnamese traditional culture and thereby developed its systems of beliefs and practices through acculturation process.

#### 3.1. Socio-historical Context of Acculturation in Vietnam

While sharing a common national culture e.g., the lunar new year festival (Tet) Vietnamese people also differ in aspects of their beliefs, values and customary behavior as a result of faith and regional variation. As anthropologist Kottak argues, although people who live in the same country share a national cultural tradition. Thus, *Tet Festival* may be considered as the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 10, p.262.

best example of such a national cultural tradition in Vietnamese context. At the same time, he mentions that all cultures also contain diversity.<sup>2</sup> As cultural diversity is a natural process, there is no exception to Vietnamese culture too. In addition to natural process, Kottak further remarks that subcultures<sup>3</sup> are different symbol-based patterns and traditions associated with particular groups in the same complex society.<sup>4</sup> In a nation like Vietnam, subcultures are found to have originated in religion. Therefore, religious backgrounds of Buddhists, Catholics, Confucians, Taoists, folk believers and Caodaists create sub-cultural differences between them. Notably, diffusion is the first mechanism of cultural changes. Diffusion or borrowing of traits between cultures is one main way of cultural change.

Acculturation, a second mechanism of cultural change, is the exchange of cultural features that results when groups have continuous first hand contacts.<sup>5</sup> Thus, with acculturation, parts of the culture change, but each group remains distinct. Cao Dai religion may be one of the best examples of acculturation in the Vietnamese context. Notably, although religion is considered as a conservative force, it is also capable of adjusting to social change. In addition, liberal approach of religion provides strong legitimation for any social change. If necessary, some religions demonstrate a striking willingness to accommodate social change.<sup>6</sup> For instance, like Japanese Shinto, the Cao Dai religion is found to have maintained a long history of incorporating changes in Vietnamese society into its own beliefs and practices. Here, Caodaism is found to have absorbed first hand elements through the immersion process of acculturation i.e., surrounding itself entirely in a hybrid culture. This process is one of the most effective ways to acculturate things. As for Caodaism, immersion does not only include

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<sup>2</sup> Kottak *op. cit.*, p.68.

<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, many anthropologists are reluctant to use the term subculture. They feel that the prefix “sub-” is offensive because it means below. “Subcultures” may thus be perceived as “less than” or somehow inferior to a dominant, elite, or national culture. For a detailed study see *Ibid.* p.69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.74.

<sup>6</sup> Crapo 2003, *op. cit.*, p.268.

borrowed elements directly with this new tradition, but also incorporates within itself the customs, traditions, and acceptable behaviors. Thus, it may be considered as one of the examples of the outcome of acculturation process in the Vietnamese context. As scholars view, this is a mixed religion of both cultural as well as religious blends. Its syncretic elements are found to have emerged from acculturation process. Sociologically, this process of acculturation continued down through the centuries in Vietnam. As far as three Asian religions are concerned, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism were not mutually exclusive rather these religions tended to be syncretic, adding and adapting their ritual and teachings to other religions.<sup>7</sup> Now with regard to Caodaism, the question may arise: Are the cultural settings of this new religion determined through acculturation process? It is clear that there could be several factors e.g., emersion, integration, syncretism etc. related to acculturation process that might have produced a distinct phenomenon for Cao Dai religion in the matrix of Vietnamese social milieu. Therefore, it naturally underwent this process of acculturation and thereby, developed its own culture that is characterized by syncretism and assimilation. Due to the situations of continuous contact with previously established traditions in Vietnam, Cao Dai religion specially blends elements of three great teachings with the elements of native spiritism. In fact, through this process the Cao Dai adherents developed a degree of consistency in their behavior and thought that differ from those of their surrounding cultures. One of main differences between Cao Dai religion and other traditions of Vietnam is its unique blend of all borrowed social, cultural and religious elements. Paradoxically, while distinguishing Cao Dai religion, this breadth is what also links it to many other religions. In fact, technique used to borrow religio-cultural elements has come to Cao Dai religion from beliefs, practices and doctrines of existing religions. These elements are adopted and absorbed by Cao Dai religion through the process of acculturation. As a new tradition, Cao

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism, op. cit.*, p.24.

Dai religion gradually internalized all elements borrowed from previously established systems. Again the question arises: How did it internalize elements into its own? Cao Dai religion, indeed, began to internalize, or incorporate borrowed elements through a process of direct and indirect absorption and interaction with other traditions. As cultural traits spread through borrowing or diffusion from one group to another, no doubt, dominant Vietnamese cultures have impact upon Cao Dai religion. On the contrary, Cao Dai religion shares cultural traits it has adopted from its common linguistic and cultural ancestors in Vietnam. The practice of spiritism became a national cultic practice, as people of Vietnam knew the rules how to hold séances and follow occult world. However, there are suggestions of many borrowed elements in Cao Dai religion. Cao Dai interpretation of borrowed elements and their original nature will reveal important sources. Therefore, several elements will be examined how Cao Dai religion, as syncretism, blended all borrowed elements and harmonized them with its own doctrine.

Caodaism has been described as a harmonious synthesis of Asian and Western beliefs, that is, as representing a comfortable synthesis of Asian and Western elements. It may be argued that recent phenomenon of an enduring interaction between Eastern and Western elements in Vietnam provide the foundation for the emergence of Caodaism in French Cochinchina. An interview with Janet Hoskins, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California, underscores this development. As Hoskins related in her interview with the Song Dao TV program, “Caodaism was born in French Indochina, at the meeting between East Asian Traditions and European forms of Christianity, Free Masonry and secular humanism”.<sup>8</sup> Now the question may arise: How did such a meeting ground come into being? The answer here concerns the issue of the acculturation process that occurred in Vietnam down through

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<sup>8</sup> See Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, “Interview with the Song Dao TV program, Dr. Janet Hoskins”, Interview taken by David Tung Che, June, 08, 2008, *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, (California: CDOM, 2012), pp. 430-433.

the centuries. The first is the web of Asian (Chinese and Indian) acculturation in Vietnam while the second web is the European (French) acculturation. In fact, the process of Chinese acculturation was dominant in Vietnam over the last one and a half millenniums since the sixth century B.C. But this process was documented in recorded history as registered Chinese annals in 208 B.C. It should be mentioned that the dynamic Han dynasty is reported to have annexed Nam Viet (the location of the nation of the extreme south) a century later as the Chinese province of Giao Chi.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, the Vietnamese absorbed Chinese beliefs, culture, institutions, ethics, and even calligraphy while resisting China's efforts to control their country. As the Vietnamese are not as passionately spiritual as the Chinese, they venerate scholars rather than priests, seeking harmony in the present rather than salvation in a hereafter. Thus, they put a premium on ethics rather than on faith, and they can blend elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, their three pillars of wisdom, with animism, superstitions, various forms of magic, idolatry and, above all, ancestor worship.<sup>10</sup> Historically, over the centuries, they repeatedly challenged Chinese domination. In fact, they broadened their movements and stressed that Vietnam's customs, practices and interests differed from those of China. In addition, French cultural influences became prominent beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The seeds of Western (European) acculturation began in Vietnam during the seventh century with Portuguese merchants and Christian missionaries. History informs us that the missionary Alexander de Rhodes traveled through Asia in this period. He is reported to have transcribed the Vietnamese language in Roman letters instead of Chinese ideographs.<sup>11</sup> Later on, the Catholic missionary Pierre Pigneau de Behaine<sup>12</sup>, a bishop of Adran, first evoked France's interest in Vietnam in the late eighteenth century.

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<sup>9</sup> Karnow 1983, *op. cit.*, p.111.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.294.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 11, p.267.

It is important to note that Francis Garnier, a heroic French officer, led an attack against the Citadel in Hanoi. He was killed by the mercenaries fighting for the Vietnamese in December 1873. Following this incident French imperial force began their drive to conquer Vietnam, with Indochina falling fully under French colonial control in 1893.<sup>13</sup> The French colonial regime lasted in Indochinese peninsula until 1954. With a dramatic and costly victory in the battle of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam obtained her independence from the French in 1954.<sup>14</sup> In her doctoral research Susan Werner provided the important information about a socio-political evolution of Vietnam. As she opines, the colonial system had brushed off the traditional Vietnamese norms and gave a completely French appearance to the society. As a result, incidents of civil disorder and violence rapidly increased. The French were threatened with insurgencies led by the pro-monarchists, and in confronting each challenge strengthened their position in Cochinchina.<sup>15</sup> She further observes that a fundamental change in the economy and society took place during the 1920s. As a result, the commercialization of rice cultivation, rubber production, and banking revolutionized the Vietnamese economy with the change from a static agrarian state to a capitalist regime by the 1920s. Alongside the economic and social changes, class changes took place in the society while political developments shook Cochinchina in the 1920s. In reaction to the effects of colonial rule, new forms of anti-French movements including communist and nationalist ones, along with new socio-economic forces, emerged in Vietnam. All are these first modern political parties emerged in Viet Nam which were committed to bring an end to French regime in Cochinchina through a revolution. While these parties had absorbed European elements through the French for about a hundred years, they rejected European domination. A profound sense of Vietnamese identity chafed against this centuries old process of absorption

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp.60-62.

<sup>14</sup> Kimsa, Tran Thi, *Bibliography on Vietnam: 1954-1964*, (Saigon: National Institute of Administration, 1965), p.iii.

<sup>15</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, pp.22-23.

and social integration. It was at this socio-historical juncture in the mid-1920s, as Werner shows in her research, the Cao Dai religion appeared in Cochinchina as a new religious mass movement.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.2. Religio-cultural Sources of Dao Cao Dai**

As a syncretic religion, Caodaism gathered elements as it gathered adherents.<sup>17</sup> Sources of Cao Dai ideology, dogmas, doctrines, festivals, rites and rituals may not be sufficient to explain why Caodaism is so popular. It is important to note that Cao Dai doctrine is rich synthesis of five great teachings of the past such as Buddhism (Phat Dao), Taoism (Thien Dao), Confucianism (Nhon Dao), cult of ancestors, Western religions (Pham Cong Tac views that Phat Dao embraces Buddhism, Hinduism, and Pythagorean teaching, Thien Dao-Taoism and thaumaturgical (magical) practices, Thanh Dao-Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam, Than Dao-Chinese, Egyptian and Greek beliefs, Nhon Dao-the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, Socrates and Plato.<sup>18</sup>The Caodaist teleology of World Eras has been perceived as Buddhist and its Golden Age shows symbolic connections with the coming Buddha, Maytreya. To some observers, as Blagov mentions, Cao Dai or “High Palace” is somewhat related to French revolutionary Etre Supreme.<sup>19</sup>The concept of the immortality of soul and sufferings are derived from the Buddhist concept of soul for sure. The origin of sufferings corresponds to the concept of Buddhist dependent origination. Caodaism holds that the sufferings originate from human’s spirit contamination by the material phenomena. Buddhist terms of karmic retribution and cycle of reincarnation are seen to be transmitted into Caodaism through the process of acculturation. Immediately after these terms are adjusted to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>17</sup> With a large following among the masses, particularly most of the converts from the peasant class, the leaders of the Minh Su, Minh Duong and the Minh Tan became Caodai disciples. Consequently in the early period Minh tan temple turned to the center for Caodai worship. See Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.28.

<sup>18</sup>See *The Collection of Divine Messages* 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>19</sup> Blagov, *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement op. cit.*, p.17.

Cao Dai doctrine, the adherents are guided to follow the doctrine as it is followed by the Buddhist followers to escape from the cycle of rebirth and reunite with Duc Cao Dai. Through the process of acculturation both the Buddhist concept of Nirvan and Moksha from Hinduism came into continuous firsthand contact. Thus, Cao Dai interpretations of Nirvana and Mukkhya actually do not differ from those of Buddhist and Hindu interpretations. The Caodaists hold that Nirvana does not mean the extinction of life rather it refers to immortal life of the spirits and this is because of the Third Salvation, the Celestial Way is open to all souls.<sup>20</sup>It is important to note that in Caodaism, spirit is synonymous with soul. In his book *The Path of a Cao Dai Disciple*, Nguyen Long Thanh explains that the soul after borrowing the physical body to manifest God's liveliness in a particular individual must return to its source. In this context he quotes a verse from the Cao Dai prayers that describe: "The soul created and maintained by God now comes back to heaven. The bodily flesh constituted from earthen elements is now ordered to be ruined and go back to their primordial nature".<sup>21</sup> As far as the concept of Moksha is concerned, Caodaism holds that a two way journey of souls actually refers to the same source of their origin and destination. Thus, Caodaists appear to utter the following common words: "God is you and you are God".<sup>22</sup> This interpretation of soul in Caodaism corresponds to the interpretation of soul in Hinduism i.e., the reunion of souls with the Great Soul (Brahma). More clearly, in her online article "Hinduism and Concept of Salvation", Tahira Basharat quotes Monier Williams as characterizing Brahma to be the universal substrate and divine ground of all beings. Basharat mentions that Moksha, according to Williams' clarification, is achieved when the individual Atman (soul) unites with the ground of all beings or the source of all phenomenal existence.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the ultimate destination of soul, for the Cao Dai adherents, refers to the essential unity of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Thanh, *The Path of A Cao Dai Disciple op. cit.*, p.24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.25.

<sup>23</sup> Basharat, Tahira, "Hinduism and Concept of Salvation", at: [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/szic/pdf\\_files/1-%20tahira%20bashart.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/szic/pdf_files/1-%20tahira%20bashart.pdf), Retrieved April 20, 2018.

macrocosm-microcosm. Though this concept of Cao Dai religion relates to earlier medieval Chinese macrocosm-microcosm philosophy<sup>24</sup> but it is quite probable that its development was inspired by this philosophy. As far as this theory is concerned, the many are (ultimately) one, and the one is differentiated in the many. Caodai explanation regarding the origin of this universe is identical to the interaction of Yin-Yang principles of Chinese philosophy. In Chinese philosophy, *Yin-Yang* duality is used in diverse purposes. In this regard, Huai-nan Tzu suggests a developmental process of Tao. As he suggests, there was a beginning, a beginning of an anteriority to this beginning, and a beginning of an anteriority even before the beginning of this anteriority, and that the great beginning produced in succession space, the universe, the material forces, the *Yin* and *Yang* finally, the material form.<sup>25</sup> Cao Dai spiritualism actually emerged from Vietnamese indigenous practice of spiritism, came in contact with European spiritualism and developed on the basis of Taoist *Yin-Yang* duality. Again the object of Cao Dai worship is the Divine Eye (left Eye) that is the symbolic representation of Duc Cao Dai. The idea of Divine Eye also seems to have emerged from ecumenical religious symbol of Catholic Church and the Masonic symbol of masonry. As syncretism, Cao Dai cult might have adopted this idea of Divine Eye and developed its own mood of worship. But at this point, Codaists are seen to have taken an uncompromising stance. It is important to mention that with regard to this issue, Sergei Blagov interviewed Vo Van Phep, the head of Tay Ninh Church, in March 1988. Vo Van Phep argued in this interview that the worship of Divine Eye should not be treated as a syncretic diffusion and had nothing to do with the Masonic Eye.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, there can only be a question of syncretism where there is a mixture, and hence a confusion, of planes and modes of

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<sup>24</sup> Moore (ed.), *The Chinese Mind op. cit.*, p.51.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.51.

<sup>26</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.* p.19.

expression. But it also makes sense that the Divine Eye of Cao Dai symbolism and Masonic Eye present formally compatible perspectives.

As far as Cao Dai concept of mother goddess is concerned, this idea corresponds to the Minh Ly group (details story about Minh Ly is cited in chapter four). The Minh Ly group was basically concerned with the worship of the mother goddess, Dieu Tri Kim Mau, whereas Cao Dai adherents worship her in the name of Duc Phat Mau besides Duc Cao Dai. Some of the original prayers used in Caodai rituals were borrowed from these Minh groups. Both Europeans and Asians are reported to have adopted different methods of spirit communication long before the Caodaist mediums used those approaches in their séances. The Ouija board, a mechanical device of spirit communication used by Allan Kardec (1804-1869)<sup>27</sup> is, later on, found to be adopted by the Caodaist mediums in their séance practices. The original *corbeille a bec* or *ngoc co*<sup>28</sup> used by the first Caodai mediums was borrowed from a member of the Minh Thien. But there are different opinions about from which source Chieu actually collected the original *corbeille a bec*. According to Duc Hong Huynh, the original *corbeille a bec* was actually borrowed by Chieu from a member of the Minh Ly sect.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is, at least, confirmed that Chieu borrowed this séance apparatus from any one of these two Minh Sects. Another type of spirit communication, noted by Oliver, familiar to

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<sup>27</sup> Allan Kardec is a French educator translator. He is the author of the five books known as the Spiritist Codification, and is the founder of Spiritism. For a fuller discussion see Lewis Spence, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, (Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p.491.

<sup>28</sup> As Professor Chris Hartney examines, this is a basket held by two mediums. Connected to the basket is a long arm, often surmounted at the end by a phoenix and holding a pencil, brush or crayon. It is believed that the spiritual forces enter the basket and direct the pen. at [http://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br\\_hartney.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br_hartney.htm), Retrieved December 20, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> According to Duc Hong Huynh, the instrument consisted of a two-foot long wooden stick with one end carved into the shape of a phoenix head. On top of the other end, a bamboo-latticed, dome-like structure was attached for mediums to place their upturned hands inside. When seances were carried out, a burning joss stick was attached to the top of the carved head end, with a pen or writing instrument projecting from the bottom of the head. Once the spirit entered the bodies of the mediums, their hand movements inside the lattice basket would dip the writing instrument onto a sheet of paper which recorded the message. See Duc Hong Huynh, *Caodai Spiritism: Hybrid Individuals, Global Communities*, M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin 2010, p.27.

the Vietnamese was *co but* (writing instrument). Ngo Van Chieu, the first disciple of Cao Dai religion, is found to have used this borrowed method in the session of séances at Tan An.<sup>30</sup> In the pagodas belonging to the Minh Su, Minh Tan, Minh Ly, and Minh Thien, prophetic statements were made via their mediums as to the future appearance of Caodaism. In his book *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*, Gabriel Gobron uncovers socio-historical connections and thereby the similarity between Caodaism and the “Minh” groups in the case of ritual and theology. As he views: “Some have mistakenly claimed that Caodaists deliberately took their theory, worship, and ritual organization from the Minh Ly”.<sup>31</sup> The literatures on European Spiritism is said to be the significant source of information on Spiritism for the Pho loan, the first group of Caodai mediums. As far as the Cao Dai Altar is concerned, this altar noted by Chris Hartney corresponds to a beautifully stylized Chinese character ‘Ch’i’/ ‘Khi (meaning breath/essence). The altar is flanked by representations of the 8 Chinese Immortals who have been characterized as the protectors of the religion and the community.<sup>32</sup> He further notes that five sticks of incense used in Cao Dai altar is said to represent the five material elements (metal-*kim*, wood-*moc*, water-*thuy*, fire-*hoa*, and earth-*tho*) borrowed from Chinese cosmology. These sticks also symbolize Buddhism related five levels of consciousness: purity, meditation, wisdom, superior knowledge and karmic liberation.<sup>33</sup> From the Church law the five interdictions (*Ngu Gioi Cam*) and the four great rules (*Tu Dai Dieu Qui*) applied for all ranks of disciples are borrowed from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Cao Dai *Ngu Gioi Cam* actually represent Buddhist Panch Shila without any change i.e., *Ngu Gioi Cam* so

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<sup>30</sup> Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>31</sup> Gobron 1950, *op. cit.*, p.116.

<sup>32</sup> See Chris Hartney’s online article entitled “Performing Dualism: Experiences of Caodaism” The School of Studies in Religion, Sydney University, NSW 2006. at <http://daotam.info/dualism.htm>, Retrieved December 24, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Vietnamese translation of five Buddhist concepts are: Gia-Sila, Dinh-Dhyana, Hue-Prajna, Thi Kien-Djnana, Giai Thoat-Apavarga)

resembles Pancha Shila.<sup>34</sup>Besides the moral precepts and great rules, the frequent use of the lay prayers is found in Caodaism to contain references to other religions. Thus, Cao Dai lay prayers seem to be the excellent symphony of common prayers for the Buddhist, Taoists, Confucians and Christians at the same time.<sup>35</sup>In addition to the above interdictions Caodaism encourages social harmony through the ancient Confucian values: *Ren/Nhan*, *Yi/Nghia*, *Li/Le*, *Zhi/Tri*, and *Xin/Tin*.<sup>36</sup>From Taoism, Caodaism borrowed the principle of the “Three Jewels” i.e., Matter, Spirit, and Soul. From Confucianism, it took the Three Duties (*Tan Cang*): duty of subject to king, child to father, wife to husband. The five Cardinal virtues (*Ngu Thuong*) of Confucianism were also incorporated as part of Cao Dai doctrine: love, Justice (Righteousness), Good Behavior, Wisdom and Loyalty. Caodaist religious themes also were a composite of the tenets of the three religions. Buddhist themes in Caodaism included the conception of the cyclical nature of the world, the belief in karma, reincarnation, the existence of Nirvana, the importance of asceticism, prayers, meditation, vegetarianism for religious purity, and charity services for the poor. Taoist themes in Caodaism included the belief in spirits, magic, the intervention of the spirits to promulgate and reaffirm religious laws, and the inclusion of Ly Thai Bach in the Cao Dai pantheon. Confucian themes in Caodaism defined social relationships and behavior, emphasizing correct comportment, the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ngu Gioi Cam* refers to no killing of living beings, no coveting including stealing, no illicit sexual intercourse, no drinking alcohol, and no telling a lie; while *Tu Dai Dieu Qui* urges the followers as: Obey the teaching of the superior...Never be proud of your own talent...Be clear at expense and income of money...and treat sincerely in both the presence and absence of others...for details see Thanh, *The Path of Cao Dai Disciple op. cit.*, pp.48-50; Werner 1976, *op. cit.*, p.52.

<sup>35</sup> Great Father i.e., God, Buddha, Saint Angel, the Divine Holy Spirits, the Superior, Holy Mother, Gotama Shiddarta, Lao-Tzu, Oliver mount etc. are frequently used in the prayers that contain references to Caodaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity, for details see *The Path of Cao Dai Disciple, op. cit.*, pp. 51-54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ren/Nhan* a highly regarded Confucian term meaning benevolence, where one must understand his or her position in life and pay respect to one's fellow beings, *Yi/Nghia* that is, the upholding of righteousness and honesty in all that we do in both business and affairs of a personal nature, *Li/Le* which refers to the revered rituals of politeness and respect that encourages social harmony, *Zhi/Tri* that is, moral knowledge where one must know right from wrong, and *Xin/Tin* which is faithfulness - where we must all be faithful to our promises and to our filial and social duties. For a good discussion, see Life of a Caodaist Adapt: <http://daotam.info/cdinans.htm>, Retrieved December 26, 2017.

ranking of social relationships, the belief in the necessary of proper relations between superiors and inferiors, a rejection in of the egalitarianism, a preoccupation with rites, the importance attached to community, scholarship, knowledge, tradition, and the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>37</sup> As for Caodaism, elements from other religions or philosophical systems are absorbed very smoothly and systematically in maintaining *with its status quo* (the existing state or condition). The Caodai belief system also included elements from other religions or philosophical systems. It borrowed from Vietnamese cult of the spirits (as differentiated from Taoism) by its inclusion of Vietnamese spirits in its pantheon. From Christianity came the inclusion of Christ in the Cao Dai pantheon and his use as a source of spirit messages. From this source also came the church structure of Caodaism, its emphasis on proselytization and social service, the notion of a monotheistic god (Duc Chi Ton), the belief in man's redemption, the copying of catholic provincial organization, and the use of Catholic like sacraments.<sup>38</sup>In Superior Spirits they felt that they had been in touch with Ultimate reality which is none other than the living God. The reign of God had come with power, and they were the witness thereof. So they believe and so they proclaim to the world the unique revelation which they had received from outside history made explicit in that higher reality, the Kingdom of God. It is clear beyond all doubt that Caodaism gathered elements from these five sources and thereby has enriched and expanded its culture.

An overall analysis, on the basis of exploratory approach, leads the researcher to evaluate that this long run acculturation process turns Vietnamese socio-cultural milieu into a complex amalgam of old and new, as well as domestic and foreign, sources. It is also assumed that the multiplicity in the religion of Vietnam has been central to the development of this culture. In fact, diverse religions have served as windows to the Vietnamese people's sense of identity. Thus, to understand Vietnamese religion today, it is important to have a socio-historical

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<sup>37</sup> McGuire, *op. cit.*, p.231.

<sup>38</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54

knowledge of how Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity were introduced into Vietnam, how they interacted with the native folk traditions and how together with native spiritism, they fundamentally shaped the subsequent Vietnamese religious landscape. This overall clarification helps understanding of how the centuries-old traditions, through a long process of acculturation, created a social milieu for the emergence of a new religious movement in Vietnam. A sharp observation of the current issue shows that the roots of Cao Dai religion are tightly linked with Vietnamese traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices that have been transmitted mainly orally down through the centuries. For a long time Caodaism, with its strange mixture of Sino-Vietnamese tradition and to some extent Christian elements, remained the religion of a marginalized minority. Its Sino (Asian, specifically Chinese) and Christian (Western) background is not just historical but essential too. Therefore, Caodaism is constantly reminded of its links with religions of the West and East in origin. Despite its direct links with Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, Caodaism developed independently within the pure Vietnamese milieu. Finally, although a religion of Vietnamese origin, Caodaism has borrowed many elements from Eastern and Western religions, incorporating all aspects within it and giving them specific Vietnamese meanings.

### **3.2. 1. Cao Dai Spiritism and Communion with the Creative Consciousness**

The belief system is called the Dao Cao Dai<sup>39</sup> for the reason that the main deity, around whom the paraphernalia (all the objects needed for or connected with ritual) of worship, ceremonies and practices gathered, and whose boundless grace and unquestionable supremacy have been demonstrated by a large number of spiritist messages, is the “Nam Mo

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<sup>39</sup> Dao means the Way or System while Cao Dai is the name of the unique God who is believed to be present in all the present and past names man gave to God. Thus Dao Cao Dai presents the Way of God or the System of God or Religion of God. For a good discussion on Cao Dai see *History and Philosophy of Caodaism, op. cit.*, pp.55-56.

Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat” or as popularly known, Duc Cao Dai. Notably, such spirit messages received by the earlier inspired mediums also make the proof of the spiritist origin of Caodaism. At the same time, regular practice of spiritism might have led the earlier adherents toward Caodaism. In Vietnam, spiritism grew as the popular medium of receiving the divine directives among the Vietnamese that later on became more accepted in Caodaism as a revised version. As a major tool of communication with the occult, the practice of spiritism came across as such a dominant role in Caodaism. Thus, Caodaists believe that they are the first religious community so far which enables the adepts to have of direct communication with transcendental world via divine messages. In this regard, we may take the concept of divination into our consideration to assess their belief regarding the direct communication with the occult world. As it is examined by the anthropologists, divination aims at immediate knowledge of the intentions of spiritual powers. Thus, a clear connection is found between Shamanism and divination with regard to spirit-powers and insight. Such insight is thought to occur during specific divination rites. Shamans may apply their own tactic and sometimes may establish dependent prophetic relations with the supernatural. As Noss explains, in general the belief is that the shaman possesses the power to make contacts in the spirit-world, including communion with the spirits of the dead, and thus gains information about things and events. He notes that it relies on divine inspiration, either through direct communication with the god or through oracles.<sup>40</sup> However, Cao Dai method and practice of spiritism may be considered as a modern version of divination. The early stage of the spiritist practice of the first disciple of Cao Dai God, Ngo Van Chieu, corresponds to the method of receiving divine instructions that is usually maintained by the shamans. However, as far as the concept of revelation in Caodaism is concerned, Cao Dai God is believed to manifest Him in the three periods of past, present and future. Thus, the

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<sup>40</sup> For a detail account see Noss, *op. cit.*, p.14.

present moment is considered to be His time, the epoch of Duc Cao Dai and His revelation.<sup>41</sup> Professor Hoskins examined the way in which God felt the necessity of revelation for the third epoch. According to Hoskins, the Supreme Being had recognized their sufferings and their humiliations and would provide them not only with a divine mandate to organize such a religion but also a new set of revelations to guide its growth.<sup>42</sup> As Schuon, in his research paper “In the Wake of the Fall, roughly presents, in all epochs and in all countries there have been revelations, religions, wisdom; tradition is a part of mankind, just as man is a part of tradition. He argues that revelation is in one sense the infallible intellection of the total collectivity, insofar as this collectivity has providentially become the receptacle of a manifestation of the Universal Intellect. There is something in man which can conceive the Absolute and even attain it and which, in consequence, is absolute.<sup>43</sup> The issue of mystic communion has a great relevance for believers in and of followers of religion. Scholars especially students of anthropology, sociology, and history, believing only in deterministic and environmental philosophies and factors, are liable to make serious errors of understanding and mystic communion in relation to a religious tradition or movement or development. Let us try to define this factor of freedom or mystic communion. Most of the traditional religions believe that there is a level of Reality different from the empirical or phenomenal reality of which we are a part and which works under a logic of cause and effect. All the same, under this logic, our entire rational thinking is governed. We are unable to explain the Transcendental Reality. Unlike the philosophical concept of Ultimate Reality, this notion of Supreme Being seems to have risen spontaneously, as Dr. Paul Radin views, as “a purposive functioning of an inherent type of thought and emotion” rather than as a result of

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<sup>41</sup> *History and Philosophy of Caodaiism, op. cit.*, p.56.

<sup>42</sup> See Hoskins, “An Unjealous God? Christian Elements in a Vietnamese Syncretistic Religion”, p.S304. Available at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/678183>, Accessed January 02, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> See Frithjof Schuon’s research paper “In the Wake of the Fall”, *Science and the Myth of Progress*, edited by Mehrdad M. Zarandi, (Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc. 2003), pp.1-28.

an elaborate search for a unifying principle as the ground of the universe.<sup>44</sup> As has been demonstrated, throughout the course of human history great personalities, endowed with peculiar gifts of leadership and spiritual insight, have been responsible for changing the outlook of their contemporaries and initiating movements calculated to have far-reaching influence on subsequent events. Such outstanding individuals may reasonably be said to have been the recipients of special divine revelations in so far as they have made known idea about God which, in the light of the fuller spiritual knowledge and ethical evaluations of later ages, can be judged as nobler, higher and purer than had hitherto been conceived; in short, a more complete disclosure of Ultimate reality.<sup>45</sup> Mystics or prophets like Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad and spiritual leaders have not only asserted the existence of such a Reality, but have also claimed some kind of touch, link or communion with that Reality or consciousness. Christ clearly asserts his communion with God. Buddha too claims elevation to the state of nirvana. The Cao Dai leaders, Ngo Van Chieu, Le Van Trung, and Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac repeatedly affirm that it is the Divine message that they have been delivering. But materialistic, deterministic or behavioral philosophies do not accept such statements or claims. Therefore, in assessing or comparing a religious thesis it is important to know whether the founder of the faith claims communion with the Creative Consciousness. While the role of men like Luther or other religious leaders could be understood or explained by the means of environmental, deterministic factors, such an explanation would be simply incongruous when applied to creative individuals like, Christ, Buddha or the Cao Dai pioneers who themselves claim touch with Higher Reality. Therefore, religious developments initiated by the creative individuals have to be viewed and appreciated very differently from the subsequent developments when the personality is off the stage of history. Hence, the

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Radin, *Monotheism among Primitive Peoples*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1924), p.67; also see James, *op. cit.*, p.51.

<sup>45</sup> James, *Ibid.* p.53.

importance of this issue and the claims of the prophet concerned. As a new belief system Cao Dai religion developed in South Vietnam out of the admixture of some beliefs, ideas and practices of three great teachings (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism) a large number of indigenous beliefs and ceremonies, and ingredients derived also from Christianity. We know that there were frequent exchanges between the Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, certain Asiatic traditions and Cao Dai religion. The keystone of all Cao Dai elements that renders possible linking of the Cao Dai spiritism with the Western and Asian types has become the source of knowledge about the existence of Transcendental Reality for the Cao Dai adapts. This religion is, indeed, responsible for the rise and growth of a type of literature (on Spiritism) which deserves attention because of its quantitative as well as qualitative importance.

Through an ethnological analysis of “culture-horizons” Fr. Schmidt finds the remains of an original monotheism, in the form of a belief in Supreme beings. This, he contends, constitutes the relics of a primeval revelation. Now it is unquestionably true, as Andrew Lang demonstrated in 1898, that remote, ethical beneficent High Gods occur all over the world among people in a very primitive state of culture. These are distinct from the lesser spirits, totems and divine ancestors and have every appearance of representing a loftier conception of Deity.<sup>46</sup> As Fr. Schmidt would urge the Creator revealed Himself and spoke directly to man before the process of degeneration had begun as a result of primeval guilt bringing with it the complex medley of magico-religious superstitions ever since current in primitive society. Thus, the practice of spiritism became the central element of Caodaism through which Cao Dai legendary figures who themselves claimed touch with Higher Reality (Duc Cao Dai). Caodaists believe that spirits can communicate with mediums. Thus, the aim of the mediums was believed to receive divine directives (messages) from the transcendental world. The first Caodaist disciples published “Le Revue Caodaiste,” which targeted “European public and the

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid. pp.45-46.

Vietnamese of French culture.” The magazine also highlighted “Golden Words,” quotations from the *Bhagavath Gita*, Allan Kardec, Annie Besant and Blavatsky. Therefore, the magazine indicated that Western Spiritism was popular among early Caodaists. Since many early leaders of the Caodaist movement were said to be ardent readers of the French spiritualist and theosophical authors, therefore, no big wonder that spiritist influence can be traced in early Caodaist literature. The data may indicate that Caodaists, as well as the French spiritists, believed in God, unique and universal, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Caodaists believe that concrete forms of religious revelations are in conformity with current levels of human development. This particular concept might be supplemented with almost verbatim quotes from the writings of Kardec. Cao Dai spiritism borrowed the analytical thought of Allan Kardec and others. Judging from the religious point of view such occultism represents only the popularly adumbrated superficial features of Caodaism. It is not also a fact that such display of supernatural power characterizes all literature belonging to the Cao Dai belief system. The same spirit of heterodoxy as is found in the European literature. The study of both Western and Asian literatures on Spiritism may tempt one to believe that there is no difference between Caodaism and the various others spiritist cults in their religious attitude. The general religious nature of Indian Nathism, for example, is characterized by a wide-spread belief in occult power attained through the practice of yoga. In the case of Caodaism the same occult power is expected to be attained

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<sup>47</sup> As Blagov quotes from Allan Kardec’s *Le livre des Esprits*, “Dieu est eternal, immuable, immaterial, unique, tout-puissant, souverainement just et bon. Il a cree l’univers” meaning God is eternal, immuable, immaterial, unique, omnipotent, extremely fair and good character. He created the Universe. See Allan Kardec, *Le livre des Esprits (The Spirits’ Book* containing principles of spiritist doctrine), 1863, p. XLII. See Blagov, *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism and Its Leap into Modernity op. cit.*, pp.45-48. The Caodaist concept of microcosm-macrocosm essential unity may also be found in the spiritist books. For further information, see Ibid. p. 48. For French version see *L’ame humaine, parcelle de la grand Ame, est immortelle* meaning The human spirit, part of the Great Spirit, is immortal-Denis, *Apres la Mort (After Death)* p. 15.

through séance.<sup>48</sup>The legislative branch of the Cao Dai hierarchy is actually responsible to communicate with the occult to receive divine messages.<sup>49</sup>With special reference to *Buoc dau tim hieu Dao Cao Dai (Preliminary Study of Caodaism)*, Blagov makes an assessment: “It is widely believed that Caodaists borrowed their hierarchical structures from the Catholicism and that it was Catholic Church, on which the early Caodaism consciously relied for a model”.<sup>50</sup> However, he further shows the distinct differences between two hierarchies. The title of catholic Pope, for instance, is translated into Vietnamese as *Giao Hoang* and not by the term *Giao Tong*. It is important to note that as the legislative branch does not resemble the catholic hierarchical order, according to Cao Dai historians, organizational structures of the Cao Dai actually remains distinct from the Catholic hierarchy.

### **3.3. Beliefs and Practices: Multiplicity of Rituals in Caodaism**

Rituals are collective memories encoded into actions. Rituals also help people deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life. Thus, ritual performance transforms people permanently.

Rituals that transform people permanently are called “rites of passage.” Initiations, weddings,

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<sup>48</sup> The general religious nature of Nathism is characterized by a wide-spread belief in occult power attained through the practice yoga. All the legends are permeated through and with a spirit of supernaturalism. Occultism is an inseparable ingredient of popular religious consciousness, nay, it is often the salt of popular religious belief. In the history of Indian religion occultism is associated with religious beliefs and practices from the time of the *Atharva-veda*, and henceforth it is associated with all esoteric religious systems in the Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious schools. In Pali literature, occasional reference to the belief in the *Iddhis* (i.e., *rddhi*) or occult powers is attainable through religious practices. For frequent reference to the ten supernatural powers and also to the six supernatural faculties which are attainable by a Buddhist adept. For a good discussion see Shashibhusan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, (Calcutta: Firma Klm Private Limited, 1995), p.211.

<sup>49</sup> Cao Dai hierarchy is constituted of two parts: Visible or these worldly and invisible or transcendental parts. (Chanh tri Dao co hai phan: Phan vo hinh va phan huu hinh) for a good discussion of Cao Dai Hierarchy, see Tran Duy Nghia, *Nen tang Chanh tri/ Political Basis of the Religion*, Tay Ninh, 1973,p.2; Blagov, *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism op.cit.*, pp.53-61; Thanh, *The Path of Cao Dai Disciple op. cit.*pp.32-43.

<sup>50</sup> See Dang Nghiem Van, (ed.), *Preliminary Study of Caodaism* Hanoi: The Institute of Religious Studies, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1995); See *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism op. cit.*, p.55.

and funerals are rites of passage- from one life role to or status to another. Every day people belonging to different faiths perform different rituals. These actually range from religious rituals to the rituals of everyday life. Many people equate rituals with religion, with the sacred. Sacred rituals are those associated with, expressing, or enacting religious beliefs. It is assumed that religious belief systems involve communicating with, praying, or otherwise appealing to supernatural forces. In religion rituals give shape to the sacred, communicate doctrine, open pathways to the supernatural, and mold individuals into communities. On the contrary, secular public life and everyday life are also full of rituals. Great events of state often combine sacred and secular ritual, as in the coronations, inaugurations, or funerals of leaders. Present-day life throughout the world is saturated with ritual observances. To specify only a few of the numerous of religious rituals: the Passover Seder of the Jews, the five daily prostrations toward Mecca of Muslims, the Roman catholic Eucharist, the waving of a camphor flame at the climax of a Hindu *puja*, the dances, songs, and utterances of a person. Religious rituals are as various as religion. There are many local, regional, and sectarian variations of the world religions. There are Shaman, Animist, Pantheist, and New Age religions. Many people actually follow more than one religion.<sup>51</sup>Rituals are both religious and secular. A wedding, for example is the performance of a state-sanctioned contract, a religious ceremony, and a gathering of family and friends. The rituals of a typical Vietnamese Cao Dai wedding are found to be both religious and secular. Sacred wedding rituals include clergy performing the ceremony and prayers. As Schechner observes, sometimes, the sacred portion of a wedding is separated from the secular by having the wedding ceremony in a temple or church and the party elsewhere. Mixing the secular with the sacred is common to many observances, celebrations, and life-passage events such as birthday parties, job-related

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, (London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 52; See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1979), pp.175-78.

celebrations honoring years of service or retirement, and the numerous holidays punctuating the calendar.<sup>52</sup> As far as Caodai wedding is concerned, a dignitary must perform the wedding (at least rank of Giao Huu). Once they have the wedding ceremony at the *Den Thanh* or *Thanh That* (Caodai Temple) the couples don't go again to a church or a Buddhist temple to do another ceremony, because the bride and groom already are Caodai adepts. Besides the wedding in a Cao Dai temple, the bride and groom need to go to a government's office to sign the official marriage book to get the marriage certificate. Then they can go to the wedding party anywhere they want. Thus, Cao Dai culture does not enforce a rigid separation between the sacred and the secular. Now we can turn our attention to scholarly view about rituals. As Schechner views, rituals and ritualizing can be understood from at least four perspectives: 1. Structure- what rituals look and sound like, how they are performed, how they use space, and who performs them. 2. Functions-what rituals accomplish for individuals, groups, and cultures. 3. Processes-the underlying dynamic driving rituals; how rituals enact and bring about change. 4. Experiences- what it is like to be "in" a ritual.<sup>53</sup> The four aspects of ritual are explored from many angles by ethnologists, neurologists, anthropologists, and archeologists. In studying ritual performances about Caodaism, all of these approaches are actually required. But throughout this chapter, author will be referring to ethological and anthropological approaches. Emile Durkheim theorized that performing rituals created and sustained "social solidarity".<sup>54</sup> Durkheim remarked that there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral remarking cannot be achieved

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p.53.

<sup>53</sup> Rappaport, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p.57.

except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirming their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. Here he asked a large question: What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principle date of s of the life of Christ, or of Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt or the promulgation of the Decalogue, and a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life?<sup>55</sup>

How do we know that Caodaists are religious? One basis for this characterization is that they espouse a set of religious beliefs. Further evidence of their religious commitment is their participation in religious behavior. Therefore, anthropologically speaking, religious ritual may be defined as behavior that follows the same sequence of actions on repeated occasions with a view to achieving accuracy of performance. Rituals are the living essence of religion. People show their religious commitment in different ways. Participation in rituals, for example, may be one of the best parts of every religion. According to anthropologist Anthony Wallace, “the goal of religion is to be achieved by performing rituals”. Giving importance to ritual, Wallace further examines that ritual is “ideally, a system of perfect order and any deviation from this order is a mistake”.<sup>56</sup>

### **3.3.1. Ritual and Ultimate Sacred Postulates**

According to Richley H. Crapo’s clarification, the most sacred beliefs of a religion that define the essential basis for the rest of its ideology are assertions that cannot be proved or disproved because they are claims that have no empirical referents in the world of ordinary

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<sup>55</sup>See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Trans. Joseph Ward Swain, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1915), p.427.

<sup>56</sup>Richley H. Crapo, *Anthropology of Religion: The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), p.180.

experience.<sup>57</sup> The succinct statement of Caodaism's ultimate sacred postulates recommends the adoration of One Being or God, the Father of all, and veneration of Superior Spirits. This statement is recommended from the view point of worship-one of the five fundamental principles of Caodaism. This fundamental principle also defines God's relationship to his followers. He is their "Lord" or "Master" rendered in Vietnamese, Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat, the same God (Troi or Thuong De) indicating him to be Supreme above all who reigns over the universe. Therefore, the adherents are bound to address a four time daily prayer to Duc Cao Dai either at home, or in appointed places. Here the Caodaists perform rituals to worship their God in front of the God's altar. In worship their purpose of ritual is to express adoration. It is because the particular meanings of each ritual depend on the specific goals that it is intended to accomplish.<sup>58</sup> And, finally it defines God's relationship to his people. This relationship between God and humanity is confirmed in Caodaism through a treaty declared by the three Cao Dai saints such as Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925) and Nguyen Binh Kiem (1491-1585).<sup>59</sup> The treaty between God and Humanity describes two basic principles: Love and Justice. Thus, humanity has to bring this principle into their practices in order to be saved and to become one with God. In expanding the concept of "Divine Treaty" between God and humanity, Caodaism places Sainthood into three persons as the Spirit mediators between God and humankind. This mediation symbolically manifests through pastoral services of the Church and its rituals. Although participation in the rituals is certainly an important part of Caodaist life, belief itself was

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p.187.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p.188.

<sup>59</sup> For good discussion see R. Pierce Beaver, et al. (ed.), *A Lion handbook: The World Religions*, (England: Lion Publishing, 1982), p. 243; It is important to note here that in Cao Dai pantheon, these three saints Joan of Arc, Louis Pasteur, and Jean Decoux (the French admiral of the Second World War who administered Vietnam for the Japanese) are revered as additional figures (Tuy Ngoc Trinh, *A Brief Introduction to Caodaism*), at <http://www.daotam.info/books/abitcaodaism/caodaism.html>, Retrieved January 7, 2018.

elevated in Caodaism to play the crucial role in defining the relationship between God and the individual and in producing the salvation of the individual.

### **3.3.2. Ritual as the Ground of Sanctity for Ultimate Sacred Postulates**

Ultimate sacred postulates can neither be proved nor falsified, because they make no claims with empirical content. Yet, adherents of world religions consider them as unquestionably true. Why do people continue to treat some beliefs as truths that are not to be questioned even though they are not demonstrably true-indeed, even though it is clearly not possible to demonstrate their truth? Rappaport's answer, as Crapo quotes in his book *Anthropology of Religion: The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, is that participation in the rituals that give beliefs (including ultimate sacred postulates) their sanctity is an act of affirmation of their sanctity and truth.<sup>60</sup> Even though words may not be able to demonstrate the truth of religion's ultimate sacred postulates, participation can nevertheless reinforce acceptance of their truthfulness, since the very act of participating places one in the position of affirming that truthfulness. Participation in rituals has the interesting characteristic of being an act of public acceptance of the beliefs and values the ritual expresses. Acceptance is different from belief. A person may participate in a religion's rituals without actually believing in the ideology that they support, but he or she cannot participate without expressing acceptance, without communicating. Participation in a religion's ritual order-its rituals practiced in group settings-constitutes a declaration that the participant publicly accepts the ideology the ritual order symbolizes. Religion being essentially practical in its outlook and primarily concerned with urgent problems of everyday life and experience, it performs its functions unlike magic, the sister technique, not only in public but for the public good. For the purpose of exercising supernatural control over the beneficent forces to promote the prosperity of the community as

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<sup>60</sup> Crapo, *op. cit.*, p.187.

a whole, religion calls upon every individual to do his part as a member of a blood brotherhood in a peculiar relationship with the external source of strength. This usually involves the correct performance of certain rites calculated to maintain the bond of union. A fourth quality common to religion, in addition to revelation, myth and ritual, recurs in a prescribed standard of conduct. Belief in a beneficent Providence carries with it not only the sense of dependence on a supernatural order but also the dependence of man on the society of which he is an integral unit, because all the members of a community share the same common life-principle. This is particularly apparent in primitive states of culture.<sup>61</sup> In his book *Cultural Anthropology*, Conrad Kottak quoted the anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace as saying: “belief and ritual are concerned with supernatural beings, powers and forces”.<sup>62</sup> Rituals, as Kottak noted, are formal- stylized, repetitive, and stereotyped. People perform them in special or sacred places. Rituals convey information about the participants and their traditions that also translate enduring messages, values and sentiments into action. Overall, rituals are considered as social acts in and through which some participants found to be more committed than others are to the beliefs that lie behind the rites.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, all religions concern with a set of beliefs and ritual practices that are both directly and indirectly associated with societies and nations. Therefore, participation in ritual practices may affirm, and thus maintain, the social solidarity of a religion’s adherents. On the other hand, this is also the reality that intra or inter-religious differences may be associated with bitter enmity in a particular society or nation. Like other religions, Cao Dai religion also experiences the same in its own society. However, a proper understanding on a particular religion can actually be developed in the matrix of its pattern of beliefs and ritual practices. Thus, in the case of understanding Cao Dai belief and practices, alongside ritual practices verbal manifestations

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<sup>61</sup>James, *The Social Function of Religion: A Comparative Study*, pp121-122.

<sup>62</sup> Kottak, *op. cit.*, P.308.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 310-311.

of religious beliefs as prayers, chants, myths, texts, and statements about ethics and morality will be considered now. As far as Cao Dai concept of Great Spirits, mother goddess and Supreme Being is concerned, Cao Dai theology seems to be evolved through stages, beginning with animism<sup>64</sup> (the belief in different categories of spirits, and the belief in two deities), and then monotheism (the belief in a single, all powerful One Being). One Being<sup>65</sup> is characterized as Eternal, Omnipresent, Unique, and True that corresponds to Judeo-Christian and Islamic God. Caodaist syncretism took place at the conceptual level and at the level of ritual practices as well. As Caodaists hold, it is rituals that develop their religion. Rituals and music in Caodaism are interpreted in a Confucian sense of reinforcing this-worldly social order and universal cosmic order. Original Caodaist rituals are considered to be simple, indicating ritual simplicity. Caodaist rituals are divided into two main groups: heavenly rites (*Le Thien Dao*) and human rites (*Le Nhon Dao*). Heavenly rite include the veneration of God (*Duc Chi Ton* or *Thuong De*) and the main spirits ( Buddha Shakyamuni, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Quan Am, Li Tai\_Po, Jesus Christ) of Spiritual council (*Bat Quai Dai*) of Cao Dai hierarchy. Human rites or rituals, on the other hand, include important events marked in the life of the adepts such as traditional purification rituals, funeral rituals, ancestor-worship etc. An altar is an essential element of rituals in all Caodaist temples. Altars may also be established in private homes of individual adepts. The altar is always designed with the Divine Eye, lamp, fruits, flowers and cup of tea in order to worship Supreme Being. Caodaist ritual calendar, according to Blagov, provides strong arguments to support a thesis that the syncretic pluralism of Cao Dai rituals included Buddhist and Taoist festivals, memorial days of the heroes of Vietnamese history. Blagov considers this approach of Cao Dai ritualism as the process of domestication through which more traditional festivities were introduced so as

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<sup>64</sup> From the Latin for soul, *anima*, anthropologist E.B. Tylor named this belief animism. The soul was one sort of spiritual entity; people remembered various images from their dreams and trances-other spirits, see Ibid. p.308.

<sup>65</sup>For a good discussion, see the *Phap Chanh Truyen-the Religious Constitution of Caodaism*, p.8.

to strengthen religion's apple in proselytizing efforts of the Tay Ninh Church.<sup>66</sup> As Gobron notes, the Caodaist doctrine is a fusion of the oldest religions of the orient; Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. For Gobron, Caodaism is the most simplified religion that urges its adherents to say their daily prayers to Duc Cao Dai (One Being); recommends the veneration of the superior spirits; to follow pure Christian morals or that of Confucius.<sup>67</sup> The Caodaist doctrine tends to conciliate all the religious convictions from major five points of view: moral, philosophical, spiritual, worship and initiates.<sup>68</sup> As far as the Caodaist adherents are concerned, they are categorized into three groups: religious, mediums and ordinary members.<sup>69</sup> As the high dignitaries belong to the first group, they are bound to refrain from certain habits, food or beverage: sexual intercourse, meat, fish and alcohol.<sup>70</sup> They have to remain fulltime vegetarians. In addition, they are only occasionally authorized to communion with God and Superior Spirits. The second category members of the Church are morally obligated to certain rules and privations in their material life. They are allowed to lead just a normal life in accordance with rules and privations. But they are not permitted to practice Spiritism. The ordinary members or the lay people are only bound to follow the morals and rules of behavior. They have to perform rituals through prayer and worship<sup>71</sup> every day before the altar of Duc Cao Dai (Cao Dai God). According to another more recent document,

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<sup>66</sup> They were benefactors of humanity at different epochs; Christ as well as Buddha Gautama, Confucius and different Geniis of the Chinese antiquity, are not forgotten in prayers. See Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.60.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* pp.31-32.

<sup>68</sup> For a good discussion see Gobron, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Ascetic like- they can keep their wives who are just treated as their sisters, See *Ibid.*, p, 34.

<sup>70</sup> Abstaining from alcohol is listed as one of the five interdictions of Caodaism and it is strictly prohibited to all adherents ranging from ascetic to the ordinary people.

<sup>71</sup> Worship denotes religious praise and devotion. It results in the honoring of God. Worship is an expression of love for God. But, prayer refers to communication with God. It literally means talking to God or in simple words thanking God. Worship is based on ritualism, whereas prayer is based on spirituality. Prayer leads to spiritual progress. Worship leads to ritual progress. This is another important difference between prayer and worship. In this regard, W.K Wright views that prayer is psychologically in the "conversational" form- a dialogue between one's self and a "thou" who is addressed. For a brief account of the problem, see Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1940) pp. 70-71.

Gobron found the Cao Dai adherents divides into two categories: the superior degree (*thuong thua*) and inferior degree (*ha thua*). Here the superior degree refers to the religious group or ascetics while the inferior degree indicates the mediums and the ordinary members.<sup>72</sup> Human spirit is believed to be immortal in Caodaism. Therefore, physical death cannot be end rather this is the continuation of an eternal life. The question arises: What happens to the spirit after its physical end? This question is answered from Buddhist perspective of karmic retribution.<sup>73</sup> Though human sufferings are determined in terms of spirits' impurity, the Caodaist doctrine ensures an end to sufferings and eternal life through Pho Do (Pho Do: salvation of all life).<sup>74</sup> Thus, due to the final Amnesty before the Judgment Day leading to the New Ethical Era (the Era of God that is called the Kingdom of God in Christianity) Hell has been closed.<sup>75</sup> This, as the scholars hold, is the distinct feature of Cao Dai doctrine that differs from other religions. Human being is identical to the unity of body (*tin*) mind (*khi*) soul or spirit (*than*) which Cao Dai calls three jewels so that they merge into a unit. In the case of Cao Dai esoteric practices the body-mind-spirit strategy is used.<sup>76</sup> As far as the principle of three cycles (three cycles: the first cycle or the cycle of creation, the second cycle or the cycle of destruction and the third cycle or the cycle of conservation) is concerned, Cao Dai doctrine explains their continuous motion without cease of Creator not only to destroy but also conserve all the souls and all living creatures. The principle of three cycles is believed to determine the destiny of the world. The mysterious predestination of evolution, according to Caodaism, has begun from primeval aim.<sup>77</sup> To Tuy Ngọc Trinh, a Cao Dai researcher, three life cycles of progress is the holy embellishment of three Buddhas: Brahma

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<sup>72</sup> Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.35.

<sup>73</sup> Blagob, *op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>74</sup> For a brief description of the problem visit <https://sites.google.com/site/caodaismmeditation/english-version>, Retrieved February 15, 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Blagob, *op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>76</sup> Teachings: *tin-khi-than*: <https://sites.caodaismmeditation/english-version>, Retrieved February 15, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> For a good discussion see *Three Vehicles op. cit.*, pp.25-27.

Buddha (The Phat Brahma), Shiva Buddha (The Phat Shiva), and Krishna Buddha (The Phat Krishna) characterizing an important natural function of life.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.3.3. Socio-religious Ceremonies

All institutions live by their rituals, and religious institutions are no exception. The history of Cao Dai religious life has also developed a ritualistic or worshipping life. Cao Dai rituals throughout a full course of worship and prayer actually appear to be a rhythm of religious life for each of the participants inside the temples. The believers of the faith gather together in the temples, located near about their households, for sermon, worship and prayer, and most importantly for fellowship. Out of daily four time rituals, two monthly and thirty one annual ceremonies, the anniversary of the Supreme Being, God (Duc Chi Ton or Duc Cao Dai) is celebrated on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the first Lunar month as the most distinctive event of Cao Dai worship.<sup>79</sup> It is important to mention that as far as participation in the ceremonies at Local Temples are concerned, every faithful is commanded by the article 19 of the New Canonical Law to visit the nearest Temple (Thanh That) twice i.e., on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of a lunar month. Following the ceremonies the disciples listen to religious discourse. The Canonical Law also makes special provision for one in case of any unavoidable circumstances. Thus, in that case one is not obliged to participate in the ceremonies<sup>80</sup> in order to control the diligence of participants of The Sacerdotal Council.<sup>81</sup> The Holy See is governed by three councils: Popular Council, Sacerdotal Council, and High Council. The Sacerdotal Council is responsible to examine the plan of the Popular Council and apply a method of certifying attendance. Two types of ceremony are conducted at the local temples such as major and

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<sup>78</sup>For good discussion see Túy Ngọc Trịnh, *A Brief Introduction to Caodaism* at <http://www.daotam.info/books/v>, Retrieved Jan. 8, 2018.

<sup>79</sup>See Appendix 12, p.268.

<sup>80</sup> See article 19, *New Canonical Codes* or *Tan-Luat*.

<sup>81</sup> Ho Tan Khoa, *The Outline of Caodaism*, trans. Doan, Pham Tai, (California: Dien Tho Phat Mau San Jose, The Holy Mother Temple of San Jose, 2002), p. 46.

minor. The scheduled time to conduct ceremony is either at 12 midnight or 12 midday. There are ritual conductors of the ceremonies. They climb the drum and bell towers just before the ceremonies start. At the opening of religious service, the drum operator starts first with three loud strikes on the drum. Following the strikes a special prayer is offered asking God's help as a part of their religious service. The prayer (*ke*) requires a mantra of four lines to be chanted.<sup>82</sup> At the end of each line one strike on the drum is required. Thus, twelve strikes are made after four lines are chanted. Then the followers enter a section of drumming session that has three divisions. Each of the division has twelve parts and each part make twelve strikes. In the beginning the drum is struck very slowly but the intensity of sound increases until it becomes a fury. The full session requires 432 strikes on the drum to be accomplished. Following the drumming session three more strikes are also required. In total, with the introductory strikes counted, the drum is sounded for 454 times i.e.,  $3+4+(4 \times 3) + (36 \times 12) + 3 = 7+12+432=454$ .<sup>83</sup> Immediately after the drum session is over, the great bell session starts. The ritual operator begins to strike the bell. Again a separate invocation of a four line mantra is required to be chanted for the bell session.<sup>84</sup>

The succeeding segments and number of strikes on the bell follow the same method adopted for the drum session. Following the accomplishment of the first two sections of the bell session, both the dignitaries and adepts form a queue ready to enter and worship throughout

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<sup>82</sup> 1. *Loi Am Thanh co triet hu khong*-The sound of the drum resounds through the realm of emptiness. 2. *Truyen tau Can Khon the gioi thong*-The sound spreads to every corner of the universe to proclaim. 3. *Dao phap duong kim duong chanh giao*-At present the dharma is creating a true teaching (Caodaism). 4. *Linh quang chieu dieu Ngoc Kinh Cung*-The Dao directs the mystical light as it flows from the jade palace to the cosmos. at <http://www.daotam.info/> A site on Cao Dai Altar-including Ceremonies at Local Temple, Retrieved March 09, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> 1. *Than chung tinh huong phong Phong Do*-Let the mystical powers of this Divine Bell be heard to the depths of hell. 2. *Dia Tang khai mon phong xa co*-The king of the underworld will open his great gates.

3. *Tam Ky van chuyen kim quang hien*-The Third Amnesty has the power to create a golden ray. See Ibid.

4. *Sam hoi am hon xuat u do*-The ray will shine beneficently on all those who are truly repentant.

the full course of major ceremonies. Upon entering the temple everyone is required to fold their hand in the *Bat An Ty* position.<sup>85</sup> This method let the adepts bring their hands close to their chest and thereby they are encouraged to keep peace and serenity in their heart. After making their entrance to the temple via antechamber, adepts are required to bow their heads as they pass the three Saints of Caodaism. This established pattern of Cao Dai rituals corresponds to Christian patterns of the post-apostolic years. In the post-apostolic years, the Christians produced an ever more detailed pattern of the Church's year not only keeping the week of creation, but also keeping annual commemorations: first of all the Passover (when Jesus had died and risen), then Pentecost (when the Spirit had come) and finally Christmas (celebrating Christ's birth) and the 'death day' of the various martyrs. In the case of Caodaism, the assimilation process, as one of the major factors of acculturation, not only encouraged the use of Vietnamese traditional festivals for Cao Dai commemorations, but also helped shape Church (*Toa Thanh/ Thanh That*) organization on the lines of the official civic structures. The part of ordinary believers is to attend Mass and to adore the presence of God. In the Middle Ages in the Western Church, the part of ordinary believers was to attend Mass and to adore the presence of Christ. Cao Dai worship is followed by a sermon that was also common in most Protestant Churches during the reformation. Weekly worship in most Protestant Churches focused on the sermon.<sup>86</sup> In the Lutheran Churches there was a growth of hymn-singing to accompany services of prayers. Cao Dai Church adopted a sober prayer Book routine, in which prayers take on more importance. The hymns are objective in their rich doctrinal content but also express emotion towards God. However, the above similarities are not pointed out to imply Cao Dai rituals, beliefs and practices have grown out or have been heavily influenced by the classical Vietnamese and foreign elements. Rather, it is very

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<sup>85</sup> For details, see *The Outline of Caodaism*.

<sup>86</sup> *The Lion Hand Book, op. cit.*, p. 370.

much possible to see that Cao Dai syncretic tradition and the classical Vietnamese traditions are closely related.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Caodaism: A New Syncretic Panorama of the Southeast Asian Tradition**

This chapter proposes syncretism in Caodaism as seen in systematic arrangement of all borrowed elements from other Asian and Western religions. Syncretism, according to H.L. Richard, is a complex topic with various usages and full of nuances.<sup>1</sup> However, in the case of Caodaism, the academic circles i.e., researchers most often view Cao Dai syncretic approach as a logistic support for the development of Caodaism within and outside of Vietnam. As Caodaism represents the ‘Third Revelatory Period’ it comes into agreement with two previous revelatory periods and neatly align with both Western and Eastern traditions. The intention of researcher is to survey different definitions of syncretism in order to bring about a thorough discussion of the meaning of “syncretism” and of the concept of “syncretism.” In addition, researcher tends to explore the impact of syncretistic elements on Caodaism that demonstrate the origin and development of this new religion calling for a fundamental shift in the ‘Third Revelatory Period’. Traditional Cao Dai thought is indicted as syncretistic due to the harmonious blend by resembling the surroundings. This analysis also opens stimulating perspectives on issues of crucial concern for Cao Dai syncretism with other religions.

#### **4.1. The Concept of Religious Syncretism and Caodaism**

According to Sanou, religious syncretism is generally defined today as the blending of different (sometimes contradictory) forms of religious beliefs and practices.<sup>2</sup> Religious syncretism refers to the blending of diverse religious beliefs and practices into a new belief system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs and practices from

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<sup>1</sup> For a good discussion of the current issue involved see H.L. Richard’s paper on “Religious Syncretism as a Syncretistic Concept: The Inadequacy of the “World Religions” Paradigm in Cross-Cultural Encounter” at: [https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/31\\_4\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_31\\_4-Richard.pdf](https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/31_4_PDFs/IJFM_31_4-Richard.pdf). Retrieved April 10, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Sanou, *op. cit.*, p.133.

unrelated traditions.<sup>3</sup> Several factors, according to him, are known to contribute to religious syncretism. Three of these factors that will be discussed here are: the growing acceptance of religious pluralism, mission approaches to other religions, and the inadequate discipleship of new converts.<sup>4</sup>

In studying Cao Dai religion as syncretism, we should pay attention not only to the socio-historical roles of Cao Dai religion but also to the content and nature of Cao Dai acts, events, processes, settings, practitioners, and organizations. It is widely believed that Cao Dai religion is fundamentally and deliberately syncretic.<sup>5</sup> Barbara Boal views Caodaism as a strikingly syncretistic religion that combines Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Catholicism and traditional cults of spirits and ancestors.<sup>6</sup> Caodaism, both a social movement and a religion, has been perceived as is syncretistic in its organizational structure, philosophy, and theology and ritual practices.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, syncretism, which may be tentatively defined as the borrowing, affirmation of integration of concepts, symbols or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation<sup>8</sup>, has been central to the religious life of the Vietnamese. Syncretic borrowing may not be entirely conscious, but it was not a hypocritical manipulation. Although religious amalgam is universal among the Vietnamese, its contest varies somewhat from place to place. Vietnam's traditional grassroots syncretism was enriched by the coming of Caodaism.<sup>9</sup> As far as spiritism is concerned, Cao Dai spiritism proposes a clear syncretic approach. Caodaists believe in several categories of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>4</sup> That the world has become a religiously plural place is a fact that cannot be denied. People of diverse ethnic origins and many dissimilar religious commitments live and share public life together. This globalization has put major world religions within the reach of almost everyone in the world today. both accommodation and displacement as mission approaches to other religions and cultures potentially promote religious syncretism. For a good discussion see also Ibid.,p.134.

<sup>5</sup> See Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.34.

<sup>6</sup>For good discussion see R. Pierce Beaver, et al., *A Lion Handbook: The World Religions* (England: Lion Publishing, 1982).

<sup>7</sup>Oliver 1976, *op. cit.*, p.1.

<sup>8</sup>J. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.10.

<sup>9</sup>Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.34.

spirits, such as Genies, Sage, Saint, Seraphim and Buddha.<sup>10</sup> But Victor Oliver mentions four major categories of spirits that present an outstanding example of a working syncretism in Caodaism. Each of the categories is shown to have three grades: Higher Order (*Tien*), Middle Order (*Nhan*), and Lower Order (*Dia*).<sup>11</sup> The most important spirits and source of revelation in Caodaism, as Blagov remarks, are the Supreme Being, as well as Buddha Shakyamuni, Li Po and Victor Hugo.<sup>12</sup> Many Western observers indicated universalistic character of the Caodai pantheon, as spiritist messages are received from Jeane d' Arc, La Fontaine, Shakespeare, Aristide Briand, Leo Tolstoy, Lenin, Descartes, Pasteur, Mencius, Allan Kardec, Marcus Aurelius, Clemenceau, St. Bernard, Nguyen Binh Khiem, Sun Yat Sen, John the Baptist, and many more are added to the list of spirits. In total more than 70 different spirits are reported to have appeared in different séances in different times. It does not neglect animistic worships and the deification of heroes of the Sino Vietnamese antiquity. Vietnamese animism suggests worshipping beings or objects beneficial to them. From the point of view of worship, Caodaism, thus, admits the national worship of ancestors (Fundamental Principles confirmed in 1946).

The new doctrine contained so many elements of the preexisting amalgam that it arguably became part of it.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it has been argued that religious synthesis would be valid only when in integrated disparate elements from different traditions while fully retaining their original definitions, overtones, connotations and associations.<sup>14</sup> By that standard, any form of syncretism as opposed to eclecticism assumes a firm basis of religious authority. It is not simply a random juxtaposition of elements into idiosyncratic whole, but the incorporation of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>11</sup> Buddhas (Phat), Holy Spirits (Tien), Saints (Thanh), and Lower-ranking Spirits (Than), See Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.50.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1964), p.56.

<sup>14</sup> Berling 1980, *op. cit.*, p.5.

various elements into a home tradition.<sup>15</sup> Syncretism requires that borrowed elements be reconciled to accommodate them to the worldview and doctrines of a new tradition.<sup>16</sup> Syncretism tends to be highly selective, and the patterns of selectivity reflect the particular religious needs and against which they emerged. It is not the fact of borrowing, but the selectivity and intention of borrowing that add to our understanding of religious thought.<sup>17</sup> Caodaist syncretic borrowing arguably aimed at facing an ideological challenge of the West, and subsequently an expansion of an imported Communist ideology. Not surprisingly, both the French and the Communist sounded critical.<sup>18</sup> As Andree Viollis notes, the French administration described Caodaism as “fraud”.<sup>19</sup> A French scholar is reported to have dismissed the Vietnamese tradition as a “tiny intellectual heritage”.<sup>20</sup> A Communist historian, Tran Van Giau argued that Caodaist claim to unite the world religions was a “spiritual commodity for internal consumption”. He claimed that in the eyes of the adepts of Vietnam’s traditional religions, Caodaism was a mere “heresy” (*Ta dao*).<sup>21</sup>

## 4.2. Syncretism with Taoism

A crucial function of religion in Vietnam was to attract the attention of and communicate with the spirits to secure advice on everyday affairs and the future, and to obtain protection against disease, famine, and other calamities, including the actions of malevolent spirits. The occult powers of mediums and sorcerers, magic and divination, votive offerings and exorcism, were valued for these purposes. In order to appeal to spirits the mediums would use a special invocation process that was called *cau tien* or *cau than*. The early Cao Dai mediums

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.10.

<sup>16</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.34.

<sup>17</sup> Berling, *op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>18</sup>Blagov, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup>See Viollis 1935, p.202, cited by Blagov in his book *Vietnamese Traditionalism*, p.35.

<sup>20</sup> See Original source: “Petit heritage intellectuel de l’Annam”-Gaspardone, Emile, *Bibliographie annamite*, BEFEO, t.XXXIV, Hanoi, 1935, p.6, cited in *Vietnamese Traditionalism*, p.35.

<sup>21</sup> See Blagov, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

are reported to have used *cau tien* practices extensively. Many of the early disciples of the religions who became its dignitaries had practiced *cau tien* and claimed that they could communicate with the spirit world. Therefore, a number of them had learned how to practice *cau tien* in the traditional Vietnamese manner. They, in particular, came from *tu tien* Taoist spiritist groups. *Tu tien* Taoist spiritist sects or groups were popular among the educated classes in Cochinchina. *Tu* is a Taoist concept and was used in conjunction with the term Dao ‘The Way’. Therefore, those who had learned the *Cau Tien* invocation process were also called *Tu Tien* meaning entering into the religion or “Way” by learning how to perform the invocation ceremony. The members of *Tu Tien* sects maintain a special diet of vegetarianism and fasting. Their religious practices include the use of magic and their invocations are made to a range of Taoist deities for the purpose of communicating with the dead and driving away evil spirits. It is important to mention that several of the first Cao Dai disciples were members of *tu tien* groups called Minh sects and most of the early dignitaries of Cao Dai religion probably had their first experiences with *cau tien* under Minh groups. These sects all had the word *minh* ‘light’, ‘enlightenment’ in their names<sup>22</sup> so they can be referred to as the Minh sects. The Minh su ( the oldest of the sects) was brought to Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam) by Chinese Minh dynasty exiles during the seventeenth century while the other sects were probably introduced to Cochinchina during the twentieth century. All of them were characterized by the use of séances, *dong tu* mediums, magic, and the practice of *cau tien* ritualized in accordance with ancient Taoist methods. In fact Ngo Van Chieu was responsible

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<sup>22</sup> By 1924 there were five different religious groups in Vietnam using the same name such as Minh ly ‘pure or enlightened reason’, Minh duong ‘enlightened path’, Minh tan ‘pure heart’, Minh thien ‘enlightened happiness’, and the Minh su ‘enlightened master’. Except for the Minh Su, as Olive examines, introduced by immigrants from China, where the members were followers of the Minh dynasty and had dedicated themselves to the overthrow of the Chin (Manchus) and the restoration of the Minh. The four other groups were products of the early twentieth century in Vietnam. These five groups shared certain characteristics. First, they were primarily religious organizations. Second, they were spiritistic organizations. Third, they were syncretistic in their doctrinal beliefs and ritual practices. Fourth, they all had some type of relationship to Caodaism, either prior or subsequent to its emergence in South Vietnam see Oliver: Caodai Spiritism, p. 28.

for supplying the religious concepts and symbols for the Cao Dai. He is reported to have spent over twenty years practicing Taoist meditation and spirit invocation in the *cau tien* manner. He started to practice *cau tien* in 1902 and first communicated with the spirit Cao Dai in 1917. He is also said to have been familiar with European spiritist writings.<sup>23</sup> Susan Werner views that Ngo Van Chieu may have been a Minh su affiliate since he practiced with a Minh su master (Ong Lao) while he was in Tan An. In addition, as Werner says, when he was in Ha Tien<sup>24</sup>, he practiced with mediums who had officiated at the Mac cuu altar there, which may have been a Minh su altar.<sup>25</sup> With regard to this issue Werner confirms the involvement of Le Van Trung and Nguyen Ngoc Tuong (they are reported to be most responsible for the official launching Cao Dai religion) also underwent Minh sect experiences. Le Van Trung's involvement with the Minh ly sect is arranged by his uncle who had very good connection with Minh ly sect. Thus, it is assumed that his uncle took him to Minh ly séances in Cho Lon city and at any rate introduced him to Cao Dai séances in 1925. As for Nguyen Ngoc Tuong, he attended séances in Saigon in 1925 and he is reported to have studied invocation practices according to Minh su methods. Another early disciple, Vuong Quan Ky, practiced *cau tien* at the Thu Dau Mot altar. His involvement with Thu Dau Mot altar gives evidence of his affiliation with the Minh thien sect. Werner was able to explore and reveal these strong Minh sect connections with the early Cao Dai séances that held in Saigon in 1925. This is how, as she concludes, the early Cao Dai séances may have been considered to have been Minh ly or Minh su séances. Thus, it is assumed that the Minh sects might have made invocations for the Cao Dai though the Cao Dai séances made invocations to a wider range of deities, including European spirits.<sup>26</sup> In this connection, scholars hold that the early Cao Dai dignitaries in charge of creating the rites for Caodaism at the Holy See

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<sup>23</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.34.

<sup>24</sup> Ha Tien, the provincial city of Kien Giang province of Vietnam, is located in the Mekong Delta region of southern Vietnam and bordered with south-eastern Cambodia.

<sup>25</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, pp.29-34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p.35.

were altar masters who actually came from the Minh sects. Werner reports that one of these dignitaries named Le Van Lich was an altar master in the Minh su sect who was one of the first three Cardinals at the Holy See. He was a Taoist master of considerable repute as well as a cousin of Le Van Trung. One source, according to Werner, states that he was especially responsible for creating the rites, prayers, and ceremonial music of Caodaism. Another altar master named Tran Dao Quang from the Minh duong sect became one of the three or four high Cardinals in the religion. Werner confirms their position with especial reference with an article on Caodaism which was published in a French magazine in 1928.<sup>27</sup> As *cau tien* was used in the Tu tien sects by the educated and by those who became Cao Dai dignitaries it proves that the early Cao Dai dignitaries were tremendously influenced by Taoist spiritist practices. Some of the original prayers used in Cao Dai rituals were borrowed from these Minh groups. In the pagodas belonging to the Minh Su, Minh Tan, Minh Ly, and Minh Thien, prophetic statements were made via their mediums as to the future appearance of Caodaism. As Oliver marks, there was so much similarity between Caodaism and the Minh groups in areas such as rituals and theology that some have mistakenly claimed that the Caodai deliberately took their theory, worship, and ritual organization from the Minh Ly.<sup>28</sup> Duc Hong Huynh points to Cao Dai's promise of utopian world where different cultures will be equally spread by Cao Dai Himself in order to blend them together. Utilizing this concept, according to Huynh, Caodaists actually engaged in such an act of blending through their use of Western apparatuses (corbeille-a-bec, table-tournante, Ouija boards) with Taoist practices of communicating with Asian deities attests to a functioning syncretism in Caodaism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.36.

<sup>28</sup> Oliver 1976, *op. cit.*, p.51.

<sup>29</sup> See Duc Hong Huynh 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

#### 4.2.1. Cau Tien: the Source of the Name of the Religion

As Werner shows, the *cau tien* concept explains the Vietnamese term for the Cao Dai. Dai Dao ‘the Great Way’ refers to following the *Dao* or becoming initiated into the spirit world and the practice of *cau tien*. Pho Do in Tam Ky Pho Do (Third Period of Salvation) refers to a type of revelation or deliverance which came through a special kind of fasting observed by both tu tien members and Caodaists. Here fasting is meant to lead to a kind of salvation by delivering up the soul, releasing it (pho do) into immortality (tien).<sup>30</sup> The spirits in the Cao Dai pantheon also reflect popular beliefs and religious conceptions. The highest spirit, Cao Dai, was not a common Vietnamese deity, but this spirit was believed to be the same as Ngoc Hoang Thuong De, the familiar Jade Emperor of Traditional Vietnamese folklore who figures prominently in every *Tet* celebration. But it is important to note that the concept of Jade Emperor is adopted from Taoism. As Janet Hoskins argues, Caodai religious teachings provided a response to the Orientalist binaries, initially through a simple inversion of their terms, in which the Taoist Jade Emperor was recognized as the Supreme Being who had sent all other religious teachers (Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tze and also Jesus).<sup>31</sup> The Sino-Vietnamese term Cao Dai ‘high tower’ used in Chinese Buddhist and Taoist texts referred to a saintly place of meditation or prayer rather than to a spirit or an immortal as such. The term is reported to have been mentioned in the Taoist manual *Van Phap Quy Tong* ‘the Ten Thousand Principles which are one.’<sup>32</sup> The Cao Dai pantheon accords the next highest places to the three saints such as Lao-tzu, Buddha and Confucius. Among many other Cao Dai pantheon includes Ly Thai Bach (Li Po) who is considered to be an immortal of the first order. Li Po is, in general, thought to have been reincarnated at one point as a Vietnamese,

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<sup>30</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.36.

<sup>31</sup> J. A. Hoskins, God’s Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina”, *Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore*, Vol. N. 189, (ARI Working Paper Series), 2012, pp. 25 pages.

<sup>32</sup> Ngo Van Chieu is found to have used this term to practice cau tien: ‘From the High Tower, with a magical pencil, Messages to the World are sent down.’ Also see Werner, *op. cit.*, p.38.

and because his verses and his signature appeared on Chinese porcelain used widely in the country. The common people consider him the most famous Taoist and literary master of Chinese antiquity. The tien, Le Son Thanh Mau, ‘Holy Mother of the Mountain of Pear Trees’, a great immortal in the Taoist pantheon is also included in the Cao Dai Pantheon.<sup>33</sup>

Werner shows that there were ten major festivals at the Holy See in 1932, nine of which are identified to be traditional festivals that would be celebrated in pagodas in Cochinchina. The tenth was Christmas. However, from Taoism, the Cao Dai copied the ceremony to the Jade Emperor, Lao-tzu’s birthday, the ceremony to Ly Thai Bach.<sup>34</sup> From Taoism, Caodaism copied the principles of the “Three Jewels”-Matter, Spirit, and Soul-as well as that of the “Union of the Five Elements” such as mineral, vegetable, water, fire, and earth.<sup>35</sup> Taoist themes in Caodaism included the belief in spirits, magic, the intervention of the spirits to promulgate and reaffirm religious laws, and inclusion of Ly Thai Bach in the Cao Dai pantheon. Taoism manifest itself more strongly in the Esoteric School of Caodaism than its Exoteric counterpart. The doctrine of silence and inactivity is the basis for the Esoteric School-asceticism is practiced to a greater extent though not extreme asceticism. Caodaites are aware that Taoism degenerated to superstitious occultism in China. They consider this deplorable. Asceticism as practiced by members of the Esoteric School consists of permanent vegetarianism and the restraint of human passion in the practice of daily contemplation. Simplicity of life and meditation on the Dao are encouraged and lead to lucidity-clarity of mind and tranquility.

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<sup>33</sup> From Buddhism the Phat ba ‘woman Buddha, Quan Am Bo Tat, the Buddhist goddess of Mercy and Fertility, the *Than*, Quan Thanh De Quan, a Chinese general of the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.) and a warrior of reputed great courage, the *Than*, Khuong Thai Cong ‘Chief of the Genies’, the Phat ba, Dieu Tri Kim Mau, ‘Holy Mother’, a Buddhist goddess ( the second most important temple at the Holy See is dedicated to her.)

<sup>34</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.48.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.53.

Caodaist architecture and statuary provides a clear example of eclecticism. Above the doorway of the Great Divine Temple (Toa Thanh) in Tay Ninh appears statuary “showing Lao-tzu carrying Jesus Christ on his shoulders; in turn, Christ supports Confucius and Buddha. The saintly hierarchy or ‘spiritual fathers’ of Caodaism are depicted inside the cathedral: the three great saints, Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-tze: Christ ranked below these since he appeared at a later date; the high category of saints, including all those of Theravade and Mahayana Buddhism; and finally Sun Yat Sen, Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, St. Bernard, St. John the Baptist, and the French admiral Duclos.”<sup>36</sup>

Caodaists feel no compunction about calling the Supreme Being by most any name commonly used to refer to God. Cao Dai is called the infinite, the Absolute, the Dao (the Way) or the Ultimate Good (comes from Taoist concept). More traditional names such as Ngoc Hoang Thuong De (Emperor of Jade God-Taoist concept), Nam Phuong Giao Chu (Spiritual Master of the South), Dai Bo Tat (the Eldest Boddhisattva), and Ma Ha Tat (the Venerable Saint) are also commonly used.<sup>37</sup> The stick ornamented with a tuft of hair is called Phat Chu (to remove dust). This is the symbol of Taoism, the symbol of purity of sentiment. The Phat Chu is also called Phat tran (to drive impurities from this world) that symbolizes the moral exercise. The moral exercise consists in purifying itself day by day from all faults. As its name indicates, Phat Chu is used to drive impurities from this world.

Cao Dai religion comes into existence as a confluence of three great teachings. Therefore, all major doctrines and theories relating to the creation of this universe developed by this religion mostly pertain to the doctrines and theories of the older traditions. According to Cao Dai cosmology, the world derived from Dao through an evolutionary process. What is that process? In the beginning, as the primordial force, Dao transformed into the Monad (single

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas E. Dutton, “Caodaism as History, Philosophy and Religion” *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.*, (5-27) p.16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

cell), then two opposite entities or energies and lastly the universe. Addressing the Cao Dai adherents, God declares: “Oh my dear children! Dao (Tao) is the Principle of the immortal Nihilism.<sup>38</sup> Dao determines *Am (Yin)*, The Feminine Passive Cosmic Principle; *Duong (Yang)*; the Active Cosmic Primary Principle, changes to establish the universe, Dao creates and nourishes prosperously”.<sup>39</sup> However, the whole cosmos, in accordance with Cao Dai cosmology, moved and animated by the divine force through which the whole cosmos was passed. Indeed, for Caodaists, Dao as the auxiliary force of Cao Dai God, it is the principle of divine reason and creative order of the universe. Therefore, Dao may be considered to be the first step of the creation of this universe as God prepared the way for His creation with the Dao. Now questions may arise: Did God first create such a unique and unparalleled supernatural force that would manifest the Absolute Truth? Did God first use this auxiliary divine force that spontaneously worked in creating the sky, the earth and all creatures? This is how the doctrine of the creation of the universe and all living things relates life in Cao Dai cosmology. As Dao represents the “Absolute Truth” of the Absolute Reality it existed before the creation of this universe. Thus, Cao Dai cosmology holds that Dao is the first cause of all creation. The following Holy message quoted by Truong Van Trang, suggests that the existence of the Dao is conditional on the purpose of the creation: “Before the existence of the sky and the earth, the nothingness (the void) gave birth to the Master and the Master presided the Monad (*Tai Chi*) and divided it into Diad (multiplicity is equal to 2), the Diad into Tetrad (multiplicity is equal to 4), and the Tetrad into Eight Trigrams -multiplicity is equal to 8 (The Eight Trigrams transformed to create the universe”.<sup>40</sup> The evolutionary process of creation, contained by this message, corresponds to a geometric sequence, as every

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<sup>38</sup> In Cao Dai cosmology, Dao is considered to be the principle of Immortal Nihilism, the Cosmic Ether or Nihilism or One Absolute Principle. For a critical treatment, see The Central Holy See of Tam Quan, *The Book of Three Vehicles of Caodaism Doctrine*, (Ha Noi: Religious Publishing House, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p.183.

<sup>40</sup> Truong Van Trang ed., *The Teachings of The Great Way*, (The Tay Ninh Holy See: The Sacerdotal Council, 1959), p.96.

geometric sequence has a common ratio between consecutive terms. Examples include: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64...and infinity. This is how the multiplicity in the creation of this universe might have happened. Thus, for Caodaists, not fire or water nor earth or air is the primordial stuff of creation. Process alone is the Spirit of God and best symbolized by the Dao in action. There may be an abiding cosmic order in the ever dynamic Dao. Hence, Dao may be the ever-changing entity that works behind the whole process of creation of the universe and maintains the order and harmony of this universe under the command of such Ultimate Reality.

In the very beginning, according to Cao Dai cosmology, God let the Dao force control and maintain the Monad. This is a singular metaphysical entity from which two opposites (*Am* and *Duong*) are said to have derived. Thereafter, those opposites reacted with each other to create the universe. This is how the universe is becoming with the origin of all creation through the unity of opposites.<sup>41</sup> In Cao Dai theology the position of God is very clear. According to Cao Dai theological description, God alone is real, eternal and indestructible whose appearance still remains as a great mystery to human beings. But the universe consists of manyness and change that happens to be the appearance of the Permanence (God) through his Dao force (Spirit). According to Cao Dai theology, God creates everything from his own Spirit while the Spirit is assumed to be the Dao. Therefore, Cao Dai cosmology comes in agreement with Taoist cosmology where the legend is identified as Dao. It is worth mentioning that Dao as the mysterious force formed as the legend of the Pre-creation Eight Trigrams. Thus, Dao as the legend of the pre-creation Eight Trigrams has been cosmic essence of the evolutionary process of the creation. Regarding the current issue, the following messages, quoted from the *Tao Te Ching*, resemble Cao Dai concept of creation: “The

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<sup>41</sup> Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism op. cit.*, p.134.

nameless is the beginning of the heaven and the earth.<sup>42</sup> In order to specify the nameless and the significant position of Dao, the Caodaists quote another message that states: “Something mysteriously formed, born before heaven and the legend of the Pre-Creation Eight Trigrams”<sup>43</sup>.

### 4.3. Syncretism with Confucianism

From Confucianism, the Cao Dai cult borrowed Confucius’ birthday festival, the Quan De ceremony and *Tet*.<sup>44</sup> Caodaism took the Three Duties from Confucianism are as: duty of subject to king, child to father, and wife to husband. The Five Cardinal Virtues of Confucianism are also incorporated as part of Cao Dai doctrine: Love, Justice (Righteousness), Good Behavior, Wisdom and Loyalty. Women are to adhere to four virtues- proper employment, proper demeanor, proper speech, and proper behavior.<sup>45</sup> Confucian themes in Caodaism defined social relationships and behavior, emphasizing correct comportment, the ranking of social relationships, the belief in the necessity of proper relations between superiors and inferiors, a rejection of egalitarianism, a preoccupation with rites, the importance attached to community, scholarship, knowledge, tradition, and the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>46</sup>

Caodaism sees itself as a natural continuity of the Vietnamese Confucian tradition. The elementary forces of nature are, of course, Yin and Yang, as set forth in the *Book of Changes*. The Mother Goddess is in many ways recognizably Chinese, since she represents the forces of Yin or female energy in opposition to those of Yang.<sup>47</sup> Caodaists must perform their duties

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<sup>42</sup> *The Tao Te Ching*: Chapter one.

<sup>43</sup> See Ibid. Chapter twenty-five.

<sup>44</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> See Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>46</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.53.

<sup>47</sup> Hoskins, “From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Deities in the Caodai Pantheon” In *The Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess: Goddess Tradition of Asia* edited by Deepak Shimkhada et.al, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008), pp. 81-100.

towards society by faithfully fulfilling their role and within the family, the village, the nation, and that larger extended family, the world.<sup>48</sup> The *Tan Luat* or New Code of Conduct is Confucian in its prescriptions for women to honor their fathers, husbands and sons, and also in its tolerance for divorce or a husband's taking a second wife if his wife has not produced a male descendant Janet.<sup>49</sup> The Confucian elements of Caodaism's "Code of Conduct", as Janet observed, have been particularly challenged in California. She explains that veneration of Mother Goddess and female saints and deities like Quan Am, Joan of Arc, and the Virgin Mary appeal to followers of feminist spirituality, but rules pertaining to marriage, divorce and the family have seemed to re-assert traditional sex roles rather than displacing them.<sup>50</sup> A kind of cube bearing the words *Xuan Thu* is the insignia of Confucianism. The cube presents a book consisting of five volumes called *Xuan Thu*.<sup>51</sup> It is a social work written by Confucius in the form of a Gospel and which signifies moral perfection, teaching, besides rites, divination of oracles, literature, music, and the rules of humanity.<sup>52</sup> This is the symbol of Confucianism. This book actually makes human morals sprout and fructify as the Spring and Autumn which are two seasons having days and nights of equal length and easy to bear.<sup>53</sup> In Confucian cosmology, the Monad refers to the nothingness (*Tai Chi*) and corresponds to *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). The opposition and combination of the universe's two basic principles of Yin and Yang comes out of this nothingness (the Monad). Here, Confucian cosmology considers the Monad as the ultimate stuff of creation that does not corresponds to the evolutionary process of creation held by Cao Dai cosmology. But certainly Cao Dai cosmology adopted this Confucian idea of Monad and thereby developed its own idea on this

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<sup>48</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>49</sup> Hoskins 2008, *op. cit.*, p.192.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.192.

<sup>51</sup> *Xuan* means Spring while *Thu* means Autumn, See Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.150.

<sup>52</sup> Rules of humanity refers to the duties of man, citizens, father and mother, husband and wife, son, brother and sister, master and pupil, public official, sovereign, even duties toward animals and plants. See *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151.

particular matter. With regard to the practice of the Way of Humanity, the Confucian doctrine has appeared to be reestablished in Caodai doctrine as a universal doctrine in order to teach the humanity a common pattern of behavior in a righteous manner.

#### **4.4. Syncretism with Buddhism**

From Buddhism, the Cao Dai religion borrowed the monthly celebration of the new moon and the full moon, the ceremony of the three Big Moons, Buddha's birthday, and the ceremony to Quan Am.<sup>54</sup> Quan Am is a female Bodhisattva, an enlightened being who assumes the form of a gentle goddess to help the living. Her counterpart is Quan Cong, a monstrous-looking male general, who is a fierce controller of homeless demons. The peaceful, white clad Quan Am is balanced by the ferocious red-faced Quan Cong, so that her power to rescue those in suffering or peril is accompanied by his power to repel danger and protect his followers. In Cao Dai temples, an image of Quan Am is often found on the right side of the Eye of God, facing the door where female disciples enter, while an image of Quan Cong is found on the left side of the eye of God, facing the door where the male disciples enter.<sup>55</sup> In the Cao Dai hierarchy of spiritual achievement, the highest rank is attained by immortals by those-like Kuan Yin-who become living Buddhas.<sup>56</sup> From Buddhism, it borrowed the belief in the Three Submissions-to Buddha, to his law, and to the religious community. Also from Buddhism came the familiar Five Interdictions: do not kill, do not steal, do not seek luxury, do not live a high life, and do not lie. Buddhist themes in Caodaism included the conception of the cyclical nature of the world, the belief in karma, reincarnation, the existence of Nirvana, the importance of asceticism, prayers, meditation, vegetarianism for religious purity, and charity services for the poor.

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<sup>54</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, P.48.

<sup>55</sup> Hoskins *op. cit.*, p.186.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p.191.

Buddhist philosophy is a fundamental aspect of Caodaism. Samsara, the wheel of birth and death, and the law of karma are accepted by Caodaists. Men's suffering in this world is seen to be a consequence on his depraved mind. He sees himself as a distinct self. The path of escape from suffering comes as a result of discipline and meditation; the goal is nirvana or eternal life. Echoing an earlier Indian tradition, the Caodaists see nirvana as man's realization that his soul is one with the soul or the universe or Brahman. As defined by a Caodaist, nirvana is an invisible life where the soul attains divine happiness.

For the Westerner, as Dr. Ryang views, the Cao Dai religion sounds easy to swallow until they hear of the belief in karma and reincarnation. This is a Hindu idea that pervaded in the later Mahayana and Tibetan schools of Buddhism, all very eastern in origin.<sup>57</sup> The lotus flower, the symbol of Mother Goddess, is borrowed from Buddhism. The cylinder represents a big bowl, in which Buddha Sakyamuni in his days was accustomed to receive food offered by his followers. The Buddha Sakyamuni had the courage to leave all his worldly wealth to go and seek in solitude Peace of soul and Heart and Truth. He had to beg for his living to nourish his body in view of propagating the Faith he had acquired. The bowl, in Vietnamese, is called *Binh bat du*.<sup>58</sup> Dao corresponds to Buddhist concept of the True-Self. In Buddhism, the True-Self is considered as the fundamental nature of the universe, that is neither born, nor destroyed, that is not confined to times. Here the concept of the Dao comes in agreement with the Buddhist concept of the True-Self. It is because the Dao is considered in Cao Dai cosmology as the true essence of the universe. Thus, being silent and active the Dao appears to be the creative force of God and the nurture of ten thousand things (creatures). For Buddhism the cosmic ether, the fifth and highest element after air and earth and fire and

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Ryang, "Cao Dai Religion of Many Spirits" In *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, *op. cit.* (169-176), p.171.

<sup>58</sup> *Binh*: basin, *Bat*: bowl, and *Du*: to beg, This bowl symbolizes the detachment from the riches of this world, abnegation, renunciation and total disinterestedness of life (asceticism). It is the insignia of Buddhism. See Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.151.

water is believed to be the substance composing all heavenly bodies. This cosmic ether in case of Cao Dai cosmology seems to be derived from the Dao cosmic essence. Therefore, alternatively the Dao is considered to be the form of the formless, the image of the imageless. And certainly it is because of the Dao the appearance (the manyness and changes of the universe) of the Permanence (Supreme Being) is comprehended through the diversity in creation.

#### **4.5. Syncretism with Christianity**

The early Cao Dai ritual masters incorporated many Christian elements into their belief system. Christmas is still celebrated and there are ceremonies to genies and Caodaist early dignitaries.<sup>59</sup> From Christianity came the inclusion of Christ in the Cao Dai pantheon and his use as a source of spirit messages. From this source also came the church structure of Caodaism, its emphasis on proselytization and social service, the notion of a monotheistic god (Duc Chi Ton), the belief in man's redemption, the copying of Catholic provincial organization, and the use of Catholic like sacraments (repentance, the Eucharist, baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme-function. Dr. Ryang notes that an interesting parallel exists between Caodaism and Catholicism. Cao Dai has a governing body, the Cuu Trung Dai that bears a striking resemblance to that of the Catholic Church.<sup>60</sup> Thus an interesting parallel exists between Caodaism and Catholicism. Cao Dai has a governing body, the Cuu Trung Dai that bears a striking resemblance to that of the Catholic Church. However, illustrative of the European influence on Caodaism are some of the early spirit messages the pioneers of the cult received during the first five or ten years of the religion. The themes in these messages, selected from a collection of spirit messages translated into French, also demonstrate some of the intellectual and emotional reactions of the pioneers of the sect to Westernization, the religious concerns important in their conception of Caodaism and the

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<sup>59</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, P.48.

<sup>60</sup>See *Various Papers, op. cit.*, p.172.

apocalyptic visions held by the pioneers. They are reported to have frequently referred to Christianity and Christ, sometimes deprecatingly and other times respectfully. Pessimism, the notion of evil, cataclysmic doom, redemption, with the drama of a salvatory eschatology, also weighs heavily. As Werner notes, one message from the Spirit Cao Dai, received in 1930 by mediums Cao Quynh Cu and Cao Hoai Sang, with Pham Cong Tac as scribe, touches upon some typical ideas found in these messages, including the notions of weakness and powerlessness, the preferences to Christianity, the apocryphal tone, the references to money and its evil ways.<sup>61</sup> Werner further clarifies that spirits messages from Westerners such as Victor Hugo and Joan of Arc also contained references to Catholicism and the French.<sup>62</sup> As Janet assumes, Victor Hugo and Jean of Arc, for example, the most famous “European saints” in Caodaism, were both spirits who initially conversed with Pham Cong Tac refusing to “come down” to a séance if he were not there as a medium to receive them.<sup>63</sup> Hugo’s mystical poems and his practice of spiritism inspired a sense of recognition among his young readers in Saigon, who saw him as revealing the intersection of eastern and western traditions. As Hoskins evaluates, Hugo had an oceanic vision of Asian wisdom spreading to Europe, and toyed with vegetarianism and ideas of reincarnation in his verses, without ever forming a coherent or systematic belief based on these connections.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the inclusion of Western historical and literary figures in the Caodai pantheon is far from a glorification of Occidental culture. She further points out that Victor Hugo is controversial in Caodaism today not because of his writings, which are still widely admired by an older generation of Vietnamese intellectuals, but because of the messages attributed to him in which he supports Tac’s struggles with his critics: “You are blessed, in your capacity as medium...Even if

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<sup>61</sup> Werner, *op. cit.* p. 61. For a good understanding, see a sample of two full texts of spirit messages in Appendix 13, p.270.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 62.

<sup>63</sup> Hoskins presented this paper at the 2007 conference on Vietnamese Anthropology in Binh Chau, Vietnam. See Hoskins, “*The Personal and Theological Imagination of Pham Cong Tac*”, In *A Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.* (372-400), p.389.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 390.

terrestrial spirits are unfaithful to you, the gates of Paradise will applaud your actions”.<sup>65</sup> The cathedral itself makes use of the twin towers characteristic of European cathedrals (spherical domes reminiscent on the Islamic mosque, and a decorative style with strong Buddhist influence). Here it should be noted that Cao Dai philosophy recognizes the validity of Christianity as a religion and Jesus Christ as one of its saints. Among the Chieu Minh disciples, for example, Ngo Minh Chieu is believed to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Chieu is the most important spirit communicant in their séances.<sup>66</sup> As Dutton remarks, although Caodaist philosophy recognizes the validity of Christianity as a religion and Jesus Christ as one of its saints, Christian doctrines and beliefs are not very evident though the religion does claim to incorporate Christian altruism and noble morals. The organization of the Tay Ninh sect and to a lesser extent, the other sects, is remarkably similar to the hierarchy of the Vatican. Codaist architecture with its similarity to European cathedrals is yet another evidence of Western influence.<sup>67</sup> Hoskin views that Cao Dai temples have the external form of Gothic cathedrals, with a nave, high towers, and carved pulpits, but inside they are filled with the colorful animals and images of Asian mythology: dragons, giant *naga* snakes, cranes, turtles, phoenixes and unicorns.<sup>68</sup> Janet Hoskin quotes Lalaurette and Vilmont (1931) as saying: Colonial administrators worried about whether Caodaists had hijacked the Christian idea of monotheism—a direct, personal relationship with God and transferred it to the Jade Emperor, as well as “importing” many of the organizational features of the Vatican’s administrative hierarchy, since there was a Caodai Pope, male and female cardinals, bishops and priests.<sup>69</sup> The most important Catholic influence on early Caodai leaders was the religious and social activism of the Catholic Mission. Unlike Buddhist

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p.390.

<sup>66</sup> Oliver 1972, *op. cit.*, p.23.

<sup>67</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.17.

<sup>68</sup> See *The Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess: Goddess Tradition of Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-100.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.204.

monks, Caodai dignitaries do not retreat from the world, live in monasteries, or take vows of celibacy as young men.<sup>70</sup> According to Tay Ninh version, on January 1, 1926, Cao Dai emphasized his identity more strongly by claiming to be another revelation of Jesus “The one who shed His blood because of His love for the world”.<sup>71</sup> As Mr. Mingiano writes, Islam does not find place among the ways<sup>72</sup> that lead to the Most High. Christ on the contrary, is considered by the Codaists as an Envoy of the Lord to a part of humanity, to guide them along the way to perfection, a way adequate to their capacity for understanding spiritual values. In order to rationalize Codaists’ view regarding this case the following messages may be taken into our consideration.

On Christmas Eve, the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1925, the guiding spirit revealed himself as the “Supreme Being”. As Oliver mentions, Speaking in Vietnamese, He said in substance: “Rejoice this day. It is the anniversary of my coming to Europe to teach my doctrine. I am happy to see you, O My disciples full of respect and love to me. This house will have all my blessings. Manifestations of my power will inspire even greater respect and love in my regard”.<sup>73</sup> In a spiritualistic message of the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 1927, Ly Thai Bach said: “Dear Brethren, the merciful Christ came among you to mark out for you the good way. Try to follow it in order later to have peace of soul; go forward each day with alter step in the love of God. Unite in love one with another, help one another, this is law divine”.<sup>74</sup> Through the image of the Left Eye of God, as Hoskins argues, Caodaism created a masculine monotheism, activist and dynamic, which would absorb Christian teachings into a more encompassing

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<sup>70</sup> Hoskins, “Cao Dai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion’s Struggle for Identity” in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, edited by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, (Rutgers, NJ: Routledge University Press, 2006), pp.191-209.

<sup>71</sup> Oliver, *op. cit.*, p.70.

<sup>72</sup> Caodaism is a synthesis of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism which united with Christianity and the worship of Genii represents the five great ways. See Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.63.

<sup>73</sup> The author, quoted in Gobron, 1950:22, repeats this message. See Gobron, *History and Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p.22.

<sup>74</sup> See Gobron, *op.cit.* p.37.

Asian pantheon, and within which the Vietnamese people would be given the spiritual mission to spread this message and unite the nation.<sup>75</sup> It is evident from this discussion that the type of syncretism occurred in Caodaism, according to Werner, corresponds roughly to European elements such as Western occultism, freemasonry (mentioned in the previous chapter), Christianity, French philosophy which blended into the whole in an affective fashion.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.6. Comparison and Appraisal

The Cao Dai belief system is often considered by the scholars as a synthesis of the three Eastern religions or a variant of any one of them. As Werner views, it is more accurate to interpret the religious character and origin of the cult in relation to Vietnamese spiritist practices and the three religions tradition. In this regard she presents some Western interpretations of Cao Dai ideology. Gerald Hickey in his book *Village in Vietnam* considers Caodaism as “a reformed Buddhist religious movement”.<sup>77</sup> Ralph Smith in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, prefers “religious Taoism”.<sup>78</sup> Paul Mus calls Caodaism a “substitution religion”, and a “mystical Buddhist sect”.<sup>79</sup> Gabriel Gobron, a French Caodaist, in his *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*, terms it “reformed Buddhism and Annamese spiritism”.<sup>80</sup> While Caodaism drew doctrinally from the *Three Religions Tradition* and the cult of the spirits, it also profited from the decline of the established faiths of Confucianism, and Buddhism. Its aim to achieve a doctrinal unity of the three religions greatly appealed to the historically and culturally conscious Vietnamese. Although there are many layers of religious and philosophical expression to Caodaism, basically the religion was

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<sup>75</sup> Hoskins 2012, *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>77</sup> Gerald C. Hickey 1964, *op. cit.*, pp.290-294.

<sup>78</sup> Ralph B. Smith, “An Introduction to Caodaism” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* ((BSOAS), University of London XXXIII vol. ii and iii, 1970. p.574.

<sup>79</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p.51.

<sup>80</sup> Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.15.

anchored in Vietnamese religious conceptions and practices widespread in the society at large. For its doctrinal fund, the new system is found to have adopted the code of ethics and its esoteric conceptions from Taoism, the norms of Confucian reigorism, the gentleness of Buddhist and its metaphysical speculations and the noble morals of Christianity.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, there are two orders of Cao Dai believers: the secular order and the superior order. These orders are constituted on the basis of the previously established orders. As for the first order, religious duties consist of a few different practices. In this order, the adherents (both married and unmarried commoners) are committed to observe a vegetarian diet of six days a month for the first six months after they become believers. After that, each month they must do these ten days. They must also follow the five prohibitions mentioned earlier (which parallel Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism and so on). The second order (*Thuong Thua*) ranges from simple believers to dignitaries of the priestly ranking (*Giao Huu*). To become a member of the Superior Order, they practice full-time vegetarianism (which is used as a spiritual cleansing and for reincarnation related reasons as in Hinduism and Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism). They must also not have their beard or hair cut and wears only ordinary, plain colored garments (either white or the color relating to their branch). Similar to Catholic priests, a vow of chastity must be made and members must be thrifty, avoiding luxuries. They also must follow the Tu Dai Dieu Qui (Four Great Commandments borrowed from Confucianism mentioned earlier). Members of the Superior Order can enter the Tinh That (House of Meditation) to receive esoteric training provided they follow a set of eight regulations (having fulfilled morals and social obligations, etc.) and once inside they may not talk to the outside world (aside from close family) or engage in any eating or activities outside of what they are followed.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>82</sup> Ryang, *op. cit.*, p.169.

With regards to the concept of goddesses in Caodaism, Hoskin presents two different arguments: The first is that the Cao Dai concept of a female co-Creator of the universe draws on indigenous traditions of Dao Mau, a goddess centered faith which is often represented as the oldest and original faith of the Vietnamese, before domination of China. Goddesses like the Holy Mother and Quan Am are popular for being close to individuals with the least social power and interceding for them to the highest level of Heaven. They serve a function similar to that of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, and Caodaist churches in the US have also received spirit messages from the Virgin Mary herself. Hoskins clarifies that many Vietnamese ethnologists and folklorists have argued that goddess worship was survival of a primitive or matriarchal period in Vietnam's history.

The second is that the introduction of French heroines into Caodaism, specifically Joan of Arc, is part of a gesture of encompassment and inclusion that builds on elements of Vietnamese heritage and their Western analogues. Caodaists give Joan of Arc a place as the sixth female goddess among the nine goddesses (or immortals, *tien*) who is responsible of helping the Mother Goddess in saving humanity. Joan of Arc is a saint in the Catholic system, but in Caodaism she has been given a promotion to occupy the rank of a female immortal or archangel (*tien*). The veneration of women warriors like the first century Trung sisters and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Lady Trieu who fought to drive back Chinese, laid the groundwork for Caodaist recognition of a French saint who was inspired by spirit messages to defend her homeland. Other great figures from French history- like the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary giant Victor Hugo, a spiritist with a strong interest in Asian religions, have also been incorporated as saints in the Caodaist pantheon. The spirit of Victor Hugo is the head of the overseas mission for Tay Ninh, the largest denomination, and he is joined by Louis Pasteur, La Fontaine, Aristide Briand, and Vladimir Lenin. But Asian figures like Li Po, the Chinese Taoist poet, remain more important than any European spirits. Li Po serves as the 'Invisible Pope' of Caodaism,

and most of his spiritual advisors are associated with Buddhism and Taoism, not Western humanism.<sup>83</sup> As Hoskins further shows, its Confucian elements celebrated the literary achievements of elite, its Taoist occult practices focused more on the relation of man to nature rather than to society, and its esoteric tradition was primarily Buddhist in inspiration. As she concludes, what was novel about Caodaism, however, was that in contrast to all three of Vietnam's "great teachings", it fostered a more personal and direct contact with God.<sup>84</sup>

A comparative study of Cao Dai and Minh Ly, made by Jeremy Jammes, shows so many common and complementary aspects in the two religions. Most significantly he shows the adoption the symbolic, liturgical and mythological legacy of the Chinese Minh sectarian tradition by the new Cao Dai religion. One common feature, as he examines, is the salutation bat An Ty ("pressing the sign of the Rat"). This salutation is performed by putting the tip left thumb against the base of the ring finger. It is a chiromantic reference to the sign of the Rat, Ty, and to the proclamation of the Minh Ly sect. Beside this salutation, which is characteristic of the two religious communities, many links are discernible throughout the history. The mediumistic use the beaked basket is a set of divinatory practices whereby the visit of a spiritual entity enables the written revelation of nonhuman message. This type of automatic writing is called by the Minh and Caodaist *co but or pho loan*. If the transfer of the beaked basket constitutes a sociological indicator of a direct relationship between the Minh and Cao Dai communities, it is also symbolic since it implies that the deities of the Minh pantheon will appear during Caodaist mediumistic sessions. This sort of transfer probably results from the need for expertise but also for the legitimization of the Cao Dai religion.

In order to compose the first corpus of prayers, the Caodaist clergy headed by Le Van Trung and Pham Cong Tac turned to the Minh religious associations. In the frame of their original

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<sup>83</sup> *The Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess, op. cit*, pp.81-100.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.81-100.

dogma, the majority of Caodaist daily prayers are generally sourced from the Minh Ly corpus of prayers. It also applies to prayers addressed to a few common divinities of the pantheon such as the prayer celebrating the Jade Emperor (Ngoc Hoang Kinh) and the three prayers to the founders (Lao-tzu, Confucius and Buddha) of the *Tam Giao* or Three Religious Traditions. Lastly Caodaism also borrowed from Minh Ly the important prayers of Repentance (*Sam hoi*), of Praises (*Xung tung*) and of the Dead (*Cau sieu*), the last being said at funerals. These transfers were further endorsed by means of oracular messages received at Minh Ly whereby Minh specialists were regarded as the legitimate elders responsible for young Caodaist groups.<sup>85</sup> More serious studies of it as a religion acknowledge its Chinese literary heritage and the blending of influences from Theravada Buddhism, Taoist occultism, western spiritists and theosophists.<sup>86</sup> The prayers used in Cao Dai rituals until 1935 were those learned from Ngo Minh Chieu, or from ancient Buddhist-Taoistic sources. Among the latter are some prayers in Sanskrit.<sup>87</sup> The altars of the Tay Ninh churches have five tiers; each tier indicates the ranking of the representative statuary. On the first and highest tier are statues of Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tze. The second tier has Quan Am, Ly Thai Bach and Quan Thanh De Quan who are recognized as the three “Lords of the earth,” Jesus Christ is on the third tier, ranked below the others because he appeared in a later era. Khuong Thai Quan, the head of the ancestral spiritists, is on the lowest tier. The candles used in Cao Dai altar represent the Chinese supposition of male and female (*Am-Yin* and *Duong-Yang*) principles. The five incense sticks symbolize different levels of spiritual development that are available to humans: purity, meditation, wisdom, superior knowledge, and liberation.<sup>88</sup>

In the few genuine Taoist temples in Vietnam “a crowd of saints, heroes and immortals are worshipped alongside such principal divinities as the Jade Emperor and Nam-Tao, the

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<sup>85</sup> A Collection of Various Paper, *op. cit.*, pp.298-99.

<sup>86</sup> For a detail treatment see Ralph B. Smith 1970 and Oliver 1976.

<sup>87</sup> Oliver 1972, *op. cit.*, p.27.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p.29.

Southern Star”.<sup>89</sup> Buddhism and Taoism were synthesized with the indigenous religious beliefs of the Vietnamese. These beliefs included the cult of spirits, both tutelary and ancestral, the hero cult, and an underlying core of animistic practices. Vietnamese animism supports the idea that one may worship any spirit if the result is beneficial, “*thieng dau tho day*” (worship wherever there is a god).<sup>90</sup> The three doctrines: “Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism”, as Gobron remarks, are the three stages of the evolution of soul, the three degrees of initiation that bring the spirit toward pure divinity. The three above-described objects ( *Xuan Thu, Binh bat du, and Phat Chu*) form Ho Phap’s insignia. For this, dignitary, spiritually speaking, is entrusted with the responsibility of uniting the three doctrines and to see men live in peace and in respect of the laws of evolution. In *A document of 1946-Caodaism: its origin, Character and projects*, as Tran Quang Vinh mentions, the architecture of the Great Divine Temple synthesizes all the symbols of the associated religions, legends and beliefs of the Sino-Vietnamese folklore. This heterogeneous mixture makes of it a monument of great originality. The tower of saker is crowned with a fabulous animal, the Dragon-Horse (Long Ma) that carries on its back the first signs of the Chinese Zodiac.<sup>91</sup>

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century French Indochina, a number of underground syncretistic secret societies deployed spirit mediums to produce a cannon of Sino-Vietnamese texts that were eventually incorporated into Caodaism. Among these texts are the Cao Dai prayers recited in daily offerings of flowers and fruits, alcohol and tea which were received at Hiep Minh pagoda in Can Tho. Others included the *long* “Canon of Repentance” received in Saigon at the Minh Ly temple, Tam Tong Mieu from April 191925 to November 21 1925. Caodaism brought these secret societies out of the shadows and into the clear light of day, but also fused them with

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<sup>89</sup> Maurice Durand (quoted in Oliver 1972, *op. cit.* p.40), “Quelques Elments de L’univers Moral des Vietnamiennes”, *Bulletin de la Socitete des Etudes Indochinoises*, 27 (4), Saigon, 389-403.

<sup>90</sup> Duncanson, Dennis, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.46. This source is cited from Oliver 1972, *op. cit.*, p40.

<sup>91</sup> Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.167.

the occult interests of Vietnamese employees of the French colonial state, who had been educated in French and experimented with the “table tipping” of Kardec style European Spiritism.<sup>92</sup>

With regard to the concept of sacred symbols in Caodaism, we may examine Durkheimian model of religion. In more general terms, Durkheimian model of religion presents religion as a symbolic expression of the social order. In connection with this model, Crapo explains that the sacred symbols of religion are representations of those social institutions and groups that must be respected by custom if a society is to function well and survive. He further clarifies that sacred symbols inspire strong feelings i.e., reverence and awe that at the same time, inspire respect for the social order that they symbolize.<sup>93</sup> In case of Caodaism, alongside a good number of symbolic expression, four sacred creatures such as dragon (symbol of wisdom), tortoise (symbol of longevity and perfection), unicorn (symbol of peace and perseverance), and phoenix (symbol of prosperity) are found to have inspired the Caodai minds with strong feelings. According to Caodai traditional beliefs, the four symbolical sacred creatures possess invisible power in order to ward off the evil spirits.<sup>94</sup> Notably, the dragon is not the subject of legends only among the Vietnamese. One finds it referred to in the tales of many nations. In Vietnam, it is regarded as the most sacred of the four mythical creatures<sup>95</sup> i.e., the dragon, the phoenix, the unicorn and the turtle and in the Cao Dai festival they appear as fire-breathing creatures. Thus, it is clear that the concept of four sacred creatures have derived from traditional Vietnamese folklore though the original source of these mythical figures goes back to ancient China. According to the findings of Wen Yiduo

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<sup>92</sup> Hoskins, “Gazing at the Left Eye of God: Esoteric and Exoteric Visions in the Expansion of Caodaism”, in *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, p.240.

<sup>93</sup> Crapo, *Anthropology of Religion*, *op.cit.*, p.15.

<sup>94</sup> *The Outline of Caodaism 2002*, *op. cit.*, p.77.

<sup>95</sup> See Vietnam and Dragons at <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2017/03/vietnam-and-dragonsin-vietnamese-culture-as-in-many-east-and-south-east-asian-cultures-the-dragon-plays-a-very-prominent-ro.html>, Retrieved May 05, 2018.

(1899-1946), a noted Chinese scholar and poet, the Chinese conception of the dragon is rooted in its early function as a totem, an imaginary symbol of a clan or tribe.<sup>96</sup> However, in China, dragon is essentially regarded as a benevolent deity that bestowed good fortune upon the Chinese.<sup>97</sup> The lion dance, perhaps the dance most beloved by the Chinese people, is probably derived from itinerant Indian jugglers and animal trainer who first appeared in China during the Tang dynasty. In general, the lion dance is also popular in Vietnam. In particular, on the occasion of the Cao Dai Grand Festival Commemorating the Holy Mother Goddess (*Dai Le Hoi Yen Dieu Tri Cung*)<sup>98</sup>, there are many troupes of lion, turtle, phoenix and dragon dancers parading in front of the Great Divine Temple of the Holy See. Since live lions and mythical creatures are not available, cloth ones serve their purpose. With one man manipulating the wooden head and another hindquarter, they develop all fabulous dances through the streets of the Holy See. Each troupe might be composed of one or two lions, two other dancers luring them on with large embroidered balls in lieu of pearls, and some musicians beating on gongs and drums. To the delight of the spectators, the blue and yellow lions, tortoises, phoenixes, dragons dance, roll, and jump about on stage in pursuit of the pearls displaying remarkable agility with eyeballs rolling, tongues flopping, jaws clacking and bells tinkling. In China's rural and urban areas, many troupes of lion dancers are found parading through the streets or going from village to village. In modern China the most likely place a city dweller would be able to see the lion dance would be at an acrobatic performance.<sup>99</sup> Thus, this fabulous performing art as an important part of Caodai culture attests to Caodai syncretic approach the way Chinese ritualistic elements are absorbed via indigenized Vietnamese folklore and thereby incorporated them into its own culture very

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<sup>96</sup> Marie Luise Latsche, *Traditional Festival* (Beijing: New World Press, 1984), p.62.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p.63.

<sup>98</sup> Every year, there are two Grand Festivals celebrated in the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See and in Cao Dai local parishes. The first festival commemorates God the Father (Dai Tu Phu) on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the Vietnamese lunar calendar's January, and the second festival commemorates the Holy Mother Goddess on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar calendar's August.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.43.

smoothly. The new religion also received support from French free Masons<sup>100</sup>, who recognized a kinship between Masonic ideas of universal brotherhood and even their emblem of the all Seeing Eye and Caodai practices. In Caodaism, God is worshipped under the sign of His left eye, while Free Masons and Americans who enshrine the eye of providence on that most sacred of objects, the one dollar bill-are said to worship the right eye of God. The left eye is identified with the heart, morality, and the Orient, while the right eye is by opposition allied with the brain, science, and the Occident. In the Sino-Vietnamese tradition, the left is the side of yang (duong), the east, the sunrise, and positive male energy. This is an inversion of the Indo-European associations but appears to be a consistent feature of Taoist thought in East Asia. In addition, Caodaism shares with Free Masonry the idea of a fraternity where all secular ranks are suspended, even if there is also a separate system of religious ranks. The lure of spiritual brotherhood which transcends race, gender, and class was crucial to attracting over a million converts in the first decades of the religion's existence.<sup>101</sup> As Hoskins explains, "Third Revelation" signaling the new revelations of spirit messages received in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century shows the common origin of all world religions.<sup>102</sup> The current chapter may end with Hoskin's remark as she shows that Caodaism brings together opposing themes in Asian and even Occidental religious life and presents the example of a modern religion which synthesizes gender division in a unifying practice premised on the philosophy of universal

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<sup>100</sup> In the end notes of Hoskins research paper she remarks that a number of Caodai leaders were also Free Masons, initiated in France when they went there to study or serve in World War I ( Cao Trieu Phat, Cao Si Tan), where Nguyen Ai Quoc ( later called Ho Chi Minh ) was also initiated in 1922. According to her, while Free Masons were considered "free thinking radicals" in many respects, their defense of indigenous rights came later in the colony of Cochinchina than in the metropole. See Hoskins, "God's Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina", *Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore*, Vol. N. 189, (ARI Working Paper Series), 2012, pp.25 pages.

<sup>101</sup> Hoskins, "Can a Hierarchical Religion Survive Without Its Center? Caodaism, Colonialism and Exile" in *Hierarchy: Persistence and Transformation of Social Formations*, (London: Berghahn Press, 2008), pp.113-141.

<sup>102</sup> Hoskins, "From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Deities in the Caodai Pantheon in *The Changing Faces of the Goddess in Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2008). Later this book chapter has appeared in *Collection of Various Paper*, pp.182-197.

redemption.<sup>103</sup> Finally, I argue that these hybrid forms allowed Caodaists to overcome a sense of cultural inferiority by establishing cultural equality with the West and the East. Caodaism has become a new panorama for its unique syncretistic approach which incorporated elements from all around it. This compromising stance of Cao Dai religion helps its adherents seek to draw connections with the world's faiths with a view to seeking harmonious relationship.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.193.

## CHAPTER 5

### Dao Cao Dai and Its Relation with Other Religions

As has already been stated in the previous chapters, the universality of Caodaism and its syncretic features are associated with diversity in its belief-systems, ritual and organizational structures and ideals. In fact, the previously established institutionalized religions in Vietnam have had profound impact at psychic, mental, material, structural and spiritual levels encompassing the cultural, social, economic and political dimensions of the shared expressiveness of collectivity. Thus, Caodaism, at a certain point of history e.g. after the first quarter of the twentieth century, has been one important force which has influenced life in its all aspects from social to trans-social both at individual and group level. In comparison to other institutionalized religions, therefore, Caodaism is also found to transcend culture, race, caste, class, nationality, gender, age and all social differentiations. Similarly, the institution of Cao Dai religion has several significant socio-cultural dimensions. At individual level, Caodaism motivates the adherents to seek truth, salvation, and establish contact with spirit or occult world, while at social level its impact on all aspects of institutional and group life has a great importance. This is how Caodaism has initially emerged as *Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* i.e., with a distinct vision of the unity of world religions in agreement with all previous traditions. It may be an evident that with a touch of creativity, Caodaists envision all the world's religions as parts of “Five Branches or Paths” of Caodaism.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Caodaists give careful consideration in emphasizing the similarities of core religion rather than pointing out abstract deviations that led to claims of superiority of one religion over another. This universal approach is very clearly manifested in the “Five Branches” of Caodaism. As Caodaists rationalize, on the basis of this philosophy, Cao Dai (God) claimed His

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<sup>1</sup> Huynh, *Caodai Spiritism op. cit.*, p.41.

responsibility for the formations of the world's great religions. As cultural ties were already ingrained into these world religions, Caodaists prescribe different pathways to practicing the Dai-Dao ("The Great Path" or Caodaism).<sup>2</sup> However, since Caodaism is a syncretic religion and both Western and Eastern traditions had been dominant streams to that of Caodaism, it was natural to have their influence on the later. Thus, the present chapter may be considered as a good effort in exploring philosophical understanding of Caodaism, its faiths and morals in order to assess Caodaism's relation with the religions of Semitic and Indian origins. In addition, a comparative study is made between Caodaism and new religious movements that will be followed by an appraisal.

### **5.1 Cao Dai Philosophy, Faith and Morals**

The Caodai doctrine<sup>3</sup> is a valuable philosophy that is, according to Gobron, set forth, demonstrated, discussed and affirmed with sincerity, with rationalism as well as in mysticism. Thus, as he views, Caodaism hopes for and tends toward a harmony of beliefs and philosophies.<sup>4</sup> From a moral point of view, it reminds man of his duties toward others whereas from a philosophical point of view, it preaches the emancipation from servitudes of matter.

However, to begin with, it is necessary to understand first the particular approach of the two disciplines, philosophy and religion. It is true that a religious system is not a philosophy. Philosophy depends on the conclusions reached by human reason and thought but religious truth depends upon the intuitive experience of the individual who reveals it to the world in human language as far as possible.<sup>5</sup> As M. N. Roy notes, in the earlier stages of its development, philosophy, by its very nature, was materialistic. Later on, its dignity and

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief account of the problem, see Ibid. p.41-42.

<sup>3</sup> See Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.44.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Amrjit Singh Sethi et al. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.129.

distinction were monopolized by metaphysical and speculative thought. He argues that philosophy begins when man's spiritual needs are no longer satisfied by the primitive natural religion which imagines and worships a variety of gods as personifications of the diverse phenomena of nature. With regard to metaphysics, he points out that metaphysics also begins with the desire to discover a unity behind the diversity. But it leaves the ground of philosophy in quest of a noumenon above and beyond nature, something which is distinct from the phenomena.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there is no problem with religion and philosophy to go hand in hand. Philosophical schools of religion discuss the existence of God, the creation of the universe, the nature of the soul, its redemption and how to achieve it.<sup>7</sup> The metaphysical assumptions of religion and its views about the nature of Reality, so often determine its other basic characteristics and its approach to the world. Accordingly, the metaphysical assumptions of a religious system have a significant relevance for understanding a system and its character. In case the Reality is attributive, world activity and moral life assume a primary and spiritual significance. But far more important is the assumption whether Reality is creative or not. As far as Caodaism is concerned, the creation is not only real but creative activity in the world is essential for the spiritual growth of man. Thus, in Cao Dai system world affirmation becomes an essential feature. But it should be noted that esoteric school of Caodaism recommends monasticism, involving withdrawal from life. So far as approach to the world is concerned, this is a very important issue dividing all Cao Dai sects into two categories, almost all are of life affirmation and only the Chieu Minh sect is of life negation. Arguably, in Caodaism, like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Bahai Faith, creative activity in the world, or activity in carrying out the Vision of God, is of the highest spiritual significance. As such, the world, according to Caodaism, is a meaningful place for spiritual endeavors. In fact, in

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<sup>6</sup> M. N. Roy, *Materialism: An Outline of the History of Scientific Thought*, (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1940), pp. 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Sethi et al. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.129.

Caodaism like the system of Sikhism, the entire growth of man and his or her spiritual stature are judged by the deeds performed by him in this world.

In Caodaism, the goal is to carry out, through deeds, the attributive and the creative will of God. In this regard, though Caodaism is considered a reformed Buddhism, at a certain point it does not come in agreement with Buddhism where no soul and no God are actually assumed. In this regard, we have now briefly to consider the view of Daljit Singh, a prominent Sikh scholar. As Singh notes, actually the spiritual goal in a religion determines not only its entire approach towards life, but also its ethics and the role of the superman.<sup>8</sup> With regard to this matter Caodaists will come in agreement with Singh's view about spiritual growth. Mystics or prophets like Buddha, Christ, Muhammad (PBUH), the Sikh Gurus and Caodai Spiritists have not only asserted the existence of such a Reality, but have also claimed some kind of touch, link or communion with that Reality or Consciousness. Christ clearly asserts his communion with God; Buddha claims elevation to the state of Nirvan; and the Caodai Spiritists repeatedly affirm that it is the Spirit message that they have directly received from Supreme Being and sometimes via spirits who are nominated by the same Reality.

With regard to the path and practices for the achievement of the goal, Daljit Singh examines that the discipline and methods suggested for attaining the spiritual goal in any system have an obvious relevance. Indeed, the methods and practices prescribed are determined by the doctrines and ideals of the system, but these certainly clarify them, as also its basic tenets, structure and approach to social life. Thus, according to him, religious leaders have prescribed a large number of practices and disciplines aimed at achieving the spiritual goal.<sup>9</sup> In Caodaism, séance is a recognized mode of spiritual effects. Side by side like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, in Caodaism ritualism and the potency and the mystic power of

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<sup>8</sup> Daljit, *op. cit.*, pp.3-4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

the recitation, or repetition of words and Mantras, too has been deemed spiritually efficacious. Deep religious devotion, colorful dance and the invoking of ecstasy are also the major parts of Caodai religious practices. Alongside all these methods, due to the spiritual progress, the emphasis on moral deeds and carrying out the Will of God is deemed to be the primary significance and value in Caodaism. Therefore, like Sikhism and Confucianism, in Caodaism, the greatest stress is on moral deeds, on which alone human assessment is based.

Just like the methodology and discipline, the ethics of a system is the projection and product of its basic doctrines and ideals. For, the value system of a religion has primarily been devised to serve aid and help in achieving its goals. Accordingly, as there is variation in the spiritual goals, there are differences in the ethical systems. In Caodaism, love for everything refers to the love for God i.e., the “Universal Love”. A Caodai prayer to God manifests such a universal love: “The life of the heart to love all men, all beings, to love all life, all divine life, angelic, human, animal, vegetable, mineral and atomic life. I (God) ask you to love earth, water, fire, air, and the pebbles of the road and the stars of the heavens”.<sup>10</sup> Its ethics is basically social, because truth and purity of conduct have meaning and have social relevance. The seeker has necessarily to accept social responsibility and consequently an ethics that is socially oriented. The Caodai Spiritists lay down the theological doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and also the logical ethical corollaries of the brotherhood of man and treating everything with due importance. Evidently, these corollaries are significantly and emphatically social in their content. This acceptance of social responsibility and consequent of Caodai ethics comes in agreement with the socially oriented ethics of the Bodhisatva doctrine i.e., the doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism. In fact, the goals set in the Caodai system are perfectly logical and consonant with its doctrines and system.

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<sup>10</sup> Cited by Gobron in his book *History and Philosophy, op. cit.*, p.46.

The world view of a system is the best expression of its philosophy and appreciation of human destiny of its aims and objectives, and of the direction in which men must move. The world view represents the character and class of a system. Schweitzer, in his survey of different philosophical and religious systems, classifies them broadly in two distinct categories, the one with the world-view of life-affirmation and the other that is largely life-denying. In one case moral life forms the chief fundamental of spiritual progress. As for Caodaism, Caodai doctrine proposes not only to conciliate all the religious convictions, but also to adapt itself to all degrees of spiritual evolution. For example, Caodai doctrine from moral point of view reminds adherents of their duties toward themselves, their families, society (that is a broadened family), then toward humanity, the universal family.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in appreciating the meaning and import of the doctrines and practices of a system, the context of its world-view has to be kept in view. Caodaism which, like Buddhism, is a revolt against any orthodoxy has its distinctive theology, philosophy and mysticism. As a syncretic religion Caodaism may be considered as a re-production of earlier religions. With regard to this criticism, Caodaism never bothers rather it appears to be a profound modification with a new revelation altogether. However, to avoid deterioration, Caodaism, like other religions, lays code of conduct for its adherents.

Caodaism is a religion of humanism as the centrality of Caodai philosophy concerns with humanity. Thus, Caodaists entrust with duties of fraternity toward their fellow human beings who are treated as their brothers and sisters in the universal family.<sup>12</sup> Showing tolerance towards other faiths is a principle of Caodaism. Therefore, adherents feel encouraged to emphasize the principle of universal love and tolerance, believing that some form of Cao Dai's message is present in all religions and thereby the Cao Dai spirit is intermixed

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<sup>11</sup> Gobron, *History and Philosophy op. cit.*, p.44.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

throughout all living beings.<sup>13</sup> Utilizing this concept, as Huynh shows, Caodaists seek to draw connections with the world's faiths in order to seek a harmonious brotherhood.<sup>14</sup> Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac would very often come into communication with Le Van Trung's spirit. Trung, in one of his spiritual meetings, recommended Pham Cong Tac: "To do our best to open our religion to all faiths, all beliefs, in broad spirit of tolerance, to destroy the materialist error wherever we shall meet it".<sup>15</sup>

There are injunctions to the effect that only he is a perfect Caodai who accords full respect to a stranger, that is, a person of other religion or nationality. Caodaism holds that all human beings are essentially pure and infinitely perfectible. In no uncertain terms Tac has declared: "Religions were differently created because of the stage of civilization of peoples, the degree of evolution, the atmosphere, place of their birth, their manners and customs, etc. But above all these things, seeming to diverse, there is the Creator, God, i.e., the Universal Conscience who unites all men in spite of the diverse colors of their skin, their degree of civilization etc...He further mentions: "It belongs to Caodaists to place themselves at the service of the "Great Faith in God" for that "Union"..."<sup>16</sup> The durable social edifice of the Caodaists rests on such moral values. Divine gospel of truth, primordial unity, universal love, tolerance, humanitarianism and meditation are the bedrock of Caodaism which reached its logical culmination and fulfillment in divine messages and teachings and activities of key leaders.

According to Caodai philosophy God is eternal and His love is characterized as eternal. For Caodaists God is Father and Master at the same time though Father and Master are different. According to Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, the Father and the Master are different. In order to understand the true nature of God, he explains why the Father takes also the title of Master:

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<sup>13</sup> Tan Khoa Ho, *The Outline of Caodaism, op. cit.*, p.17.

<sup>14</sup> Huynh 2010, *op.cit.*, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> The Newspaper "Le Khmer" (5-30-1937) briefly interviewed His Holiness Pham Cong Tac. For the full text of the interview see Gobron, *op. cit.*, pp.182-185.

<sup>16</sup> See Ibid. p.190.

“He is the same time Father and Master, for from Him come all of our beings. He nourishes our bodies with that which is good, and makes up our spirit of what is divine. In Him all is science and wisdom. Progress of soul is his unceasing work...His law is love, His power is justice. He knows but the virtue, and none of the vice. Father: He gives to His children vitality. Master: He bestows on them His own divinity”.<sup>17</sup> In Caodaism God is won through love and service of humanity, animals and plants. Thus, “the love of all beings is published everywhere”, as pointed out by Ho Phap.<sup>18</sup> This view about Caodai concept of universal love is identical with Christian Islamic concept of universal love. As for Christianity two great commands sum up the Law and the Prophets: First, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind.” Second, “You must love your neighbor as you do yourself.”<sup>19</sup> The Prophet of Islam is reported to have declared: “All creatures of God are members of the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loves best His creatures. According to him, “all human beings are brothers unto one another”.<sup>20</sup>

Alongside the concept of Supreme Being, the forces of Yin and Yang, so pervasive throughout Chinese philosophy, are also essential to Codaist philosophy. These forces (created by God or Monad) were used to create Man and the World. Within Cao Dai temples, women (Yin-Nu) are always to the right of the Divine Eye and the Man (Yang-Nam) to the left. Man is the extreme parts of the Universe: One is the smallest atom and the other, the widest solar system. Man’s soul is a natural alteration of the Universe; he possesses an immortal soul which passes through a natural cycle of life and death.<sup>21</sup> Man’s soul inhabits an occult world dominated by three categories of invisible beings: a) the highest deities

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<sup>17</sup> Cited by Gobron in his book *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*, See p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>19</sup> See Matt. 5:43-48, 7:12, 22:37-40.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ahmad; Abu Daud*.

<sup>21</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.19.

composed of Buddhas, saints and angels, b) the medium beings which include sanctified spirits and great benefactors of mankind and c) the lower beings which include both phantoms and devils.<sup>22</sup> All these three orders of beings must pass through human existence in order to help humanity and normally move from the lowest towards the highest forms. Of all living creatures, man alone has the capability to become either a devil or an angel. Man has a unique soul and his position is determined by the effects of his deeds, by the law of karma. The human soul may go up or down the ladder of existence, the direction being determined by Man's will and action. Caodaists believe that man is constituted by three elements: the *Tinh*, *Khi*, and *Than* (mentioned in previous chapter).

The essence of Cao Dai ethics epitomized by an absolute respect for life in any form provides the best justification for existence.<sup>23</sup> Melvin Radar in his book *Ethics and the Human Community* holds in opposition to the relativist, subjective, intuitional and a priori theories that "ethics should be based upon human nature and its potentialities".<sup>24</sup> He finds an expression of man's deliberate attempt to make himself at home in the universe "through religious sense of community" which enable him to escape from his loneliness and self-alienation in the ancient Egyptian religion, in the Confucian doctrine of human-heartedness and universal kindness, the Taoist sense of mystic unity with nature, the Buddhist emancipation from selfhood, the Hindu vision of all-encompassing, all penetrating spirit, the Moslem idea of One God and One Humanity, the Hebraic devotion to God of love and justice, and the Christian fellowship of all men in God.<sup>25</sup> Moral aphorism of all religions, including Caodaism, confirms their community-mindedness. A religion that ignores society

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<sup>22</sup> See *Caodaism: Historical and Doctrinal Glimps*, *op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>23</sup> See the prayer to Cao Dai quoted by Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.47.

<sup>24</sup> Melvin Radar, *Ethics and Human Community* (New York: Helt. Richart and Winston, Inc., 1964). See Preface, p.v.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.417.

has no chance of survival.<sup>26</sup>The ethical ideals of universal love and brotherhood, nonviolence, charity, simplicity, chastity, truthfulness and non-attachment to worldly interests and gains are extolled in all religions. There may be some difference of emphasis on these ideals in one or the other religion, but none preaches hatred, malice, pride, prejudice, passion, and exploitation of fellow human beings or disrespect of life. And if religion is not to be mistaken for dogma or ritual, which sometimes sanctions intolerance and disrespect for life, it can be affirmed without fear of contradiction that religion is no antithesis to humanism, social development, universal understanding and democratic spirit. And as far as Caodaism is concerned, *Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* founded on the cardinal ethical virtues is eternal and universal in its approach. Belief in God of any description or in an elaborate metaphysics and ontology may be discarded but concern for alleviation of the suffering of a fellow human being and his ultimate and absolute freedom or beatitude should engage the immediate and everlasting attention of all religions and ethical quests. It is with this basic understanding of religion or ethics that the Cao Dai followers realize the social and contemporary significance of Cao Dai ethical teachings.

## **5.2 Dao Cao Dai and the Religions of Semitic Tradition**

In showing relation of Caodaism to Middle Eastern traditions it is essential to focus on some contents of these religions on specific points in a comparative perspective so that points of similarity and difference between Caodaism and Middle Eastern Traditions may be brought forth. With regard to this case, Tiwari's view may be taken into consideration. As Tiwari examines, different religions have come out of different traditions and against different backgrounds. Therefore, differences are bound to be present in them. But because religion as a whole arises in human consciousness due to certain common problems that human beings have to face in the world and because people of different traditions share certain common

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<sup>26</sup> James Bissett Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1920), pp.7-12.

feelings, ideas and sentiments, therefore, there are bound to be certain similarities too amongst different religions.<sup>27</sup> However, a comparative study of them actually aims at highlighting the relationship of Caodaism with the Middle Eastern traditions. In doing this, according to Tiwari, there may have occasions to make modest critical appraisals but such appraisals should go only to the extent which will not adversely affect the sentiments of the followers of any particular religion.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.2.1. The God Who Speaks

According to Jewish tradition, Jehovah is believed to have concluded a covenant<sup>29</sup> with Abraham who preached the doctrine of uncompromising monotheism.<sup>30</sup> When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai.<sup>31</sup> Walk in my ways and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous.”<sup>32</sup> Through revelation and also by reflection he came to the conclusion that One God rules the universe and the many idols, therefore, are of no real value. Though Abraham is taken to be the pioneer of Judaism, doubts have been expressed in certain quarters as to his authenticity as a historical character. But perhaps there is no scope for doubt in the case of Moses, the Jewish law-giver. It was Moses to whom God spoke ‘face

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<sup>27</sup> Tiwari, 1983, p.191.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.191.

<sup>29</sup> In accordance with the Jewish tradition the traditional idea of a covenant (Heb. *Berit*) between God and His people is presupposed by the prophets and forms the background of their preaching. See *Religion in Human Culture: The Jewish Tradition*, a Project of St. Louis Park Independent School District, Argus Communications, 1978, pp.21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.45.

<sup>31</sup> Reza Aslan in his book *God: A Human History of Religion* shows that “El” was unquestionably the original god of Israel rather than Yahweh. As he mentions, the early Israelites worshiped El by many names-El Shaddai, or El of the Mountains (Genesis 17:1); El Olam, or El Everlasting ( Genesis: 21: 33); El Roy, or El Who Sees (Genesis 16:13); and El Elyon, or El Most High ( Genesis 14:18-24). Thus, he argues that the biblical Patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not worship a Midianite desert deity (Yahweh) rather they would worship an altogether different god- a Canaanite deity “El”. For a good discussion see *God: A Human History of Religion*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 2017), pp.116-119.

<sup>32</sup> For a good discussion see Genesis 17:1-21.

to face, as a man speaketh to his friend'<sup>33</sup>, and it was through him that God gave the Law (Torah-the first five books of the Bible) to the people of Israel. And thereby Yahweh announced his wishes to make a compact or covenant with the Israelites.<sup>34</sup> The Old Testament, the Bible of the Jews, is a great literature based on the belief that God directly spoke to man. God revealed Himself through the Prophet by giving the Law (called the Law) that is the height of His self-manifestation. As a result the Israelites underwent a transition from their adaptations of ancient rites to new purpose.<sup>35</sup> In considering this aspect, As Noss emphasizes, through Moses' leadership Israelite religion successfully made the transition from polytheism to monotheism.<sup>36</sup>

For the Jewish prophets, one of the most distinctive characteristics of their God, in comparison with the idols of the surrounding nations, was that he was the God who speaks. Moreover in contrast to the pagan gods, he is the God who acts. In fact, these two belong inseparably together. It is precisely through his speaking or in fulfillment of his speaking, and as subsequently confirmed or interpreted by his teaching. First, there is his spoken instruction to Abraham to leave the security of his homeland, then the promise made to him and his descendents. In the same way, the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt starts with God's confrontation with Moses at Horeb<sup>37</sup> and finally takes place at his command. Indeed, at every step of God's purpose for Israel, the sovereign power of God's word is present. Always it

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<sup>33</sup> See Exodus, XXXIII, II.

<sup>34</sup> See Ibid. 34: 17-26; 24:3-8.

<sup>35</sup> The Jewish patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) revealed the will of God to humankind. Moses continued this tradition. See Ibid. p.46.

<sup>36</sup> See Noss, *Man's Religion, op. cit.*, p.361.

<sup>37</sup> Although the term "Horeb" is used as an alternative name for Mt. Sinai it is actually used in reference to events that took place at Mt. Sinai. For a detailed story visit <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/11/What-Do-Mt-Horeb2c-The-Mountain-of-God2c-Mt-Paran-and-Mt-Seir-Have-to-Do-with-Mt-Sinai.aspx>, Retrieved July 10, 2018

accomplishes what it says will happen. This word is frequently associated with, even at times described as, God's spirit or breath, and equated with his thoughts and purposes.

### **5.2.2. Prophets, Priests and Wise Men**

God spoke through people. And these fall into three main groups. Of first importance are the prophets, among whom Moses takes pride of place. The prophets proclaim and recall God's basic promises. But their primary task is to deliver his contemporary word to the people, a word which sometimes includes predictions of what the future holds. One of the chief tasks of the priests within Israel was to teach what God had already revealed. The application of past demands to present circumstances was also part of their work, with new legal decisions sometimes resulting. Occasionally they also received a direct word from the Lord. The third group within Israel responsible for making known God's will comprise the wise men. Their concern was with the understanding of God, man and the world drawn from human experience and observation. Alongside prophet, priest, and wise man, God also makes himself known through individual people's responses to their message, as, for example, in the Psalms. The post-biblical writers continued to claim God's authority for their words. For example, the apocalyptic writings mention a prophetic concern for determining God's will in the present, though this is modified by their practice of casting such messages into the mouths of earlier figures and the fact that the chief emphasis is always upon future events. The apocryphal books display a less dynamic approach to God's law. The later wisdom literature, however, actually strengthens the authority of the wise man's instruction.<sup>38</sup>

The Christians believe that their religion is the complete and final revelation of God to men. Christianity maintains with Judaism that the Old Testament is the revealed word of God, but adds that the New Testament is the final of that revelation. The culmination of the Revelation

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<sup>38</sup> *A Lion Hand Book, op. cit.*, p. 287.

took place in the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus, who is still in Heaven and who still bestows the power of Holy Spirit upon man. There is belief in Caodaism alongside other non-Christian religions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism etc.), but the Christians insist that Jesus is the only one and true revelation, that such revelation is supreme and absolute.<sup>39</sup> The Christians believe in the reality of spiritual and ethical relation between man and God. Though the Jewish scripture foretells the advent of the Messiah, it rejects the Christian belief in Jesus Christ as the Son and Incarnation of God, and also in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. But most Christians accept the view that Jesus was both Son of man and Son of God, the Redeemer of Mankind.<sup>40</sup> Jesus accepted the view that God is single, holy, all-powerful and compassionate. He laid great emphasis on the Fatherhood of God.

Christianity is a religion of love which speaks of brotherhood of man under the common Fatherhood of God. Its salient crusade is against all bitterness, violence, duplicity and jealousy. It has always asked its followers to develop a rounded world-view instead of an angular one. As the Ephesians<sup>41</sup> expresses the hope, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”.<sup>42</sup>

### **5.2.3. The Kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God (more accurately, the ‘reign of God’; it is an activity, not a place or a community) is central in Jesus’ teaching. It means that God’s will is done. Now the question arises: Is actually the God’s will done? Indeed, the emergence of Islam and other religions

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<sup>39</sup> Chatterji 1971, *op. cit.*, p.313.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 311.

<sup>41</sup> A New Testament book containing the epistle (A book of the New Testament written in the form of a letter from an Apostle) from Saint Paul to the Ephesians (residents of the ancient Greek city of Ephesus) which explains the divine plan for the world and the consummation of this in Christ

<sup>42</sup> For a good discussion, see Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

such as Sikhism, Bahai Faith, Caodaism and hundreds of New Religious Movements challenge this claim of Christianity. As far as Caodaism is concerned, although it is one of the youngest religions of the world, it claims to preach the same truth of the oldest religion and claims also to be the natural religion of man.<sup>43</sup> According to the religions of Semitic origin, different messengers in different ages received divine revelations and tried to envision God's mission in this earth. Now it may be asked: How many Prophets were there? Indeed, it is difficult to give an exact number, for it may run to 'one or two hundred and twenty four thousand'. The Quran itself speaks of twenty-eight Prophets, beginning with Adam. The last and the greatest of all Prophets is Mohammad himself. Other important Prophets are: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and so on. It should be mentioned that Caodaism recognizes all the previous messengers it claims no more mortal founder. Rather Caodaists claim that God is the Founder of Caodaism. As God declares: "Today, I, God Supreme Master change to found the *Third Universal Salvation* which improves the Principle of the same one's origin, in order to abolish colorful Ego grasping aspects that amalgamates essential part of Ancient and Modern Europe and Asia in the sole stand-point, that means to eliminate a difference which brings forth a similarity between the colors of Religions..."<sup>44</sup> Caodaists, therefore, see the Manifestation of God as the foundation of all civilizations. It is He who provides for cultural synthesis. There may be a doubt regarding the monotheistic nature of Caodaism, because apparently it seems to be dualistic. Again, one may have such doubt about Caodaism also in so far as it incorporates Hindu triad gods. But we have seen that Caodaism has ground to claim itself monotheist and the ground is not merely lame excuse. The duality in Godhood in Caodaism is only outward and secondary. What is basic and essential is its monotheism. There may be a doubt regarding the monotheistic nature of Caodaism in

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<sup>43</sup> Caodaism as the Great Dao is recognized to be the true belief of one stream and thereby continuation of divine mission of the same Creator. According to Caodaism, all previous religions are categorized into Five Branches that represent Caodaism as a whole. For a good discussion, see *Three Vehicles of Caodaism Doctrine, op. cit.*, pp.26-29.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

comparison to Semitic religions, particularly Judaism and Islam that rather emphasize their monotheistic character too much.<sup>45</sup> But our observation says that even beneath the apparent polytheism of the Cao Dai pantheon, there is always an undercurrent of monotheism and when Caodaists worship their Mother Goddess and pay respect to nine Muses and believe in Chinese supposition of Yang and Yin alongside Duc Cao Dai, in so doing they are fully aware that the deities they are worshipping are all the manifestations or expression or aspects of the same Supreme, all-powerful God. In this regard, Tiwari's argument may be helpful to understand the current issue. As he argues, it seems to be a general point of unity amongst religions that most of them either very strictly or in somewhat a lenient form believe in only one supreme, all-powerful, all-knowing creator God, although this God may have his various manifestations or aspects.<sup>46</sup> Though, in comparison to Judaism and Islam, Caodaism does not advocate the doctrine of uncompromising monotheism, it preaches the unity in attributing to God some of the metaphysical qualities like infinity, all-powerfulness, all-knowingness and all-pervasiveness as well as some of the ethical qualities like mercy, benevolence, justice etc. Furthermore, God is also regarded by these religions as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the world and he is also taken as both transcendent from and immanent into this world. In addition, Judaism and Christianity take God as personal. In this regard, Caodaism comes in agreement with both Judaism and Christianity and thereby it takes God as personal. The most important distinction seems to be regarding God's relation to the concept of incarnation. Religions of Semitic origin do not believe in Divine incarnation, i.e., do not believe that God Himself appears in the form of a human or sub-human being; but they believe in divine

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<sup>45</sup> In Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 44:6 we find: "I am the first and I am the last and beside Me there is no God." Similarly in the Surah al-Hadid 57:3 we find "He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner, and He is the Knower of all things." Again in Isaiah 46:9 we find: "Remember the former things of old; for I am God and there is no one else. I am God and there is none like Me." As in Surah Shura 42:11 it declares: "Nothing is like Him. He is the Hearer, the Seer." For more parallel messages, see Charles Selengut ed., *Jewish-Muslim Encounters: History, Philosophy and Culture*, (Minnesota: Paragon House, 2001), pp.200-202.

<sup>46</sup> Tiwari, 1983, p.192.

inspiration. However, the most important familiarity seems to be regarding God's relation to the world which he creates. For the religions of the Semitic tradition, God is only the efficient cause of the world, and not the material cause. He has, according to Semitic religions, created the world *ex nihilo*.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, according to the concept of *ex nihilo*, reject the doctrines of materialism, dualism and emanation. But according to Caodaism, God is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. However, for Semitic religions, creation happens out of nothing and it has been accomplished by God at a definite period of time.<sup>48</sup> Caodaism also believes that the world has been created at a definite period of time although nobody knows when. And it is clear that Caodaism takes the world as created out of nothing.<sup>49</sup> Cao Dai view also regarding the creation and destruction of the

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<sup>47</sup> a) According to Genesis (1:1-5), when God began to create the earth and the heaven-the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water-God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day... God said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature..." And it was so.

b) For Christians, creation of the world is a Divine Act *ex nihilo*. See Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p.314. This might seem similar to the account related in the Old Testament.

c) For Islam, Allah created the world out of nothing. In this context, as the Qur'an states in Chapter 2:117, "Originator of the heavens and the earth, whenever He decrees a thing, He says to it, "Be," and it becomes (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ-read as "kun fayakoon"). If the Qur'anic term "kun fayakoon" (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ) is considered as cardinal principle of creation it means Allah created this universe out of nothing. And it only depends on His divine will.

<sup>48</sup> a) As it appears in the Ten Commandments, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested on the Sabbath Day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it." To be sure, the commandment on the Sabbath is explicit, giving two distinct, equally valid accounts of the Sabbath:

"For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested on the Sabbath day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:11).

"Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy... You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" ( Deuteronomy 5:12, 15).

b) There is no clear detail of each creation day in the Quran. Some vague clustering of the days is mentioned in Chapter 41:10–13 of the Qur'an. Although verses 10–13 give a contradictory total of eight days, Muslim apologists explain this away by making two days concurrent: Koran 41:10–12 'Say: "Is it that ye deny Him Who created the earth in two Days? ... He set on the (earth) mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the earth ... in four Days ... So He completed them as seven firmaments in two Days'.

<sup>49</sup> The Supreme Being as described by a Holy message:

"Before the existence of the sky and the earth, the nothingness gave birth to the Master (the Supreme Being), and the Master presided the Monad (Tai Chi), divided it into Diad, the Diad into Tetrad, and the Tetrad into Eight Trigrams. The Eight Trigrams transformed to create the universe." According to

world seems to be closer to the views of Semitic religions. Notably, Caodai creation story is mostly based on Chinese philosophy and it differs from Judeo-Christian creation myths while Islam does not seem to have any such mythical stories regarding the exact process of creation. However, according to Semitic religions, as according to Caodaism, the world is definitely a creation of God and is fully dependent upon him for its sustenance. For Caodaism, the creation of the world is always real and it holds that this religious truth is propagated from century to century according to the times, in harmony or against opposition.<sup>50</sup> Thus, as to the nature and status of the world, it may generally be understood that almost all the religions take it as real.<sup>51</sup> As Tiwari further examines, some religions lay greater emphasis on the reality of the world as compared to others, but no religion, perhaps, takes the world as wholly unreal.<sup>52</sup> In this regard, Caodaism comes close to Judaic view. Judaism seems to emphasize more clearly upon the reality and significance of the present world. Caodaism, like Judaism and Islam, emphasizes the role of man in this world in so far as his entire future according to this religion depends upon what he does here. It is not a fact that religions like Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, Caodaism takes attachment to this world as desirable. In addition, it teaches non-attachment as a virtue. Hence, like religions of Semitic origin, Caodasim takes this world as real.

Between the Christian and Cao Dai conceptions of God, there is hardly any difference of such a kind which may attract the attention of a general reader. The two are essentially one,

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this message it is assumed that at the beginning of times, the nothing created the Supreme Being and the Monad. God presided the Monad and divided it into Yin and Yang energies. Thereafter, Yin and Yang energies reacted with each other to create the universe.

Caodaism admits two phases of creation: pre-creation Tao and Post-creation Tao. In this regard, as the Supreme Being taught, "...After the creation of the universe, I then divided My spirit to create ten thousand things, forming elements, and finally living beings: plants, insects, animals and humans. You should understand that everything emanates out of My spirit; wherever there is life, there am I. I am the progenitor of life. My love of life is unfathomable." See Truong Van Trang, *The Teachings of the Great Way op. cit.*, pp.96-103.

<sup>50</sup> Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.58.

<sup>51</sup> Tiwari, *op. cit.*, p.199.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

although there are certain points of difference also. Both Christianity and Caodaism lay utmost emphasis upon God's character of love so much so that God is identified with Love and the overall picture of God appears before man as a loving father and as none else. There is no cause of any fear from God now. He is completely kind and loving and loves even the worst of sinners. Judaic God is sometimes characterized as wrathful and revengeful also but like Christianity, there is no such thing in the Cao Dai conception of God. As far as Jewish God is concerned, God had a contract with his people that he would save them only if and in so far as they would serve him, but like Christianity, in Caodaism God's love for men (his children) is not based on any precondition. It is absolute and unconditional. However, it must be noted that the idea of God as a loving father is not completely absent from Judaism; it is only that it does not lay such exclusive emphasis upon this character of God as Caodaism does. One very marked difference between Judaism and Caodaism, which takes the former nearer to Islam than to the latter, is regarding the number of Godhead. Both Judaism and Caodaism claim to be monotheistic, but the latter due to its doctrine of duality does not remain as strictly monotheistic in character as the former. It is felt that the doctrine of duality breaks the strictly unitary character of Godhead and thus jeopardizes Cao Dai claim for monotheism. Judaic and Islamic monotheism is unstained and absolute, but the Cao Dai monotheism becomes controversial. It does not look at all necessary now to go into the details of comparison between the Islamic and Cao Dai conceptions of God. It is clear by now that in spite of having almost all those attributes which the Christian or Cao Dai God has, Islamic God on the whole appears as an absolute master, where as the Cao Dai God, like Christian conception of God, appears as a loving father.

Man has been given a very high status in almost all the religions. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, man is regarded as the highest creature. These religions in their own ways make man the greatest of all creatures. According to Judaism and Christianity, God made man in his

own image<sup>53</sup> on the final day of creation to be its final fruit. According to Islam, God created man in the best of stature<sup>54</sup> and sent them to the earth as his own representatives.<sup>55</sup> Here the purpose of the creation of man is very clear that man has been created to act as the fellow partner of God in his scheme of establishing the complete reign of good on the earth by eradicating evil. Caodaism also gives the same status to man and at the same time, inflicts the greatest responsibility upon man. The status of man in Caodaism comes into agreement with the status of man reserved in Semitic religions. As Caodaists are the chosen people of God it corresponds to the very idea of Judaism where the Israelites are called the chosen people of God. Like Judaism and Christianity, Caodaism also grants freedom to man in their own ways. Man can use his freedom in any way he likes. Indeed, it is true that every religion grants some amount of freedom to man because of their talks of a bright future of man by virtue of his own good deeds on earth. In addition, as to the nature of man, Caodaism is very clear in saying that it is essentially spiritual in nature. This soul is immortal and therefore, man in his essential nature is immortal. In this regard Gobron presents Comtist formula: “The dead necessarily and more govern the living.” But as he concludes, for it, the dead are really and always living.<sup>56</sup> Judaism, Christianity and Islam also maintain this essentially spiritual character of man by maintaining that God has created man in his own image. Because God is spiritual in nature, so man is also spiritual. It is due to ignorance that man fails to recognize the greatness of his being and suffers within various limitations. Caodaism also clearly maintains that only man’s actions in this world determine his future. The law of Karma actually stands for such ideas and beliefs.

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding man, the Christians subscribe to the Old Testament view that God created man after His own image. As God said in the Genesis, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Genesis 1:1-5, 24-28). Here it should be noted that this is considered as an essential Biblical doctrine of man. See Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), pp. 177-85.

<sup>54</sup> See al-Qur’an, Surah At-Tin 95:4.

<sup>55</sup> See Ibid. 2:30.

<sup>56</sup> Gobron, *op. cit.*, p.55.

### 5.3 Dao Cao Dai and the Indian Traditions

Historically, the Indian subcontinent has once more become a significant exporter of religions and religious ideas to the east for over 2000 years ago. Some of these religions and ideas, of course, have travelled with the spread of South Asian communities in the past centuries throughout the world. But more significant are those religious ideas generated in India which have influenced men of many different faiths living outside the subcontinent. During the reign of Champan kings in Vietnam, Hinduism was patronized as if it got its primacy over the kingdom and continued its influence till the demise of this prominent kingdom.<sup>57</sup> The kingdom of Champa was founded in 192 A.D.<sup>58</sup> in the central Vietnamese region of modern Hue against the Han dynasty. To the Vietnamese the kingdom of Champa was known as Lam Ap. It came under the influence of Indian civilization since the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward when the process of Indianization was well underway. As the scholars assume, the real history Champa, in particular, began in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was in this period that the Cham people began to create stone inscriptions in both Sanskrit and in their own language, for which they created a unique script. One such Sanskrit inscription, the Vo-Canh stele Pallava Grantha inscription hails from the early Cham territory of Kauthara, and establishes the great grandson of a local Hindu king of the Pandyan dynasty<sup>59</sup>, Sri Mara. Archaeological evidence confirms it that Sri Mara was the founder of the kingdom of Champa. He is known in Chinese records as Qu Lian which in Vietnamese pronunciation is Khu Lien. Attempts have also been made to identify Sri Mara with Fan Shih-man of Funan (Southern parts of today's Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar) on a stele recorded as Sri Mara. According to Chinese records and archaeological evidence Khu Lien and Fan Shih-man (Che Man) of

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 14, p.272.

<sup>58</sup> John Haywood, *Historical Atlas of the Medieval World, AD 600-1492*, (Barnes & Noble, 1998), p.3.31

<sup>59</sup> The Pandyan dynasty was an ancient Tamil dynasty, one of the three Tamil dynasties, the other two being the Chola and the Chera. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2009-03-01), Britannica Guide to India. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. p. 57.

Funan actually refer to Sri Mara.<sup>60</sup> However, much of the remaining art of Champa expresses religious themes and serves important functions in the religious life of the Chams which synthesizes elements of Hinduism (especially Saivism), Buddhism and indigenous cults.<sup>61</sup>

In Shaktism<sup>62</sup> the worship of Shiva's consorts<sup>63</sup> is considered as forms of his *shakti* (energy or force). The philosophic aspect of Shaktism concerns with the benevolent phases of energy of nature under the symbol of a mother goddess that comes in one shape life and death. Here the character of *shakti* is found to be identical with Cao Dai mother goddess Duc Phat Mau's *mysterious* power in giving life and causing death.<sup>64</sup> As Bengali poets and swamis like Tagore and Rama Krishna makes much of this aspect of the mystery and reality of the universe, *shakti* is identified with *maya*, the illusion-creating power that has produced the beautiful and terrible phenomenal world.<sup>65</sup> This *maya* is also identical with Duc Phat Mau's cosmic power in producing this universe.<sup>66</sup> With regard to this illusion, Ram Krishna is

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<sup>60</sup> For a detailed account, see Milton W. Meyer, *Asia: A Concise History*, (Lanham, New York, Boulder, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publications, Inc., 1997) pp.62-63; also visit [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khu\\_Li%C3%AAn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khu_Li%C3%AAn), Retrieved July 12, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> For a good discussion see Andrew Hardy (et al.) *Champa and the Archaeology of My Son- Vietnam* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 45-59.

<sup>62</sup> A distinct subdivision of Hinduism concerns itself with the worship of Shiva's spouse or spouses, and in northeastern India particularly, it almost attains the status of a separate religion. See David S. Noss and John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1949), p.200.

<sup>63</sup> Shiva's life energy is characterized by his various consorts or associates. His divine spouse or Devi is many persons in one and bears different names in the various regions in India such as Parvati-"the mountaineer," or Uma-"light", Durga-"the unapproachable", Chandi-"the wild," or Kali-"the black". For a detailed study see Ibid, pp. 197-200.

<sup>64</sup> The origin of humanity comes from the Goddess Dieu Tri Kim Mau (Mother Goddess). The Great Mother is also called Duc Me, the Holy Mother, since she is the Mother of all living creatures. In this connection, as Hoskins rationalizes, She is the source of the first sexual fluid or *tin*, which is also the name for the sexual fluids produced in men's bodies as semen (ngon tinh) and in women's bodies as the ovum (am tinh). When an individual receives a spark of the divine light, that individual's spirit is incarnated and the body comes to life. The divine light or spirit comes from the Supreme Being, but the Mother Goddess provides the perispirit or soul, the part of the spirit which can travel out of the body, and the human mother and father provide the flesh of the material body. See Hoskins, Hoskins, J. A. (2008). "From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Deities in the Caodai Pantheon In *The Changing Faces of the Goddess in Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press." Also see *Cao Dao: A Collection of Various Papers 2012*, op. cit.p.186.

<sup>65</sup> See Noss, op. cit., p.201.

<sup>66</sup> The Mother Goddess of Caodaism represents the yin cosmic forces or female energy in opposition to yang cosmic forces or male energy. In East Asian cosmologies, the Supreme Being is associated with yang in contrast with yin and it is the interaction of these opposing cosmic forces that brought

reported to have exclaimed: “When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying, I call him Brahman or Purusha, the impersonal God. When I think of him as active, creating, preserving destroying, I call him Shakti or Maya...the personal god. But the distinction between them does not mean difference. The personal and impersonal are the same Being, in the same way as are milk and its whiteness...It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother (Kali) and Brahman are one.”<sup>67</sup> In addition, as he views, “Kali is none other than He whom you call Brahman. Kali is Primitive Energy (Shakti)...To accept Kali is to accept Brahman...Brahman and his Power is identical.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, the concept of Cao Dai Father God, Duc Cao Dai and Mother Goddess, Duc Phat Mau becomes very identical with *Brahman* and *Kali* of Shaktism. This refined and philosophic aspect of Shaktism gives a strong platform in order to claim the relationship between Cao Dai concept of Duc Cao Dai and Phat Mau as Divine Mother (Phat Mau) and *Supreme Being* are one. It should be mentioned that unlike Shaktism, Phat Mau is not the spouse of Duc Cao Dai.

### 5.3.1. The Triadic Idea of God

In the early Gupta period three great deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva achieved a significant cosmic manifestation of Brahman-Atman among them. They perform between them the functions of creation, preservation, and destruction. This was an intellectually satisfying and comprehensive synthesis. In art Brahma is depicted as a kingly personage with four heads, severely reading the Vedas, and shown riding a white wild goose, symbolic of his

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the universe into being. Thus, according to Caodai cosmology, Mother Goddess can only be considered as a co-creator of this universe. It now seems clear that the cosmic yin forces of Mother Goddess collaborated with the yang cosmic forces in producing the universe. For a good discussion, see *Various Papers, op. cit.*, pp.183, 185, 186.

<sup>67</sup> Cited by Romain Rolland in his book *Prophets of the New India*, trans. E.F. Malcolm Smith, pp. 42-43.

<sup>68</sup> See *Ibid.*, p.43.

aloofness.<sup>69</sup> In Cao Dai Divine Temple, Krishna is set beside Brahma and Shiva in the case of Vishnu. According to Hindu tradition, Krishna is incomparably one of the most popular avatars of Vishnu.<sup>70</sup> There is no authentic version that carries the significance of adopting Krishna as one of the *Trimurti* in Caodaism. Indeed, a fast-developing mythology went on to relate that Vishnu has had animal as well as human avatars. It is significant that the tortoise is in the list as one of the ten avatars of Vishnu. Legend says Vishnu became in turn in a tortoise which swam under Mt. Mandara and assisted the gods in using it to churn the nectar of immortality and other valuable products from the ocean of milk.<sup>71</sup> As far as the concept of tortoise in Caodaism is concerned its symbolic sign of longevity corresponds to this Hindu legend.

The underlying goal of a Cao Dai disciple is to escape the continuing cycle of reincarnation based on the deeds he performs in this life. Like Hinduism, in order to achieve heavenly union with Cao Dai it is essential that man performs successfully his duty on earth. In respect of the question of human destiny, Caodaism seems to share more or less a common belief with the religions of Indian tradition. As Dr. Ryang observes, for the Westerners, the Cao Dai religion sounds easy to swallow until they hear of the belief in karma and reincarnation. This is a Hindu idea that pervaded in the later Mahayana and Tibetan schools of Buddhism, all very eastern in origin.<sup>72</sup>

Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism all believe that the final destiny of man is *Moksha* or liberation. This Moksha according to these religions essentially means release from the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth on its negative side and attainment of spiritual status of freedom, perfection, eternity and immortality on its positive side. Like Sikhism,

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<sup>69</sup> Noss et al. 1949, *op. cit.*, p.197.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>72</sup> See *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Paper, op. cit.*, p.171.

Caodaism believes that the final or complete liberation is possible only after the end of the physical life. It also comes in agreement with Hinduism regarding the ultimate destiny of man. According to Hinduism, heaven is taken to be the ultimate destiny of man. Here it should be mentioned, though Caodaism is considered by some scholars as a reformed Buddhism, but it disagrees in certain respects. Indeed, there is a definite affinity between the Cao Dai and Indian understanding of the nature of the ultimate destiny of man. In one sense or other, Caodaism also, like Hinduism, takes the life of this world a life of suffering. To some extent in Caodaism, as Blagov observes, human sufferings are explained in terms of spirit's impurity therefore the sufferings are caused by the human element, and not by the Supreme Being.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the affinity lies in the use of spirit also. According to Caodaism, salvation lies in attaining eternal nearness to God. In Hinduism also, this conception is very much present. At least the theistic brand of Hinduism as represented by Ramanuja and the Bhagavad-Gita depicts actually this conception of Moksha. Moksha according to it consists in attaining a state of eternal communion with God, a permanent nearness to God.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, both Caodasim and the brand of Hinduism in reference assert that by attaining communion with God, man only becomes similar in nature with God, and he never becomes as perfect and as infinite as God is. Man is always finite in relation to God. Of course, that brand of Hinduism which takes self-realization of self-perfection to be the nature of Moksha is also nearer to Buddhism, Jainism and Caodaism in its belief about the destiny of man. A similarity between Cao Dai and Hindu conceptions may be marked in this respect also that just as the latter sometimes seems to believe that the kingdom of God or the reign of Heaven will be established in this Third Revelatory Period of Duc Cao Dai. God's grace is very important factor in Caodaism for salvation. Similarly in Hinduism also it is regarded as very important, at least in the theistic conception of Moksha. Caodaism also comes close to

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<sup>73</sup> Blagov, *op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>74</sup> Tiwari, *op. cit.*, p.212.

Sikhism in this regard. In Sikhism, God's grace is taken as an important factor. The ideology of almost all neo-Hindu movements, a combination of eclecticism and idiosyncratic representation may come in agreement with the universalistic approach of Caodasim. Hindu revivalist reform movements, which stress rural and general social uplift, better living standards, female emancipation and economic progress, de-emphasize individual, contemplative, mystical involvement.<sup>75</sup> At one extreme of this scale, the Arya Samaj and perhaps the Ramakrishna Mission, which are focused on reform and social uplift, come close to the ideology of Caodaism. In Caodaism like 'The International Society for Krishna Consciousness' (ISKCON)<sup>76</sup>, the core of devotees live in strictly controlled esoteric communes, totally vegetarian and teetotal i.e., practicing complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages. There seems to be a good connection between Hinduism and Caodaism in point of incorporating Hindu Trinity into its own without any change. Caodaism and Sikhism seem to lay specifically explicit emphasis upon the reality and significance of the present world, while from the overall attitude and tone of Hinduism and Buddhism it appears that they do not want to emphasize the significance and reality of the world too much. In respect to the question of human destiny also, as in respect of such other questions, religions of Semitic origin and Zoroastrianism seem to share, more or less, a common belief, while Caodaism seem to hold another common belief like religions of Indian tradition.<sup>77</sup> The Bahai Faith<sup>78</sup>, which arose in

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<sup>75</sup> Lama, *op. cit.*, p.297.

<sup>76</sup> ISKCON has solid Hindu roots. Founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, a Calcutta bullion merchant turned Vaishnava monk, the movement gained a strong foothold in North America in the 1960s. Within fifteen years of Bhaktivedanta's arrival in New York, the organization had spread throughout the West as well as Japan, and then re-entered India to an enthusiastic welcome. Its teachings and practice are firmly based on the Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Sri Chaitanya, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Bengali saint regarded as avatar of Krishna by his followers. For a good discussion, see Lama, *Major Religions in Contemporary World*, pp. 295-97.

<sup>77</sup> Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism all believe that the final destiny of man is Moksha or liberation. This Moksha according to these religions essentially means release from the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth on its negative side and attainment of a spiritual status of freedom, perfection, eternity and immortality on its positive side. See Tiwari, p.210.

<sup>78</sup> The basic of Baha'I Faith lie in a radical religious movement within Shia Islam that began in Iran in the 1840s under the leadership of the Bab. In some respects the Bab is to Baha'is what John the

an Islamic context, shows some similarities to Caodaism. As Alam in his book *The Concept of Unity in Baha'i Faith and Caodaism: A Comparative Study* has critically examined some major points of agreement between Baha'i Faith and Caodaism with special reference to the concept of the Unity of God, unity of religion and unity of mankind. As he has further clarified, the basic philosophy of Baha'i Faith and Caodaism regarding the concept of "Unity" is drawn from a common fount and a common thought manifested under different forms.<sup>79</sup> However, it should be mentioned that unlike Caodaism, Baha'is lack formal rituals, a professional priesthood and any hierarchical order. Both Baha'is and Caodaists are actually pacifists.<sup>80</sup>

#### **5.4. Dao Cao Dai and the New Religious Movements**

There are many circumstances in which new religious movements emerge even due to the presence of a bias against them. This may be termed as a common image of contemporary religious movements. In light of these circumstances, there are reasons to think about why this image of contemporary religious movements has caught the attention of the press, public, and social scientist. According to McGuire, this situation may happen only because of a diverse, colorful, strange, or exotic assortment of religious groups. He argues that the types of collectivities characteristic of emerging religious movements are related to their cultural setting. For him, the types of social organization and characteristic religious orientations developed by these emerging religious movements are particularly well suited to the social structural place of religion in modern society.<sup>81</sup> His assessment comes in agreement with Kim Knott's understanding of contemporary religion. As Knott examines, there is a possibility to

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Baptist is to Christians: John prepared the way for Jesus, the Bab prepared the way for Bahauallah. See Lama, p.268

<sup>79</sup> For a good discussion, see Alam, *The Concept of Unity in Baha'i Faith and Caodaism: A Comparative Study*, (Washington DC: Caodai Overseas Missionary, 2010), pp.65-79.

<sup>80</sup> See Ibid., pp.75-76.

<sup>81</sup> McGuire, *Religion the Social Context op. cit.*, p.175.

develop a relationship between religions and the physical, social, and cultural arenas in which it is situated. In addition, at a certain stage there develops dynamics relations between religions and different features of spaces (social, cultural, physical, political, and economic), the place of religion in their structure, its active and passive modes, and its possibilities for dominance, resistance, and liberation.<sup>82</sup> McGuire further points out that the new religious movements appear anomalous. As he has identified the main reason, they emerge precisely at a time when religion seems weakest.<sup>83</sup> But this reason may not be applicable for Vietnamese *tam giao* and folk traditions because these long-established traditions always made a significant and lasting contribution to Vietnamese cultural spaces. In such a social and cultural arena Caodaism alongside different new religious movements emerged primarily as secret societies in French Cochinchina. Here the dynamic approach of Vietnamese major religions evokes their strongest position when new religious movements like Caodaism, Hoa Hao etc. developed in the Southern part of Vietnam.

As Ellwood shows, the two main sources of new religious movements are the Judeo-Christian heritage and the more amorphous nonofficial religious area or cultic milieu.<sup>84</sup> The Judeo-Christian strain is a fertile source of new religions because of its built-in tendency for cycles of renewal, reform, and schism. Most ideas and many ritual practices of numerous new religions were already present in the cultic milieu, but the new movements shaped the ideas and adherents into an organized form. Some new religious movements claim to be totally new; others emphasize that they are older even than historical religions such as Christianity. McGuire, for example, shows that many new religions borrow from Eastern religions such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, various Hindu forms of yoga and meditation, or Sikh, and Sufi,

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<sup>82</sup> Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.1-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Religion the Social Context, op. cit.*, p.176.

<sup>84</sup> Robert S. Ellwood Jr, "Emergent Religion in America: An historical perspective" in *Understanding the New Religions* edited by Needleman and G. Baker (New York: Seabury Press, ND), pp.267-284.

and Taoist traditions.<sup>85</sup> Other emerging movements borrow heavily from Celtic lore, Native American religions, and Shamanism. Other sources inspiration include various psychotherapeutic group movements (often called the Human Potential movement), the Green movement (especially its spiritual deep ecology version), and various identity movements. Nevertheless, as a social phenomenon even the more exotic new religions have their roots in identifiable clusters of prior beliefs and practices.<sup>86</sup> Many of the most successful new religious movements, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, are organized on firmly patriarchal lines with an all-male leadership. It should be noted that New Religious Movements are found to have emerged throughout America's history, in part the result of U.S. religious and cultural pluralism. Later periods of great religious fervor were the Great Awakening (1730s) and the Second Great Awakening (1790s onward). The latter continued for some years and stimulated pioneer revivalism in the Western expansion well into the nineteenth century. The early nineteenth century saw many religious and communal experiments. The New Age has rekindled interest in the Goddess principle, placing it in feminist context. Women are also prominent among the fully engaged participants in the New Age. Within Christianity itself, it is significant that women have had leadership roles in Gnostic movements offering a new esoteric interpretation of Christianity.<sup>87</sup> However, this section will proceed by presenting some of the different ways in which new religious movements are explained and evaluated in order to understand their common features. This section will conclude by examining in which ways new religious movements come into agreement with Caodaism.

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<sup>85</sup> McGuire, *op. cit.*, p.177.

<sup>86</sup> For good discussion see Jeffery L. MacDonald, "Inventing Traditions for the New Age: A Case Study of the Earth Energy Tradition" *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 1995, 6, 4:31-45.

<sup>87</sup> Lama, *op. cit.*, p.33.

### 5.4.1. Features of New Religions and Caodaism

As soon as mention is made of New Religions, the problem of terminology or delimitation arises. The problem centers on two questions relating to the meaning of “new,” which is considered to be a very relative term. In terms of time, how *new* is new? At what point does the new become old? In terms of content, at what point does a body of doctrine or an organization become a new religion rather than another sect within a larger religious tradition? In what precise classification does Caodaism belong? Is it to be included within Three Great Teachings (*tam giao*)? Is it sect within Christianity or Buddhism? Is it to be regarded as New Religion? As precise demarcation is always difficult it is not possible to say whether Caodaism is a new sect or reformed Buddhism or a new religious movement. Others prefer to limit it to a religious movement. Popular usages seem to side with the former. Since this study concerns the relationship between Caodaism and “New Religious Movements”, the explicit content of the term need not cause a problem. Suffice it to say that in this study the term is used as a convenient designation for all the religions included in this investigation. Historically, new religions arose during the periods of change, uncertainty, and discontent. As the scholars argue, for many, the formal, standardized, traditional religions failed to provide answers to the problems of modern existence. Thus, dissatisfaction with the disagreements and seeming irrelevance to much of modern life which characterized the established religions helped to pave the way for the popularity of the New Religions.<sup>88</sup> And in the development of such New Religions, some major factors are recurrent. According to Prof. H. Neill McFarland, at least five factors work behind the development of the New Religions such as, (1) social crisis intensified by an intrusive culture, (2) a charismatic leader, (3) apocalyptic signs and wonders, (4) ecstatic behavior, and (5) syncretic doctrine. As he further mentions, in the words of anthropologist Margeret Mead, the milieu from which the New Religions

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<sup>88</sup> Henry Van Straelen, *Modern Japanese Religions* (Tokyo: Rupert Enderle, 1963), p25.

arise, is the ‘ferment of half-abandoned old and half-understood new’.<sup>89</sup> For Caodaism, its increasing power, undeniable vitality, and continued expansion are causing a new appraisal. Its importance in the life of the community in particular and the nation in general at the present, and its probable influence in the future may not be a matter of speculation.

#### **5.4.2. Caodaism and New Religious Movements: Comparison and Appraisal**

In order to characterize the New Religions their particular teaching, emphases, ceremonies, and sacred writings (which are divinely revealed to the founders or foundress) are especially considered. Here, it is important to note that new religious movements make full use of group psychology by offering both informal small group meetings and elaborate mass assemblies. Most of them are highly centralized in their organizational structure. A few of them have smimiliaristic disciplines. All of them use modern mass media of communication and have efficient methods of tithing (considered for legal and security purposes) or its equivalent. What gives each of these new religions its distinctive character is the personality of the founder or organizer. Many of these boast unusual spiritual powers in divination, sorcery, incantation, fortunetelling, and healing, which betray the shamanistic roots of their religious orientations. They also have the capacity to attract and maintain rapport with a large number of followers. For the most part, these new religions draw their adherents from the lower middle class, or peasant class, especially middle-aged and older women, although a few of them claim to have some followers among the upper middle class and young people as well. But opinions vary among the scholars as to why so many new religions have mushroomed throughout the world. In the case of Japan, according to a noted historian, “Buddhism cannot speak to the new Japanese society; Christianity does not speak to it. Japan needs a new

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<sup>89</sup> For a detail study see “Japan New Religion”, *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (December, 1960), p. 60. This source is collected from Henry Van Straelen’ book *Modern Japanese Religions* (Tokyo: Rupert Enderle, 1963), p.33.

religion which combines the good points of Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, and Chinese ethical teaching.”<sup>90</sup> Others attempt to explain the emergence of new religions in terms of social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors that create spiritual vacuum in a particular society in a particular situation. Most observers agree that the rise of new religion signifies the reassertion of the old folk religious ethos.

However, in the course of time some features of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and other religious and semi-religious traditions penetrated the world of the masses, but the fundamental meaning of life and the world of the masses remained intact to a significant degree. This is, in a sense, what the new religions seem to offer, and this may account for the dynamism exhibited by the new religions. “Most of the new religions,” says a critic, “have something inherently repulsive to the educated mind.”<sup>91</sup> This sentiment is shared by many of the intelligentsia and the leaders of established religions. However, leaders of the new religions are seemingly oblivious to such criticism. In the case of Japan, in order to restore the idealized state of the golden days, coupled with the notion of the identity of religion and politics, has often developed a messianic fervor, especially during political crises. The ethnocentric, messianic restorationism implicit in the indigenous religious tradition of Japan received further stimulus from the apocalyptic notion of Buddhism known as *mappo* ( the coming of the age of degeneration of the Buddha’s Law) as well as from the “immanental theocratic” motif of Confucianism, as exemplified by the messianic motif of Nichiren’s teaching in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and by the emotionally charged restoration movement influenced by the Shinto-Confucian ideologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, respectively. Many observers sense the similar ethnocentric, messianic motif in Soka-gakkai<sup>92</sup> and many other postwar new

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<sup>90</sup> This is the opinion of Nakamura Naokatsu, retired Professor of History, Kyoto University; and cited in Joseph M. Kitagawa’s *Religion in Japanese History*, p.334.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Joseph M. Kitagawa’s, *Religion in Japanese History*, p.335.

<sup>92</sup> The American version of the Japanese Soka Gakkai, known in America as Nichiren Shoshu of America, is one of the chief world-accommodating movements. See H C Steyn, *New Religions*

religions that present the “old dreams” of Japan as the “new visions” of the coming social and political order.

However, as far as Caodaism is concerned, sacred writings are not revealed to any founders. Divine source of a religion is considered rather than being the creation of man. In the case of Caodasim, it is not a creation of man rather a divine origin. It is believed that some major spirits possessed the pioneers and God spoke to them through those spirits or communicated them directly. In any case, as Straelen argues, the truth of the religion is considered to have come by divine revelation, which ensures its vitality.<sup>93</sup> This seems to be a common phenomenon in the case of Caodasim. Thus, there are a number of similarities that are evident in a comparison of many of the New Religions with Caodaim. The foundress of *Dai Hizen-kyo*, Mrs. Nami Orimo, claims that the highest deity of the universe had descended upon her, and Kiyomi Miyaoka, the founder of *Sei Kyokai*, experienced twice a divine descension<sup>94</sup> upon him. The founder of *Nembo Shinkyo*, Reigen Ogura, claims that Amida Bosatsu spoke to him directly and ordered him to start a new religion. Kakushin Baba, the founder of Issai Shu, received necessary directions from Buddha himself. The list of examples could go on and on.<sup>95</sup>

Some of the founders of New Religions refer to themselves as Saviors of the present time or equate themselves with Moses, Christ, Buddha, Confucius. To some extent a few of them claim themselves as God. Mrs. Sayo Kitamura, for example, calls herself *Ogamisama*, the Great God. One of the founders of *Omotokyo* called himself “the Savior of Mankind.” In

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*Movements Cults, New Age and Related Phenomena* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2011-2013) p.17

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.28.

<sup>94</sup> A Descension occurs when a vaster, higher frequency part of a person’s Spirit comes to reside in the body. See Center of Love and Enlightenment, at <http://www.centrefloveandenlightenment.net/articles/what-is-a-descension/>, Retrieved August, 13, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Straelen, *op. cit.*, p.29.

comparison with such New Religions, Caodaism neither has any human founder nor savior. Rather Caodaism claims that God himself is the Savior who talks to humanity directly. In this regards, we can compare some early disciples of Caodaism with the founders of New Religions with a view to understanding some common points. As Straelan presents Joseph Spae's study of the founders of New Religions, all are proficient in spiritual science. Mystical experiences are common with them. For, they commune with gods, demons, and ancestral spirits.<sup>96</sup> The difference is that the early disciples of Cao Dai did not seek to commune with gods or demons rather different categories of spirits including Supreme Spirit (God). They did not claim miraculous powers of healing like many of the founders of New Religions. In regard to the organization Caodaism differs from many of the New Religions. Caodaism, for example, maintains the traditional hierarchy which distinguishes dignitaries and believers while many of the New Religions have rejected such hierarchy.<sup>97</sup> As a syncretic religion Caodaism comes into agreement with the New Religions. As Straelan notes, the majority of the New Religions are syncretistic to a greater or lesser degree. Teachings and practices from various other religions or philosophical systems are freely incorporated into their scheme.<sup>98</sup> In case of Caodaism, it is assumed that during its whole history the adherents have shown a pronounced undogmatic tendency together with a great flexibility and adaptability of mind. This characteristic is common in the majority of the New Religions.<sup>99</sup> This characteristic seems to go together with their (Cao Dai adherents) aversion for absolutes. Thus, they can easily venerate different categories of superior spirits alongside the worship of Supreme Being.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>100</sup> They venerate different categories of superior spirits alongside the worship of Supreme Being. The list includes Mother Goddess, Nine Muses, Li Tai Pe, Quan Am Bo Tat, Quan Thanh De Quan, Sakyamuni, Lao Tse, Confucius, Khuong Thai Cong, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, three saints such as

As scholars view, these new religions present nothing new, as far as their religious contents are concerned. Many of them derived their doctrines from previously established religious traditions. Thus, Caodaism as a new religion or a new religious movement also derived its doctrines from Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity and folk traditions. But it should be noted that like most of the new religions the teachings of Caodaism are not eclectic rather well systematized. In fact, like Caodaism the simple, direct, and practical beliefs and practices of new religions equally appeal to the masses who do not feel at home with the complex doctrines of established religions. In addition, a special feature of the new religions, which draws many people to them, is that their leaders give a kind of personal guidance to the believers. In case of Caodaism, Ngo Van Chieu, Le Van Trung and His Holiness Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac (the Defender of the Law) were concerned with the same role. Like New Religions, Caodaism tends to be quite simple regarding its doctrines and ceremonies. Moreover, Caodaism comes into agreement with most of the New Religions regarding a strong eschatological character. The New Religions point to a bright and cheerful life sometime in the future in this world. As they believe, when the messianic time has approached a kind of heaven on earth or a peaceful and happy, ever so happy, welfare state will come into existence. With special reference to an article by Ensuke Konno “Nihonjin no Shuzoku Meishin”, as Straelen presents his views, among the New Religions, however, there are those which, because of doctrine, size, or history, are more representative and important than others. Some of these New Religions have reached the stage of development where they have been classified as established religion.<sup>101</sup> Here on the basis of his view we can consider

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Trang Trinh, Victor Hugo, and Sun-Yat-Sen and many other spirits. For a good discussion, visit <http://www.religioustolerance.org/caodaism.htm>, Retrieved July 20, 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Straelen, *op. cit.*, p.38.

Caodaism as an established religion because when we speak of Caodaism we refer it to an organized religion like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

## CHAPTER 6

### Dao Cao Dai: Prospects for the Future

It is quite conceivable that other new religions may still emerge and some of the old ones may decline. Here, the critical mind may enquire about what the future has in store for Caodaism as a new religion. But the reality is that no one can predict it.<sup>1</sup> If we consider Ellwood's clarification about the major expressions of religion the future progress of Caodaism may be traced. As he insists that something can only be religion if it finds expression in three areas simultaneously: the theoretical, the practical and the social.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is in response to this need that Caodaism also finds its expression in three areas simultaneously that are essential for the existence of a religion. We may safely assume, however, that three types of religious approaches will survive for many years to come. Thus, so long as these types of approaches last, religion will also sustain for many years and so does Caodaism. Caodaism will no doubt develop according to its own dynamics<sup>3</sup> which will inevitably involve certain kinds of conflicts and tensions among the groups, but they also may influence, transform, and even purify, one another. It goes without saying that religion is not an isolated phenomenon detached from other aspects of human society. Thus, the future of Caodasim within and outside of Vietnam will be greatly conditioned by what takes place

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis see Blagov, "Caodaism Vs Religious Persecution in Post-1975 Viet Nam", Published by Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, Washington DC, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical area concerns the doctrines and myths of a religion, the practical area deals with its rituals and the social area deals fellowship with fellow believers. See Ellwood (1974:4) cited in H C Steyn, *New Religious Movements Cults, New Age and Related Phenomena*, (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2013), p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Janet Hoskins in her research paper on Gazing at the Left Eye of God provides the dynamics of Caodai religious inspiration in four historical contexts 1) as the first mass movement in French Indochina, born during a period of anti-colonial resistance, 2) as a semi-autonomous religious community seeking to remain "independent" during the period of American military intervention, 3) as a "religion in exile" formed in overseas communities in the US, Europe and Australia, and 4) as a form of "rationalized mysticism" restructured in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam after the 1975 ban on spirit medium séances. For a detail account, see the paper which has been included in *Various Papers, op.cit.*, pp.239-266, was presented at the Vision Conference held at the University of Southern California, in 2006.

in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, while at the same time Caodaism will also influence the direction of various aspects of Vietnamese society and culture. And needless to say, what happens in Vietnam will have both a direct and indirect bearing on the future of the rest of the world. This may remain an important question for historians of religions as well as for others. And as far as “new religion” is concerned, the question is: Can Caodaism really be called “new”? Steyn in his book *New Religious Movements* shows three different time frames relating to the emergence of new religions. According to him, some scholars (Clark 1987:5) use the Second World War to separate old and new religions, while Barker (1999:9) prefers using the year 1950 as the watershed. Others (Melton and Moore 1982; Beckford 1985) identify the real rise of NRMs as having occurred during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Thus, according to his observation, if we link the term “new” to any one of the specific dates mentioned, we cannot define Caodaism as a recent phenomenon. We can, therefore, say that Caodaism is no longer a new religion rather an old tradition. On the contrary, if we consider Hargrove (1978) module of “new” this resolves the problem of with regard to Dao Cao Dai as a New Religious Movement. In Vietnam it may be old and established, but in a Western context it is still new.<sup>5</sup> However, if we consider the most profound characteristic of Caodaism,<sup>6</sup> it may give the impression of being true that all New Age movements are automatically part of a great new Universal movement which has been revealed to Caodaism as the *Third Religious Amnesty*. However, as far as the *Third Religious Amnesty* is concerned, the focal point of Caodai teaching, as Blagov examines, shows the

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<sup>4</sup> *New Religious Movements, op.cit.* p.3.

<sup>5</sup> According to Hargrove's module of “new”, all imported movements undergo a measure of adjustment in the West. In that case, she holds that the Western version eventually differs from the original. Hence, in her view it continues to provide sufficient ground for the description “new”. For a good discussion, see *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> In comparison to syncretistic religions such as Bahai Faith, Sikhism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy and New Age Movements, Caodaism appears as a key factor of synthesis of world’s religions that has inherited directly the genius of four thousand years of unbroken Chinese religious thought. Those four thousand years have been marked by a growing ability to tolerate and combine religious traditions. See *Various Papers, op.cit.* p.107.

way for overcoming intolerance of earlier salvations.<sup>7</sup> Again the question is: Is it possible for Caodaism to overwhelm the prejudices that impedes people of different faiths to come on a common ground because of their inherent and vital differences of temperament, standpoint, and civilization? The cohesive, constructive and integrating tendency of Caodai syncretic philosophy may envision its end. This is because it actually gives importance to discover the fundamental unity and uniformity that run through all diversities. Thus, with a view to exploring Caodai universalism<sup>8</sup> and its future vision we should take the following subject matters into our consideration.

### **6.1 The Concept of Millenarianism and the Messiah**

As a theological concept, millenarianism exists and has existed throughout history of religion. In addition, this is one of the most common beliefs known to man. However, according to millenarian theodicy, millenarianism is considered as the expectation of an imminent collapse of the entire social order and its replacement with a perfect new order under the control of a Messiah. As McGuire remarks, the term *millenarianism* is derived from occult Christian predictions that the world would end one thousand years after Jesus' birth. The appeal of the interpretation of reality and of millennial expectations results from a need for a new, firmer order in a time when the old basis of order appears to be collapsing.<sup>9</sup> He argues that as the expectation of an imminent disintegration of the entire social order and its replacement with a perfect new order, millenarianism is a recurring theme in religious movements. Thus, the millenarian theodicy informs the believers that the present chaotic social order, with its misery and deprivations, is transient and that in the coming new order the believers will have a better life and no longer experience the turmoil and malaise of the present. In addition,

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<sup>7</sup> See *A New Religious Movement*, p.16.

<sup>8</sup> The universalism of Caodaism with its considerable reconciliatory potential is believed to correspond to the level of integration processes in the modern world in large measure than any other existing religion. Thus, the aim of Caodaism is believed to what extent it can revitalize the humanity in the context of global peace. See *Ibid.*, p.17-18.

<sup>9</sup> McGuire, *op. cit.*, p.38.

millenarianism offers both an explanation of the wrongness of the present social order and a hope for future change; as such, it is a potent source of change-oriented behavior. The millennial dream that the perfect new order is imminent is also a response to anomie.<sup>10</sup> Lama in his book *Major Religions in Contemporary World* presents the relevance of models on the basis of third-world millennial movements. These models are questioned by critics. With special reference to Smith's stand point he mentions that these models are in fact themselves heavily based upon Christian history. For Smith, of course, early Christianity will look like a millennial movement if the model of a millennial movement is taken in the first place from Christianity. Again, for Lama the point is relevant only at the level of description. He argues that the description of millennial movements in diverse parts of the world may well reflect assumptions of what is relevant to Christian models. These movements are of the same types as early Christianity. An understanding of the social, economic, and political conditions associated with their emergence can, therefore, be applied to early Christianity. Here, Lama concludes that this knowledge can then direct people to look for relevant evidence in the case of early Christianity in order to assess whether it does in fact fit the model. In his long thesis, millennial movements are shown as ephemeral affairs and cannot sustain long continued enthusiasm. They seem generally to fade away or may settle into small millennial sects. Here, Lama cites Tidball's consideration regarding the current problem. As Tidball notes, the early millennial expectations of the followers of Jesus were a misunderstanding of his teaching which did envisage an extensive missionary endeavor on a long time scale.<sup>11</sup> For Han Gang Hyen, The Master of Neohumans Research Center, the origin of the concept of the Messiah and Maitreya are revealed as the thought of the Savior's expectation that is assumed to have thousand years of history before the exchange of East-West culture began. In order to provide a clear understanding to the issue he cites Dr. Choi Jung Hyeun's critical review regarding

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>11</sup> Lama, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-90.

the term ‘Messiah’.<sup>12</sup> As Choi examines, it is Hebrew, it came from ‘anoint’. That is, the passive form of the verb “anoint” is used as an adjective. Later, it was changed into a noun with article in front of it, which means that it became an ‘anointed person’.<sup>13</sup>

### **6.1.1. Major Features of Millennial Movement**

Millennial movements, documented and studied by anthropologists, exhibit a number of important features. A common feature of these movements is the intense emotion experienced by or induced in their followers. They are often ecstatic and sometimes hysterical e.g., they show extreme and unrestrained emotion relating to mystic trance. They can spread at an alarming rate and totally dominate the lives of those who fall under their influence. Therefore, millennial expectations promote a complete break with normal ways of life, social and moral rules, norms and customs. Very often the millennial expectation is marked as to be so strong that people abandon normal productive activities. They may abandon homes and livestock convinced that they will have no further need of such things. However, as far as Cao Dai millennial concept is considered, it does not necessarily come in

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<sup>12</sup> Han Gang Hyen, “The Era of Neohumans Seen from Prophecy Secrets” in *Journal of the Neohuman Culture*, International Academy of Neohuman Culture (IANC), Vol 6. June 2018, pp.109-162.

<sup>13</sup> He notes that the story of King Saul and King David in the Jewish scriptures informs us about a ceremony of pouring oil on the head of a person who is admitted to have received a special mission from their God Yahweh. Thus, according to him, the Jews have traditionally handed down the custom of setting up the person as a missionary. And this special mission first included ruling people, in later generations, it was said that other missions were included in addition to the rulers of the people. For evidence he presents an example of such a trail from Daniel 9:26 that tells this “anointed” qualifier to the high priest, while Chronicles 16:22 and Psalm 105: 15, to the patriarchs. Here he agrees to some other views and presumes that this ‘anointed one’, the Messiah, which has been applied to such a variety of missionaries, indicated as the Savior who will smite the devil and judge the sinful world after the Jewish kingdom was destroyed by the Babylonian empire, and after the temple was destroyed, many Jews were captured in Babylonia. He argues that After all since the advent of Jesus, the concept of the ‘Messiah’ has undergone a new transformation with the formation of a new religion, the ‘Jesus Party of Nazareth’. First, the number the Christians increased and in progress their scriptures were gathered together, the “Messiah” was written in the Greek language widely used on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Thus, he examines that the ‘Messiah’ is translated in the Greek into the noun ‘Christ’, which is derived from the root meaning ‘pour oil’, which is used by the Christians as a title referring only to Jesus. And this tradition continues today in Christianity. Therefore, for the Christians, nobody before Jesus was Christ, and no one, except Jesus, was Christ. See *Ibid.*, pp.114-116.

agreement with all the points of the common feature of millennial movements. As scholars view, it is also apparently a millenarian movement. They argue that Cao Dai doctrine claims a period of final reconciliation between the East and the West. Theologically, this period ushers in by the coming of Cao Dai (God) that would be the third and final epoch of spiritual development in Vietnam's history.<sup>14</sup> But as Hyeun remarks, if we recall that Christ was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah and that the Hebrew Messiah was an anointed one in the tradition of the Jewish people, including King Saul and king David, today we think it should be given a broader meaning to this word than what the Christians claim.<sup>15</sup> Italian religious scholar Vittorio Lanternari presupposed that the term 'Messiah' has a historical background, so it has changed from a general meaning to a limited and individual meaning during the passage of time" said 'it deserves to use "any being expected by a community as the future savior in a religious context" when scholars using the term, by expanding its meaning.<sup>16</sup> An American cultural anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace has compressed the Messiah as "divine savior in human flesh".<sup>17</sup> However, in contrast to the general concept of millenarianism, in Caodaism, contemplation is primarily the search for the advent of an Eternal Messiah i.e. Duc Cao Dai (God) Himself. This is actually the unique character of Caodai Messiah. We shall find this contrast significant in the following sections.

### **6.1.2. Religious Millenarianism and the Concept of Messiah**

The idea of an apocalypse i.e. a dramatic end of the world is not a new religious theme. Many religious groups have anticipated the imminent end of the social order they define as ungodly. Some have expected a total physical cataclysm in which the world would end; others have

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<sup>14</sup> For a detail treatment see Werner 1981, *op. cit.*, p.7; Smith, "An Introduction to Caodaism II: Beliefs and Organization," pp.580-582; Chapman 2006, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Han Gang Hyen, "The Era of Neohumans Seen from Prophecy Secrets", p.115.

<sup>16</sup> Vittorio Lanternari, "Messianism: Its historical origin and morphology," *History of Religions*, Vol.2 1962, p.53.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 58, No.2, May 1956, p.267.

awaited a God-sent revolutionary end in which the existing social order would cease and be replaced by a perfect new order. This latter hope was frequently combined with the anticipation of a messiah who would bring about the new order. Such themes are particularly prominent in Western religions, especially Christianity. Likewise several Shi'ite (Muslim) sects combine a messianic and millenarian expectation in their belief that the Twelfth (Hidden) Imam would reappear as the Mahdi (bringer of justice to the world) and the Riser of the Resurrection (who would preside over the end of the world and the last judgment). As Itzchak mentions, the Haqqaniyya, one of the most visible Sufi brotherhoods on the global scene, is curiously interested in New Age<sup>18</sup> culture and believes in the imminent appearance of the awaited one-the Mahdi.<sup>19</sup> There are different ways to evaluate the messianic vision of Shaykh Nazim, which employs Christian and universal symbols along with traditional Muslim ideas and is constantly updated to take account of current events in the international arena. Nizam's view of the end of days may be seen as part of the general upsurge of apocalyptic literature in the trouble Muslim world, which largely coincides with contemporary resurgence and radicalization of Islam.<sup>20</sup> According to Itzchak, it may reflect the efforts of devout Muslim to exploit the new opportunities offered by the current technological revolution in communications to spread the Islamic call to the West.<sup>21</sup> Itzchak assesses that the evolving Haqqani apocalypse is a mythic articulation of the anxiety felt by an adept of an orthodox Sufi brotherhood in a cosmic struggle against the rising tide of global militant Islamism. While messianic hopes are linked with millenarianism in Christianity and

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<sup>18</sup> The New Age culture refers to the New Age Movement that was established in the 1970s. The approach of the New Age movement is characterized as humanistic and transpersonal. For a detailed study see Steyn, *New Religious Movements, op. cit.*, pp.38-39.

<sup>19</sup> Itzchak Weismann, (ed.) et.al, *Islamic Myths and Memories: Mediators of Globalization*, (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), pp.121-138.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. For a good discussion see David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Timothy R. Furnish, *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, Their Jihads, and Osama bin Laden* (Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Itzchak borrowed this idea from Jamal Malik and John Hinnels (eds.), *Sufism in the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Islam, other religious groups such as Sikh “fundamentalists” in India have used millenarian visions of alternative social systems in which their oppression by a more powerful religious group would end and utopias of harmony, purity, and justice would prevail.<sup>22</sup> Historically, millenarian movements were widespread in the United States in the nineteenth century, sometimes combined with a messianic vision of a special destiny for the nation. The Mormons, Millerites, Christadelphians, and Jehova’s Witness are examples of groups in which the millenarian expectation was or is central.<sup>23</sup> Nativistic religious movements, which envisioned the millenarian as the dramatic restoration of a traditional “native” way of life, arose in the nineteenth century among several Native American tribes, whose social and economic plight was desperate. The Ghost dance<sup>24</sup> Handsome Lake, Indian Shakers, and the peyote cult exemplify these movements by which Native Americans responded to the profound disruption of their traditional way of life wrought by white settlers, government policy.<sup>25</sup> A black syncretic movement, the Lost Found Nation of Islam (i.e., Black Muslims) appealed to both the millennial possibilities in Islam and U.S. black’s familiarity with Christian millenarian themes. Belief in the imminence of the millennium is widespread among new religious movements as well as in Christian fundamentalist denominations and sects. Peculiarly modern forms of millenarianism include groups that base their millennial expectations on UFOs and extraterrestrial communications.<sup>26</sup> The Millennial Prophecy Report, published in November, 1994 tells us that the order of the Solar Temple, whose

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<sup>22</sup> For a detail account McGuire refers to Harjot Oberoi, *Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory* in *Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.256-285.

<sup>23</sup> See Bryan R. Wilson, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

<sup>24</sup> The Ghost dance was a highly traditionalistic movement that foresaw the destruction of the white man. Although the movement itself was pacifist, its appeal and potential for uniting diverse tribes frightened the frontier army, culminating in the Battle of Wounded Knee, in which over two hundred men, women, and children were killed. See footnote used by McGuire, *op.cit.*, p44.

<sup>25</sup> For a detail treatment see Aberle, 1966; Barnett, 1957; Moony, 1965; and Myerhoff, 1974.

<sup>26</sup> See Balch and Taylor, “Salvation in a U.F.O.” *Psychology Today*, 1976, 10:pp.58-66; “Seekers and Saucers: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a U.F.O. Cult”, *American Behavioral Scientist* 20, 6:pp.839-860, 1977.

members in Canada and Switzerland might have committed mass suicide in 1994, based its millenarian vision on the Western occult tradition e.g., Gnostic Christianity, Kaballism, Rosicrucianism, and hermetic freemasonry.<sup>27</sup> However, we may deduce from all this that the theme dealt with currently in Caodai formulation is totally different from the themes of the older. In contrast to the general clarification of the present theme Caodaism finds its expression in a distinctive order. On the basis of the central doctrine of Caodaism, Dutton points the argument decisively in his research paper “Caodaism as History, Philosophy and Religion”. As he mentions, “in the *Third Amnesty of God*, Cao Dai reveals Himself through spiritualism rather than through physical incarnation in a man”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, understood the revelation of God is no longer limited to the life-span of a single man. Rather Cao Dai guides man continually by revealing Himself through mediums. Therefore, in the final era, according to Caodai doctrine, God Himself has appeared as a Savior to save man kinds.

### **6.1.3. Cao Dai Understanding of Millenarianism and Messiah**

Cao Dai apocalyptic expectations have witnessed a new efflorescence in the *Third Revelatory Period*. Reacting to the failure of previous missions assigned by God and subsequent disastrous events, the new apocalyptic mission relies on the *Third Universal Salvation of God*. Therefore, it has departed from the traditional orthodoxy regarding their views about apocalyptic announcement who claimed to have the Messiahs among them. The basic components of Caodai apocalyptic mythology was already in place when Ngo Van Chieu held continuous séances on Phu Quock island. Ngo Van Chieu claimed to be in spiritual contact with God, who was predicted by God that he would send no more mortal to fulfill his prophecies. The question may be raised here: Is Ngo Van Chieu a Messiah? Do Caodaists consider him as a Messiah as Christians do Jesus as Christ (Messiah)? The answer will be

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<sup>27</sup> See McGuire, *op. cit.*, p.45.

<sup>28</sup> See Various Papers, *op. cit.*, p.21.

certainly “No”, if it is taken into account of what Caodaism indicates the “Third Era”.<sup>29</sup> For Caodaism, Messiah is God Himself. Thus understood in the *Third Great Period*, Caodaism actually heralds the world’s religious development. And for Caodaists, this is actually the reason that this time God did not send any individual. For Tac, the central theme of the subject matter is “God comes to earth in a divine manner. He has no physical form but we can see Him. He has no voice but we can hear Him. He uses His authority to directly manage the religion”.<sup>30</sup> In all these formulations Tac’s view can merely be discerned. As Dr. Ryang in his research paper “Cao Dai: Religion of Many Spirits” explained, one of the main points of Caodaism can be seen as early as this point in its history: it is a religion not founded by a man like Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism were, but rather by God himself. As he further argues, the fact that God is revealing himself directly to humanity is a very unique aspect of Caodaism: through very solemn and ritualistic preparation, a selected few can become participants at medium sessions.<sup>31</sup> The final sign heralding God’s appearance was Chieu’s Vision of Divine Eye. In this Third Era of Salvation, God and his followers (chosen people)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Third Era, the “Era of Annihilation” or “Preservation” brought about God’s Third Revelation (the First Revelation is also called the Era of “Creation” or “Innocence”. During this time, there was peace. But when man began to lose his natural goodness, God sent down Moses-Judaism, Christianity, Dipankara Buddha-Buddhism, Thai Thuong for Taoism, and Fu His for Geniism. Greed continued to attack the soul of man, dragging him into the next era. The Era of “Progress,” “Wars,” or “Self-Destruction” was next, bringing about the Second Revelation. God revealed himself this time to Sakyamuni Buddha for Buddhism, Lao-Tzu for Taoism, Jesus Christ for Christianity, Mohammad (SM) for Islam, Khuong Thai Cuang for Geniism, and Confucius. For caodaism denying the Second revelation, the majority of the world went their own way towards utter moral and spiritual collapse). At this point, as Caodaists believe, God realizes that he cannot count on members of the world following any one messenger, so he decides to bring the message directly.

<sup>30</sup> Brief Outline of History and philosophy of Caodaism, Remarks given by Tran Quang Canh, president Cao Dai Overseas Missionary at IARF 31st World Congress in Budapest, Hungary, July 28, 2002). The paper was published in *Various Papers, op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> See Ryang, “Cao Dai: Religion of Many Spirits”, *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.*, p.169.

<sup>32</sup> According to Christian notion of *Chosenness*, particular person chosen by God was articulated in the Hebrew Bible. As scholars like Hoskins clarify, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is reported to have adopted by many Western nationalist movements in order to underscore and justify imperialistic expansion. For a good discussion, See “Introduction” in Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehman, *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press). Hoskins further examines that the idea of “chosenness” has been incorporated into the ideologies of many non-white activities, especially those with a millenarian or messianic bent, such as the

of this new religion usher in a new era of supernatural events, including a miraculous end to the war by stopping the weapons—a triumph over global materialism. This apocalyptic teaching of Caodaism declaims the Islamic concept of the advent of Imam Mahdi who is expected to travel to Istanbul.<sup>33</sup> According to Cao Dai apocalyptic myth, salvation will ultimately come from the West i.e. through the Westerners (Americans) who are gaining knowledge of Caodaism. But what Blagov anticipates is that it remains to be seen whether Caodaism could prove its ability to expand outside the boundaries of the communities of overseas Vietnamese, notably in the US, Canada, and Australia.<sup>34</sup> Studies of Cao Dai apocalyptic vision have tended to focus on its role in God’s self-declared spiritual mission to the East and the West. Cao Dai prophecies contain millenarian elements which challenge the powers that exist today, at the same time that they show respect for many forms of occult knowledge that go back for centuries.<sup>35</sup> America gave rise to a number of millenarian religious movements in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Millenarianism is the religious belief in a future “Golden Age” in which the evils of today’s world no longer exist. It is often thought that the new age will be ushered in by the action of powerful supernatural forces.

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Rastafarians of Jamaica and African-American based Nation of Islam. In Vietnam, according to her observation, it developed within the context of Buddhist apocalyptic and millenarian traditions. For a detailed account, see Carolyn Rouse and Janet Hoskins “Purity, Soul Food and Sunni Islam: Explorations at the Intersection of Consumption and Resistance”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.19, Issue 2, 2004, pp.226-249.

<sup>33</sup> According to Islamic apocalyptic literature, the Mahdi will travel to Istanbul. Dajjal (the anti-Christ), who is believed to have chained on an island, would appear in eastern Persia. He will conquer the entire world, except for Mecca, Medina and Damascus, while his followers—the Jews and all deniers of God—will assemble in Israel. Contrary to other contemporary apocalyptic writers, Shaykh Nazim contends that the Mahdi’s camp will consist of believers of all religions, not only Muslims. Then Jesus will descend on the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, kill Dajjal and lead a war to exterminate all unbelievers. The *jinn* (spiritual beings) will cleanse the earth of radioactivity and pestilence, and a 40-year period of peace and goodness will ensue under the successive rule of the Mahdi and Jesus. But unbelief will reappear to be followed by sign of presaging the Day of Judgment: the flooding of Egypt and Cyprus, the eruption of a volcano in Turkey and the war of Gog and Magog that will destroy everything. God will then send down a regenerative rain, life will be restored and, when the angel Israfil blows his horn, all humanity will rise from their graves to stand before their Lord. For a detailed study see Itzhak Weismann et al., *Islamic Myths and Memories*, (Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), p.133.

<sup>34</sup> See Sergei Blagov, *Caodaism: Global Ambition Vs Persecution in Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, *op. cit.*, p.43.

<sup>35</sup> See Hoskins 2006, *op. cit.*, pp.191-209.

Typically, the transformation from an old, evil world to an ideal millennium is conceived of as the result of divine intervention, not a natural evolution toward a better society. Often, though not necessarily, the divine intervention is expected to involve an apocalypse, a cataclysmic end of the world, often in the near future, that will be brought about by divine intervention. It is often expected to be accompanied by major economic and political disasters and warfare between the righteous and the evil. Throughout world history, apocalyptic millenarian movements have been particularly common as dates, depending on the calendar in use, approached the end of full thousand-year periods—for instance, in Europe in A.D. 1000.<sup>36</sup>

## **6.2 The Third Universal Amnesty of God and the Unity of World Religions**

The central concept of Caodaism is unity, the oneness of mankind based on the ‘Primordial Unity’ (God) and the oneness of all His revelations to mankind. The idea is very old one in religious and philosophical thought. It is no more original than the idea of monotheism was with Abraham or moral law with Moses or the love of one’s neighbor with Jesus. Each of these ideas existed much earlier than the period in which it became the central concept of a particular religious movement. The time came for the ideas of monotheism, of moral law, of love of one’s neighbor, of oneness of mankind. Caodaists believe that today the time has come for the idea of “The Great Way of Third Universal Salvation for Mankind”, and that the world is standing on the threshold of its unification. The question may arise: Is this unrealistic idealism of Caodaism? What are the reasons to consider the unification of mankind through the unity of religion a very realistic objective? The first is their current experience in the world. In spite of all the confusion, frustration and hatred which are their common experience—partly because of these things mankind has kept seeking its essential unity. There is a second and decisive argument for the Cao Dai belief in the oneness of mankind, one

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<sup>36</sup> Crapo 2003, *op. cit.*, p.270.

without which the first would be sterile because simple unformed desire is non-productive. The second argument is for Caodaists the basis of the realism with which they view the present development of the unification of mankind through the unity of religions. Caodaists do not believe that the evolution of consciousness ended with the appearance of the rational mind in man. More and more man is beginning ardently to desire a real sense of oneness.

In her article, “Caodai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion’s Struggle for Identity”, Janet Hoskins writes that Caodaism began with a vision of religious unity and interracial harmony that formulated in contrast to colonial dislocations and repressions.<sup>37</sup> Regarding interracial harmony, as God confirms in His message, “There will come a day when my people will no longer be divided in three<sup>38</sup>, as I the Teacher will unite all my children under one roof. Southerners and Northerners will travel overseas. The sovereign power of the True Way is ours”.<sup>39</sup> With special reference to Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, Hoskins mentions in her paper that justice could only be achieved when the people of the world realized that all religions came from the same origin, and accepted to live peacefully with others of different cultures and races.<sup>40</sup>

During his great journey to recruit religious leaders to support a United Religions, William E. Swing, an Episcopal Bishop of California, VII, notes his experience: A United Religion is on the horizon. The proposed United Religions is to be built on four basic attributes: a symbol of unity among religions; a spiritual resource for the sake of the world; a collective voice to

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<sup>37</sup> Hoskins 2006, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-209.

<sup>38</sup> For Hoskins, when Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam), Annam (Central), and Tonkin (Northern part of Vietnam) were in fact united in 1975, there was a huge exodus of people in boats, escaping to save their lives but also, later, founding new congregations of Caodaists all over the world. See Hoskins, God’s Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina”, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Vol. N. 189 (ARI Working Paper Series), pp. 25 pages. Later the same paper has been reprinted in *Various Papers, op. cit.*, pp. 122-154.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding this message, as Hoskins notes, this prophecy has been reprinted and translated in many different ways. She mentions that it appears in a book by an English Caodaist named Khanh Phan, *Caodaism*, London: Minerva, 2000 p.135. The same message has also been cited by Hoskins in her journal article mentioned above. See *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

speak from spiritual roots to the world's issues; and a channel for common action, especially among the grassroots people of religions, and primarily in the field of conflict resolution.<sup>41</sup> The idea of a United Religions developed in the first World's Parliament of Religions held in 1893. In the early 1920s, Rudolph Otto suggested the creation of an Inter-Religious League, as a parallel to the League of Nations (now UNO). In 1930s, in his Book, *The Religious Foundation of Internationalism*, Dr. Norman Bentwich called for a League of Religions, and said the idea had a long history including such proponents as Leibnitz and Rousseau.<sup>42</sup> The concept of the "Third Universal Amnesty of God" in Caodaism can uproot the differences no matter how deep rooted they are. This ideology believes in bridging the gulf between conflicting ideologies. It strives to establish a liberal attitude in the feelings and dealings of the peoples of different faiths. In addition, this ideology is found to have incorporated mostly the truth of *tam giao* systems and Christianity with its two organs, the doctrine of standpoint, and the organizational structures. Moreover, Caodaism, in the shape of harmonious synthesis of world religions, addresses the unity as well as diversity and continuity as well as change is all real. The new universalizing power of Caodaism was that it claimed to restore earlier Asian teachings to their original, pristine form, no longer corrupted by historical distortions and local practices, as well as to absorb Christianity into the more encompassing vision of the three great religious and philosophical traditions of East Asia. After analyzing a divine message, Hoskins argues that the spirit of the Jade Emperor articulated a clearly global vision of religion that was explicitly linked to the technological

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<sup>41</sup> William E. Swing, *A Bishop's Quest: Founding a United Religions*, (Ohio: XOXOX Press, 2015), p.55.

<sup>42</sup> In his Book, he proposes a paradigm regarding the relation of different religious systems to the development of world unity, peace and international law. He examines Pagan worship, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Indian and Far Eastern religions and shows how far their universalism has made for peace or war. He traces the struggle for religious freedom through the ages and what part religion could and should play in the movement for international peace. For details see Dr. Norman Bentwich, *The Religious Foundations of Internationalism*, Chapter XII, Routledge Library Editions: International Relations, 2016, available at <https://www.routledge.com/The-Religious-Foundations-of-Internationalism-A-Study-in-International/Bentwich/p/book/9781138945982>, Retrieved March 12, 2018.

transformations that had come to bring the peoples of the world into contact with one another.<sup>43</sup> The message is as follow: "...In Vietnam the age-old traditions of Asian divination and Taoist mediumship began to mix with the new traditions of European Spiritism. This meeting of Eastern and Western traditions caused an evolutionary leap in humanity's spiritual quest. Thus, a strong communication link was established between Heaven and Earth. It was through this special link that God granted His Third Universal Redemption (Caodaism) directly. Though it was announced to the humble and grateful nation of Vietnam, The Third Universal Redemption is a gift to all".<sup>44</sup> Here, Dutton analyzes that Caodaism makes no claim to be the only way to salvation. Rather, as a universal religion, it recognizes the truths in all religions and includes them in its teachings. In this context, he further cited Ngo Van Chieu as saying: "We do not believe that there is only one truth and one uniquely sanctifying belief. The creator has scattered the seeds of Truth over the centuries and over the continents of the early. Jesus or Buddha or Lao-tze, their message is at bottom only a form of the great divine truth. In their depth all religions come together."<sup>45</sup> As Rev. Canh Quang Tran, the President of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, mentioned in his remarks at IARF 31<sup>st</sup> World Congress in Budapest, Hungary July 28, 2002, "The main objective of Caodaism is to preach for and reach for a Universal World. All peoples of the world must acknowledge that they come from the same origin, which is God, and it is essential that they see one another as brothers and sisters of the same Father."<sup>46</sup> Caodaism brings "Eastern tolerance to the West"<sup>47</sup> with the pious

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<sup>43</sup> Hoskins, "God's Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina", Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Vol. N.189 (ARI Working Paper Series, 2012, p.9 at [http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps12\\_189.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps12_189.pdf), Retrieved June 05, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> See Ibid., p.9. (Séance on Christmas Eve, December 31, 1925, published in *Thanh Ngon Hiep Tuyen*, translated by Hum and Hong Bui at [www.caodai.net](http://www.caodai.net), Retrieved by Hoskins December 15, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Canh Quang Tran, "Brief Outline of History and Philosophy of Caodaism" in *Various Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> As for Caodaism, though there are many surface differences such as different teachings, personalities, but in fact there are no differences between the "Tam Giao" or three teachings of China. They all attempt to reveal the Way or eternal mystery. They are actually considered to be three

hope that many eyes will be opened. This suggests that there will always be new approaches to the Way opening up, and Caodaism will now be there to build upon traditions. Thus, Caodaism is not the “only way” but because it combines all religious traditions as they develop, it is the most effective way.

With regard to lasting peace on this planet for the real cause of humanity, in two different messages received on October 01, 1926 and October 28, 1926, God addresses: “There must be a new teaching capable of uniting humanity in the love of all creation. This new doctrine will be universal. If all human beings practice it, the peace promised to all races will indeed be realized.” In another message received on August 15, 1933, as God prophesized: “Humanity will become one, one in race one in religion, one in ideology”.<sup>48</sup> As Rev. Thuong Mang Thanh argues, the main objective of Caodaism is to preach for and reach for Universal World. All Peoples of the world must acknowledge that they have come from the same origin, which is God and it is essential that they see one another as the brothers and sisters of the same Father. According to him, as a Great House of Faith, Caodaism combines the teachings of all the great religious traditions and opens before the humanity a great way to return to the primordial unity. Thus, he further argues that this is the “Great Way” that presents the world with a real chance for unity and understanding between the great cultures

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windows that ultimately face the same view. As a result, millions of followers throughout Asia find no difficulty in calling themselves Buddhists, Taoists and Cofucianists in the same breath. As far as the Western religions are concerned, the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition provides intense interrelationship between Egyptian religions and the religion of Israel, between Persian Zoroastrianism and Christianity, and also between Christianity and Islam. So here too Caodaists concern their religious traditions, which like the traditions of China, built on and rely on one another. Caodaists show this attitude of the Western religions as a big problem with the West and Middle East. Consequently, a refusal is marked to admit to these interrelationships and a need to erase the connections (See *Various Papers*, p108).

<sup>48</sup> See *Les Messages Spirits, de la Traisieme Amnistie de Dieu en Orient, Recueil des messages spirits en Francais, dans les annees 1925-1938, Collectionne par l' Archeveque Thuong Vinh Thanh (Tran Quang Vinh) en 1962, Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, Washington DC, USA-2007, pp.35, 82-83.*

of the East and West.<sup>49</sup> According to Caodai doctrine, each race holds its own sacred personality. It does not matter, whether they live in a developed or underdeveloped country. Therefore, in the *Third Revelatory Period*, Caodaism as the “Great Way of Third Universal Salvation” reconfirms the oneness of mankind by introducing labeled mark *humanity*. With the *Divine Treaty*<sup>50</sup> signed by God and Humanity, Cao Dai doctrine calls for human beings to love one another in the universal love of God for humanity regardless of races are all brothers and sisters of the same Father God. God’s message received on November 28, 1926 explains: “People living in this world, regardless of race, have only one common Father, which is God, and He controls your destiny. So why are you divided because of moral disagreement, since you have all suffered to cleanse your sins in this world”? Caodaists feel the necessity to promote global tolerance in cultural, political, social, and religious affairs.

In this regard, Ryang argues that the combining of Western and Eastern religions and thoughts make it one of the most accessible and universal.<sup>51</sup> Now the question may arise: Will Caodaism be accepted as the *Third Universal Salvation*? This question represents Caodaism as a universal religion. Is there any practical possibility for Caodaism to be a universal religion? What the possible universal religion will possibly be like? With regard to this issue, Tiwari’s model of a universal religion draws attention. He presents three possible forms of a universal religion. They are as follows:

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<sup>49</sup> For a good discussion see Rev. Thuong Mang Thanh’s remarks made at International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) 1999 World Congress held in Vancouver, Canada July 31 1999. Later this remark is published in Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers, *op. cit.*, p.403.

<sup>50</sup> This agreement is signed by the Three Saints: Duc Thanh Son Dao Si, reincarnated in Vietnam as the famous poet Nguyen Binh Khiem, Duc Nguyen Tam Chon Nhon, reincarnated in France as the famous writer Victor Hugo, and Duc Ton Son Chon Nhon, reincarnated in China as the famous statesman Sun Yat Sen. This agreement is recorded on a painting at the entrance to Cao Dai Great Divine Temple in the Holy See, Tay Ninh province. See Canh Quang Tran, Caodaism: A Religion for Peace, *Various Papers*, pp.164-167 (this paper presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, held on November 26-28, 2010 at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh).

<sup>51</sup> Variou Papers, *op. cit.*, p.174.

- a) One of the prevailing religions themselves may be taken universally by all people of the world to be their religion instead of one which they have so far been following as their own.
- b) Or else, common and essential points of all prevailing religions may be drawn out so as to form common set of beliefs and practices to be observed and followed by all religious people of the world.
- c) Or again, a totally fresh religion in a fresh manner may be evolved and people all over the world accept it as their common religion. But before seeing whether universal religion in any of these forms is possible, it will, perhaps, be worthwhile to see what actually the acceptance of a religion by a people means. This consideration will, as a matter of fact, bring us very near to the consideration of the problem regarding the very nature of religion.<sup>52</sup>

His analysis may or may not be accepted. Now let us see in this light the question of the acceptability of the so-called universal religion in any of the three possible forms mentioned by Caodasim, because practical possibility of universal religion in any of the above forms means its acceptability by all people alike. As Tiwari analyzes, the practical possibility of the universal religion in its first form means the acceptability of the beliefs, practices, and religious stories of any one of the prevailing religions by all religious people of the world. For example, if Caodasim becomes universal religion, it will imply that all religious people of the world begin to believe alike in spiritism and all of them adopt the Caodai way of prayer and worship, perform Caodai rituals and observe Caodai moral principles etc. But question must arise: When will it be possible? Perhaps only then when Caodai beliefs, practices and religious stories prove to be the most religiously satisfying, i.e. when they prove to be such

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<sup>52</sup> Tiwari, *op. cit.*, p.217.

which satisfy the religious instinct and hunger of all the people of the world in the most efficient manner.

Let us now take up the second possibility which perhaps seems to be the most viable alternative. If the common and essential points of all the religions are drawn out and put together so as to form a common set of beliefs and practices, perhaps that will be acceptable to all the religious people of the world ungrudgingly. But on analysis and examination, the matter does not seem to be so easily practicable. The third alternative of the practical possibility of universal religion is no less dubious. If universal religion comes about as a new religion in any form whatsoever, it is bound to be nothing other than one more religion besides many existing from beforehand.<sup>53</sup> It may be concluded with Hoskins view. In *the Changing Faces of the Goddess in Asia*, as Hoskins explains, “Third Revelation” signaling the new revelations of spirit messages received in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century shows the common origin of all world religions. In her concluding remark, she shows that Caodaism brings together opposing themes in Asian and even Occidental religious life and presents the example of a modern religion which synthesizes gender division in a unifying practice premised on the philosophy of universal redemption.<sup>54</sup>

### **6.3. Ideal of the Democracy of Religion**

The starting point for this discussion will be the conceptual and ideological resources relating to the spirit of democracy in the Caodai tradition. Now the question is: Does Caodaism has a full spectrum of potential as well as foundations for liberty and equality? However, in a context in which many non Caodaists question the existence of any conceptual or theological foundations for democracy in Caodai tradition, it is important to examine the conceptual resources within the democratic approach of Caodaism. Thus, this section presents a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.224.

<sup>54</sup> See *Collection of Various Papers, op.cit.* pp.183&193.

conceptual understanding between Caodaism's altruistic concern and democracy, and suggests as to whether it can be an ideal of the democracy of religion. The researcher shall, therefore, endeavor to define and explain the meaning of democracy first and then try to find the conceptual relationships between Caodaism and democracy.

### **6.3.1. Defining Democracy**

Democracy is considered as the most sanctified political term that has left almost no enemy over time. This is widely accepted as the highest form of political order. Thus, even today everybody feels comfortable to talk in favor of democracy. This acceptance of democracy, as the scholars argue, reveals the sign of a basic agreement in the ultimate aims of modern life.<sup>55</sup>

As Hossain explains, recent global democratization has further helped established democracy as a well-acclaimed form of government. He further shows that as the society changes, the famous dictum of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people and for the people' by Abraham Lincoln has been put forward by political scientists and theoreticians.<sup>56</sup> Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States, defined democracy as 'Liberty' and argued that without liberty life is not worth living, while Walter Bagehot, editor of the Economist, called democracy as 'government by discussions'. Democratic theoretician Giovanni Sartori commented on democracy as 'power of the people' and government by consensus', while classical theoreticians emphasized on the 'will and purpose' of the people. As Samuel P. Huntington argues, a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for office and in which virtually all adult population is eligible to vote.<sup>57</sup> Agreeing with Huntington, Robert Scalapino remarks that democracy

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<sup>55</sup> Niru Kumar Chakma et al. eds., *Inter-religious Dialogue: Chance for Peace*, (Dhaka: Goethe-Institute, 2004), p.81.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.81

<sup>57</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp.5-29.

ensures competition, participation and openness.<sup>58</sup> Overall, democracy is viewed as a system of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by their representative, and the rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm.<sup>59</sup> Referring to USIA.1991: What is Democracy, Washington D.C., Hossain gives a sum up of the analysis of the definition of democracy as follows: Whatever may be the argument for and against, it may summarily be viewed that democracy stands on the sovereignty of people; a system of government based upon consent of the governed; majority rule and minority rights; guarantee of basic human rights; free and fair elections; rule of law, due process and fair trial; constitutional limits of government; social pluralism and pragmatism; values of tolerance; freedom of speech, expression and of the press; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly and associations such as protests, pressure groups and political parties. The purpose of democracy is to establish a social order based on justice. The success of democracy depends on the existence of a large middle class and the development of a political culture where people from all walks of life can freely participate in the political process to select their leaders who are committed to work and live in competition, cooperation and compromise, and not in confrontation and enmity.<sup>60</sup>

As Hossain further remarks, democracy requires its elements to be rooted in the society, a political culture where citizens are freely ready to choose their leaders, and functioning of political institutions, particularly the press, political parties, and many different voluntary associations with openness and responsibility in their sphere of life. It is a process and goes on to develop and flourish over a long period of time.

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<sup>58</sup> Professor Golam Hossain had discussions with Professor Robert Scalapino at the University of California at Berkeley several times during 1993-1994. See Footnotes, Ibid. p.96.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp.83-84.

### 6.3.2. Understanding Caodaism as Ideal of the Democracy of Religion

It may be more important to begin with a critical analysis of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac. As he points out, “Caodaism is a religion which takes conscience as foundation; it involves all doctrines in the world and serves as a mediatory place for the union of ideologies which is necessary for guiding man to perfection”.<sup>61</sup> There is no room for dogmatism in Tac’s conceptualization of democratic spirit of Caodaism. Now the question is: As per Tac’s view, can we consider Caodaism as an ideal of democracy of religion? The answer is either “Yes” or “No”. However, it is true that there is respect for the individual and his dignity and a sense of equality and “the democratic spirit” in Caodaism and so are other world religions. In this regard, we can focus on Probhu Dutt Shastri’s observation. As he remarks, all men are originally and /or potentially and/or ultimately equal but not “actually” or literally equal.<sup>62</sup> This may seem to pose serious problems for the non Caodai followers if all of these seem to be conceived of in a strictly Caodaist-and therefore a unique-form and meaning. Shastri further suggests that there is the optimistic-and thoroughly democratic-doctrine of what is called the universal attainability of goodness.<sup>63</sup> Thus understood his general assessment resembles Duc Pham Cong Tac’s formulation of the democratic approach of Caodaism. However, the intention implicit in this section is not to make a comparative study between Caodaism and democracy. The aim is rather to briefly characterize the democratic spirit of Caodaism in the following space.

The official name of Caodaism is *Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* meaning ‘The Great Way of Third Universal Salvation’. Thus, the ‘universal salvation’ could be achieved through the complete fulfillment of the commitment of the mankind to the will of God to who belongs to every creation and the generous master of the universe. In essence it amounts to a

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<sup>61</sup> See *The Path of a Cao Dai Disciple, op. cit.*, p91.

<sup>62</sup> For details, see Probhu Dutt Shastri, *The Essentials of Eastern Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1928), pp5-6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness of the vision and plan of God and thereby it is committed to fulfill that vision and plan. While defining ‘universal salvation’ as the objective of Caodaism, for realization of true and sustainable peace, advocates social ethics, morality and virtues such as honesty, truth, kindness, wisdom and righteousness. With such teachings and prescriptions, Caodaism stands for universal salvation. Notably, divine messages determine individual’s relationship with God through certain duties and rights.

Caodaists are enamored of a way of life based on democracy and social justice. Thus, Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac’s philosophy of democratic socialism aimed at complete liberation of human personality and society based on equality and prosperity. At a certain stage he successfully established a strong community in Tay Ninh; a community involved in a variety of economic, social and spiritual activities.<sup>64</sup> The Caodai key figures enunciated a creed toward equality, tolerance, simplicity of worship, higher and practical ethics, and application of democratic principles of religion. Caodai doctrine emphasizes and promotes all human rights and fundamental freedoms, tolerance, peace, understanding of and respect for cultural diversity in a globally interdependent world. Caodaism recognizes that the family is the basic unity of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a major force of social cohesion and integration. One of the noble aims of this religion is to ensure gender equality. Caodaism recognizes that equality and equity between men and women are essential for family well-being and for society at large. Caodaism opposes discrimination against women and advocates their empowerment and full participation in all areas of life and at all levels in order to bring about a balanced representation of women and men in all sectors and occupations. These beliefs, for example, are found to be enshrined and institutionalized in Caodaist hierarchy, which includes both male and female dignitaries. There is an equivalent

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<sup>64</sup> See Tran My Van, *Vietnamese Caodaism, Independence, and Peace: The Life and Work of Pham Cong Tac (1890-1959)*; *Academica Sinica: Prosea Research Paper*, 2000, No. 38. Trung Buu Lam *Colonialism Experienced*, 2000, pp. 208-227; *A Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.*, p.357.

for female dignitaries in almost every branch of Caodaism. Viewing Caodai communities as important actors of civil society, Caodaism advocates people centered sustainable development through capacity building, institution-building, and social action to develop and maintain equality, including gender equality; to eradicate poverty; universal and equal access to basic social services; social protection and support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as orphans or elderly people. In Caodai communities, people are placed at the center of the community development. Community members, Caodaists and non-Caodaists alike, are seen as entitled to have the right and the ability to participate fully in the social and economic life of their communities within a framework of ethical values. Caodaism has institutionalized its social protection and poverty eradication priorities in the form a “Social Protection Agency” or *Phuoc Thien*, established in 1938.<sup>65</sup> The Agency is in charge of planning, organizing, and providing basic social services such as education, food, shelter, employment, and health care in order to assist people living in poverty and to ensure the strengthening of local institutions in charge of their implementation.

In this way, human responsibility is again and again insisted on as the keynote of Caodaism, an idea compatible to Protestantism’s faith on individual conscience and his direct relation to God. Agreeing with all previous religions, for a conduct of human life, the concept of liberalism, tolerance, freedom, liberty, and equality has been strongly enforced in Caodaism. Thus, the aim of Caodaism, according to Bawa Jain, is to revitalize humanity in the Universal Peace. Here, he argues that the Universalism of Caodaism, with its considerable reconciliatory potential, corresponds to the level of integration and globalization processes in the modern world. This is why, as Jain views, Caodaism hopes to become actively involved

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<sup>65</sup> See *Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.*, pp.49-50.

in the Dialogue among Civilizations.<sup>66</sup> It is thought that over 50 years, His Holiness Ho Phap taught and recommended all dignitaries and male and female disciples to love and unite together; and behave fairly to preserve the work of real Great Way. The main purpose of Caodaism is to take care of freedom, happiness for all people. Due to unfairness, as it is recorded, SUPREME BEING descended in a séance to teach: “whenever unfairness still happens on this earth, the Religion is not complete yet”. For that noble reason, His Holiness Ho Phap often reminded Disciples: “Caodaism cannot be a tool, chess of any body. The position of Caodaism is the eternal, perpetual position standing ahead and above to guide the earth, to guide human beings according to three standards: Mercy, Love, and Justice.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, Caodaism stands against any kind of coercion, suppression or oppression, and rejects all forms of discrimination, exploitation, and inequality on the grounds of religious identity, race, color, ethnicity, and sex, and believes in the complete equality of mankind. The main objective of the Third Alliance between God and Mankind is to establish ‘Freedom and Liberty’, and guards them against injustice, oppression and inequality. Third Alliance, therefore, has laid down universal fundamental rights for humanity including the protection of rights of non-human beings. This altruistic concern of Caodaism addresses the real spirit of democracy that actually suggests that people in a state should be citizens and not subjects. Such a democratic picture has appeared favorable in Bawa Jain’s observation. He has remarked that Caodaist communities are important actors of civil society who are found to have played vital role to sustainable development through capacity building, institution-building, and social action to develop and maintain equality, including gender equality; to eradicate poverty; universal and equal access to basic social services; social protection and

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<sup>66</sup> See Bawa Jain, “Elimination of Poverty: The Cao Dai Experience”, a paper submitted to the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit on August 27, 2000. This paper appears in *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers, op. cit.*, pp.49-52.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed study visit <http://hocday.com/inh-tn-thnh-933-woodside-dr-holland-mi-49424-tiu-s-c-h-php-phm.html?page=6> last Retrieved April 12, 2018.

support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as orphans or elderly people.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Caodaism provides a set of norms which are quite consistent with the operative ideals of modern liberal democracy, and these can very well be realized within the framework of contemporary forms of democratic governments. It should be mentioned that with a view to serving democratic purposes, His Holiness Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac institutionalized a “Social Protection Agency” in 1938. He promoted a holistic approach to the various needs of people through this particular agency. In reality, the agency and its local outlets became responsible for the social needs of people in the area, whether they are Caodaists or not.<sup>69</sup> Here this Caodaist model of social protection provides an example of decentralization in the delivery of basic social services by society actors as a means of responding more efficiently to the needs of the people.

As far as democratic approach of Caodaism is concerned, Caodaism and democracy seem to have similar aims and thereby serve similar purposes. Like Cao Dai basic values, democracy also means the right to differ and competition, not enmity; cooperation, and compromise, not confrontation; and accommodation, not acrimony. The aim of Caodaism is to revitalize humanity in the Universal Peace. The Universalism of Caodaism, with its considerable reconciliatory potential, corresponds to the level of integration and globalization process in the modern world. This is why Caodaism hopes to become actively involved in the Dialogue among Civilizations. As Rev. Tran Quan Canh, the President of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary, explained, before formulating a universal doctrine for all, God taught that people must practice first the Way of Humanity, which is to be virtuous, so the Confucian doctrine has to be re-established in order to teach humanity how to behave in a righteous manner. Men and women who realize their own human dignity are full persons, because they recognize their love for other men and women, they see the universal love in their hearts, they can find

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<sup>68</sup> See *Various Papers, op. cit.*, p.50.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.51-52.

God in their inner souls. Thus, the veneration of the Divine Eye in Cao Dai religion also means that God has called human beings to return to their consciences. Returning to their own conscience is a synonym for returning to their inner God, thus eliminating all hatred between human beings.<sup>70</sup>

As far as the concept of one race is concerned, for all human beings in this world, irrespective of race, color, language, sex, living in any country on this globe, all are brothers and sisters, having a common Father God, all coming from God's spirit. Therefore, the races must be treated with equality, mutual respect for their culture. Caodaism, therefore, stands for a commitment to present man's will to the will of God and to be at peace with the creator and thereby with all He has created. That is what actually Caodaists envision humanity on the peace field towards attaining "Universal Salvation" through constructive dialogue. Notably, Jurij Alschitz in his book *The Art of Dialogue* draws attention to the extraordinary importance of dialogue. As he argues, dialogue is the only way for all of us to live together, peacefully and happily.<sup>71</sup> His formulation of dialogue, in fact, comes into agreement with the dialogical approach of Caodaism. This assessment can be put in approximately the following terms: Caodaism offers a new vertical plane of dialogue between God and humanity for the quest of a very successful horizontal plane of dialogue between humanity.

#### **6.4. Understanding Interfaith Dialogue**

Since we are concerned with the current subject matter, we might properly ask to what extent interfaith dialogue can contribute in promoting harmonious and peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths. However, with a view to developing a clear idea on interfaith dialogue we should here point out the importance of dialogue first, in general. In this regard, we may understand the genuine purpose of dialogue better if we consider Alschitz's exposition of dialogue. In fact, this is very important for a general understanding of dialogue.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.166.

<sup>71</sup> Jurij Alschitz, *The Art of Dialogue*, (Berlin: ars incognita, 2010), p.27.

However, he is particularly concerned with the real but constructive effect of dialogue in building free democratic relations.<sup>72</sup> As he considers, “there are no equals on the battle field but as per the core meaning of dialogue (agreement/compromise) all are equal on the peace field”.<sup>73</sup> We can conclude his formulation of dialogue in his words: “Dialogue and its path can always develop successfully and on the principles of compromise or mutual concessions”.<sup>74</sup> Now it can easily be understood that agreement and compromise may function as powerful and potential dynamics of any successful dialogue. Thus, it is not exaggeration to mention that these integrating forces of dialogue are able to influence the people’s moods and attitudes regarding a certain issue to be gathered together for a common purpose. The same is also true in the case of interfaith dialogue. Now we can turn our attention to interfaith dialogue with a view to understanding its importance from Caodai perspective.

#### **6.4.1. Dao Cao Dai and Interfaith Dialogue**

Today it is commonly assumed that interfaith dialogue is good and necessary and should be furthered as much as possible. As For the practice of interfaith dialogue, three issues are seriously taken into consideration. These three issues concern the cognitive, the affective, and the objective aspects of dialogue. With regard to the cognitive aspect it is followed by its two components. First and foremost, participants in a dialogue should be familiar with their own religious traditions. Secondly, the aim must be to acquire as much knowledge about the religion of the others as possible. On the affective level, a sympathetic attitude towards the other religion is indispensable if a true understanding is to be achieved.<sup>75</sup> With regard to the third aspect of dialogue, E.J. Sharp examines the ambiguity of the word “dialogue” to be unclear about what the aim(s) of the process is (are). In this regard, he shows four kinds of

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<sup>72</sup> See Ibid., p.39.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>75</sup> Reinhard Pummer, “Research in Comparative Religion-Implications for Interfaith Dialogue”, *Coparative Religion*, Amarjit Singh Sethi and Reinhard Pummer (ed.), (New Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1979), p.6-7.

dialogues and objectives are intended. First, the discursive dialogue as a shared quest for intellectual clarity and understanding; second, human dialogue as an encounter on the level of a common humanity; third, secular dialogue, that is, a shared involvement in a secular situation; and fourth, interior dialogue, that is, a common quest for ultimate reality or God. The first and the second of these types correspond to cognitive and affective requirements, where as types three and four refer to objectives of interfaith dialogue.<sup>76</sup> Now the question is: What may be the contribution of Coadaim to interfaith dialogue on the basis of cognitive, affective and objective aspects of dialogue?

As Caodaism falls into the Third Revelatory Period it encompasses the essence of all previous religions. It may be considered a preparatory stage in relation to interfaith dialogue. Its only goal is to bring back all religions to the primordial unity. However its indirect contribution may be fundamental to all such endeavors. It may be examined from moral point view of Caodaism that the universal family of Caodai doctrine seems to be a possible vanguard of the movement for true and essential understanding. However, this issue may be examined from different aspects such as i. historical perspective, ii. The people, iii. The Caodai religion, iv. Human relations-from individual to the universal family-the Caodai approach; and v. Message of Caodaism

#### **6.4.1.1. Historical Perspective**

God, the founder of the Great Way of Third Universal Salvation (Caodaism), appeared in the third phase of His Universal Amnesty so as to avoid further ferment, persecution and religious intolerance. All around the world, chaos had been appeared to be a common phenomenon of instability due to socio-political and religious prejudices. Though the soul of the people was struggling to find expression, the traditional solidarity had weakened because

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.7-8.

of foreign invasion and aggression for over the centuries. The country had been ravaged by the Chinese, French, Japanese and finally, the American.<sup>77</sup>

#### **6.4.1.2. The People**

Both in theory and practice, the purest, the simplest and the youngest of the world's great religions, Caodaism was founded by God himself in South Vietnam, a land which enjoys the natural advantages of its fertile soil and healthy climate and whose broadminded inhabitants are valorous and industrious. Considered by some as a historical necessity, Caodaism developed for over four decades under especially Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, the Defender of the Law or Religion and secured permanent importance. Caodaists, in particular, owe their present insignia to the Defender of Law, Pham Cong Tac, who infused a new spirit in his fellow Caodai brethren to such an extent that even timid men staked their lives to resist political oppression and to revive human values. The first disciples of God, well known both for their actions and thought, awakened the light of the Third and the Final Era of God within a nation in the Orient. Their selfless devotion and dynamic teachings actually engendered a republican spirit and supreme sacrifices under the leadership of Pham Cong Tac. It was possible to revolutionize the Caodaists who acquired intensive stability and prosperity which could not be eroded or ossified. In fact, the Caodaists, after unusual trials and tribulations, succeeded in wresting power from the French and established the Great Divine Temple in Tay Ninh province. As a community, the Caodaists have reached the stage of self-generating progress in almost all walks of life-growth is as natural to them as leaves on a tree. The warmth and sincerity of a Caodai who has a refined conscience for a stranger are proverbial. He has feeling of compassion and empathy; human values are always respected by him. If we analyze the very cause of the formation of Cao Dai army it appears that a Caodai, characteristically, was a saint-soldier. As a saint-soldier he is to turn to Duc Cao Dai for

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<sup>77</sup> For a detailed study, see *Vietnam: A History*.

spiritual quest and to realize that the soul is immortal. He is committed to practice the discipline of Caodaism as strictly and obedience to it as unquestioningly as a soldier in any army. A Caodai must use his or her faculties to develop him/herself as an ideal human, balanced spiritually, physically and mentally.

#### **6.4.1.3. The Cao Dai Religion**

Caodaists argue that their dialogues with the Great Master Teacher created a faith that was born in dialogue with the West, but not subservient to western ideas. It was Asia-centric but universalistic, cosmopolitan but also distinctively Vietnamese, and rather than being isolated and vulnerable, its openness to the outside world made it strong and flexible, able to absorb modern statecraft, science and technology without losing its own cultural identity.<sup>78</sup> Thus understood Caodaism has been described as a homogeneous tradition, that is, as representing a synthesis of Eastern and Western elements. Caodaism, actually, provides a full re-expression of the religious spirit of the people of the land and serves as a common ground to meet with mutual understanding. Caodai doctrine emphasizes and promotes all human rights and fundamental freedoms, tolerance, peace, understanding of and respect for cultural diversity in a globally interdependent world. The aim of Caodaism is to revitalize humanity in the Universal Peace. The Universalism of Caodaism, with its considerable reconciliatory potential, corresponds to the level of integration and globalization process in the modern world. This is why Caodaism tends to become actively involved in the Dialogue among Civilizations.<sup>79</sup> As the Third Great Way of Universal Salvation, the major purpose of which is how the best to unite all religions on a common ground. What is important in all this is the fact that Caodaism aims at representing all religious faiths in such a way that respective members can recognize themselves in its descriptions. In other words, by the very fact that it

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<sup>78</sup> See *Various Papers, op. cit.*, p.140.

<sup>79</sup> Cited from a paper entitled "Elimination of Poverty: the Cao Dai Experience" submitted by the Cao Dai Overseas Missionary to the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit on August 27, 2000.

aims at empathy and understanding in its universalistic approach, it can indirectly further the attitude of tolerance and sympathy.

#### **6.4.1.4. Human Relations from Individual to the Universal Family-the Caodai Approach**

There are different approaches within and between the established religious traditions of the world. Thus, one cannot overlook this immensely complicating factor in trying to deal with a project described as philosophy and world religion.<sup>80</sup> As he argues, there may well be philosophies of religion inherently embedded in the world religions, each with its own distinctive identity. Those philosophies of religion belonging to a particular religious family can engage in dialogue with one another. As members of the same family they share the same conceptual and linguistic world with fundamentally the same or similar symbolic, mythical and doctrinal structures. In this connection, Lama Gangchen actually emphasizes intra religious dialogue rather than interreligious one. As far as Caodaism is concerned, like other religions it is also a cluster-term or family-name for separate religious traditions that have elements in common in a way analogous to family-resemblances. According to Lama such commonalities are not functions of a single homogeneous and homogenizing essence.<sup>81</sup> Thus, as far as the commonalities of Cao Dai family-tree is concerned like Vaishnavas and Shaivas under 'Hinduism', Roman Catholics and Anglicans under Christianity, Theravadins and Madhyamakas under Buddhism, Shi'ite and Sunni under Islam etc., Exoteric and Esoteric sects under Caodaism can engage in interreligious dialogue within the confines of Cao Dai family-tree- that is, engage in sustained debate and exchange of ideas in pursuit of truth and understanding. This is due to their protracted histories they have done so, producing new meaningful emphases, coherent conceptual structures, significations, outworking, during the course of their internal development and mutual understanding. According to Lama's formula

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<sup>80</sup> Gangchen, *Major Religions in Contemporary World*, p.2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

of interreligious dialogue, it may be assessed that a crucial feature of what it is to be 'Caodai', for example, is to share with others who are identified as Caodaists the same linguistic-cultural web of patterns of discourse and practice, and long-term goals and aspirations. As Lama further views, since the differentia of the various strands of this web are quantitative rather than qualitative, dialogue is quite possible. Indeed, even dialogue across overlapping linguistic-cultural webs is possible, for the reason that they are historically interconnected, structurally commensurable patterns of development. One just needs to call to mind the great and fruitful philosophical interactions as well as the centuries-old exchanges between the Eastern and the Western systems of thought. As far as genuine dialogue is concerned, Lama views that genuine dialogue is not possible across the religio-cultural divides of our world, and any attempt to engage in such dialogue would be doomed to failure. In this particular aspect how can Caodaism overcome the lack of the requisite linguistic and semantic commensurability between the religio-cultural matrices involved and produce results that would remain superficial and worthless at best? Genuine dialogue cannot take place across the barriers of cultural incommensurability. There are insufficient grounds for the cognitive exchange and reintegration of semantic and linguistic content. According to this incommensurable view, Caodaism cannot genuinely dialogue across certain cognitive divides since the linguistic-cultural webs involved do not overlap in a sufficiently significant manner. If there are structural barriers to free dialogue between a religion and a religion, important consequences for the doing and development Caodai philosophy would follow, not to mention changes in attitude and outlook. If religious traditions can arise with integrity in this way, then surely dialogue, including philosophical dialogue, can similarly occur in this way. Indeed, the process of such dialogically constructing new faiths has continued, e.g., Caodaism. At an informal level empathetic understanding is a widespread and much valued phenomenon of our daily lives, transcending barriers of gender, race and culture. From

instances of flashes of empathy or sympathy with the other to the more sustained identification of parents, lovers and friends, empathetic understanding is integral to the fabric of everyday experience.<sup>82</sup> Empathetic understanding can further take as constructive empathy. Constructive empathy is considered to be a disciplined process with both a cognitive and moral dimension. Its moral component comes to the fore in the underlying motivation to relate positively with the other on the basis of sustained empathetic understanding. Empathetic understanding can be deployed as a means of dialogic interaction with a view to building bridge of mutual understanding. It is considered to be a maker of the significant mutual cognitive access that is possible with respect to the other in the philosophical domain, regardless of cultural and other divides. A different but related facet of the cognitive process is the fact and mode of the way cognitive structures such as concepts, symbols, paradigm, beliefs, arguments and doctrines are susceptible to change and growth. Within these parameters, these cognitive structures are continually undergoing modification, sometimes substantial modification, on the basis of interactive transactions such as conversations, discussions, debates and controversies, which take place both inside and outside a religious tradition. But debate on this understanding, and development of the doctrine in numerous ways and contexts, may be continued as debate on the doctrine of Christian Trinity have continued over the centuries. In so far as the continuing debates have already taken cognizance of basically Cao Dai assumptions, beliefs and objectives, these changes may be regarded as internal to the Cao Dai context. With the passage of time like other religious traditions, Cao Dai thinkers, for all sorts of theological and sociopolitical reasons, have also engaged in debate with those who have avoided basic Cao Dai tenets, including humanists, atheists, and scientists. These external debates have had to take cognizance of new understanding of the concepts of substance, person, relation, causality,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. pp.4-5.

etc., which have had to be factored into the on-going process of the reconstructions of the doctrine of universal family in Caodaism.

#### **6.4.1.5. Message of Caodaism**

With special reference to a spirit message, as Caodaists affirm strongly, the *Third Amnesty* is a successful leap from the intolerable present to the perfect future where all religions would come together eventually and would last 700,000 years. Such a clear sign of a potential “Golden Age” is marked in the millenarian ideology of Caodaism. As Blagov remarks, the millenarianism seems to be a great potency in the Caodaist canonical texts.<sup>83</sup> Thus, they argue that there is no rush to convert the world, but there is a great deal of pressure on them to do it properly. As they points the argument with firmness, currently one could say that Caodaism is in a Confucian mode where Caodaists stress to adapt the need to live a correct life so that when one’s familial and social duties are completed each soul can slowly remove from the world and dedicate their lives to the Great Way.<sup>84</sup> On the whole, as the *Third Universal Amnesty of God*, Caodaism paves the way for a universal religious consciousness. In the *Third Great Period*, Caodaism actually heralds the world’s religious development. This time, according to one of the important concepts of Caodaism-“Opening the Way”<sup>85</sup>, God would no longer send any individual messenger. In this regard, Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac holds: “God comes to earth in a divine manner. He has no physical form but we can see Him. He has no voice but we can hear Him. He uses His authority to directly manage the religion”.<sup>86</sup>

However, as far as Caodaism’s future prospect is concerned, it may be begun with a clarification. And for the sake of clarity, it is necessary to examine the current position of the

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<sup>83</sup> Blagov, *A New Religious Movement*, p.24.

<sup>84</sup> *Various Papers*, *op. cit.*, P.109.

<sup>85</sup> This term is identified to be associated with apocalypse-a great leap from the intolerable present into the perfect future. See Blagov, *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> “Brief Outline of History and Philosophy of Caodaism”, Remarks given by Canh Quang Tran, president of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary at IARF 31st World Congress in Budapest, Hungary, July 28, 2002.

dominant world religions in order to draw attention to the future potency of Caodaism. Christianity, for example, is the great religion of the West and the Cross has followers all over the world. Islam claims more than one seventh of all mankind. Buddhism is the dominant religion in the Far East. India is the homeland of Hinduism, an ancient over 4000 years old. Not millions on millions but a bare 2.5 million men, women and children mostly of Tay Ninh province (South of Vietnam) who are numerically less than 3% in their country are the adherents of Caodaism.<sup>87</sup> Notwithstanding various handicaps such as political, social, economic, geographical, because of its doctrinal appeal, ideas of simplicity and intuitive inspiration, the influence of Caodaism is being felt beyond its traditional confines. Though it may not spread with hurricane speed, as is the tradition in Caodasim, it will be propagated through precept, not through fire and sword and this would put it up into stilts. In a world torn by hatred and mistrust, Caodasim which aims at the welfare of the whole humanity can prove to be a great unifying factor for it has a message to win minds and hearts of modern men and women. As Janet Hoskins notes, Caodaism emerged as a public, mass movement that brought together a number of underground organizations into a new and vigorous national congregation, and it was at the same time filled with nationalist spirit and oriented towards universal salvation.<sup>88</sup> The growing attention of Caodaism since the 1950s has produced a number of studies on local Caodai communities. The earliest fieldworks were carried out in South Vietnam; whereas most subsequent studies have focused on the Western settings of France, Russia, and the United States including Australia. Taken together, they allow us to examine the specific operation of Cao Dai communities scattered across South Vietnam, the evolution of the movement as a whole and, most importantly from our point of view, the

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<sup>87</sup> As per the statistics of the Vietnamese Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2017, Caodaists made up 2.62 percent of a total population 95.54 million. This data is collected via e-mail from Professor Huỳnh Ngọc Thu, Professor of the Faculty of Anthropology, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU-HCM) dated 9/03/2019. It should be mentioned that Caodaists made up 70 percent of a total population of Tay Ninh province. For more details, see Nguyen Long Thanh, *op. cit.*, p.37.

<sup>88</sup> *Various papers, op. cit.*, p.124.

overall structure of its global networking. The Tay Ninh branch of Caodaism began to form in 1926, when its activities in the provincial city (Tay Ninh) were regularized through its historic inaugural ceremony. Now Caodaism's following in Vietnam consists of ten main branches. In his recent research article Professor H. Ngoc Thu finds that ten branches are currently legally recognized by the government of Vietnam.<sup>89</sup> These groups are separated and the differences between them are epitomized in the ways they perform their activities. The Tay Ninh branch gathers for all sober rituals and festivals in the premises of the Great Divine Temple and holds more enthusiastic meetings at the divine temple. Notably, they also conduct open ceremonies that present Caodaism to people of different faiths and promote intra and interreligious harmony. Women are allowed to participate together with men. At this time the transnational character of Caodaism is most visible. Far more than in Vietnam, Caodaism's appeal to Westerners and Australians relies on its charming ideology as well as an attitude of tolerance and flexibility toward other religions and creeds. As Tran Quang Canh explains, Cao Dai philosophy denotes to the oneness of religions under the Providence of one Supreme Being who is venerated under different names. Thus, according to him, a Cao Dai disciple can accept all religions with equal importance.<sup>90</sup> Concomitantly, the adherents have drawn closer to the New Age culture of spirituality and self-fulfillment. Historically, the global potential of Caodaists came to fruition after the Cao Dai Foreign Mission was transplanted to the United States. The various websites of this network are dedicated to the diffusion of Caodai secular and spiritual teachings among Caodaists and non-Caodaists, the promotion of peace and tolerance. The Cao Dai Foreign Mission of North America, as the representative voice of global Cao Dai sentiment. The two key points of its agenda have been

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<sup>89</sup> Professor Thu shows a complete list of ten branches such as 1.Tien Thien, 2.Minh Chon Ly, 3.Minh Chon Dao Hau Giang, 4.Ban Chinh Dao, 5.Chieu Minh Long Chau, 6.Chieu Minh Tam Thanh Vo Vi, 7.Bach Y Lien Doan Chon Ly, 8.Tay Ninh, 9.Cau Kho-Tam Quan, and 10.Truyen Giao. See Huyen Ngoc Thu "Social Function of Caodaism in the South of Vietnam", Korean Association of Vietnamese Studies, 2015, pp.167-197.

<sup>90</sup> Tran Quang Canh, Cao Dai Frequently Asked Questions appeared in *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, p.111.

to impart religious education to Caodaists and non-Caodaists to present Caodaism as a peaceful and tolerant religion. Caodaism is much more successful in its appeal to the adherents and non-Caodai spiritually oriented segments of the American society. Reflecting on the transnational character of Caodaism it may be concluded that the Cao Dai network has shown a remarkable flexibility in its adaptation to the transnational world. It has also reproduced within its ranks the globalised class polarization between Western spiritual seekers, who normally are physically and virtually free to move around the globe, and indigenous and migrants Caodaists, who typically remain fettered to their place. The Cao Dai Overseas Missionary has thus become part of the global New Age movement. The principal means of recruitment to the religion was its early leaders' charismatic attraction. It was enacted through their piety and exemplary behavior, and augmented by their apocalyptic prophecies. Caodaism is not only a new lofty belief system offering a solution to the existential wilderness of modern society, however; for its followers it is also the means to connect to a fledging transnational religious network. The hub of this transnational network is California. From his close observation, Professor Thu goes so far as to say that Caodaism is now considered as one of the indigenous religions which have strongly developed in the South of Vietnam and spread to the whole country as well as abroad.<sup>91</sup> To the extent, with a view to finding its expressions in a globalized world, caodaism has already spanned both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans what J. Hoskins has termed it "Transpacific" religion. As Hoskins's observation says, "estimates of the world's top ten religions by numbers of adherents have often included Caodaism".<sup>92</sup> From this point of view, it may be rationalized that Caodaism occupies a distinctive social position which touches on the global society as a whole. Caodaism must, therefore, rank as one of the central positions of world religions.

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<sup>91</sup> See Huyen Ngoc Thu, *op. cit.*, p.175.

<sup>92</sup> J. A. Hoskins, *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism*, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), p.4.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

The main elements of Vietnamese higher culture are derived from China and India. But the Vietnamese are not alone in this process. As W. Scott Morton views, China has for long been the dominant power all over East Asia, not merely by virtue of its size or its large population, but because of its superior culture. Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, and parts of Southeast Asia, as well as, Japan, have been accustomed to look to China as a source of leadership and inspiration, a cultural stimulus, and a cultural storehouse.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a noteworthy fact is that Vietnamese culture is always found distinctive. Some Vietnamese scholars, according to Oliver, claim that through so many centuries of Chinese rule the Vietnamese managed to maintain a distinct and independent civilization.<sup>2</sup> There must be some major facts worked behind this distinct phenomenon of Vietnamese society that helped retain its original shape even after many changes. One of the most intriguing features of the Vietnamese people is their capacity to accept and adapt and yet to retain their own individuality and their own style. To be sure, the penetration of Chinese cultures since sixth century B.C. that ensure the arrivals of tradition of “three religions” (*tam giao*-Taoism and Confucianism in the first century A.D., Buddhism in the second century A.D).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the spiritist cult of its Vietnamese origin drew its philosophical source and inspiration from the blending and adaptation of the three Eastern religions. Notably, this blending process between *primitive and non-primitive*<sup>4</sup> elements had evolved over the centuries, mostly among the popular

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<sup>1</sup> W. Scott Morton, *Japan: Its History and Culture*, (NY, London: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver 1976, *op. cit.*, p.20. For a detail account also see Reischauer and Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), pp.60, 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.20-21.

<sup>4</sup> Charterji in his book *Studies in Comparative Religion* has broadly categorized religion into primitive and non-primitive. He divides primitive religion into different stages of its development: a) the stage in which there is a vague and diffused conception of power e.g., the stage of manaism, b) the stage in which power is identified with spirit and different natural objects are peopled with spirits e.g., the

classes. Historically, during these ten centuries of Chinese domination or more there was a continuous exhibition of nationalistic fervor by the Vietnamese. The historical situation in the (may be used particular centuries) early centuries brought about a series of social, cultural, political, and religious changes in Vietnam under the influence of Chinese thought and institutions. Chinese elements had been infiltrating Vietnam over a long period of time through acculturation process (naturalized process). As scholars argue, yet it seems quite clear that such a long period of acculturation resulted in Vietnamese society being modeled by Chinese values and customs.<sup>5</sup> However, although during the early centuries in the Christian era cultural and religious influences continued to flow in from China, they were quickly indigenized. It should be mentioned that in the second phase, the arrival of Roman Catholicism during the seventeenth century<sup>6</sup>, actually, invites the French colonialism in the late nineteenth century and further confirms the penetration of the Western elements in Vietnam. Later on, since the outset of the establishment of French colony in Vietnam, a new form of spiritism is found to have been practiced by a good number of Vietnamese officials working under colonial government. The Vietnamese indigenous form of spiritism came into contact with Western spiritualism and had developed a hybrid spiritism. This practice of hybrid spiritism began to evolve over the decades in the early twentieth century, mostly among the pioneers and early members of Caodaism.

However, in the third phase, the Vietnamese people experienced serious political crises and religious-cultural disruptions in French Cochinchina that continued till 1999 after the

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stage of animism, c) the stage in which ancestor-worship or ghost-worship predominates, and d) the stage of totemism. He has classified non-primitive religion into a) godless, and b) those that believe in a personal being or beings. the latter is divided into i) pluralism, ii) dualism, iii) monism. He has further divided dualism into two forms: a) dualistic theism, and b) ditheism; while monism into a) deism, b) pantheism and c) theism or panentheism. For a detail account see Chatterji 1971, *op. cit.*, pp.32-41.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver 1976, *op. cit.*, p.21.

<sup>6</sup> It is noted that from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese embraced the new faith, for diverse reasons. For a detail see Karnow 1983, *op. cit.*, pp.72-74.

Communist government took power in 1975.<sup>7</sup> The demolition of monarchial rule, the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), the Franco-Vietnam war (1946-1954), the Republic of Vietnam or simply South Vietnam during the period between 1954 and 1975, and finally, American intervention in the second half of the twentieth century were but a few examples of epoch-making events that had far-reaching consequences. Many bloody wars fought among the rival groups had devastated the cities and countryside, and particularly the Vietnam War (1965-1975) precipitated social, economic, and cultural dislocations. Notably, never in the history of Vietnam had she encountered such a traumatic experience as during the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Vietnamese people as a whole did not lose their traditional sense of values and of the meaning of history. And it must be recognized that the Vietnamese people now find themselves balance and are certain in which direction they should take the next steps. Thus, though Caodaism is heavily indebted to the established traditions within and outside of Vietnam for the shape of its organizational structure, what emerges is distinctively Caodaist. The Cao Dai religion has always shown great powers of converting borrowed materials to its special purposes, purposes conceived deep within its own domain of universal consciousness, and so of molding a culture that offers a grand union of world religions. And it may be noted that today Caodaism along with other religions have a real opportunity to grow and develop in an atmosphere of religious liberty after Vietnam

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that after the second century there was a perpetual struggle between Buddhism and Confucianism to establish religious suzerainty over the country. In the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Hanoi authorities were keen to recognize all religious communities in Southern Vietnam as a way so as to destroy them as autonomous hierarchical social organizations and subordinate them to the political ideologies of the Socialist Vietnam. The new authorities apparently viewed the majority of the priests, notably those who had been socially active before 1975, as “the spies of the CIA”. During the late 1970s the state apparatus seemed to try to eliminate religions, viewing the denominations as superstitious and “anti-revolutionary”. However, Caodaism is targeted by a drive designed to subordinate them to Hanoi’s political ideologies. It should be noted that ultimately Vietnamese government confirmed the party’s policy to respect religious freedom. For a detail study see Blagov’ “Religion Vs Restrictions and Persecution” (presented at International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) 1999 World Congress, Vancouver, Canada), *Various Papers, op. cit.*, pp.28-33.

initiated a policy of openness in 1990.<sup>8</sup> The important thing, however, is a remarkable homogeneity of the Cao Dai religion and Vietnamese culture, existing already in the previous belief systems and culture. Through acculturation process many features of ‘*Tam Giao*’ traditions penetrated the entire Cao Dai religion and culture. The diverse cultural and indigenous elements that made up the following of the new religion during the early twentieth century had achieved something of a common ethos. The main characteristic of Caodaism is its cosmic orientation. Central to this well systematized, indigenous religious tradition is the notion of Dao, which is usually translated as the “Way” or the “Way of Cao Dai”, but also means “Above” or “Superior”. This cosmic orientation had been submerged through the long history of Vietnam by the influences of religions and cultures that had been introduced from abroad, it remained at the core of the spiritual culture of Vietnam, transforming alien influences and naturalizing them. This assimilative approach comes close to the Japanese way of incorporating foreign elements into its own. Similarly, it was also this underlying cosmological orientation which enabled the Japanese people to assimilate various alien religious and cultural elements and forms without becoming schizophrenic.<sup>9</sup>

Supposedly, the nature and character of the Cao Dai temple had taken a new shape through Chinese and other influences. The meaning of human life is understood in terms of man’s relation to God, who talks to the humanity directly. Herein lies the Cao Dai conception of correspondence between the realm of occult and that of man. The new ecclesiastification of culture, as envisaged by Caodaism, brings not only heavenly peace to the world but also prosperity and happiness to humanity. The use of Chinese geomancy, the Yin-Yang system, and Taoist ideas about the Tao are often referred to as words of unmistakably Chinese origin

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<sup>8</sup> Now more liberal policy towards politico-religious movements of Southern Vietnam has been launched. The earlier repressive phase has been replaced by a more liberal recognition of the fact, that religious element of the movements cannot be so easily annihilated. In addition, currently people are no longer discouraged from attending religious festivals. See *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, ND), P.331

relevant to gods. By far the greatest influence is exerted on Caodaism by *tam giao* traditions. The complex phenomenon of Cao Dai religion is reflected in the various kinds of divinities. Among these divinities is Nhien Dang Co Phat, the Sakyamuni Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Dipankara Buddha, Kwan Yin or Quan Am-the Eternal Mother and so on. It may be recalled that when Buddhism was first introduced into Vietnam, Vietnamese Buddhists could not deny their beliefs in mythologies and in all traditional deities. Consequently, alongside Buddha, they venerated indiscriminately all bodhisattvas such as Sakyamuni Buddha, Buddha Maitreya etc.<sup>10</sup> It is because at first very few might have known the differences in nature and function of these divinities. Now as far as Cao Dai pantheon is concerned, there have been stimulating influence of the images and overtones of ancient Chinese millenarianism on the Cao Dai pantheon via Vietnamese *tam giao* traditions. Moreover, Cao Dai pantheon constituted strong images of seventy types of spirits alongside the Supreme Spirit. Thus understood Cao Dai pantheon may be considered as the revised version of the Western and Eastern pantheon that represents universal inclusiveness in its range of application. As Blagove mentioned, many Western observers indicated universalism of Caodaist pantheon.<sup>11</sup>

However, Caodaism's syncretic architecture and universalistic approach of its ideology served to integrate quite a good number of Vietnamese into a new religio-cultural system at two levels. At the top level, it absorbed Minh Ly leaders (as earlier chapters have discussed in details) into the services of its propagation and spread. At a lower social level, meanwhile, Cao Dai syncretic but universalistic ideology sought to expand the new community's agrarian base, and hence its wealth, by transforming forest lands into arable fields, and the nomadic or forest-dwelling very poor people inhabiting Tay Ninh region into settled farmers of rice and other important crops. In Tay Ninh, the Holy See played important roles in attracting and integrating pre-agrarian and non-Caodaist into their ritual, socio-economic and political

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<sup>10</sup> Blagov 1999, *op.cit.*, p.36.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

orbits. The Holy See thus served as key player at the very point in time that these communities were passing from a life of no hope to one of settled agriculture. In Tay Ninh province, where Cao Dai pioneers obtained grants from the members of well-to-do families<sup>12</sup> to clear virgin forests so as to expand the area of rice and rubber cultivation. These pioneers also constructed local and regional oratories alongside temples (Tanh That) that functioned as magnets integrating forest people both into an agrarian way of life focused on the Holy See and into a locally structured style of Caodaism heavily inflected with the structure of spirits and spirit-veneration. As a result of these processes, by the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of the twentieth century in Tay Ninh and across the South of Vietnam there appeared large communities of Cao Dai peasants who belonged mainly to the Tay Ninh branch of Caodaism, reflecting the sectarian affiliation of the pioneers and dignitaries in the forefront who had carried Cao Dai culture into the frontiers of French Cochinchina. It should be mentioned that the appearance of Caodai settlements in Tay Ninh and its suburbs involved a great socio-economic transformation of rural society in these regions. As a syncretic religion Caodaism appeared unique from a cross-cultural perspective. It provided a powerful stimulus to three great teachings (*tam giao*) and indirectly to Western traditions particularly Christianity. It became a grassroots social movement and has consistently taken its cue from broad, syncretistic and vociferously pro-Vietnamese themes, and these pervade theosophical teachings. Theosophical teachings, with their emphasis on fate or destiny (karma) are a blend of Hindu and Buddhist elements. But it should be noted here that Cao Dai believers deny the influence of Theosophy on Caodaism.<sup>13</sup>

Caodaism's emergence as a world religion is attributable in no small part to certain of its universal characteristics. First, the adherents have energy, drive, and the capacity for hard

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<sup>12</sup> Such conformity to the fact is recorded in A French Testimony. For a good treatment, see Gobron, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

work; they show immense application and an expectation of hardship far above tolerance. Second, they have discipline, leading to a capacity to act together. Caodaists are expected to act under discipline i.e., under an obligation to the universal family<sup>14</sup> and indeed to themselves and their personal honor. However, the task of the historian is to record and interpret the past. But it is tempting to ask questions of the future. In the long term, to what extent and how successfully will Caodaism cooperate with international associations for religious freedom? Will Caodaism be in the leading position in the world and its application in, say, the twenty first century? Whatever the future holds, Caodaism's maturity seems to be a proof of its capacity to change, to offer a new paradigm for a grand union of world religions, and to work constructively together with world religions for the achievement of global peace and harmony. Caodaism dreams of a grand union of religion and mankind and it concerns with all phases of life of mankind.

If we survey the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition we see that there is an intense interrelationship between Egyptian religions and the religion of Israel, between Persian Zoroastrianism and Christianity, and also between Christianity and Islam. So here too we have religious traditions that like the traditions of India and China build on and rely on one another. The problem with the West and Middle East is that there is a refusal to admit to these interrelationships and a need to erase the connections. This is often with dire and tragic consequences. Caodaism brings Eastern tolerance to the West with the pious hope that many eyes will be opened.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it brings Western compassion and kindness to the East with a view to creating a new epoch of overreaching liberation and freedom from adversity. The spirit of such universal amnesty is very clearly engraved, as essence of Caodaism, in the very name of the religion i.e., the *Third Great Way of Universal Salvation*.

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<sup>14</sup> Caodaists are entrusted with their fellow human beings and non-humans in the universal family. For a clear understanding see a Cao Dai prayer quoted in Gobron 1950, *op.cit.* p.47.

<sup>15</sup> See *Various Papers*, P.108

This attempt of Caodaism appears to be a syncretic mission. Cao Dai spirit messages, for example, propose such syncretic mission of the religion. Jayne Susan Werner prefers to see the emergence of this syncretic religion as a nativistic or revitalization attempt.<sup>16</sup> Here we can make a judgment as to the acceptance of Werner's observation. As per her investigation, on the one hand Caodaism is found to have regenerated parts of the dominant indigenous ideology and culture of Vietnamese society, but on the other hand it revitalized all borrowed elements and thereby reformulated a new order of world religion in response to bringing love and peace to mankind.<sup>17</sup> Caodaism tries to bring together the world through its syncretic doctrine that actually provides a great synthesis of world religions.<sup>18</sup> Although Caodaism encompasses many world religions it is actually extraordinarily unique in its belief system and practices.<sup>19</sup> The synthesis of Caodai philosophy has assumed different lines of development in accordance with the mood of both Eastern and Western traditions and thereby come to a mutual understanding to pave the way for a truly universal doctrine.

My overall analysis tends to prove the significance of the syncretic approach of Caodaism toward its growth and development within and out of Vietnam. In her research article J. Hoskins assigns to Cao Dai syncretic process the task of absorbing Western and Eastern elements into a new universal religion, and specially its social recognition in the social life of the South of Vietnam. At the same time, there has been a lot of debate about the point of how those elements were replaced with a new focus on national identity and authority. Here

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<sup>16</sup> Werner, *op. cit.*, p521.

<sup>17</sup> As Werner critically views, "Cao Dai ideology aimed in the first instance to revitalize those parts of Vietnamese culture which were under attack by Western ideas and no longer sustained by traditional Vietnamese institutions... Caodaist leaders were preoccupied by their conception of the fallen state and moral degeneration of Vietnamese society. They stressed that caodaism was the answer to arresting this social decay and providing a new foundation for Vietnamese life. The conception of this process of rebirth, it can be noted, had apocalyptic overtones. Caodaists not only slated Confucianism for renewal but Buddhism as well..."For a good discussion see Werner, *op. cit.*, p524.

<sup>18</sup> See Tran Quan Canh, "Brief Outline of History and Philosophy of Caodaism", a paper presented at International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) 31<sup>st</sup> Congress in Budapest, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

analysts have tried to show how the earlier Cao Dai dignitaries of versatile generous very tactfully made an attempt to follow the syncretic technique very carefully and thereby they converted borrowed elements into new sources of thought, words and actions. Hoskins, for example, finds that the central theme of Cao Dai syncretism is “the ways” by which Caodaists have Vietnamized their pantheon.<sup>20</sup> Although the issue of Cao Dai syncretism is much debated both in the academic and non-academic fields most of the early and contemporary researches and presentations on Caodaism support its syncretic orientation as positive, constructive, and integrating. Caodaism, for example, has developed its new Asian fusion cosmology as a response to spiritual stirrings of a new generation what Hoskins has called it “*de culture Francaise*”.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of the findings in chapter 1 to 6 and the conclusion presented in this chapter, the syncretic origin of Caodaism can now be summarized in brief. The relevant factors can be grouped into several categories, as follows:

1. Cao Dai syncretic doctrine contributes to promoting Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian values.<sup>22</sup> Cao Dai syncretic ideology proposes in the first instance the restoration of parts of Vietnamese culture which were under attack by foreign ideas and ideologies. With a view to regenerating the moral basis of the society the new religion came out its limited circle immediately after its official commencement in the late 1926. The early Caodaist leaders are reported to have been monopolized by their syncretic religious experience and attitude toward the restoration of moral values of Vietnamese society. They might have emphasized that the

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<sup>20</sup> Hoskins 2012, *op. cit.*, p.4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> As the Western and Eastern religions are considered as part of the total religious structured created by God from the First Revelation period to the Third Revelation period i.e., the current or the Final Revelation period. Thus the fund of Cao Dai syncretic doctrine is full of the doctrine of the Buddhas which includes Brahmanism and Buddhism; the doctrine of the Seraphims which includes Taoism; the doctrine of the Saints which includes Judaism, Christianity-Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Protestantism etc. and Islam; the doctrine of the Genies which includes the Chinese, Greek and Egyptian Mythologies; and the doctrine of the Sages which includes Confucianism. See Various Papers, *op. cit.*, p.113.

syncretic values of Caodaism might have been the cohesive response to restraining this social breakdown and contributing a new base for Vietnamese life in particular and life of the whole population of the world in general. In the wider sense, it can be said that this process of reviving people and returning them to consciousness suggests the *Primordial Unity*. Hence it may be said that Caodaism just maintains an ancient truth as it was similarly maintained by Christianity and the churches to found their eternal truth anew in changed social structures which have become autonomous in this world.<sup>23</sup>

2. Cao Dai syncretic doctrine proposes religious pluralism.<sup>24</sup> The conception of this process of rebirth seems playing a key role in not only in shaping modern thought of unification but also kindling scholastic interest. Thus understood the ultimate aim of Cao Dai syncretism is to bring about the unification of world religions. As it appears in a message, "God unites all religions in one: Caodaism ...toward Primordial Unity". With their historical approach and their comparative viewpoints, Caodaists assume that since the creation of mankind, the great way of God (Caodaism) has been shown in the three different epochs.<sup>25</sup> Caodaism has characterized this formulation of three epochs as an attempt to give new life with eternal peace and vision to humanity.<sup>26</sup> It used to be said that God will integrate religion and science giving inspiration to the spiritual and material life of mankind, will adapt His teaching to the progress of human spirit now more advanced and more refined than formerly.<sup>27</sup> In fact, social reality of the South of Vietnam demanded the emergence of Caodaism. With special reference to Worsley and Hobsbawm argument, it is more true to say that Caodaism emerged

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<sup>23</sup> Joan Brothers, *Readings in the Sociology of Religion*, (London, New York: Pergamon Press, 1967), p.34.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted here that religious pluralism is not used in the sense of academic discipline but more pointing out towards diversity in faith.

<sup>25</sup> According to Cao Dai theology, the third epoch actually proposes the opening of a "Great Way" (Dai Dao) or the third and last historical cycle of the Humanity. For a good treatment see Jeremy Jammes, 2009, *op. cit.*, p.334. As Werner

<sup>26</sup> As Werner notes, there was a thread of apocalyptic millenarianism in Cao Dai ideology by which Caodaists believed that history was divided into three epochs, with the third epoch, the Cao Dai epoch, to usher in eternal peace. For a good discussion see Werner 1976, *op. cit.*, p.525.

<sup>27</sup> *The Outline of Caodaism, op. cit.*, pp.17-21.

in times of social breakdown, political crisis, oppression, and despair on the part of the lower orders of the society.<sup>28</sup>

3. Cao Dai syncretism provides “Holistic Idea of Religiosity” to modern society. If we scan the socio-historical factors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of the South of Vietnam, we find that alongside *tam giao* traditions there were several connections between Catholicism and Caodaism. It might have been an attempt on early Caodaists’ part to discover the basic elements underlying different religions. Notably, Werner has characterized this strategy as an attempt to give new strain of “holistic idea of religiosity” to modern society. Thus understood Caodaists never bother to use frequent references to Christian beliefs and saints in Cao Dai spirit messages, sermons, and propaganda. Through this structure of holistic system of religiosity the religion used Catholic-like terminology for the ranks and titles of its hierarchical orders. Caodaists are found to have borrowed the word *Holy See*, copied the Catholic organization of dioceses and parishes, made Jesus Christ a leading saint in the Cao Dai pantheon and used him as a source of spirit messages. Thus, as Werner further views, there was a strong imprint of catholic institutions on Caodaism such as the use of the model of the Catholic Church as a whole for the Cao Dai organization and its priesthood. The organizational trappings of Caodaism were all in fact borrowed from the outside, as the structure of the Cao Dai Church was quite unprecedented in Vietnamese history.<sup>29</sup> However, in all these observations, Werner’s view of the issue can clearly be understood. The words have changed but not the contents. There is, actually, one difference, that the theme of the borrowed elements of Caodaism have been put the other way round, but remain essentially the same.

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<sup>28</sup> As Werner evaluates the argument of Worsley and Hobsbawm , socially Caodaism emerged at a time when the peasantry in Vietnam was in a state of turmoil and deprivation. Social institutions were falling apart as a consequence of the French colonial tyranny. For a good treatment see Werner, 1976, p.527.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.526.

4. Phenomenal growth of Caodaism attributes to several factors. The rapid growth of Caodaism in its early years was truly phenomenal. This phenomenal growth has been attributed to several factors. One factor was the prevalence of borrowed elements within the religion. At this point in the process of syncretism via absorption and assimilation, all instances of borrowed elements have actually been converted into native sources that help define the implication of Caodaism as a universal salvation to the peasant class in particular. In this case we can take the sociological function of religion into our account in order to examine how natural and religious organizations coincide in particular groups of people in the society.<sup>30</sup> This implies that the purely sociological inquiry is called for the examination of social contexts based on which Caodaism emerged, developed and arrested the attention of the mass Vietnamese peasants. Thomas E. Dutton already identified one source of borrowed elements for Caodaism that was actually not foreign to the early peasant converts of Caodaism. As Dutton examines, the *Taoist Triad Society* had long been active in Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> Thus understood the existence of this society led some to conclude that Caodaism incorporated elements and followers from the Triad Society in the early stage of its development. Another factor was the influence of local and national integration upon Caodaism. In an institutional sense, the integration of local and national structures created a scope in the South of Vietnam that was actually in harmony with the rise and development of Caodaism.

5. Cao Dai syncretism appears to stimulate an appreciation of the democratic process. Some sharp observations suggest that although more or less esoteric schools of Caodaism rejects some of the traditional Vietnamese beliefs and practices, the dominant Tay Ninh sect of the exoteric school does not force its adherents to give up much or any of their traditional beliefs. At this point it may be rationalized that this is more in keeping with Caodaist belief that all

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<sup>30</sup> Wach 1949, *op. cit.*, p34.

<sup>31</sup> Dutton, *op. cit.*, pp.7-8.

religions contain some truth and are part of the Great Way (That continued since the beginning of the creation of human beings).<sup>32</sup> Thus it may be said that Cao Dai “Reformulation of the Great Way” seems to be logical. And from the Caodaist point of view that Caodaism is really a compilation of the myriad religious influences which have touched Vietnam in the course of centuries. In the course of my current study it appears that Caodaism even never bothers recognizing the truths in all religions and includes them in its doctrines and teachings while excluding their separatist or chauvinistic tendencies. However, despite the reasonableness of the logic, I did not find any evidence that exposure to the Cao Dai belief system produces intolerance toward Vietnamese society. It does not seem to foster intolerance of non-Caodai individuals. Rather it does appear to produce tolerance of non-Caodai religious groups. However, I would insist that we cannot ignore the fact that Caodaism is an intermingling of all the various religious and philosophical influences that have reached the shores of Vietnam down through the centuries. Moreover, in the course of my analysis one of the surprising findings is that “Cao Dai Syncretism” seems to stimulate an appreciation of the democratic process. Or at least, this is suggested by the fact that exposure to the “Cao Dai Syncretism” produces tolerance toward world religions. In addition, its eclectic mixture of “the gods of Europe” and “the gods of Asia” drew the support of French-educated intellectuals, peasants and landlords, who yearned for an immediate contact with spirituality, presented as hybrid of indigenous traditions and modern democratic ideals.<sup>33</sup> As Caodaism tries to bring together the world through its syncretic doctrine, so does the world have to recognize itself as a world each part significantly interdependent on every other part.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Hoskins, “From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc...” A book chapter republished in *Cao Dai: A Collection of Various Papers*, p.184. For a comprehensive study see Deepak Shimkhada, *The Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess: Goddess Traditions of Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2008).

6. Cao Dai cultural syndrome simultaneously offers strong mutual ties to world religions. There is, of course, an obvious logic to say that the Caodaist adaptation of the norms of Confucian rigorism, Buddhist gentleness and metaphysical speculations, Taoist code of ethics and esoteric conceptions, and Christian noble morals have appeared to be clear evidences of the Eastern and Western influence. In that case, first to be considered is the fact that Caodaism has always made an attempt to blend all known religious influences into one philosophical unity. One reason of this for Caodaism was that it resolves the conflict within the Vietnamese personality. It is noted that in doing so Caodaism is found to have put the Vietnamese stamp on the numerous foreign influences which have for centuries permeated and destabilized Vietnamese society.<sup>34</sup> This is a matter which has profound implications not only for the Caodaist world, but for the world as a whole. This is to say that Caodaism, the Great Way of the Third Epoch, always tends to reconcile its ideology with the ideologies carried on by previous religions. In short, the Cao Dai system seems to foster this interesting and important cultural syndrome which simultaneously offers strong mutual ties to world religions. Thus, in its final form, Caodaism claims to be the synthesis of all religions.<sup>35</sup>

7. The blend of Western and Eastern spiritism is the foundation of Caodaism. Caodaism has been labeled as an occult syncretic religion that emphasizes the system of collective dogma and authority. In that case, spiritism has always been an element of key importance in Caodaism. Broadly speaking, the dynamic that Caodaists actually expose here about the roots of the emergence of Caodaism is again a synthesis of Eastern and Western spiritism. This development in Caodaism is obviously connected with syncretism. The importance of Western spiritism appears to demonstrate that early followers of Caodaism tended to view

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<sup>34</sup> As Dutton very clearly remarks in his concluding remarks, the Vietnamese society of the Mekong delta is a poorly integrated society. It is a region which has felt the thrust of Indian, Chinese, Islamic, and even Western philosophical traditions. See *Ibid.*, P-27.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

themselves in global context.<sup>36</sup> For instance, the theosophical concept of perispirit constitutes an important element of the Caodaist teaching. In this connection, it is interesting to speculate whether the blend of Western and Eastern spiritism is the foundation of Caodaism.

8. Caodaist syncretic borrowing appears to reflect global ambitions.<sup>37</sup> It should be pointed out that it is not the fact of borrowing, but the selectivity and intention of borrowing that add to scholars' understanding of religious thought. Janet Hoskins's analysis of the syncretic development of Caodaism suggests that scholars of Vietnamese religion have often described two parallel traditions, one identified with goddesses, spirit mediums and indigenous forms of worship, and another identified with Confucianism and Taoism, literate religions brought to Vietnam during the thousand year period of Chinese domination. Thus, according to Hoskins, as a syncretistic religion Caodaism presents an Asian fusion of millenarian and monotheistic beliefs. It also includes Judeo-Christian figures such as Jesus Christ and Moses, and integrates the veneration of spirits of nature and great heroes.<sup>38</sup> However, a main theme in Caodaism is that all religions are one. This is a strong tie that binds Caodaism to all the other religions that God has revealed. Caodaism brings together opposing themes in Asian and even Occidental religious life and presents the example of a modern religion which synthesizes gender division in a unifying practice premised on the possibility of universal redemption.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> It would be interesting to review the saga of Caodaist community Caodaist communities have been settled around the world. Rising up from the shock of defeat, it is only now, almost a generation on, that overseas Caodaists are growing more active and confident in the different societies and languages within which they now live and work. And it is only now that Caodaists are making an effort to gather social acceptance and new members among the Vietnamese community.

<sup>37</sup> To the extent Caodaist syncretic and universalistic would be synthesis may also be viewed in terms of the dialogue between the East and the West or what Blagove has called it "planetarization". For a good discussion see Blagov "Caodaism: Global Ambition Vs Persecution", a paper presented at CESNUR 1999 Conference, Pennsylvania, at [https://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br\\_blagov.htm](https://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br_blagov.htm), Retrieved February 2, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed study see Hoskins, "From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Deities in the Caodai Pantheon" *op. cit.*, pp81-100.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

In short, my data led me to the final stage of conclusion that the work of collection, redaction, and codification continues. The written tradition now replaces the oral tradition in the form of sacred writings. African and Polynesian mythologies, for example, illustrate the first step in this process. Babylonian, Egyptian, Mexican, Chinese, and Greek religions show the next step, which is the distinct tendency toward unification and codification. The holy books with their well-developed dogma-Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism-illustrate the third step.<sup>40</sup> Now if we compare Cao Dai syncretic process with these three steps we will find syncretism as a common process to be adopted more or less by all religions down through the centuries. Thus, it has been demonstrated that syncretic process is traceable through the whole history of religion. In addition, this process can be most clearly followed in the history of Cao Dai religion from its origin until its transformation into final development. Caodaism manages to put aside whichever of those criticisms first occurred to it and thereby the religion very successfully entered the journey of the Great Way with its syncretic approach. As Hoskins in her famous work *The Divine Eye* puts forward the view, “Caodaism represented a conversion to a kind of modernity, an exercise of individual choice based on reason, careful deliberation, and historical consciousness. It was a movement designed to assert the right to practice Vietnamese syncretistic traditions under the label of a religion, rather than as a motley set of indigenous practices and superstitions not dignified by this label”.<sup>41</sup> However, as per Hoskins’ account of the Cao Dai syncretism, we can argue that it may be identified with outrageous only in its restricted sense but for Caodaists it actually appears to be a constructive and integrating factor in Cao Dai religion. It may be pointed out that the central theme of Cao Dai syncretism is actually the way in which Caodaism approaches all borrowed elements from a refreshed and new viewpoint. Hoskins puts this concept more precisely when she has characterized

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<sup>40</sup> Wach 1949, *op. cit.*, pp.22-23.

<sup>41</sup> Hoskins, *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora*, pp.4-5.

Caodaism as a syncretic mixture of the Eastern religions and at the same time reimagined it within the external structure of a modern, monotheistic religion.<sup>42</sup> Thus, we must deduce from her argument that the themes dealt with in the syncretic doctrine of Caodaism are the new versions of the themes of the older ones which have been transparently assimilated into Caodaism. It is my conclusion that to the degree the Cao Dai Syncretic orientation strengthens the hold of Caodaism in the modern history of religion.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.5.

## Appendix 1

The following photographs show the Annual Grand Festival Commemorating the Holy Mother Goddess (in Vietnamese Hoi Yen Dieu Tri Cung) that is held on the 15th and 16th of the lunar month of August every year. The researcher had occasions to attend the festival and observe all fabulous events several times in the years 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2018.



Photograph 1: Hosted by the Sacerdotal Council of the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See, this celebration usually attracts tens and thousands of pilgrims and tourists from all over Vietnam and many countries abroad (Photo Credits Bill Roberts, a Freelance Writer and Photographer, posted on Caodai.com.vn, 25/9/2018).



Photograph 2: Every year the festival witnesses hundred of exhibition stands which are set up around the Holy Mother Goddess' Temple (Photo Credit Bill Roberts posted on Caodai.com.vn 25/9/2018).



Photograph 3: Hundred of stands hold mainly flowers, fruits and other foods in highly-decorated arrangements (Photo Credits Caodai.com.vn September 2013).



Photograph 4: Stands represent offerings to the Holy Mother Goddess and Her Nine Muses marked in circles (Photo Credit Bill Roberts posted on Caodai.com.vn 25/9/2018).



Photograph 5: The researcher is seen (fourth from right) with Cao Dai scholars and devotees while he attended the festival celebrated in 2013 during his stay in Tay Ninh (Photo Credits Caodai.com.vn September 2013).



Photograph 6: Festival features flag parade that is followed by the Divine Altar (Photo Credits Bill Roberts 25/9/2018).



Photograph 7: (Photo Credits Bill Roberts 25/9/2018).



The parade consisted of diverse performances including the fabulous dragon dance (Photograph: 7), lion dance (Photograph: 8), phoenix dance, turtle dance and many other musical and cultural activities creates the Holy See environ full of joy and amusements. Photograph 8: (Photo Credit Bill Roberts 25/9/2018).

## Appendix 2

### The Great Divine Temple



Photograph 1: The Exterior Side of Cao Dai Holy See in Tay Ninh (Photograph Credits Tran Quang Canh, the current president of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary)



Photograph 2: The interior of Temple Dignitaries and members in daily ritual ceremony (Photograph Credits Tran Quang Canh)

### Appendix 3

Selected Photos of the Researcher's Field Trip to different provinces of the South of Vietnam and Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia (a visit made for the purpose of firsthand observation and collecting materials on primary and secondary sources)

**Location: My Tho City**



Photographs 1, 2, 3: With three Caodai dignitaries in My Tho city on October 23, 2013.

**Location: Ben Tre City**



Photograph 4: With Hean Phap Lu Minh Chao in Ben Tre City on October 24, 2013  
(Photograph Credits, Le Thanh)

**Location: Can Tho City**





Photographs 5, 6, 7: With Giao Ho, Than Son Thanh, Nguyen Kim Chi and Tien Hanh in Can Tho City on October 26, 2013 (Photographs Credits, Le Thanh).

**Location: Tay Ninh City**





Photographs 8, 9, 10: With a Caodaist lady, Bac Chuong, a Great Contributor to Cao Dai Overseas Missionary in California, USA, and a Cao Dai Bishop in Tay Ninh in October 2013.

**Location: Phu Quoc Island**



Photograph 11: With a Caodai dignitary on Phu Quoc Island located off the coast of Cambodia in November 2013.

**Location: Ho Chi Minh City**



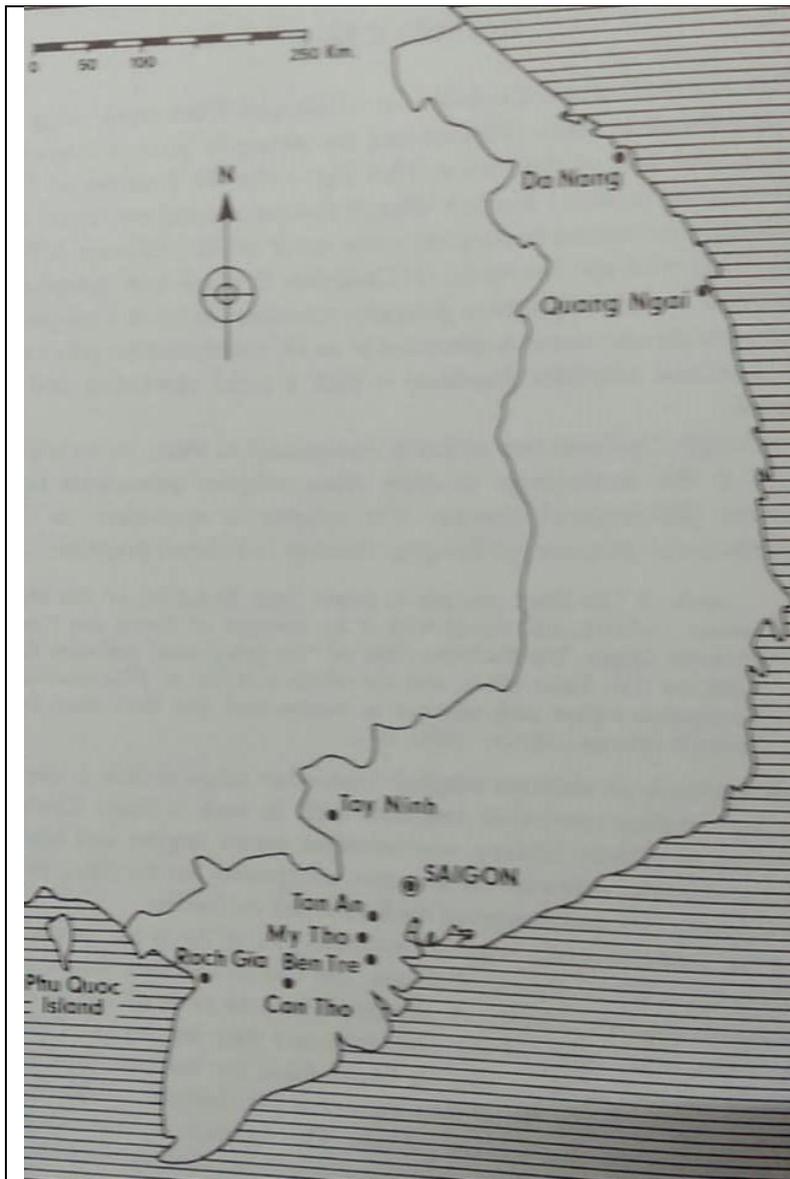
Photograph 12: Visited History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City on September 22, 2013

**Location: Phnom Penh City**



Photographs 13, 14: With Phan Van Quang, Deputy Leader of the Temple, Phnom Phen, Tran Minh Net, Secretary of the Temple and Vo Quang Minh, Representative of Cao Dai in Cambodia (Photo Credits Vo Thanh Tam, 18/8/2013)

Except Da Nang and Quang Ngai in the central and south central of Vietnam, researcher has visited all places of the South of Vietnam dotted in the map.

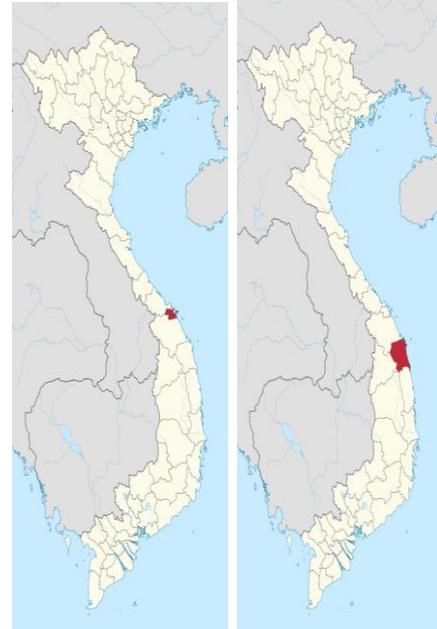


Maps 1: The locations of some major Cao Dai centers in the South of Vietnam are visited by the researcher during his stay in Vietnam (Map Credits, Oliver, 1972, p.289.

The North of Vietnam is not seen in the map.

Da Nang

Quang Ngai



Map 2, 3: Da Nang and Quang Ngai are provinces in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam, on the coast of East Sea

(Map Sources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da\\_Nang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da_Nang); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quang\\_Ngai\\_Province](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quang_Ngai_Province))

**Tay Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City ( Old Sai Gon), Tan An, My Tho, Ben Tre, Rach Gia, Can Tho and Phu Quoc Island are seen in the lower part of the map.**

## Appendix 4



Photograph 1: Standing in front of a library which the researcher visited during his stay in Tay Ninh province. In response to the following letter the researcher is permitted to visit the library regularly. The letter was issued by Mr. Nguyen Tuan Em, who is currently working as Assistant Director of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary.

**CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM**

Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc

*Tây Ninh, ngày 22 tháng 10 năm 2013*

**THƯ GIỚI THIỆU**

Kính gửi: Ban lãnh đạo Thư Viện Khoa học tổng hợp Tỉnh Tây Ninh.

Tôi tên: Nguyễn Tuấn Em

Ngày sinh: 21-4-1979

Số chứng minh nhân dân: 290 659 152, ngày cấp: 7/6/2000 tại CA Tây Ninh.

Hiện công tác tại: Khoa Ngoại Ngữ, Trường CĐSP Tây Ninh.

Địa chỉ thường trú: A15/3A, Ninh Đức, Ninh Thạnh, Thị xã Tây Ninh, Tỉnh Tây Ninh.

Tôi viết thư này để giới thiệu anh **MOHAMMAD JAHANGIR ALAM**, sinh ngày **10-06-1977**, hiện là Giáo sư dự khuyết của Khoa Tôn Giáo Thế Giới của trường Đại Học Dhaka, Bangladesh đến thư viện đọc sách và tìm hiểu tài liệu về Tôn giáo Cao Đài.

Tôi đã quen biết anh ALAM được hai (02) năm khi anh đến Việt Nam để học tiếng Việt và nghiên cứu đề tài về Đức Ngài Phạm Hộ Pháp cho bài luận văn tiến sĩ của anh. Trong quá trình tiếp xúc với Anh ALAM, tôi nhận thấy anh ấy là người rất yêu thích đọc sách, có tinh thần học tập tốt, có thái độ hòa nhã, lịch sự và tôn trọng người khác.

Khi biết Anh ALAM đến Thư Viện khoa học tổng hợp tỉnh Tây Ninh tìm sách về Tôn Giáo Cao Đài để làm cơ sở cho bài nghiên cứu của mình và theo yêu cầu của Thư viện cần người biết Anh ALAM để giới thiệu, tôi viết thư này để giới thiệu đến Ban lãnh đạo thư viện để anh Alam có thể được tiếp cận các loại tài liệu về Tôn giáo Cao Đài, giúp anh hoàn thành luận văn.

Tôi rất mong Ban lãnh đạo Thư viện xem xét, giúp đỡ để anh ALAM có điều kiện thu thập tài liệu về Tôn giáo Cao Đài cho bài luận văn tiến sĩ của mình. Tôi xin chịu trách nhiệm về tư cách đạo đức của Anh ALAM khi anh đến thư viện đọc sách hoặc sưu tầm tài liệu.

Trân trọng kính chào,

Nguyễn Tuấn Em

Giảng viên Khoa Ngoại Ngữ,

Trường CĐSP Tây Ninh

Email: [Elmertoni@yahoo.com.vn](mailto:Elmertoni@yahoo.com.vn)

Tel: 0979 980 918

## Appendix 5

### Materials used in Altar and the Disposition of God's Altar



Photographs 1, 2: Disposition of God's Altar properly arranged with nine types of things i.e., 1) Divine Eye, 2) Lamp, 3) Fruits, 4) Flowers, 5) Cup of Tea (on the left), 6) Three Glasses of Wine, 7) Cup of Pure Water (on the right) 8) Two Candles, 9) a Vase for 5 Sticks of Incense is found in all local temples and at home. Disposition of God's Altar (Photograph 2) in the Great Temple located in the Holy See also uses the same items. (Photographs Source: <https://www.daotam.info/caodai.htm> Retrieved April 20 2019).

## Appendix 6

### The legends of Caodaism and its History

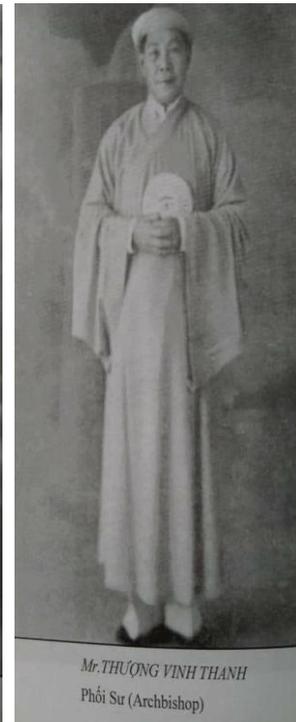
1.



2.



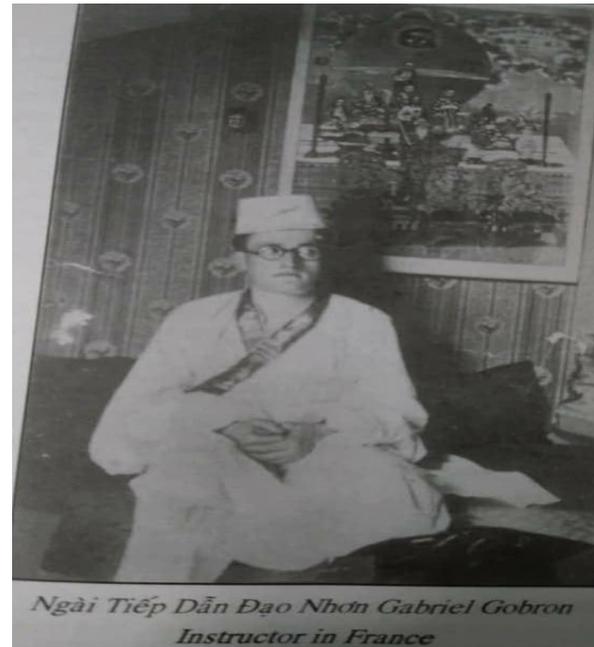
5.



3.



4.



Photographs 1) Duc Ngo Van Chieu, the first disciple of God, 2) Duc Le Van Trung, the first Acting Pope of Caodaism, 3) Duc Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, the Defender of the Religion, 4) Ngai Tiep Dan Dao Nhon Gabriel Gobron, Instructor in French and the author of voluminous Cao Dai literatures, and 5) Archbishop Tran Quang Vinh (religious name: Thuong Vinh Thanh) first Chief of Cao Dai Army and the first President of Cao Dai Overseas Missionary (Photo Credits, Gobron, *History and Philosophy of Caodaism* (re-edited in 2011) pp.

17,23,29, 88). As for the photograph of Ho Phap Pham Cong Tac, the researcher has collected this photo from the Cao Dai Temple located in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

## Appendix 7



Photograph 1: Divine Eye (Thien Nhan), the Major Religious Symbol of Caodaiism that is also believed to be the Representative of God (Photo Source: <https://www.daotam.info/caodai.htm> Retrieved April 20 2019).

## Appendix 8

### Vietnamese Lunar Calendar



Photograph 1: As per Vietnamese lunar calendar each of the zodiac signs comes back to their respective numerical position after every twelve years. The Rat comes to the first position of 12 zodiac signs while the Pig holds the last position in a twelve year time circle. Notably, the same calendar is followed by the Caodaists in order to serve the purposes of their religious activities.

(Photo Source: <https://www.vietvisiontravel.com/category/zodiac/> Retrieved 12 April, 2019).

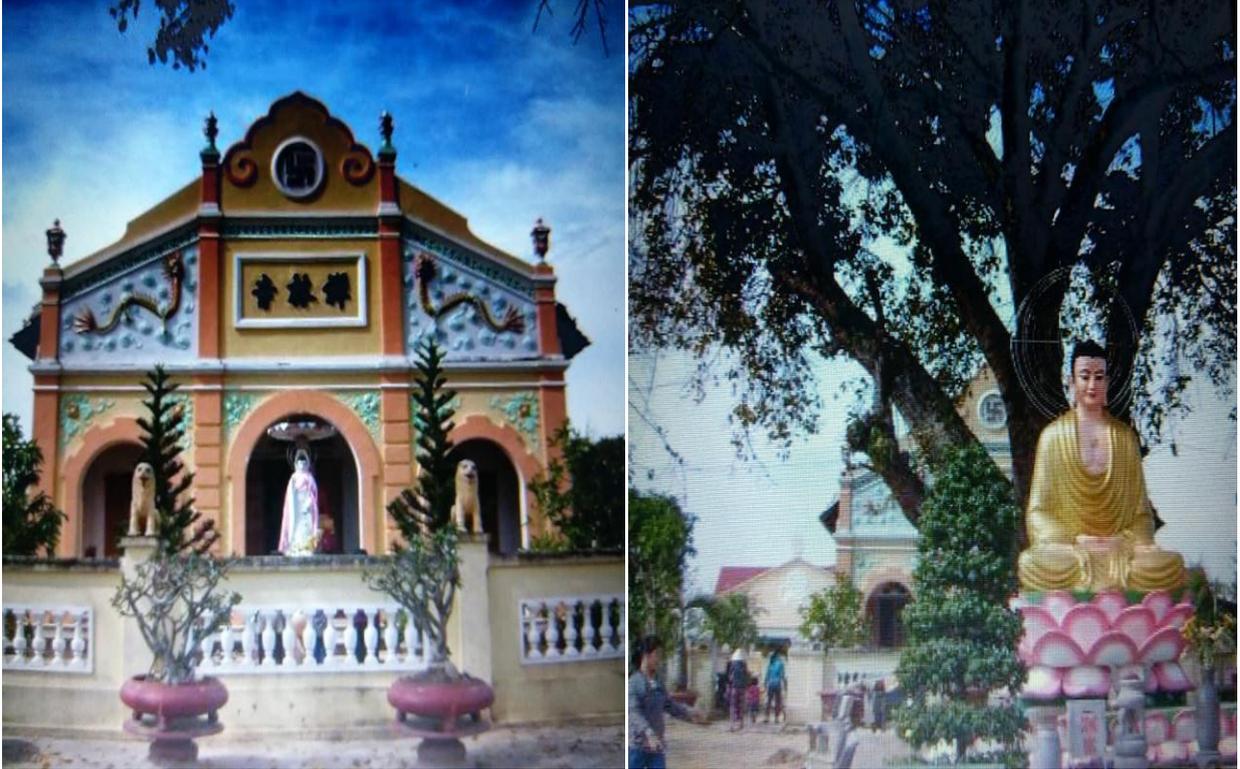
Rat	1924	1936	1948	1960	1972	1984	1996	2008	2020	2032
Buffalo	1925	1937	1949	1961	1973	1985	1997	2009	2021	2033
Tiger	1926	1938	1950	1962	1974	1986	1998	2010	2022	2034
Cat	1927	1939	1951	1963	1975	1987	1999	2011	2023	2035
Dragon	1928	1940	1952	1964	1976	1988	2000	2012	2024	2036
Snake	1929	1941	1953	1965	1977	1989	2001	2013	2025	2037
Horse	1930	1942	1954	1966	1978	1990	2002	2014	2026	2038
Goat	1931	1943	1955	1967	1979	1991	2003	2015	2027	2039
Monkey	1932	1944	1956	1968	1980	1992	2004	2016	2028	2040
Rooster	1933	1945	1957	1969	1981	1993	2005	2017	2029	2041
Dog	1934	1946	1958	1970	1982	1994	2006	2018	2030	2042
Pig	1935	1947	1959	1971	1983	1995	2007	2019	2031	2043

Table 1 shows the animals and their corresponding years.

Source:<https://www.vietvisiontravel.com/post/animal-vietnamese-zodiac/>, Retrieved 12 April, 2019.

## Appendix 9

### Tu Lam Tu Pagoda



Photographs 1, 2: In the village of Go Ken (now suburb), five-kilometers south of the town of Tay Ninh, Tu Lam Tu Pagoda (now renovated) had just built in August 1926 by a Buddhist monk, Nhu Nhan who dedicated the temple to the new religion for its inaugural ceremony held in November 1926. Some 50,000 followers and local people attended the ceremony that is reported to have lasted for three consecutive days (Photo source Caodai.com.vn). After the Great Divine Temple in the premises of the Holy See is built by 1917, the pagoda is returned to the Buddhist community in Go Ken.

## Appendix 10

### Acculturation in Vietnam and the Emergence of Caodaism

Figure 1: Major Factors or Process of Acculturation

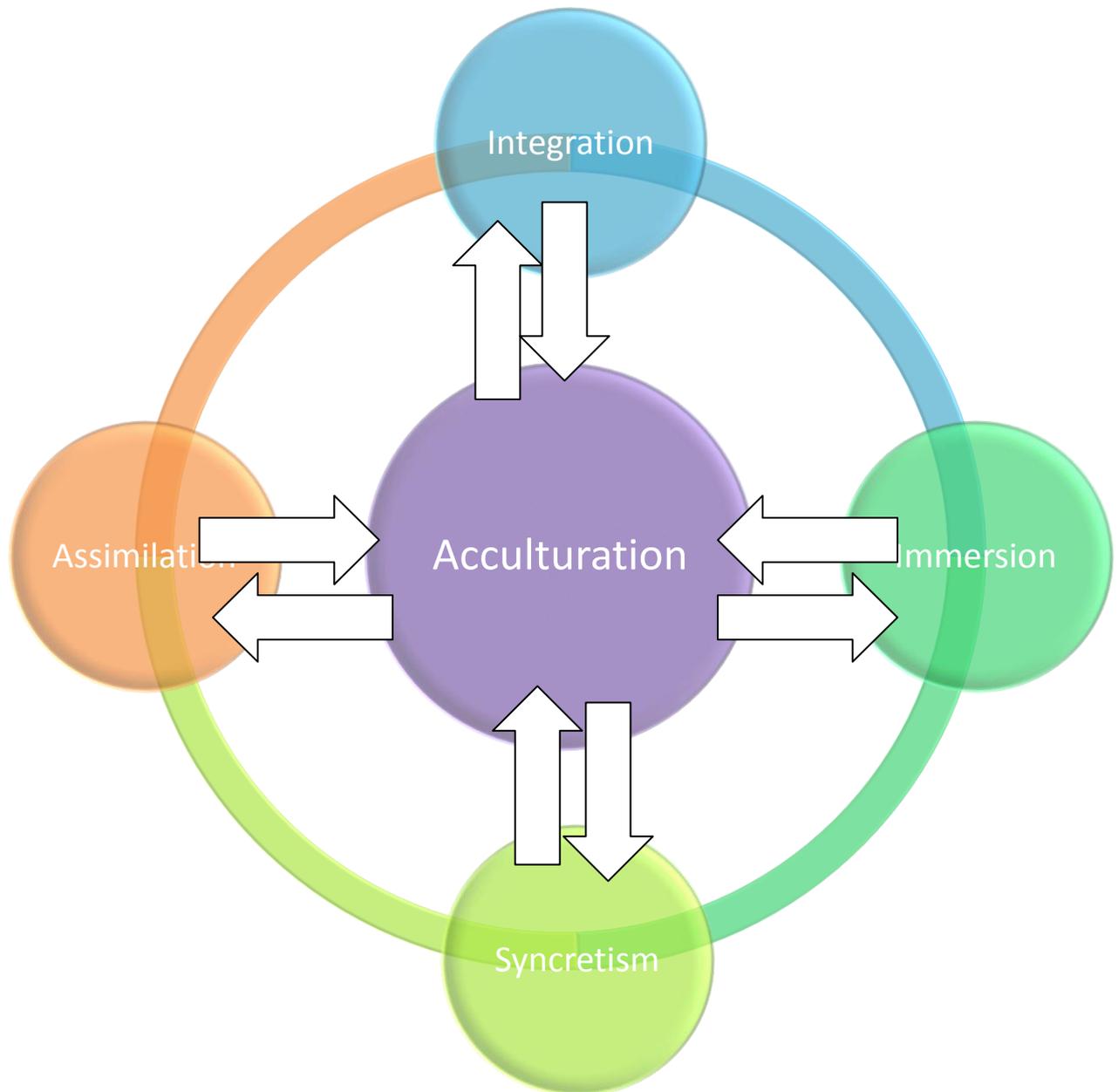
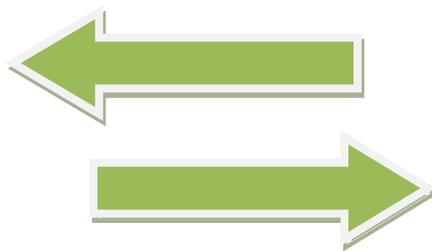


Figure 1 shows the relationship between acculturation (central factor) and its sub factors emphasizing both interaction in the center circle and how interaction in the outer ring of circles contributes to the central factor. Here, it proposes how acculturation occurs based on

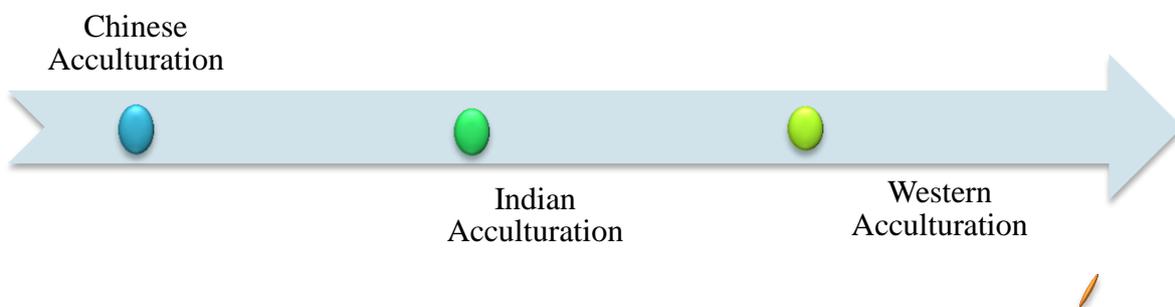
the interaction between the existing systems of a particular society and the significant role of the certain factors in influencing such systems. In fact, acculturation occurs more or less in every society. However, in comparison to the North of Vietnam it seems acculturation predominated over the social milieu of the South of Vietnam down through the centuries. As a result, the society in the South of Vietnam had remained predominantly liberal in appearance. Thus, at a certain stage of socio-political change beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the rise of Caodaism in the South of Vietnam itself is a case to prove the point.

**Figure 2: Acculturation: A Two-way Process**



Acculturation is also a two-way process because two cultures are still changed and be affected by each other. Any time when two cultures come into prolonged contact, acculturation starts to happen. In most cases, the society in the South of Vietnam is found to be a readymade ground for the occurrence of acculturation. But such was not always the case. This two-way process of acculturation can be considered as responsible for the emergence of a new religion.

**Figure 3: Asian and Western Acculturation in Vietnam**



- The recorded history, as registered in Chinese annals, begins only in 208 B.C., while the dynamic Han dynasty annexed Nam Viet a century later as the Chinese province of Giao Chi. As Hickey remarks, by 218 B.C., the Red River delta was part of the southern territories of China under Emperor Shih Huang Ti. After his death in 212 B.C., China went through a period of anarchy. During this time, the Red River delta

and the coastal areas of Southern China became the kingdom of Nam Viet.<sup>1</sup> According to Reischauer and Fairbank, Chinese contact with Vietnam occurred as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>2</sup>

- The Indian subcontinent has once more become a significant exporter of religions and religious ideas to the east for over 2000 years ago. The Indian subcontinent has once more become a significant exporter of religions and religious ideas to the east for over 2000 years ago. Some of these religions and ideas, of course, have travelled with the spread of South Asian communities in the past centuries throughout the world. But more significant are those religious ideas generated in India which have influenced men of many different faiths living outside the subcontinent. During the reign of Champan kings in Vietnam Hinduism was patronized as if it got its primacy over the kingdom and continued its influence till the demise of this prominent kingdom. The kingdom of Champa was founded in 192 A.D.<sup>3</sup>
  
- The area had been visited by traders from ancient Rome, then by an occasional Catholic missionary before 1535. The bold Portuguese sailed to Vietnam from Macao, on the southern edge of China in 1557. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch and English closed the small offices they had opened earlier in Ha Noi. The French shut down their post at Pho Hien. Finally, the French established their colony in 1893.<sup>4</sup>

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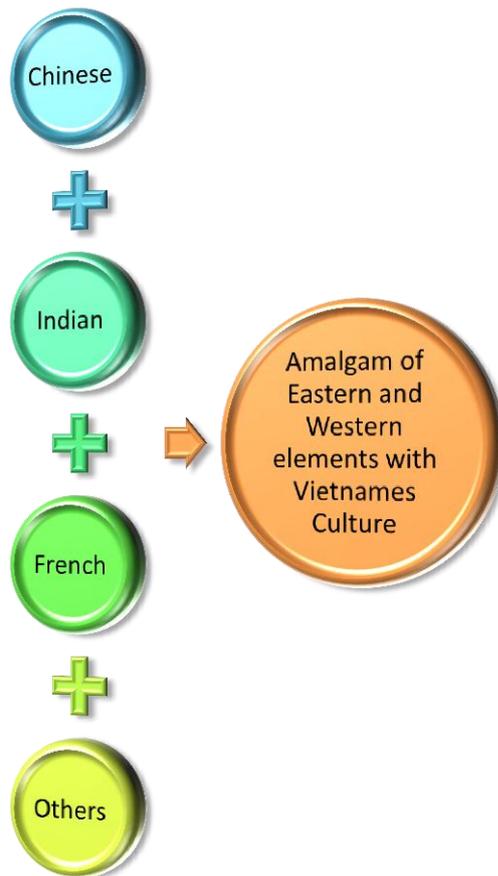
<sup>1</sup> Gerald C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, (CT: Yale University Press, 1964), pp.2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Reischauer, Edwin O. and Fairbank, John K., *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> John Haywood, *Historical Atlas of the Medieval World, AD 600-1492*, (Barnes & Noble, 1998), p.3.31

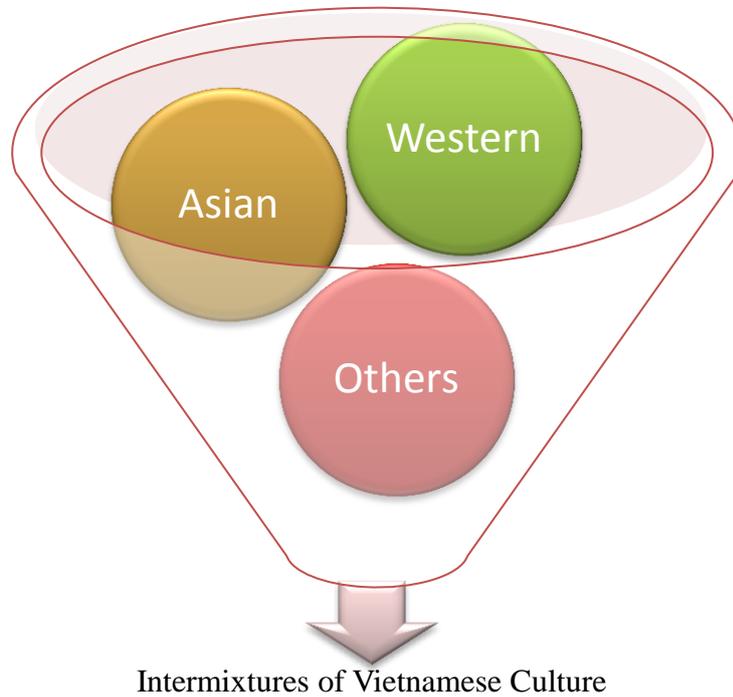
<sup>4</sup> The bold Portuguese sailed to Vietnam from Macao, on the southern edge of China in 1557. The first European to plant a durable settlement there was Antonio Da Faria, who in 1535 found a suitable site for a harbor at Faifo, 15 miles south of Tourane (Modern Da Nang). By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch and English closed the small offices they had opened earlier in Ha Noi. The French shut down their post at Pho Hien. The merchants failed but Catholic missionaries evolved a different approach and with greater success. The Catholic Church left a deeper imprint on Vietnam than on any other country apart from Philippines. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese embraced the new faith, for diverse reasons. See Karnow, *op. cit.*, pp.68-71).

**Figure 4: Cultural Amalgamations in Vietnam**



A long run acculturation process turns Vietnamese socio-cultural milieu into a complex amalgam of old and new as well as domestic and foreign sources.

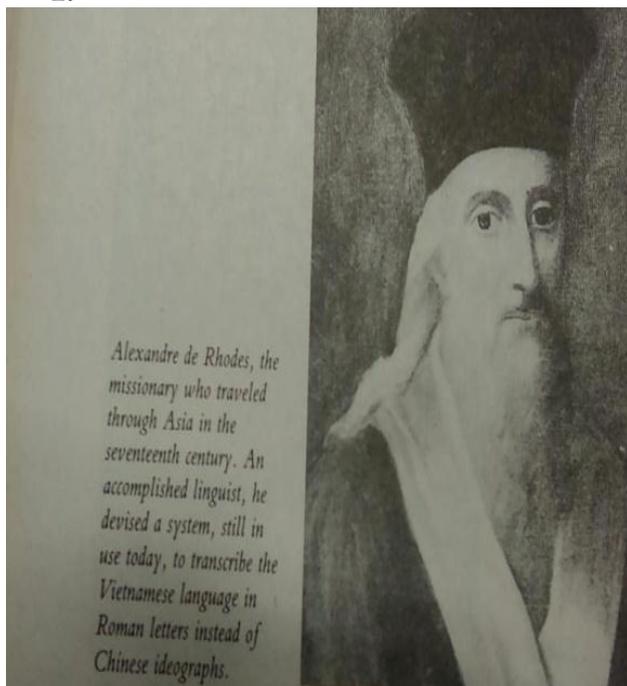
**Figure 7: A Complex amalgamation followed by the foundation of new syncretic religion**



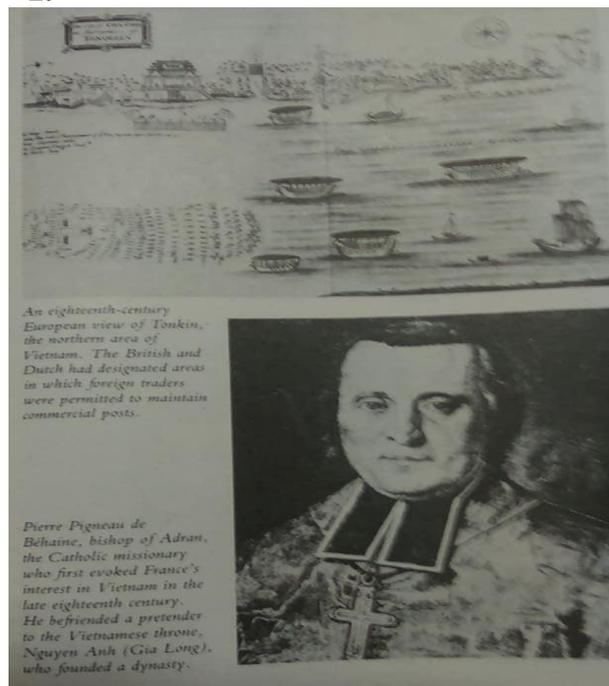
In such an intersection of interactions between domestic and foreign cultural elements creates the foundation for the emergence of Caodaism as a syncretic religion.

## Appendix 11

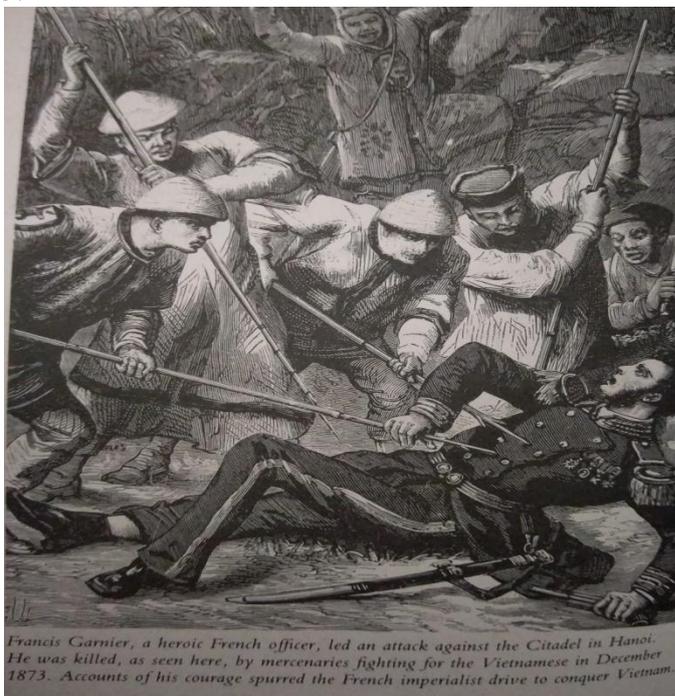
1.



2.



3.



1. Alexander de Rhodes, the missionary who traveled through Asia in the 17th century. An accomplished linguist, he devised a system, still in use today, to transcribe the Vietnamese language in Roman letters instead of Chinese ideographs.

2. Pierre Pigneau de Behaine, bishop of Adran, the catholic missionary who first evoked France's interest in Vietnam in the late 18th century. He befriended a pretender to the Vietnamese throne, Nguyen Anh (Gia Long) who founded a dynasty.

3. Francis Garnier, a heroic French officer, led an attack against the Citadel in Hanoi. He was killed, as seen here, by mercenaries fighting for the Vietnamese in December 1873. Accounts of his courage spurred the French imperialist drive to conquer Vietnam.

Photographs 1, 2, 3: Alexandre de Rhodes, Pierre Pigneau de Behaine and Francis Garnier (Photo Source, Karnow, Vietnam: A History, pp.60-62)

## Appendix 12

### Liturgical Calendar

According to the Book of Prayers/ Kinh Thien Dao va The Dao (Toa Thanh Tay Ninh, 1975), the following ceremonies and holy days are held at all temples. These ceremonies follow the lunar calendar, except for the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth (Christmas) in December and that of Duc Nguyet Tam Chon Nhon (Victor Hugo) on May 22nd.

- 1 Month 1: Celebration of Tet Nguon Dan/ Lunar New Year (The return of Divine Beings)
- 9 Month 1: The Supreme Being's Day, God (Duc Chi Ton, Duc Cao Dai)
- 15 Month 1: Thuong Nguon Ceremony (Beginning of year, or the start of the first-third of the year)
- 15 Month 1: Ngai Truong Tiep Phap's Day (to commemorate the late Juridical Legislator)
- 22 Month 1: Ngai Tran Khai Phap's (to commemorate the late Juridical Reformer)
- 29 Month 1: Phoi Thanh Bui Ai Thoai's Day (to commemorate Saint Bui Ai Thoi)
- 15 Month 2: Duc Thai Thuong Lao Quan's Day, the founder of Daoism (to commemorate His Holiness Taishang Laojun)
- 19 Month 2: Duc Phat Quan Am's Day (to commemorate Her Holiness Quan Yin)
- 1 Month 3: His Holiness Cao Thuong Pham's Day (to commemorate the late Head of Spiritual Affairs)
- 26 Month 3: His Holiness Cao Thuong Sanh's Day (to commemorate the late Head of Temporal Affairs)
- 8 Month 4: Duc Phat Thic Ca's Day (to commemorate His Holiness Gautama Buddha)
- 8 Month 4: Ba Nu Dau Su Lam Huong Thanh's Day (to commemorate the first female Cardinal of Cao Dai Religion)
- 10 Month 4: His Holiness Pham Cong Tac's Day (to commemorate the disincarnating of the Ho Phap-Head of Legislative Affairs)
- 5 Month 5: Birthday Anniversary of His Holiness Pham Cong Tac, Ho Phap
- 11 Month 5: Ba Dau Su Nguyen Huong Hieu's Day
- 22 May (Western Calendar): Duc Nguyet Tam Chon Nhon's Day (to commemorate His Eminence Victor Hugo)
- 22 Month 5: Ngai Cao Tiep Dao's Day (to commemorate the late Religious Legislator)
- 24 Month 6: Duc Quan Thanh De Quan's Day (to commemorate His Holiness Kuan Sheng Ti Chun/Guan Sheng Di Jun, Kuan Kung/Guan Gong)
- 15 Month 7: Trung Nguon Ceremony (Middle part of the year)
- 21 Month 7: Ngai Dau Su Thai Tho Thanh's Day (to commemorate the late Cardinal Thai Tho Thanh)
- 15 Month 8: Hoi Yen Dieu Tri (The Dieu Tri Festival / The Mother Buddha's Festival)
- 18 Month 8: Duc Ly Giao Tong's Day (to commemorate the Spiritual Pope Li T'ai Po)
- 27 Month 8: Duc Khong Thanh's Day (to commemorate His Holiness Confucius)
- 4 Month 9: Ngai Bao Van Phap Quan's Day (to commemorate the late Head of Cultural Affairs)
- 7 Month 9: Ngai Nguyen Bao Phap's Day (to commemorate the late Juridical Conservator)
- 1 Month 10: Phoi Thanh Pham Van Mang's Day (to commemorate Saint Pham Van Mang)
- 13 Month 10: His Holiness Thuong Trung Nhut's Day (to commemorate the First Caodaist interim Pope)
- 15 Month 10: Le Ha Nguon Ceremony (the last period of year), and Commemoration of Dai dao Tam Ky Pho Do (Commemoration of the inauguration of the Cao Dai Religion)
- 19 Month 10: Ngai Ca Bao Dao's Day (note - 18 Month 12: Ngai Ho Bao Dao's Day, to commemorate the late Religious Conservator)

- 25 December (Western Calendar): His Holiness Jesus Christ's Day (Christmas Eve)
  - 24 Month 12: Dua Chu Thanh Ceremony (departure of Divine Beings to Heaven)
- Source <http://www.caodaicenter.org/liturgical-calendar> Retrieved Jan 13, 2018

## Appendix 13

### Sample Texts of Spirit Messages

592

Present at the séance:  
A few dignitaries and  
two Frenchman

Holy See at Tây-ninh, 8 June 1926  
(26th day of the 4th month of the  
year Bính-Dần)

CAO ĐÀI THE VERY HIGHEST

O Blessed race, I am going to satisfy your curiosity.  
Human beings, do you know where you come from?  
You are the most blessed among all the creatures  
living on this earthly globe. I raise you up as far as  
myself in spirit and wisdom. You have demonstrated all the  
proof needed to be recognized for celestial promotion.

Christ has come among you. He shed his blood for  
the Redemption. What have you learned during almost two  
thousand years of his absence? You preach his Evangel  
without even understanding it. You minimize the signifi-  
cance of his holy doctrine. Humanity suffers from the  
vicissitudes of all the apostles. They have not followed  
the same road of Calvary as their Master.

The most precious throne in the world is that of the  
first disciples.

This doctrine, instead of bringing humanity peace  
and concord has brought it dissension and war.

This is why I come myself to bring you peace as  
promised.

Christ will come later.  
You will learn many more things from my disciples.

Farewell.

Present at the séance:  
Some dignitaries and  
two Frenchmen

Holy See at Tây-ninh, 27 October 1926  
(17th day of the 9th month of the  
year Bính-Dần)

ALL-POWERFUL GOD

(who comes under the name Cao Đài  
to speak the truth to Annam)

Humanity suffers from all sorts of vicissitudes. I have sent Allan Kardec. I have sent Flammarion as I have sent Eli and St. John the Baptist, precursors of Jesus Christ . . . . One was persecuted and the other killed by you. You only venerate him in Spirit and not in Holiness.

I wanted to talk with you at the time of Moses on Mt. Sinai, but you did not understand me. The promise that I made to your ancestors about the redemption and the coming of Christ was predicted. You did not want to acknowledge this. I now have to use myself, in a more spiritual way, to convince you. You will not be able to deny, when the Great General Judgment comes that I have saved humanity by all reasonable means. Although I am indulgent, I will not be able to erase all the sins you have created since the creation. The world, from this moment, is in the shadows. God's virtue is destroyed; universal hatred envenoms people; world war is inevitable.

The French race and the Annamite race are my two blessed races.

I want you to be united forever. The new doctrine that I teach aims to put you in a community of common interest and life. Be united therefore through my will and preach peace and concord to the world.

This is enough for this evening.

Farewell.

Archbishop Tran Quang Vin is reported to have translated these spirit messages into French from Vietnamese. Source: Werner 1976, op. cit., pp.52,594.

## Appendix 14



Map 1: Ancient Indianized Kingdoms of Champa are seen in Indian Names in the old map of Vietnam (Map Source History Museum, Ho Chi Minh City September 21, 2013).

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