

**Asia Research Institute  
Working Paper Series No. 189**

**“God’s Chosen People”:  
Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Struggle  
in French Indochina**

**Janet Hoskins**  
University of Southern California, USA  
jhoskins@usc.edu

**September 2012**



The **ARI Working Paper Series** is published electronically by the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each Working Paper.

ARI Working Papers cannot be republished, reprinted, or reproduced in any format without the permission of the paper's author or authors.

**Note:** The views expressed in each paper are those of the author or authors of the paper. They do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the Asia Research Institute, its Editorial Committee or of the National University of Singapore.

Citations of this electronic publication should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," ARI Working Paper, No. #, Date, [www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm](http://www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm). For instance, Smith, John, "Ethnic Relations in Singapore," ARI Working Paper, No. 1, June 2003, [www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm).

#### **Asia Research Institute Editorial Committee**

Michelle Miller - Chair

Jeremy Kingsley

Jonathan Benney

Liang Yongjia

Maureen Hickey

Peter Marolt

Tim Bunnell

Valerie Yeo

#### **Asia Research Institute**

National University of Singapore

469A Tower Block #10-01,

Bukit Timah Road,

Singapore 259770

Tel: (65) 6516 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: [www.ari.nus.edu.sg](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg)

Email: [arisec@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arisec@nus.edu.sg)

**The Asia Research Institute (ARI)** was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

## **“God’s Chosen People”: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Struggle in French Indochina**

In 1926, a new syncretistic religion was founded by the educated but dis-enfranchised Vietnamese employees of the French colonial administration in Saigon, Indochina. “Caodaism” (the worship of the “highest power”) was officially called “The Great Way of the Third Era of Redemption” (*Đạo Đại Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*), and presented an Asian fusion of millenarian and monotheistic beliefs. Caodaists adopted the idea that one race or people may be “chosen” for a special spiritual mission from Christian teachings, but inverted the sense in which it was applied. Instead of talking of a “*mission civilisatrice*” or a “white man’s burden”, Caodaists argued that Asia was the true home of all religious teachings and the Vietnamese, having experienced the most intense colonization in East Asia and the most repressive colonial regime, had for this reason been honored with the mission of announcing the single origin of all religions to the rest of humanity. A discourse initially phrased in terms of race, and influenced by turn of the century notions of Social Darwinism, was transformed by the 1940s into one of nation and a “national religion” which would also be realized as a global faith of redemption. The historical development of these notions is traced from 1920 to 1954, with reflections on the relationships between race, religion and nation from the perspective of colonial and postcolonial studies.

Modernity and nationalism have often been linked to the rise of secular ideologies, which were said to displace religion, relegating it to a purely private realm, and reconfiguring society in relation to expanding global capitalism and powerful state institutions (Anderson 1983). But more recent work (Van der Veer and Lehman 1999) has challenged this view, showing that religious discourse was crucially important to the imperialist project, producing notions that a particular nation was chosen to first subjugate colonized peoples and then lead them into civilization. Other studies of the process of decolonization (Duara 1995, 2003) have examined how religions themselves have been racialized, both by ideas of the “white man’s burden” to bring order to Asia and by indigenous responses which have justified nationalist struggle with religious teachings (here, M.K. Gandhi is the primary example, but the Caodaist leader Pham Cong Tac was, as we shall see, in many ways his Vietnamese counterpart).

Race, nation and history are what Prasenjit Duara has called the “three key terms of the circular discourse of Social Darwinism” (1995: 35) that were incorporated into nationalist doctrine at the turn of the twentieth century:

The three terms were unified by the narrative construction of a historical subject: an agent constituted by a homogenous community (race), within a territorial state (nation) that had evolved into the present so that it was now poised to launch into a modern future (history) of rationality and self-consciousness in which contingency or history itself would be eliminated (end of history). (1995: 48-49),

For the peoples of East and Southeast Asia, the first task was to respond to the binaries produced to justify European conquest, in which the west was seen as dynamic and progressive, while the east was stagnant, backward and---in reference to its earlier great civilizations---decadent and powerless. This paper argues that Caodai religious teachings provided a response to these 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 and Lao Tse), and was also the father of Jesus. Through the image of the Left Eye of God, Caodaism created a masculine monotheism, activist and dynamic, which would absorb Christian teachings into a more

encompassing Asian pantheon, and within which the Vietnamese people would be given the spiritual mission to spread this message and unite the nation. The radicalism of this religious vision was initially played down in presentations of its doctrine in French, where the symbolism of the left eye as “yang” (*duong*)—forceful, positive and expansive—was not revealed. Instead, messages to the French government stressed the concern of elite groups that “traditional values” had become corrupted, and a return to moral standards was in order. There was also, as we will see, a different emphasis in spirit messages received in French as compared to those received in Vietnamese.

Caodaism emerged as a public, mass movement that brought together a number of once 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. Officially called the “Great Way of the Third Universal Redemption” (*Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*), it proved enormously popular during its first few decades, gathering over a million members and converting a fourth to a fifth of the population of Cochinchina by 1940<sup>1</sup>. As many Caodaists love to say, more people joined this new faith in southern Vietnam after just one decade of proselytizing than over the 300 years of Catholic missionary activity (Werner 1981). In the 1930s, Phạm Công Tắc voiced a clearly articulated critique of the hypocrisy of French colonialism through spirit messages from French luminaries like Victor Hugo and Jeanne d’Arc. His emphasis on a dialogue with the French was controversial, and contrasted with the liturgy of dozens of “dissident” branches of Caodaism whose disciples followed a more Taoist model, influenced by Sino-Vietnamese Minh groups often described as “secret societies”.

My analysis probes the significance of the term “race” in Caodaist discourse, since 1926, when it first appeared in spirit messages addressed to French visitors, up to 1954, when it was almost completely displaced by the term “nation” or “people” (as a translation of the Vietnamese term *dân tộc*). I argue that the colonial period was characterized by debates about how to absorb both French and Chinese elements into a new universal religion, but by 1954 this discourse had shifted to focus more on national identity and sovereignty as distinct from the satellite politics of the Cold War.

## **SOCIAL DARWINIST NOTIONS OF RACE AND THE BIRTH OF ASIAN NATIONALISM**

The Vietnamese poet and prophet Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491-1585) is credited with having announced the idea of Vietnam in literary works (*Sấm Trạng Trình*) describing a territory then still under Chinese domination. His long poem predicts various mysterious events in the future and contains the line “Vietnam is being created” (*Việt Nam khởi tổ xây nền*). Today, he is one of the “three saints” who stand at the entrance to the Great Cao Dai Temple in Tay Ninh, where he rubs shoulders with Victor Hugo, who had himself prophesied the birth of a new global faith in Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Sun Yat-Sen, the founder of Asian nationalism. In 1802, the kingdom unified under the Nguyen dynasty was officially given this name by Emperor Gia Long. Truong Buu Lam argues that this kingdom (*quốc*) “was essentially a state and territory, not a society”, but it was a territory which had struggled to exist independent of the Chinese over many centuries. The Vietnamese people felt

<sup>1</sup> The estimate of “one out of five” is given in Popkin, based on leaders’ claims of a million disciples by 1934 (1979: 194). Werner (1976: 4) cites somewhat lower numbers from French archives: 600,000 out of a population of four million in 1940 (but this counts only the “mother church” of Tay Ninh). Hanoi sources had in the past presented lower estimates, but a recent government sanctioned study based on data from police archives (Tram Huong 2002:17) says 25% of Cochinchina’s people were Caodaists in 1930. Scholars (Hartney 2004, Oliver 1976) estimate Tay Ninh Caodaists at two million from the 1950s to 1975. Current government figures estimate 3.2 for Tay Ninh, but when other branches are included, numbers sometimes range up to four to six million,

loyalty and emotional attachment to the country, even if that attachment was initially inseparable from loyalty to the king.

The popular idea of “the nation” did not emerge as such until the early 20th century in Vietnam, when it made its first appearance in the writings of the famous anti-colonial activist Phan Bội Châu. In 1904, Châu wrote that “The people are in fact the country, the country is the people’s” (Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1993), thus forging the new term *quốc dân* which came to mean both a “country of people” and the new political category of “nationalist”. The goal of popular sovereignty was also first articulated in Châu’s *History of the Loss of the Country of Vietnam*, which argued that the people had been dispossessed by the French conquest, even if some members of the royal family remained on their thrones under a French administration. Phan Bội Châu allied himself with the exiled Prince Cường Đệ, and believed that a member of the royal family was needed to rally popular support, but his loyalty was to the idea of the nation, not to any one particular ruler.

Early nationalist leaders like Phan Bội Châu were exposed to Social Darwinist ideas through reading Chinese reformers like Liang Qichao and Kang Yuwei. Qichao was the first to write a linear history of China, in which he gave new meaning to the national experience by turning away from a chronicling of monarchical reigns, one dynasty following another, to create a narrative of the people themselves (Duara 1995: 33). Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinist idea of the “survival of the fittest” offered an intriguing model both to explain the weaknesses in Vietnamese traditional society that made it vulnerable to domination by the French, and the strengths of the west that offered a new program for national regeneration. Instead of celebrating equilibrium and harmony, this new model exalted the idea of competition for supremacy and survival in which some talented actors could draw on new cultural gifts and resources.

Phan Bội Châu traveled to Japan to meet Liang Qichao, who was living in Yokohama, and encouraged a whole generation of young Vietnamese students to follow him by “traveling east” (*Đông-Du*) to study in the only Asian country that had been able to rival western ones in its level of technological development. Modeling his ideas of “national restoration” on the Meiji example, Phan Bội Châu recognized that preserving Vietnam’s “national essence” would require dramatic changes in the ossified forms of Confucianism practiced by traditional literati. Specifically, Phan Bội Châu advocated using the Romanized script as a vehicle for new Western-inspired learning, to spread literacy and practical knowledge in order to eventually overthrow foreign rule (Ho Tai 1992: 20-26).

The Social Darwinian critique of culture and the “traveling east” movement had a profound effect on several important Caodai leaders, including Phạm Công Tắc and Do Van Ly. Tắc was a young student selected in 1908 to travel to Japan to join Phan Bội Châu’s group, but French authorities got wind of the idea and so Tac was forced to flee to escape arrest, dropping out of the prestigious French Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat and hiding at his grandparent’s house in Tay Ninh. Twenty years later, he was to emerge as the most prominent Caodai leader on the national stage during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Do Van Ly lived in Japan from 1942-45 in the complex for training the Revolutionary Army established by the exiled nationalist Prince Cường Đệ, but eventually became convinced that Japan was also a colonizing power and chose to pursue his education in the United States. After a career representing South Vietnam as the head of diplomatic missions to Indonesia, India, the U.S. and Japan, he led the first overseas American congregation of Caodaists in Los Angeles in 1979.

Phan Bội Châu ‘s 1905 book begins “For a human being, the greatest suffering comes from losing his country” (Ho Tai 1992: 22). He poignantly evokes the tragedy that befell his homeland when the once unified Nguyen kingdom was divided into a colony (Cochinchina) and two protectorates (Annam and Tonkin), and grouped with Laos and Cambodia in French Indochina. He attributed this loss to cultural weaknesses that could be changed by reforming Vietnam’s racial characteristics:

To the Vietnamese, Social Darwinism was a revelation. It provided an explanation of their country's downfall which was both familiar and startlingly new: Vietnam had indeed fallen prey to a mightier country, but its conqueror's might lay in its cultural superiority. Accustomed to using cultural criteria to gauge a country's health, Vietnamese literati easily accepted the thrust of this argument (Ho Tai 1993: 20).

While Phan Bội Châu was not himself a Caodaist, his project of moral and ethical reform, paired with armed struggle, is still resonant for many Caodaists. For more than a million South Vietnamese who fled as refugees from 1975-1985, the wounding theme of the "loss of country" (*mất nước*) returned with particular poignancy when Saigon fell and they were forced to adjust to a life in exile.

### **"RACE", "PEOPLE" AND "NATION" IN VIETNAMESE DISCOURSE**

The theory of racial differences articulated in colonial society also had an influence on nationalist aspirations. As Duara notes, "The understanding that only certain advanced races possessed nationality and rights over races without races and History was...resoundingly clear to the nearly colonized in East Asia...The circle of Social Darwinist discourse not only enabled nations to be imperial powers, but also necessitated a cultural project to maintain the colonies as non-nations" (1955: 22).

The French attempted to do this by dividing Vietnam and elaborating a racial hierarchy of groups within Indochina (Pelley 1998, Vann 2003: 187-204). Vietnamese elites were seen as more ambitious and energetic than the Cambodians or Laotians, and as a consequence were used to staff colonial offices in Laos and Cambodia with clerks, secretaries and accountants. The Chinese were feared as the agents of a clandestine "underground empire" whose transnational trading networks threatened French domination through subversive secret societies (Chesnaux 1972, Vann 2003).

The notion of "people" or "race" did not emerge in Vietnam until the early 20th century (Marr 1971: 172). For many centuries, Vietnam has been a *quốc*, a kingdom ruled by a monarch, but under the influence of Social Darwinists ideas they came to see themselves as a *dân tộc*, a racially distinct people with its own heritage (Smith 1968: 65-66). The term *dân tộc* initially meant "those of one womb", suggesting a biological connection rather than a political one. It became widespread in the context of both the obvious racial differences with the French, and also the somewhat more subtle racial differences between Vietnamese and Chinese. The young Nguyễn Ái Quốc (later to be called Hồ Chí Minh) described himself to a Russian writer in 1923 as belonging to "an ancient Malay race" (sic) (Smith 1968: 66). His clear demarcation of racial difference from China reflected a sense that the Vietnamese had to define themselves in opposition to their former Chinese overlords, and that opposition was racial as well as cultural.

The notion of a people chosen by God took place within a cultural discourse about race and nation, which developed in a quite different direction in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Caodaism was born in Saigon, from the one followed by the Hanoi government after 1945. Kim Ninh summarizes this contrast:

From the 1920s onward the intellectual discourse was increasingly concerned with *dân tộc*, a term that means both "people" and "nation". The term *nhân dân*, while it also means "people" (and only people) is distinct from *dân tộc*. According to the critic Van Tam, *nhân dân* recognizes a societal entity that is horizontal: one speaks in terms of the people of a particular country or peoples of the world. *Dân tộc*, on the other hand, is vertical in the sense that it refers to a specific people in the context of

geography, language and culture connected through time. Therefore for Van Ta, “the concept of *nhân dân* generalizes a comparison with *the ruler*, whereas the concept of *dân tộc* generalizes a comparison with *another people*” (Ninh 2005: 89, italics in the original).

The study of the “races of mankind” developed into the new discipline of Anthropology (*dân tộc học*), which would now be described as the study of cultural and ethnic diversity, but in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was described as the study of racial differences. As Ninh notes, the idea of *dân tộc* “with its viscerally emotional overtone, was especially effective for uniting people across the political divide” (Ninh 2005: 90). The idea of *nhân dân* was associated with Hanoi’s emphasis on state building, and could in many contexts be more accurately translated as “the people under the authority of a particular state”. Socialism was built on an idea of the people as a category of political subjects, while cultural nationalism built on the idea of the people as “a race” with a specific cultural heritage. So while both the cultural nationalists and the communists claimed to be champions of “the people”, they were speaking about quite different entities that have historically been associated with different names<sup>2</sup>.

### BACKGROUND TO THE BIRTH OF CAODAIISM: COLONIAL DISLOCATIONS

The creation of an educated elite, trained in French language schools and by the early twentieth century no longer literate in Chinese characters, had a corrosive effect on Confucian familial and social bonds under French colonialism (Bradley 2004:5). Heavily influenced by the veneration of French ideas and the poetic forms of French literature, young Vietnamese intellectuals felt uncertain about how to define their own cultural identities. Phạm Công Tắc described the transformations of the early 20th century as a “bouleversement général” of all the accepted verities, which threatened to set his generation loose from all standards of morality and religious meaning.

Two thirds of the founding disciples of Caodaism were Vietnamese employees of the French colonial administration (Werner 1976: 96<sup>3</sup>), most of them working as lower-level bureaucrats on painfully small salaries, usually only a fifth of the salaries earned by the former French classmates in the same offices. A few prominent leaders were among the highest ranking indigenous government officials, including the first Temporal Pope, Lê Văn Trung, who was head of the Colonial Council, and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, the second Pope (elected by the dissident Ben Tre branch which broke off from Tay Ninh in 1935) who had been the head of a Prefecture. There were also some wealthy landowners who offered early support, especially Madame Lâm Thi Hương, the widow of a Swiss jeweler, who used her substantial private fortune to purchase the land where the Holy See was eventually built (and became the first female cardinal).

Several authors have described Caodaism as a “religion of the bourgeoisie” (Ho Tai 1988) or the “middle class” (Werner 1976), but this seems to imply more material comfort and security than was the case for civil servants and teachers who, as a result of their activism in religious and political groups, often spent many years in prison and had their property seized by the French government. It

<sup>2</sup> The nascent democracy movement in modern Vietnam, significantly, associates itself with the term *dân tộc*, and the more neutral *người Việt* (“the Vietnamese”), as well as the term for democracy *dân chủ nghĩa*, which refers to the sovereignty of the people, which they argue has not been achieved by a one party system.

<sup>3</sup> Thirty-three of the 54 dignitaries were clerks, administrators, members of colonial advisory councils or teachers. If village notables are also counted, then 76% of first dignitaries had some connection to the French colonial administration.

is perhaps more accurate to note that it was considered a “religion of the educated” (Popkin 1979, Smith 1968), or the “marginal intelligentsia”, to use Jean Baechler’s phrase to designate members of the traditional elite displaced by colonial rule. (Baechler 1975). While Caodaism acquired a huge base among peasants in Tay Ninh, the Mekong Delta and central Vietnam, its leadership remained to a great extent urban-based and tied to particular elite schools.

## NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

Caodaism declared itself the “national religion” (*quốc đạo*) of Vietnam at a time when the nation was not officially recognized, so the bestowing of a spiritual mission on the Vietnamese people was, in part, a strategy to bring the nation into being and to lay the groundwork for the spreading of this universal faith across the world. Caodaism developed its new Asian fusion cosmology as a response to the spiritual stirrings of a new generation “*de culture Française*” but positioned as colonial subjects. They wanted to both restore pride in Vietnamese culture and restore themselves to positions of political and economic influence in the new colonial order. As Phạm Công Tắc said, the people of Vietnam would “no longer accept the spiritual humiliations of before” (Werner 1976: 296), and Caodai theology was a way to reclaim the spiritual and temporal authority that had been denied to them by French rule.

As the largest mass movement ever seen in Cochinchina, Caodaists inaugurated a new coalition of once “secret” societies in a huge celebration, planned to last for three days but said to have actually extended over three months. Members were instructed to address each other as “brother” and “sister”, and to share in the religious life of the “Great Way” that cut across traditional divisions between rich and poor, male and female, and educated and illiterate. Caodaism was the first social organization to effectively bridge the gap between rural peasants and the urban elite (Werner 1971, Popkin 1979). Its leaders laid claim to the emerging concept that civilization should be defined not only by material progress but ultimately as a spiritual and moral concern, in the hopes that new French respect for Vietnamese culture and morality would increase support for granting sovereignty to the nation of Vietnam.

Caodaists were also, in the early years, eager to recruit French converts, and drew on the writings of a number of French Orientalists, like the famous “Taoist adventurer” Jean de Pourvoirville, also known with the Vietnamese name “Mật giới” (“secret world”) who presented a “rationalist” view of Taoism tinged with romantic idealism:

We note right away.... how the Taoist doctrines are in agreement with the secret teachings of the West and pure Kabala....In every place and at all ages of the world, the luminous truth that I am summarizing here was understood and hidden in the brains of a few rare and erudite persons, although it remained unknown to the agnostic multitudes. This torch, which opened the eyes of all those great figures in the universe, was first lit by Taoist hands; and it was Lao Tsu, the first, to bring this light out of the Promethean myth and allow it to shine and burn as a torch. No one who thinks impartially can doubt that the Chinese Sage was the originator of this notion, the first to possess the arcane knowledge by which all of humanity acts, suffers and, according to its merits, fears or desires death. (Pourvoirville 1907: 135, my translation)

The works of the Comte de Pourvoirville were translated into Vietnamese in 1935 by Nguyễn Hữu Đắc, a Caodai theologian, and so were many works by French spiritists like Alain Kardec, Léon Denis and Flammarion. An extensive library of esoteric writings by French, Chinese and Anglo-American



authors was established at the “Temple of Three Religions” (*Tam Tông Miếu*) in Saigon, where it was consulted by Caodai historians as well as the Sino-Vietnamese ritualists of the Minh Lý tradition<sup>4</sup>.

Ngô Văn Chiêu, a Confucian scholar and religious ascetic from the Mekong Delta, received the first vision of the Left Eye of God in 1921 when he was serving as the district administrator of the island of Phu Quoc, off the west coast of Vietnam. In 1925, he returned to Saigon where he was contacted by a group of younger civil servants who had contacted a very erudite and philosophical spirit using the European method of table-tipping, and been instructed by him to use a phoenix-headed basket brought to Vietnam by followers of the Chinese-derived Minh religions. At midnight on Christmas Eve 1925, this spirit identified himself as Cao Đài (“the highest tower”, meaning the Supreme Being), the Jade Emperor who was also the father of Jesus, and the one who had send earlier religious teachers like Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tse.

Caodai prophecies asserting that the Vietnamese people were chosen for a special spiritual mission fused national aspirations for independence with a religious language of spiritual mastery. Even before they could be their political equals, it was argued, the Vietnamese could draw on their own traditions to become the spiritual superiors of a hypocritical European administration. They could do so through practices of self-cultivation (*tu tiên*, “following the path of immortality”) that would concentrate their spiritual power (*linh thiêng*) into a new kind of energy. The Caodaists called this *điện quang*, or “spiritual electricity”, a kind of divine charge that was the outcome of individual effort (in meditation, self-purification, and ascetic practices such as vegetarianism) and divine intercession. The possessor of this new energy, a blending of knowledge and power, could serve as a conductor to heal the sick and perceive things beyond the ordinary senses and intellect (Do Thien 2003: 163). Mediums chosen to write spirit messages were expected to follow a strict regime, involving celibacy and food avoidances, which would keep the body pure to attract the clearest energy possible.

The spirit of the Jade Emperor (Cao Đài, the “highest tower”) articulated a clearly global vision of religion that was explicitly linked to the technological transformations that had come to bring the peoples of the world into contact with one another:

Formerly people of the world lacked means of transportation, therefore they did not know each other.... Nowadays, all parts of the world are explored--humanity, knowing itself better, aspires to real peace. But because of the very multiplicity of religions, humanity does not always live in harmony. That is why I decided to unite all these religions into One to bring them back to the primordial unity ... 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 Era of Redemption directly. Though it was announced to the humble and grateful nation of Vietnam, The Third Era of Redemption is a gift to all.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The extent of these influences from the Minh traditions has been exhaustively documented in a recent PhD thesis by Jeremy Jammes: “Le Caodaisme: Rituels médiumniques, oracles et exegeses. Approche ethnologique d’un mouvement religieux vietnamien et ses réseaux”. Submitted in November 2006 to Université de Paris X Nanterre.

<sup>5</sup> (Séance on Christmas Eve, December 31, 1925, published in *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, translated by Hum and Hong Bui at [www.caodai.net](http://www.caodai.net), accessed December 15, 2006).

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.

### THE “CHOSEN RACES”: SPIRIT MESSAGES RECEIVED IN FRENCH

Caodai spirit messages were received in several languages---Vietnamese, French, Chinese and (in the late 1950s) even English. An explicitly racial and Social Darwinist discourse appeared in the first messages received in French, starting at a midnight séance on October 27, 1926 to which Captain Paul Monet was invited.

Captain Paul Monet was a Free Mason<sup>6</sup>, an advocate of extending greater civil liberties to colonial subjects, and a critic of colonial policy who wrote several books calling for better treatment of indigenous workers (notably *Les Jaunières* 1924). In 1926, he was invited to the huge ceremony to inaugurate the religion. There he received the mission to represent Cao Đài to the government in Paris. He was one of about a dozen French dissidents who were heavily involved in the early years of Caodaist expansion<sup>7</sup>.

“Humanity is suffering from all kinds of vicissitudes. I sent Allan Kardec, I sent Flammarion as I had earlier sent <the Prophet> Elijah and John the Baptist, who came before Jesus Christ: one was persecuted and the other was killed by you. You only worship them in spirit and not in their full holiness. I wanted to talk directly to you once in Moses’ time on Mount Sinai, but you could not understand me,,, I had to come to you directly now in a mediumistic séance to convince you.....*The French and the Vietnamese race are my two chosen races*. I want you to be united forever. The new doctrine that I am teaching you should show you your common interests in life. It is my divine will that you should be united and preach peace and harmony to the world. That is enough for now. Goodnight.”<sup>8</sup>

Explicitly linking the destinies of the French and the Vietnamese, this message seems to argue that if both sides of the colonial divide committed themselves to moral reform, they could cooperate in spreading a new message of universal salvation.

<sup>6</sup> 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 Triều Phát, Cao Sĩ Tân), where Nguyễn Ái Quốc (later called Hồ Chí Minh) was also initiated in 1922. 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, as noted by Nguyễn Ngọc Châu: “In Vietnam, the lodges did not really open their doors to Vietnamese until the end of the 1920s. The fear or rather the specter of having to treat “natives” as equally “evolved” or, for some of them, even more “cultivated” than pale Frenchmen coming from the metropole took a bit away from the “fraternity” which was supposed to exist between Masons”.

<sup>7</sup> Another Frenchman, Gabriel Abadie de Lestrac, was appointed to the position of “Bishop” (French *éveque*, Viet. *Giáo hũu*) in a séance in 1926, and two women (Mme. Felicien Challaye and Marguerite Gobron) were instructed to direct a women’s organization in a small cénacle of 15 people based in Paris (Vinh 1977: 92).

<sup>8</sup> *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển (Official Selection of Spirit Messages)* 1969: 131).

The next day, a second message addressed to Paul Monet adds a more critical note:

“You are designated by me for a thankless but humanitarian task. You can use your noble sentiments to relieve the decadence of a race over a thousand years old, which has its own civilization. You have sacrificed yourself to give this race a true morality. So here is a job well suited to your talents. Read my sacred messages. This doctrine will be universal. If humanity practices it, peace will be established for all races. You will make France understand that Vietnam is worthy of her. That is enough for tonight. Good night.”<sup>9</sup>

This passage is supremely ambiguous, since the “thousand year old race” referred to could be either the French or the Vietnamese. On a first reading, it seems that Monet is being congratulated for his efforts to promote colonial reform in France, and relieve the sufferings of the Vietnamese. However, it could also be read as meaning that Monet is being offered the chance to redeem his own race (that is, the French) from the sins involved in colonial conquest. A hint that the later reading is more accurate is contained in the use of the familiar form “*tu*”, which was almost universally used by colonial masters (the French) to address their subjects (Vietnamese servants, but also Vietnamese colleagues who worked beside them in the colonial bureaucracy and were often educated beside them in French language schools). When the Jade Emperor addresses Monet in the familiar form, it suggests that Monet’s deference to the Supreme Being of an Asian pantheon could help to heal the wounds of colonialism. The retrospective reading of this message in a postcolonial context leans heavily towards the second interpretation<sup>10</sup>.

In 1931, the International Colonial Exposition was organized in Vincennes, and a Caodai disciple, Trần Quang Vinh, was sent to Paris as the general secretary of the Museum of Art in Phnom Penh. Although his French employers were not aware of this fact, in 1927 a great destiny had been predicted for Vinh on the eve of his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, since he was called to join the religion in a séance by a spirit named Nguyệt Tâm Chơn Ngôn (“Heart as Pure as the Moon”) who revealed that he was Victor Hugo (Vinh 1997: 103). Hugo’s spirit eventually adopted Vinh, along with another young man, as his “spiritual sons”, the reincarnations of his historical sons François and Charles.

While Vinh was in Paris, he met with a number of French intellectuals and artists, including Gabriel Gobron, a novelist and philosopher who, along with his wife and a dozen others, formed the first French circle of Caodaists in Paris. Although neither of them ever traveled to Vietnam, Gobron and his wife, Marguerite, eventually published a book on the *History and Philosophy of Caodaism* (1950) and a collection of photographs of its temples and rituals (*Le Caodaisme en Images*, 1949). They were ardent advocates of religious freedom in the colony, lobbying the French government through the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme (Vinh 1977: 110) and publishing Caodaist writings and spirit texts in French journals such as *La Revue Spirite*.

<sup>9</sup> *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển (Official Selection of Spirit Messages 1969: 55).*

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether Monet achieved his “mission”. He returned to France and retired in Toulon, remaining a member of the Ligue Internationale des Droits de l’Homme, and founded an Institut Franco-Annamite to make colonialism more “democratic”. Gabriel Gobron, who soon became the most prominent proponent of Caodaism in France, described Monet as a “great French spiritist” (Gobron 1950:12), but there is no evidence of contact between Monet and Caodaists after 1928 (Blagov 2001: 25). After Gobron’s death in 1948, Professor Gustave Meillon of the Ecole des Langues Orientales carried on the torch as another French Caodaist who described its doctrines to a western audience and documented the execution of religious leaders after 1975 (Meillon 1985).

Vietnamese journalists defended the faith in Francophone newspapers published in Indochina, mixing their criticisms with biting sarcasm, as in this article from *L'Ere Nouvelle* (1927) parodying French reactions to the new movement :

Some vicious people claim that Caodaism mixes religion and politics in the shadow of the altar, behind the curtain of a legitimate religion. Is it possible for a government endowed with soldiers and cannons to be afraid of a few thousand bigots and crazy worshippers of the Buddha? Oh no! What a joke! And yet the Caodaists, according to public rumor, would figure all in blacklist of suspects and classified with great care as revolutionaries to be hanged at the first opportunity. We demand with energy and in a loud voice in favor of the mass of our compatriots the right to serve either "the Supreme Being or the Devil", as we see fit. Where would we be, o my Lord, if they came to remove the last right that is left to us, a vanquished people: the liberty of conscience and of opinion? (reprinted in Truong Buu Lam 2000: 83).

The explosion of print culture in Cochinchina with more than 163 periodicals published in Saigon from 1918 to 1939, has been linked to the resilience of religious discourse in the public sphere (McHale 2004: 12-18). Many Caodaists, including Phạm Công Tắc, wrote for them (Tran My Van 2000:5), especially *Echo Annamite*, which became a voice for the 1925 demands of Vietnamese civil servants presented to the French Minister of Colonies Alexandre Varenne (Truong Buu Lam 2000: 208-227).

### **CHRISTIAN NOTIONS OF "CHOSENNESS" AND VIETNAMESE INTERPRETATIONS**

The idea that a particular people was "chosen" by God was articulated in the Hebrew Bible and formulated by ancient Israelites resisting Egyptian domination. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it was adopted by many western nationalist movements (Hutchinson and Lehman 1994) to underscore and justify imperialistic expansion. "The White Man's Burden", in Kipling's famous phrase, or the French *mission civilisatrice*, were conceptualized as the unique calling of a particular group who were divinely elected to rule over the "lower races". From another perspective, however, the same idea has been appropriated by colonized peoples to explain suffering and provide a stimulus for political emancipation and national liberation.

The idea of "chosenness" has been incorporated into the ideologies of many non-white activists, especially those with a millenarian or messianic bent, such as the Rastafarians of Jamaica and the African-American based Nation of Islam (Rouse and Hoskins 2004). In Vietnam, it developed within the context of Buddhist apocalyptic and millenarian traditions and, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai notes in describing her own father's life, there were many who crossed "the dividing line between millenarian and revolutionary politics" not once but several times (Ho Tai 1989:ix): She explains how this could happen to many idealistic colonial subjects at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "The experience of participating in outburst of millenarian fervor had a cumulative effect: far from persuading the adepts of the fallacy of the millennial myth, such an experience made it easier for them to contemplate revolt as an acceptable mechanism for dealing with overpowering misery, whatever its causes" (Ho Tai 1989: viii). The young intellectuals in Saigon who wanted to remake the world often vacillated between political action and proselytizing the new faith, but they saw both goals as intimately entwined.

At the outset, spirit messages in holy texts preached that the French and the Vietnamese were both “chosen people”, and together they could collaborate in bringing the new religion to the attention of the wider world. Since 1927, however, there were also suggestions that political changes might be necessary to achieve justice, “because justice should always defeat oppression” (*Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* 1969: 84). Remembering the first spirit séances, one of the founding mediums, Cao Hoài Sang, noted that he, his uncle Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc were “harboring hatred for foreign domination and had chosen spiritism as a way to gain some knowledge of the fate of their country” (Hương Hiếu, 1968: Vol I:1). Cư’s wife Hương Hiếu, who participated in the séances and took detailed notes, added that all of these early spiritists were “revolutionaries at heart”, even if it was not permitted to express these feelings in direct political action at the time (Hương Hiếu, 1968: Vol I: 10)).

### NATIONALISM AND SPIRITUAL MISSIONS: SPIRIT MESSAGES RECEIVED IN VIETNAMESE

The universalist message came at the same time as a more specific spiritual mission was given to the Vietnamese people, whose destiny was tied to the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. On September 27, 1925, the Supreme Being sent this message through a mediumistic séance;

One day, a country now in servitude will arise, through My words, to become the master teacher of all humanity. (Hiếu 1968: 242, *Thánh Ngôn Sưu Tập* 1969: 88).

The Vietnamese were chosen, it was detailed in other messages, because they had been able to absorb many other religions, with a spirit of tolerance and an appreciation for their value. While they had, in the past, suffered greatly under the colonial yoke, they would now be “rewarded with a compensation greater than that of any other nation” (Đỗ Vạn Lý 1989:357, Hiếu 1968: 115). As Đỗ Vạn Lý noted, Vietnam was given at this time the potential to become the first nation to become “founded by heaven, organized by heaven, guided by heaven and managed by heaven”, as long as its people agreed to embrace this universal faith and follow its precepts (Đỗ Vạn Lý 1989: 490).

Hue-Tam Ho Tai has interpreted this aspect of Caodaism as an effort to blend nationalist aspirations with the familiar apocalyptic rhetoric of Vietnamese millenarianism: “The Social Darwinian vision of perpetual struggle for survival had by then percolated into popular culture and was incorporated into the millenarian rhetoric of the Cao Dai sect, but with a twist. It was presented, not as an eternal law, but as a world historical stage: in the new millennium, competition over limited resources would be rendered unnecessary by unbounded prosperity” (1993: 190). However, she fails to note that the prophecy of a new world order was contingent on the response that the Vietnamese people would make to this new offer of salvation.

The Supreme Being did say in 1926 “From this day on, in Vietnam, there is only one religion which is genuine, and that is the religion of the Great Master who came to give it to his children, calling it the religion of the nation, do you understand?”. But he also said “If you, my children, do not respond to this message and take it into your hearts, then a great calamity will come, and there is nothing that even I with all my supernatural power can do to prevent it” (Đỗ Vạn Lý 1989: 38, *Thánh Ngôn Sưu Tập* 1969:77).

For many overseas Caodaists, this “great calamity” was the fall of Saigon in 1975, which was also supposedly prophesied in a famous message received in 1926 which noted; “Once the three become one, all my children united under one roof, then southerners and northerners will travel overseas,

showing how I am the leader of the true way” (Khanh Phan 2000: 135<sup>11</sup>). When Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin 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 globe. The “true way” according to one interpretation of this prophecy, would only be found after an experience of exile, which was itself predestined. Khanh Pham argues that “Caodaism now depends on Caodaists living overseas to make it survive” (Khanh Phan 2000: 135). And for several commentators, it is because of divisions among the Vietnamese themselves (“God’s children”, united under one roof but only by the threat of violence) that this millenarian vision had to be postponed until after the end of the Cold War.

### NEGOTIATED SPHERES: CONFLICTS AND ACCOMMODATION WITH THE FRENCH

Cosmopolitanism and an international presence were necessary for the new religion to survive, since it was immediately subject to extensive surveillance from the French secret police (*Surêté*) and restrictions from the colonial administration. Forbidden to expand into the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin, Caodaists were permitted to proselytize only within Cochinchina and in Cambodia, where the first “Foreign Mission” was established under the tutelage of the spirit of Victor Hugo in 1935, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hugo’s death in 1885. It is intriguing, of course, that this was considered a “foreign mission”, since Cambodia was also a part of the French Indochina. But Vietnamese national sentiment dominated the Caodaist leadership, and while Cambodian disciples were welcomed, there were no Cambodian leaders in this early period. Of the congregation in Phnom Penh in 1951, the vast number (64,954 according to temple records) were ethnically Vietnamese, and only 8,210 were Cambodian (Vinh 1977: 108, see also Bernardini 1971).

Thousands of Cambodians had, however, participated in the inauguration ceremony to establish the new religion in 1926, and many also helped to build the Holy See in Tay Ninh. They were welcomed by the Caodaists, although their enthusiasm was interpreted by French observers as showing that Cambodians were “naïve and credulous”, and thus subject to manipulation by the more “sophisticated and sneaky” Vietnamese religious leaders (and thus also displaying a number of French colonial racial stereotypes, see Vann 2003).

Caodaists proclaimed that their new faith was part of a struggle against “feudalism” (*phong kiến*) and when it was first spreading across the countryside, French officials sought to suppress it on the ground that it was nothing but “communism masquerading as a religion” (Popkin 1979: 185, Thompson 1937: 474). But Caodaism was also admired by many visitors to French Indochina. The American Virginia Thompson called the “the one constructive indigenous religious movement among the Annamites” (1937: 475), and noted “There is a Gandhiesque flavor about creating a community which is economically self-sufficient” (1937: 474), noting that the Great Temple in Tay Ninh was flanked by a village, school, printing press and weaver’s looms. Thompson was also the first visitor to report the strong sense of mission that took the shape of the idea of a chosen race: “It has also created a hitherto unknown fanaticism in the colony: the spirit of Cao-Dai can save the Indo-Chinese who have lost their independence as punishment for their sins” (Thompson 1937: 474).

<sup>11</sup> This is my translation of the Vietnamese original. There are many interpretations of this prophecy, and Caodaists in Vietnam tend to see it as referring to re-uniting dissident branches with the mother church of Tay Ninh.

The French secret police (Sûreté) accused Caodaists of using religious trappings to promote nationalist politics. The acting Pope Lê Văn Trung, was imprisoned in 1933 for sending money to Prince Cường Để, an aristocrat leading the nationalist resistance from Japan. He reacted by angrily turning in the ceremonial ribbons of the “Legion d’Honneur” medal he had received a decade earlier as a prominent political figure in the French colonial regime. He was released, but soon fell ill and died.

Divisions within Caodaism which appeared after the death of Pope Lê Văn Trung fragmented the new faith into several regionally based congregations. In 1934, the Caodaists at Ben Tré elected Nguyễn Ngọc Tường as the leader of a reformed Caodaism. The election was held when Lê Văn Trung was known to be ailing, but in fact it coincided exactly with the day of his “disincarnation”. Members of the Holy See saw this as an extreme sign of disrespect, while others interpreted it as a sign that the succession was legitimate. But when Cardinal Tường came to the Holy See to attend the late Pope’s funeral, he was not allowed to enter.

Phạm Công Tắc presided at a séance where the spirit of Victor Hugo spoke and supported these actions. Believing that the great French literary figure should not have taken sides in this dispute, Tường and his followers in the Ben Tré group renounced spiritism completely, arguing that it only served to feed “egotism, dissidence, and sectarianism” (Tran Thu Dung 1996: 236). None of the séances since July 1927 were recognized as legitimate, and even those dignitaries who had once conversed with the spirit of Victor Hugo now refused to recognize him as a saint or the head of the foreign mission. While Tay Ninh continued to commemorate Hugo’s death each May 22 with an annual festival in his honor, no such event appears on the sacred calendar of the Ben Tré group (where Tường was soon named Pope), which was then and remains the second largest Caodai congregation (Blagov 2001: 169).

By the mid 1930s there were about ten different branches of the religion, each with its own leaders and often its own ritual costumes, ritual practices and iconography. Some (like the Ben Tré branch) favored statues on the altar, while others (like Tay Ninh) shifted to ancestral tablets with Chinese characters, and one (Minh Chon Lý) placed the left eye of God inside a heart rather than in front of the sun’s rays, to show the importance of sincerity and approaching the faith with knowledge that came from the heart. These differences may have been a natural consequence of the explosive growth of the new faith and many competing charismatic leaders, but Ralph Smith notes:

The seriousness of the schisms should not however be exaggerated. For this not a religion dependent on an apostolic succession and a conviction that there could be only one law-giving authority within it. A unifying authority was far less necessary to hold a religion like Caodaism together than it was in medieval Christendom. Although attempts to reunite the faithful in the late 1930s, and again in 1946, were not very successful, the adepts of all branches probably continued to feel a sense of belonging to the same religion (Smith 1963: 75-76).

In 1941, the pro-Pétain French colonial government accused Caodai dignitaries and mediums, and Phạm Công Tắc in particular, of being pro-Japanese, since they had been in contact with Prince Cường Để in Japan and received spirit messages that were interpreted by French agents (perhaps wrongly) as prophesying the eventual triumph of the Japanese. Arthur Dommen (2002, p. 53) explains the reasons for the French actions:

The adherents of the Cao Dai, on the other hand, although they foreswore violence, constituted the closest thing to a mass movement outside the government’s own organizations, and thus were in a position to act autonomously. In a vast police

operation on August 24, 1940, supported by the Garde Indochinoise and army units, 328 Cao Dai temples were entered and searched and 284 of them were closed. Cao Dai private schools and charity clinics were likewise closed. In all, using the tons of documents seized by the police to incriminate ever more of their membership, a total of more than 5,000 members of various Cao Dai sects were arrested, of which 1,983 members of the clergy, notables, and simple faithful were kept in prison until their liberation by the Japanese on March 9, 1945. (Dommen 2002: 53).

The French army invaded the Holy See at Tay Ninh on July 27, 1941, and arrested Phạm Công Tắc, exiling him and five other high-ranking dignitaries to the islands off the coast of Madagascar. Other Caodaists leaders moved their base across the Cambodian border, where they were allowed to carry on religious activities while the Japanese occupied their temple. When the French seized the temple, they destroyed Caodai religious relics and pushed Caodaists into the hands of the Japanese. Guided by a spirit séance that told him it was time to fight “for the religion and the country”, Trần Quang Vinh agreed to meet the Japanese secret police (Kempeitei) in Saigon, offering them information in return for promises to protect the religion (Vinh 1977: 187).

Caodai workers were organized to work at the shipyards around Saigon, and these workers were then organized into militia with a Caodai uniform of white khaki and white hats. When Vinh asked the Japanese to give guns to his forces, they refused. Caodai forces, armed only with bamboo sticks, served as guards for the Japanese coup on March 9, 1945 that captured French soldiers and police, and declared an end to French colonialism. Caodai leaders organized a massive rally on March 18 to celebrate the end of French rule. Vinh gave a speech calling for unity behind the “national religion” (*quoc giao*) in which he said the Caodai forces would be the basis for a new “national army” to safeguard independence (Tran My Van 1966: 7). But then the Japanese refused to bring Prince Cường Để out of exile and grant Vietnam immediate independence. Vinh and others protested, and were promised that their prince and savior would come in July. A welcoming committee was formed, with banners, arches, flags and banner ready to welcome the exiled leader. But many days and nights passed and he did not come (Tran My Van 1996: 9). Then the Americans bombed Hiroshima, and Japan surrendered unconditionally in August. The trust that Caodaists had had in Japan seemed blind and illusory, a trust that had been completely betrayed.

In Vinh’s autobiography, he documents not only his political actions during this period, but also the spirit messages that guided him. The spirit of the deceased Pope Lê Văn Trung often spoke to him, as did the “invisible Pope” Lý Thái Bạch, the spirit of the famous Tang dynasty poet who became the primary intermediary between Caodai disciples and the world of the spirits. Trần Hưng Đạo, a militar hero who defeated Mongol armies in the 13<sup>th</sup> century came to tell him: “After I fought, for many centuries there were no new heroes, until God established Caodaism. I have come to lend my support to efforts to spread the religion, since without faith there can be no victory, and even great heroes will fail to reach their goals...The children must pay the karmic debts of their ancestors, but now it has all been paid back. Soon we will come to the day when the land of Vietnam will once again belong to the Vietnamese” (Vinh 1977: 162).

Looking back on these events in 1973, Vinh wrote that although prophecies that Cường Để would be returned and that the Japanese would free Vietnam seemed to have been inaccurate, going deeper into the “true mysteries” (*huyền bí*) of history tells a different story. Prince Cường Để died in exile in Japan, but in 1954 Phạm Công Tắc himself traveled to Tokyo to retrieve his ashes and bring them back for a commemorative ceremony in Tay Ninh. Atom bombs may have interfered with the “divine laws that were written in the heavens”, but Japan and the pan-Asian movement for national self-determination ultimately won a “moral or spiritual victory” (*trọn vẹn về tinh thần*), because “if Japan had not been brave enough to confront England and America, then it is unlikely that the



smaller countries of Southeast Asia could have obtained a release from their servitude to the super powers” (Vinh 1977: 192).

### IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS AMONG THE ANTI-COLONIAL FORCES

After the Japanese defeat, Hồ Chí Minh issued his own declaration of independence in Hanoi in September, and most Caodaists rejoiced. The Caodai militia, allied with the separate militia of the Buddhist reformists Hoa Hao, controlled more of southern Vietnam than any other force, including the Viet Minh, and seemed poised to share power in a new government of national unity (Fall 1955: 239). But since the religious leaders were still in exile, there was no consensus. When Vietminh political prisoners were released from French prisons, some of them formed roaming bands determined to destroy all perceived reactionaries and traitors, including nationalist leaders who had contemplated cooperation with the Japanese (Marr 1995: 223). In Quang Ngai province, former prisoners from the Ba To detention camp attacked Caodai communities, killing many Caodaist leaders who had also just been released from French prisons. These killings, which began in August 1945, eventually claimed 2,791 victims----dignitaries and disciples, women and children---- and the site where many of these killings occurred was commemorated in 1956 as the “graveyard of Caodai martyrs” (Nguyễn Trung Hậu 1956, Đông Tân 1967).

Alienated from their former comrades in arms by these attacks, the Caodaists in Tay Ninh were then courted by the French, who realized that if there were to return to re-conquer Indochina, they would need at least some indigenous collaborators. On June 6, 1946, Trần Quang Vinh was captured by French forces, tortured, and forced to agree to a truce. In return for his promise not to attack the French army, he was able to negotiate for the return of Phạm Công Tắc and the other exiled leaders from Madagascar. The French General Latour announced dramatically that the Caodaists had “rallied to the national cause”, and a military convention was signed with the French High Command in which Caodaists promised “loyal collaboration” with the French. The French benefited immensely from this agreement, since it gave them “control over wide areas of south Vietnam which they could never have hoped to conquer militarily” (Fall 1955: 297), while the Viet Minh suffered a setback because of their brutality in attacking Caodaists and other nationalist groups who been their allies.

When Phạm Công Tắc returned from exile, he accepted the political conditions which had made this possible, and stated that a continued French presence might be “necessary” for a few more years. Some leaders of dissident denominations in My Tho and Ben Tre remained in French prisons, but the mother church in Tay Ninh functioned openly, and the Holy See was re-opened as well as thousands of temples in Vietnam and Cambodia (Blagov 2001: 94). Caodai soldiers saw themselves as a defensive force, and showed some reluctance to attack Vietnamese who had not targeted Caodaists, but they served as a home guard throughout the Mekong Delta, allowing the French to concentrate on waging war against Hồ Chí Minh’s armies in the north<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> Phạm Công Tắc’s acceptance of the militarization of Caodaism is, for other Caodaists as well as for many outsiders, the most controversial aspect of his career. Tac called the Caodai militia “the fire inside the heart which may burn and destroy it” (*tâm muội hóa*) (Bui & Beck 2000: 85) and immediately moved its military headquarters out of the Holy See, but he did see its benefits in preventing more killings of Caodaists and allowing him political leverage. American advisor Edward Lansdale bribed Caodai generals to betray the religious leadership in 1955, assimilating them along with militias formed to defend Hoa Hao Buddhists and Catholic congregations.

Bernard Fall visited Phạm Công Tắc in August 1953 to ask for his perspective on the decolonization process. The Caodist leader impressed him deeply, as noted in a letter to his wife not published until this year: “The man had a piercing intelligence and his approach to things is very realistic. I learned more about Indochina than I’d learned before in three and half months. To think that he was sitting there with me telling me about the need for French help after he’d spent five years in French banishment in Madagascar. The man was fascinating and I can see why two million people think he’s the next thing to God himself---and that includes a lot of educated Europeans” (Dorothy Fall 2006: 77-78). Fall famously described Tắc as “Vietnam’s most astute politician”, but remained skeptical about whether he could use his religious base to reconcile the increasingly polarized forces of the communists and nationalists (Fall 1955: 249).

In 1953-54, Phạm Công Tắc gave a series of press conferences praising both Bảo Đại and Hồ Chí Minh and calling for national union. When the French were defeated at Diem Bien Phu in 1954, he called for a reconciliation of the southern nationalists with the northern communists. Tắc believed that his religion of unity would provide the ideal setting for negotiations to bring Vietnam’s different political groups together, and he hoped for French and American backing for this to proceed. He attended the Geneva Conventions as the head of a non-aligned nationalist delegation where this proposal was, however, doomed to defeat as the French and Viet Minh agreed to the “temporary measure” of a partition at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Tắc and many other Caodaists had been willing to work with Bảo Đại, but as Ngô Đình Diệm moved to consolidate his own power, with US backing, the non-aligned nationalists were forcibly dissolved. In October 1955, Diệm ordered Caodai General Commander Phương to invade the Holy See and strip Phạm Công Tắc of all his temporal powers. Three hundred of his papal guardsmen were disarmed and Tắc became a virtual prisoner of his own troops. On February 19, 1956, Tắc’s daughters and a number of other religious leaders were arrested, but he himself managed to slip away. He made contact with his followers several weeks later from Phnom Penh, and lived out the last three years of his life in exile in Cambodia. For 47 years, Phạm Công Tắc’s body lay in an elaborate eight-sided tomb in Phnom Penh, following his deathbed request to King Sihanouk that he would not be returned to Vietnam until the country was “unified, or pursuing the policy of peace and neutrality to which I gave my life”<sup>13</sup>.

On November 30, 2006, Phạm Công Tắc’s octagonal Lotus Tomb was moved to Tay Ninh, in a procession with hundreds of disciples following the dragon-horse hearse. The Communist-directed Caodai management committee (*Hội Đồng Chương Quản*) had negotiated with the Cambodian government (without consulting Sihanouk) to end this “half-century of exile”. The repatriation of

<sup>13</sup> The translation of this final letter was the subject of recent discussions on Caodai list serves, since some Caodaists in Vietnam (associated with the government appointed “Management Committee” which replaced the religious hierarchy mandated in the supposedly divinely inspired Religious Constitution or *Pháp Chánh Truyền*) have argued that Tắc asked that his tomb remain in Cambodia “until Vietnam was unified, or peaceful and neutral” (from a letter titled “Affectionately remembering a Religious Leader, and Consideration for the Fate of the Religion”, November 14, 2006, Nguyễn Châu Hóp of Tay Ninh, Vietnam). They called for his tomb to be moved now, “returning him from exile, and commemorating his patriotism and revolutionary spirit”. Others, writing from the overseas congregations in Sydney, say that Tắc’s tomb should not be moved until the Religious Constitution is re-instated, marriages and funerals are conducted as originally mandated, spirit séances are again permitted in the Great Temple, and the government returns property and facilities confiscated after 1975 (*Bản Nhân Định* or “Point of View” dated October 25, 2005, signed by 58 disciples in Sydney, 35 in New South Wales, and 17 dignitaries elsewhere). This correspondence also included a letter of protest from a Caodai student (“Presenting my own perspective”, dated November 2, 2006) purporting to speak for the present generation, calling on both sides to be willing to negotiate and reach a compromise.

Tắc's body was accompanied by rhetoric praising his "patriotism and revolutionary spirit", apparently reversing the Socialist Republic's policies over the last three decades of closing down Caodai temples and "re-educating" the majority of its religious leaders. Among those who died in the re-education camps was Trần Quang Vinh, (1897-1975) Caodaism's first missionary to visit Paris and the founder of its defense force. But it was his son, Trần Quang Canh (a strong critic of the communist government, cf. Trần Quang Canh 1999), who helped negotiate the transfer---a move intended to provide closure to the long decolonization process, and also to endorse the idea that "religious freedom" had at least partially been restored in Vietnam<sup>14</sup>. From the thousands of Caodaists living overseas in the US, Australia, Canada and Europe there were many protests that neither goal was really met.

### A RE-EVALUATION OF RACE, RELIGION AND NATION

The end of the French colonial period did not, of course, put an end to the political or spiritual struggles of Caodaists. But by that time the discourse of "race" had been definitively replaced by the discourse of "nation", and increasingly complicated by Cold War divisions that opposed "the struggle for freedom" advocated by southern nationalists to the "struggle for independence and reunification" promoted by the Hanoi government.

Racial competition and racial difference were notions introduced into nationalist discourse by social Darwinism, and eventually re-shaped into new ideological forms in the divisive years of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>, but the sense of the special spiritual mission given to the Vietnamese people survived the transition from race to young nation and, in the late 1970s, to the long distance nationalism of the diasporic community in California and elsewhere.

It is precisely this loss of agency and loss of dignity that Chatterjee writes about so poignantly, in lamenting that in relation to Benedict Anderson's formulation of nationalism, the historical consciousness of the "native" seems to be totally eclipsed:

History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall be only the perpetual consciousness of modernity, Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (1993: 5)

Caodaism presented itself to young students and professionals in Saigon as a way of resisting the "colonization of the imagination", and could also be applied to a pseudo-colonization not directly conceived as such, and not accompanied by plans for direct incorporation into an imperial state. American intervention in Vietnamese affairs echoed a colonial pattern but was more insidious, and because of its seductive consumerism, perhaps even more dangerous to traditional ideals and values.

<sup>14</sup> The US government, which had placed Vietnam on a list of "countries of particular concern for religious freedom" in 2004, withdrew that sanction days before President Bush's first official visit to Hanoi on November 15, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> In contemporary Vietnam, the term race is generally translated as *chủng tộc*, which is then divided by skin color (*chủng tộc da đen*, *chủng tộc da trắng*, *chủng tộc da vàng*) as black, white and yellow races, and Vietnamese are described as having "yellow skin and flat noses" (*dân Việt Nam da vàng mũi tẹt*) while Euro-Americans have "blue eyes and high-bridged noses" (*mắt xanh mũi lõ*). Stripped of some of its cultural and its Social Darwinist implications, it remains a corporeal marker of difference.

I argue that the Caodaist vision of 1926 was an early attempt to “decolonize the Vietnamese imagination” and re-think nationalism, not as a derivative discourse borrowed from the west, but a new spiritual discipline to restore a sense of dignity and self worth to a country torn by war and colonial persecutions. Asian nationalism has been misunderstood by westerners, according to Chatterjee, because they focus only on its political expressions, direct challenges to European rule, and neglect the important fact that nationalism as a cultural construct must first create “its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society”. It does so by dividing the world into an outside sphere of material phenomena—the economy, statecraft, science and technology, and opposing this to an inner spiritual domain of religion, customs and the family:

In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nonetheless not western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its time and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. The dynamics of this historical project is implicitly missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power” (Chatterjee 1993: 6-7).

The project of an “imagined spiritual community” gave rise to Caodaism in the 1920s and 1930s, born amid widespread strikes and demonstrations against the French, and it would also be possible to argue that a new form of the same project was made necessary during the period of American military intervention, in the 1960s and 1970s.

Chatterjee writes that the nation was imagined first as a spiritual entity. While he limits his examples to India, it is clear that this argument also applies to Vietnam. And since Vietnam is the only country in the East Asian cultural world to have been completely under colonial domination, it applies perhaps more strongly to Vietnam than to many other Asian examples. Caodaism, which explicitly called itself a “religion of the nation” (*quốc đạo*) assembled a modern group of disciples, educated in French or English, but anchored in the East Asian traditions of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Caodaists argued 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 universalist, 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.

Few writers have bothered to assess the passion and subtlety of Caodaism’s theological imagination: Its inclusiveness is not random but motivated, its politics consistent in their goals of national integration if apparently shifting in their particulars, and its mystical vision focused on global transformation. What some have seen as a confusing “Russian salad” of beliefs could and should be re-assessed as an effort at synthesis and consensus building across the colonial divide, not in the spirit of capitulation to European domination, but to assert that a fusion of Asian traditions could provide the conceptual basis for the struggle for self-determination.

It has often been argued that modern nationalism is itself a form of religion, since it defines the past of a people, their future or salvation, and the sacrifices necessary to claim salvation and attain that destined future. In the history of Vietnam, it is clear that the Caodaist vision shared many features in common with the nationalist vision of Hồ Chí Minh—a vision which, while avowedly secular and marxist, was also full of mystified values of unifying the nation, purifying its soul, and expressed these values with shrines and memorials to ancestral heroes borrowing from religious discourse (Malarney 1996, Luong 2003). Young men were encouraged to “offer their lives to the altar of the fatherland” (*bàn thờ tổ quốc*) rather than the “altar of the three religions” (*bàn thờ tam giáo*), but

they were ritually commemorated and even granted a certain immortality as “martyrs to the nation”. Although with the fall of Saigon in 1975, the “spiritual nationalists” (as some Caodaists described themselves) would seem to have been defeated by their “materialist” opponents, it could be argued that in fact many elements of Caodaist theology have in fact been incorporated into the new nation state. And it is already true that Phạm Công Tắc’s remains, now resting in the “Precious Hall” of Tay Ninh has dramatically increased the number of religious pilgrims swarming to the Holy See.

Van der Veer and Lehman note “It is an open question whether the definition of nationalism as religion should be seen as part of the process of secularization or whether we should think in terms of redefinition of religion and speak of a sacralization of the idea of the nation” (Van der veer and Lehman 1999: 9). Caodaist anti-colonial activism defined an important era in the history of Vietnam, especially the southern and central areas, and is re-emerging in the liberalizing market economy of the renovation period (*Đổi Mới*). The idea that the sufferings of the Vietnamese qualify them as spiritual teachers and prophets of peace to the rest of the world is now being spread to a wider global public through a transnational diasporic mission.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Baechler, Jean (1975) *Revolution: Key Concepts in the Social Sciences*. (Translated by J. Vickers) Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bernardini, Pierre (1974) *Le Caodaisme au Cambodge*. These de Doctorat 3ème cycle en Histoire: Université de Paris.
- Blagov, Sergei (2001) *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism and its Leap into Modernity*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Bui, Hum Dac and Ngasha Beck (2000) *Caodai, Faith of Unity*. Fayetteville, AR: Emerald Wave.
- Bradley, Mark Philip (2000) *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Nguyen Ngoc Chau (2001) Un peu d'histoire...peu connu: Les Vietnamiens Francs-Maçons. *Bulletin des anciens élèves du lycée Jean-Jaques Rousseau*.
- Chesnaux, Jean (1972) *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China 1840-1950*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Do, Thien (2003) *Vietnamese Supernaturalism: Views from the southern region*. London: Routledge Curzon.
- Đỗ Văn Lý (1989) *Tìm Hiểu Đạo Cao Đài* [Understanding Caodaism]. Perris, California: Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam Hải Ngoại [The Caodai Religion of Overseas Vietnamese].
- Đồng Tân (2006) *Nhân Vật Cao Đài Giáo* [Caodai personages: Biographies of prominent Caodaists]. Carlton, Victoria, Australia: The Caodai Cultural Association.
- Đồng Tân (1970) *Lịch-Sử Cao Đài Đại-Đạo Tam-Kỳ PhỔ-ĐỘ: Phần PhỔ-ĐỘ*. [The history of the exoteric branch of Caodaism]. Sài Gòn: Hòa Chánh.
- Đồng Tân (1967) *Lịch-Sử Cao Đài Đại-Đạo Tam-Kỳ PhỔ-ĐỘ: Phần Vô-Vi*. [The history of the esoteric branch of Caodaism]. Sài Gòn: Hòa Chánh.
- Duara, Prasenjit (1995) *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*.
- Duara, Prasenjit (2000) The discourse of civilization and Pan-Asianism, *Journal of World History*, March (accessed on the internet).
- Duara, Prasenjit (2004) Introduction in Duara, Ed. *Decolonization: Perspectives from Then and Now*. Routledge: New York.
- Fall, Bernard (1955) The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam. *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 3: September issue p, 235-253.

- Fall, Dorothy (2004) *Bernard Fall: Memoirs of a Soldier-Scholar*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books.
- Gobron, Gabriel (1950) *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*. Saigon: English translation by Pham Xuan Thai, Tu Hai, French original edition published in 1949 Paris: Dervy.
- Gobron, Marguerite (1949) *Le Caodaisme en Images* [Caodaism in Images]. Paris: Dervy.
- Hartney, Christopher (2004) *A Separate Peace: Cao Dai's Manifestation in Australia*. PhD thesis in Religion submitted to the University of Sydney, Australia.
- Ho Tai, Hue-Tam (1983) *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, Harvard University Press.
- Ho Tai, Hue-Tam (1993) *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*. Cambridge Massachusetts and London, England, Harvard University Press.
- Huệ Nhân (pen name for Võ Thành Châu) (2005). *Khai Đạo: Từ Khởi Nguyên đến Khai Minh* [The inauguration of the faith: From its first beginnings to the official declaration]. Hồ Chí Minh City: Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo, Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo.
- Hương Hiếu (religious name of Nguyễn Thị Hiếu, wife of Cao Quỳnh Cư). 1968. *Đạo Sử*, Vols. I and II [History of the religion]. (Originally published by Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, Vietnam. Reprinted in 1997 by Thánh Thất Dốc Đa in Westminster, California from the mimeographed text by the author, a female Cardinal who participated in the first séances with Cao Đài.)
- Jammes, Jeremy (2004) "Le caodaisme: Rituels médiumniques, oracles et exegeses. Approche ethnologique d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et ses réseaux". Submitted in November 2006 to Université de Paris X Nanterre.
- Laurant, Jean-Pierre (1982) 1982 *Matgioi: Un aventurier Taoiste*. Paris: Dervy-Livres, Histoire et Tradition.
- Luong, Hy Van. ed. (2001) *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.
- Malarney, Shawn K. (1996) "The Emerging Cult of Ho Chi Minh? A Report on Religious Innovation in Contemporary Northern Viet Nam." *Asian Cultural Studies* 24: 121-131.
- Marr, David G. (1971) *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism 1885-1925*, University of California Press, Berkeley, London,
- Marr, David G. (1981) *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920-1945*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- McHale, Shawn Frederick (2004) *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Meillon, Gustave (1984) "Le Caodaisme" accessed on line at [www.caodai.net](http://www.caodai.net), French site. Copied from an article originally published in *Cahier de l'Asie de Sud-Est*, n. 15-16 (161-202) and 17-18 (153-195).

- Ninh, Kim (2005) *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan).
- Nguyễn Trung Hậu. 1956. *Lược Sử Đạo Cao Đài* [A short history of Caodaism in central Vietnam] (First edition 1954, second 1956). Tourane: (later Đà Nẵng) Truyền Giáo Việt Nam Trung Kỳ, republished by Cao Đài San Bernardino Temple.
- Nguyen Ngoc Chau (2001) 2001 Un Peu d'histoire...Peu Connu: Les Vietnamiens Francs-Maçons. *Bulletin d'information de l'amicale des anciens élèves du lycée Chasseloup-Laubat/ Jean-Jaques Rousseau* No. 16: P. 7-10. [A little history...little known: Vietnamese Free Masons. *News Bulletin of the alumni society of the Chasseloup-Laubat/Jean-Jacques Rousseau School*]
- Oliver, Victor, L. (1976) 1976 *Caodai Spiritism; A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society*, Leiden, E.J.Brill,
- Pelley, Patricia (1998) "Barbarians and Younger Brothers: The Remaking of Race in Postcolonial Vietnam" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* No. 2, p. 374-91.
- Popkin, Samuel (1979) *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press.
- Pouvourville, Comte Albert de (1907) *La Voie Rationnelle* Paris: Paul et Louis Chacornac (republished in 1941 by Editions Traditionnelles, Paris).
- Rouse, Carolyn and Janet Hoskins (2003) "Purity, Soul Food and Sunni Islam: Explorations at the Intersection of Consumption and Resistance", *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.19, Issue 2, pp. 226-249.
- Smith, Ralph B. (1968) *Viet-Nam and the West*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, Ralph B. (1970) "An Introduction to Caodaism 1. Origins and early History", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* University of London 33 (2): 335-349.
- Smith, Ralph B. (1971) "An Introduction to Caodaism 2. Beliefs and organization", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* University of London 33 (3): 573-589.
- Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* [Official selection of spirit messages] (1969) Translations into English by Hum Bui of many of these at [www.caodai.net](http://www.caodai.net). Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh [The holy see of Caodaism], Vietnam.
- Thánh Ngôn Súu Tập* (Unofficial selection of spirit messages) (1969). Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh [The holy see of Caodaism], Vietnam.
- Thompson, Virginia (1937) *French Indochina*. New York: Macmillan Company for the American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, reprinted in 1968 by Octagon Books, New York.
- Tram Hường (2004) *Đêm Trống Cửa Đức Giáo Tông* (The Sleepless Nights of the Caodai Bentre Pope). Ho Chi Minh City: Nhà Xuất Bản Công An Nhân Dân.
- Tran My-Van (1996) "Japan and Vietnam's Caodaists: A Wartime Relationship, (1939-45)" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* no. 1, vol 27, March 1996, 179-183.



- Tran My-Van (1999) "Japan Through Vietnamese Eyes 1905 – 1945" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* no. 1, vol. 30, 1999, 126-154.
- Tran My-Van (2000) "Vietnam's Caodaism, Independence and Peace: The Life and Times of Pham Cong Tac (1890-1959). In *Academica Sinica: Prosea Research Paper No. 38*, p. 1-28.
- Tran My-Van (2006) *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cuong De 1882 –1950*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tran My-Van and Dean Meyers (2005) The Crisis of the Eighth Lunar Month; The Cao Dai, Prince Cuong De and the Japanese in 1937-39 in *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, Vol. 2 (May 2006): 1-39. Penerbit USM, Malaysia.
- Tran Quang Canh (1998) Religious Persecution in the Cao Dai religion: Policy and measures aimed at the abolition of the Cao Dai religion by the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Conference paper at CESNUR August 12, 1998.
- Tran Quang Vinh (1982) *Messages Spirites de la 3ième Amnistie de Dieu en Orient*. Sainte Seige du Caodaisme, Tay Ninh (reprinted from an earlier edition in 1951). [Spirit Messages from the Third Era of Redemption of God in the Orient, Holy See of Caodaism]
- Trần Quang Vinh (1972) *Hồi Ký Trần Quang Vinh và Lịch Sử Quân Đội Cao Đài* [Mémoir and history of the Caodai army]. Maryland: Thánh Thất Vùng Hoa Thịnh Đốn,
- Tran Thu Dung (1995) *Le Caodaisme et Victor Hugo*. Thèse de Doctorat d'État, Université de Paris VII, UFR de Sciences des Textes de Documents. Directeur de Thèse: Guy Rosa. Paris, 1996.
- Truong Buu Lam (2000) *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Van der Veer, Peter and Hartmut Lehman (1999) *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vann, Michael (2003) "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racism in Colonial Indochine" in Sue Peabody and Tylor Stovall, *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Werner, Jayne (1976) *The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement*. PhD thesis, Cornell University 1976.
- Werner, Jayne (1981) *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Vietnam*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven.