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AN INTRODUCTION
TO CAODAIISM

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PROFESSOR RALPH B. SMITH

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A short biography

by

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Ralph Smith, who died in January, was born on 9 May 1939 in Bingley, Yorkshire. He attended Burnley Grammar School and then went to Leeds University where he obtained a First in History, and in 1963 completed his doctorate a study of land and society in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the first half of the sixteenth century.

By this time his retraining as an historian of South East Asia was already well advanced. During 1961-62, while attached to the Institute of Historical Research in London, he was employed in the History Department at SOAS as a part-time tutorial assistant in British history since 1760. Subsequently he was appointed as Assistant Lecturer in the History of South East Asia, and for the next four or five years he devoted himself to building up a teaching competence in South East Asian history and to developing a research expertise in the history of Vietnam; he also acquired a command of modern Vietnamese and began the study of classical Chinese. In 1966 he made the first of many research visits to Vietnam, and an important achievement of that period was the publication in 1968 of *Viet-nam and the West*, which,

together with a number of specialist articles, established his reputation as an historian of Vietnam. Ralph was promoted to Reader in 1971.

In the mid-1970s Ralph began work on what became his major scholarly project, a multi-volume study of the Vietnam War. The first volume, *An International History of the Vietnam War: Revolution versus Containment, 1955-61*, appeared in 1983 and, like its two successors *The Struggle for South-East Asia 1961-65* (1985) and *The Making of a Limited War, 1965-66* (1991) was extremely well received. Four volumes, at least, had been proposed; but even in this truncated form, this is a major contribution to a huge subject. In recognition of this achievement and of the shift in his scholarly focus, Ralph was promoted in 1989 to a personal Chair in the International History of Asia.

During the final years of his life Ralph suffered from increasingly poor health, but in these years he devoted his efforts to his many research students, and his generosity in time and hospitality to them and to his friends in his fiat and in a well-researched cluster of restaurants in Bloomsbury and Soho was legendary.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CAODAISM
I. ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY

By R. B. SMITH

PART I

Few phenomena in the modern history of Asia can have been so completely misunderstood by Westerners as the Vietnamese religions (and political) movement known in European languages as Caodaism. Based upon a syncretic approach to religion, in which a key role is played by spirit-seances, it has inevitably been regarded by Christian writers with the same suspicion (if not contempt) as occidental spiritualism; and this initial lack of sympathy is compounded by the fact that the spirits who have revealed themselves at Caodaist seances include such familiar figures as Victor Hugo and Jeanne d'Arc. Then there is the show-piece temple of the Caodaists at Tây-Ninh, which drew forth Mr. Graham Greene's description of Christ and Buddha looking down from

the roof of the Cathedral on a Walt Disney fantasia of the East, dragons and snakes in Technicolor.[1] This superficial notion of the religious element in Caodaism fitted in very well with the cynicism of political observers, notably Bernard Fall, who saw in Caodaism no more than a political movement anxious to preserve its private armies and local power, using its religious ideas merely to dupe a credulous peasantry.[2] In these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the real nature and origins of Caodaism have been lost from view, and even its history has never been adequately summarized in any Western language. The present article will attempt to fill the historical gap, by tracing the history of the religion from 1925 to 1936; and then looking at its by tracing and antecedents. A subsequent article (to appear in BSOAS, XXXIII, 3. 1970) will analyse the various beliefs which have been incorporated into this essentially syncretic cult.

To some extent Western ignorance about Caodaism is the responsibility of the Caodaists themselves. In the early days it was their deliberate intention to conceal their activities from the French, except in so far as it was necessary to offer the authorities a faade in order to obtain formal permission to open oratories (thánh-thất). Moreover, it is in the tradition of Vietnamese religious sects to keep their innermost beliefs secret, not only from the authorities but from all outsiders. They did, it is true, put out a small amount of literature in French and English (especially around 1950-1, when there was a possibility that they

might attract American support); but it is not easy to interpret correctly unless one is able to relate it to a wider background of Chinese and Vietnamese religious practices.[3] Moreover, it is very easy to be misled by then works into thinking that they contain the whole truth, whereas in fact they give only a few clues. It is only in recent years that a number of more detailed accounts of the early history of Caodaism have been published, in Vietnamese, and it is those works which form the most important source material for the present article. The author has probably not found all available writing, of this kind, but in the present state of Western knowledge one may hope that it is excusable to publish an article based on incomplete material. The most important works used are a history of Caodaism by *Đông Tân*, of which that first volume appeared in 1967; and a biography of *Nguyễn Ngọc Tương* published in 1958.[4] Another valuable source is the number of the bilingual *Revue Caodaque* for December 1950, which contains some material about the early history of the religion.[5] In addition mention may be made of two Western-language accounts by people who were not themselves Caodaists: that compiled by the French colonial *Suâreté* in 1933-4,[6] and that written by the American anthropologist *Dr. G. C. Hickey*, relating particularly to the village of *Khánh-Hậu* (Long-An province) in the 1950's.[7] Finally, it is possible to glean a little additional information from contemporary accounts in the Saigon press, notably the *Écho Annamite* (1920-42), whose director was for a long time *Nguyễn Phan*

Long, a sympathizer and eventually an active member of the Caodaist movement.

PART II

The formal inauguration of the Cao Đài religion took place at a ceremony near Tây-Ninh, on 18 November 1926. Tây-Ninh has remained ever since the most publicized centre of Caodaist activity, though not necessarily the most important at all periods. As a centre its scale has increased with the passage of time. The inauguration ceremony took place in the village of Gò-Kén, five km. south of the town of Tây-Ninh, where the Từ Lâm Tự temple had just been built by a Buddhist monk, the hoà thượng Giác-Hải, of Chợ-Lớn. He was a convert to the new religion, and had eagerly made over his new temple to its leaders; but the laymen who had subscribed funds to construct the temple were less happy with the arrangement, and consequently the Caodaists had to leave and find a new home as early as March 1927.[8] They moved to another village, Long-Thành, not far away, and began to construct a new temple of their own with funds donated by Madame Lâm Thị Thanh, a businesswoman of Vũng-Liêm (My-Tho), who was rewarded by becoming the first woman to hold high office in the Caodaist hierarchy, with the grade of Phối-sư.[9] The present temple was presumably the result of this donation, though the date of its final completion is not recorded in any of the materials used for this study. But it was not merely the temple which made Tây-Ninh so important as a Caodaist centre. In August 1930 there were press reports that

the Caodaist leader, Lê Văn Trung, had appealed to followers living in various parts of French Cochinchina to move to Tây-Ninh to settle on 500 hectares of land which the movement had acquired.[10] A description of the Caodaist settlement as it was in 1932 indicates that the movement had two concessions provisoires at Long-Thành, amounting to 196 hectares (none of it rice-land) and in addition an unspecified area of rice-land at the village of Hiệp-Ninh, a little towards the north.[11] There were also workshops of various kinds, and the community living there had (in the early days at least) something in common with the self-sufficient communities favoured by Gandhi in India. Indeed, given the considerable interest in Indian affairs shown by some of the Saigon press at that time, it is not impossible that Gandhi provided the inspiration for the Tây-Ninh community. But in the details of its administration, as well as in its religious content, Caodaism was thoroughly Vietnamese. Nor is it likely that Gandhi would have approved the development of Tây-Ninh into a military centre, which was to happen in the years after 1945 when the Caodaists created their own private army.

In some respects Tây-Ninh was recognized by all Caodaists as the focal point of their religion. But it would be wrong to regard Caodaism as in any sense a monolithic movement, always focused upon a single centre; nor would it be correct to accept 18 November 1926 as the date of its first beginning. The history of Caodaism cannot be written in terms of the

history of Tây-Ninh, nor in terms of the careers only of those Caodaists who played a leading role there.

The official founder of Caodaism was a man who had very little to do with Tây-Ninh. He was Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878-1932), sometimes known as Ngô Minh Chiêu, a Vietnamese official in the French colonial administration of Cochinchina. The son of a rice-mill employee, he was born at Bình-Tây (Chợ-Lớn), but from the age of seven he lived with his aunt (his father's sister) at Mỹ-Tho. With financial help from a friend of the family, he was able to go to French schools (first the collège of Mỹ-Tho, then the Collège Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon) and so to qualify for entry into the administrative service in 1899. But he was never able to study in France, and Vietnamese cultural and religious influence inevitably counted for much more in his life than his French education. Having served for 10 years in Saigon, he was transferred to a post at Tân-An in 1909, and remained there for a further decade. The remainder of his official career consisted of periods in Hà-Tiên (1920), on the island of Phú-Quốc (1920-4), and once again in Saigon (from 192 till his retirement in 1931).[12] It was on Phu-Quoc that he first became an adept of the spirit Cao-Đài.

The evocation of spirits was traditionally a common pastime amongst Vietnamese (as amongst Chinese) officials, but Ngô Minh Chiêu appears to have taken it more seriously than some, especially after about 1917 when he sought by this means to obtain a cure for his sick mother. About the period

1917-19, he used to attend séances at a temple at Cái-Khế (near Cần-Thơ). later known as the Hiệp-Minh temple; and it was then that the spirit called Cao-Đài-Tiên-Ông first appeared to him.[13] At Hà-Tiên, he made further contacts with that spirit, in séances at the tomb of Mạc-Cửu (the Ming refugee who had founded Hà-Tiên around 1690). But it was after he moved to Phú-Quốc that the Cao-Đài spirit began completely to dominate the life of Ngô Minh Chiêu. At Tết (8 February) 1921, he accepted an instruction to adopt the discipline of vegetarianism; and in April of that year he had the vision which led him to adopt the great Eye as a symbol of the Cao-Đài spirit.[14] By the time of his return to Saigon in 1924, he was sufficiently confident of the importance of this spirit to begin to convert his friends to its worship. Those who became adepts of Cao-Đài during 1925 were Vương Quan Kỳ, a fellow-official in Saigon; Đoàn Văn Bản, who was in charge of a primary school at Cầu-Kho (Chợ-Lớn) where he subsequently founded a Caodaist temple; and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, an official at Cần-Giuộc (Chợ-Lớn).[15] Then in December of that year, Ngô Minh Chiêu was visited by a quite separate group of spiritist adepts, known as the Phò-Loan group, and it is from that meeting that we can perhaps date the beginnings of Caodaism as an organized movement. The following month (January 1926), the cult of Cao-Đài began to be organized under the leadership of Lê Văn Trung.

About some of the early converts little is known beyond their names and profession; but a few

can be studied in greater depth. Notable amongst them was Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (1881-1951), an official of about the same generation as Ngô Minh Chiêu, and one whose career was in many respects similar. Born at An-Hội, near the town of Bến-Tre, he was educated in Chinese at home and in French at the collèges of Mỹ-Tho and Chasseloup-Laubat. He entered the administrative service in 1902, and from 1903 till 1919 served in his own province of Bến-Tre. Then from 1920 till 1924 he was district chief at a place called Hòn-Chông, not far from Hà-Tiên, where the population was mainly Chinese and Cambodian.[16] It was whilst he was there (and interestingly enough, these were the same years that Ngô Minh Chiêu spent on Phú-Quốc) that he began to lead an ascetic life and to study the religion of the Minh-Su sect, with which Chiêu had also had connexions.[17] In 1924 he was transferred to the district office of Cần-Giuộc, where he remained till 1927: it is said in his biography that he was moved from Cần-Giuộc to the more remote district of Xuyên-Mộc (Bà-Rịa) as a result of his proselytizing activities for the new religion. In due course, towards the end of 1930, he would leave government service altogether to take up an administrative position at Tây-Ninh, where we shall meet him again.

The background of the Phò-Loan group is somewhat different, for they appear to have had no education in Chinese culture or religion, and apparently some of them were originally Catholics. We first meet with them in July or August 1925, when

they were practising spiritism in the European manner: that is, using the ouija-board.[18] The two most prominent figures in the group were Cao Quỳnh Cư (1887-1929), a clerk in the railway office at Saigon, and Phạm Công Tắc (1893-1958), who held a similar position in the customs department. Phạm Công Tắc, and probably other members of the group, belonged to a slightly younger generation than Ngô Minh Chiêu and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương. He was born in Tân-An province, and had entered government service in 1910: he served in the customs department from then until January 1928, when he retired to devote all his time to religion. Although he was by no means a young man by 1926, he was not merely an organizer of spirit-séances, but also a medium himself.[19] This notwithstanding, his whole career suggests that he was more interested in politics than religion, though it is not clear whether at this stage he was already a supporter of the Vietnamese pretender, Prince Cường-Đê, then living in Japan. Certainly he had contacts with him later on, in 1941-2.

Finally, something must be said of the career of Lê Văn Trung (1875-1934). He too was of roughly the same generation as Ngô Minh Chiêu, and to begin with they had similar careers.[20] Born in Chợ-Lớn province (canton of Phước-Điền-Trung), he was the son of a small farmer, but was able through hard study to gain entry to the Collège Chasseloup-Laubat whence he graduated in 1893. He entered the administrative service soon afterwards, and advanced by the normal stages until 1905. But in that year he left to enter a

business enterprise, and when it succeeded he resigned his government position for good. Subsequently he was elected to the Conseil Colonial of Cochinchina and later was chosen by the authorities to serve on the Conseil Supérieur de l'Indochine; he resigned from the latter in October 1925. By that time he had suffered some severe financial setbacks, especially in 1921; also, he had become interested in Caodaism. There are two different versions of his first attendance at a séance. According to one story, he was taken to a séance at Chợ-Gạo in June 1925 by his friend the Conseiller Nguyễn Hữu Đắc; the same account mentions that he was also a friend of the brother of Vương Quan Kỳ, one of Ngô Minh Chiêu's first converts.[21] The other version tells how Lê Văn Trung was introduced to a séance by a relative, who was a member of the Minh-Lý sect, and how the spirit of Lý Thái Bạch (Li Po, the Tang poet) predicted a spiritual future for him: whereupon he gave up all his vices overnight.[22] Whatever the origin of his connexion with Caodaism, there can be no doubt that he was in touch with the Phò-Loan group by 18 January 1926, when a séance was held at his house attended by Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, etc., and it is from that date that he appears to have begun the organization of Caodaism as a formal religious movement.[23]

It was Lê Văn Trung who in May 1926 sought government permission for the opening of 21 oratories in various parts of east and central Cochinchina, most of which had been permitted to open,

under strict conditions for worship, by the end of the year.[24] It was he too who organized the petition of 7 October 1926, addressed to Le Fol, the Governor of Cochinchina, in which 28 Caodaists appealed for the official recognition of their movement as a religion.[25] Besides Lê Văn Trung, and also Madame Lâm Thị Thanh, the signatories included Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Lê Bá Trang, and Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (who by 1931 occupied the three highest offices at Tây-Ninh under Lê Văn Trung); two of Ngô Minh Chiêu's first converts, Vương Quan Kỳ and Đoàn Văn Bản; and also the five members of the Phò-Loan group. Two other names which figured prominently in the list were those of Lê Văn Lịch and Trần Đạo Quang, both of whom are described as thầy-tu (religious masters). They are mentioned in another context by Gobron: Lê Văn Lịch as head of the Minh-Đường sect, and Trần Đạo Quang as head of the Minh-Sư sect.[26] Their presence in this list of October 1926 confirms the impression that at its roots Caodaism must have had some connexion with the Minh sects.

The letter of October 1926 was not, however, signed by Ngô Minh Chiêu himself. His connexion with the Phò-Loan group and with Lê Văn Trung proved to be very short-lived. As one source put it, used to his solitude, he was annoyed by the influx of adherents, who bothered him.[27] In April 1926 he had already decided not to become involved in the politics of the new religious organization, and handed over his leadership to Lê Văn Trung. Shortly

afterwards he organized his own small following at Cầ̀n-Thơ, and for the remainder of his life he was associated only with that place. It was to Cầ̀n-Thơ (in fact, Cầ̀i-Khế) that he retired in 1931, and there that he died the following year. His followers became known as the Chiếu-Minh sect of Caodaism. But behind this apparent schism there was another distinction: between the inner and outer aspects of the religion, or between nonaction (vô-vi, Chinese wu-wei) and salvation (phổ-độ, Chinese pu-tu): it was in the nature of this type of religious movement that some of its members should go out into the world and proselytize, whilst others remained aloof from lay contact, and also from politics.[28] It is not necessary therefore to suppose an open quarrel at this stage in the development of Caodaism, although we cannot of course be certain that none had occurred. We do not even know whether Ngô Minh Chiếu attended the formal inauguration of the Cao-Đài religion, of which he was ostensibly the founder, at the ceremony at Tap-Ninh in November 1926.

PART III

The movement which had thus been launched expanded rapidly during the next three years. Lê Văn Trung, in a letter defending Caodaism against the attacks of Ernest Outrey (the Cochinese Deputy in the French Assembly), claimed in October 1928 that the religion had over a million adepts; but that was almost certainly an exaggeration. More credible is the report of 100,000 adepts in June 1927; and when a year later an article in *L'Opinion*

suggested that there were as many as 7100,000 adepts, even the less credulous Maurice Monribot agreed that there must be at least 200,000.[29] The number of oratories rose from about 20 at the end of 1926 to over 100 by 1931.[30] To begin with, the religion was mainly centred on east Cochinchina, but as time went on it became equally popular in the provinces of the centre (along the Mekong), and began to spread to the west (the Transbassac). Gobron, for example, notes that all the early séances took place at Chợ-Lớn, Cầ̀n-Giuộc, Lộc-Giang, Tân-Định and Thủ-Đức: all places in the vicinity of Saigon.[31] And of the 21 oratories (thánh-thất) for which Lê Văn Trung sought government permission in May 1926, 13 were in Saigon and the provinces of Gia-Định and Chợ-Lớn, and another 2 in Tây-Ninh and Biên-Hoà; the remaining 6 were in provinces of the centre, Mỹ-Tho and Bến-Tre (2 each), Sa-Đéc and Vĩnh-Long.[32] But by 1932 there were said to be about 35,000-50,000 adepts in each of the provinces of Chợ-Lớn, Gia-Định, Bến-Tre, and Mỹ-Tho; by then, too, there were rival Caodaist centres at Mỹ-Tho and Bạc-Liêu. Down to 1930, most Caodaists (with the exception of those in the Tiên-Thiên sect, of which we must treat separately) accepted in principle the hegemony of the holy see (toà-thánh) at Tây-Ninh. There seems to have been some kind of disagreement within the movement in 1928, as a result of which the oratory of Cầ̀u-Kho (Saigon) came to be regarded as a dissident centre, but this does not appear to have amounted to a major breach.[33] It was not until 1930 that a real split

began to develop, which produced rival centres of Caodaism.

What happened in that year must be seen against the background of growing concern on the part of the authorities that Caodaism was merely a cover for nationalist and perhaps also Communist activities. The attack by Outrey in 1928 has already been mentioned. About the same period there were other attacks in the Saigon press: some merely objected that the spiritism of the Caodaists was a superstition unworthy of men who had at least some French education; others went further, seeing in Caodaism a disguised revival of the secret societies which had endangered the security of the colony in the years before 1916. One writer suggested that the temple at Tây-Ninh was built on the precise spot where two Frenchmen had been murdered during the troubles of 1866.[34] A feature of the religion which especially alarmed the authorities at that time was its popularity amongst Cambodians, many of whom came across the border on pilgrimages to the holy see during 1927. As a result, on 23 December 1927 the King of Cambodia issued an ordinance condemning the new religion as a heresy, and for the time being these pilgrimages came to an end.[35] Then in 1930 came the most serious unrest in Cochinchina since 1916, with many and frequent demonstrations by gatherings of peasants, which were obviously the work of some kind of organization. Whilst the most concrete evidence seemed to attribute the unrest to the Communists. It was alleged by several people that

the Caodaists were equally involved.[36] In vain was it pointed out that the worst trouble was in the provinces of the centre, whilst Tây-Ninh remained completely calm.[37] Whatever secret relations may have existed between the Caodaists and followers of the Việt-Nam Communist Party or of Nguyễn An Ninh's secret society left no tangible evidence, and it is impossible to know whether or not Caodaists actually were involved in the demonstrations. But the crisis of these years was sufficient to make the government more watchful in its desire to keep organizations like Caodaism under control. This in turn forced the leaders of the movement to consider carefully their attitude to the authorities.

The occasion of the first major Caodaist split appears to have been a decision, sometime towards the end of 1930, that all dignitaries of the religion above the grade of *phối-sư* should go to live permanently at Tây-Ninh. One of the three men holding that grade in 1930 was Nguyễn Văn Ca, whose home was at Mỹ-Tho and whose family was, it would seem, opposed to his commitment to the religion in this way. After considerable hesitation, during which time he is said to have visited the dissident oratory at Cầu-Kho, Nguyễn Văn Ca decided not to go to Tây-Ninh but to establish his own holy see (*toà-thánh*) at Mỹ-Tho.[38] It was said that there had been a long-standing rivalry between Ca and Lê Văn Trung; it was also said, that at this stage the Mỹ-Tho group had the tacit support of the French administration, and even implied that the latter was trying to use Nguyễn

Văn Ca to create an alternative focus of loyalty amongst the Caodaist faithful in order to draw them away from Tây-Ninh. During 1931-2 rivalry between Tây-Ninh and Mỹ-Tho became acute, and it would seem that many adepts transferred their allegiance to Mỹ-Tho. It was at this point, in 1931, that Lê Văn Trung transferred his administrative responsibilities at Tây-Ninh to Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, who had taken over Cas place as chánh-phối-sư, when he had gone to live permanently at the holy see late in 1930.[39] Tương was able to persuade another chánh-phối-sư, Lê Bá Trang, to return from Mỹ-Tho to Tây-Ninh in November 1932, and these two men worked in close collaboration for the next four years, but Tương was unable to heal the breach entirely.[40] In August of that year a council at Tây-Ninh issued a decree outlawing Nguyễn Văn Ca and his followers as rebels against the holy see (of Tây-Ninh). But it was evident from the poor attendance at the Tây-Ninh festivities to celebrate the anniversary of the religion in November 1932, that its support had dwindled away.[41] Moreover, in the meantime yet another holy see had been created at a place called Giồng-Bướm, in Bạc-Liêu province. This was established by Trần Đạo Quang, who had been a high dignitary at Tây-Ninh from 1926 to 1928, but then had gone to live at Cầu-Kho, and eventually moved to Bạc-Liêu in 1931.[42] The centres at Mỹ-Tho and Bạc-Liêu were probably on good terms with one another, though there were doctrinal differences between them. Their new forms of the religion were called respectively the

Minh-Chơn-Lý and the Minh-Chơn-Đạo.

The crisis at Tây-Ninh had by 1932 produced serious internal disagreements between the leaders who remained there. The principal rivalry was between Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang, on the one hand, and Phạm Công Tắc and Lê Văn Trung on the other. Phạm Công Tắc, who held the position of hộ-pháp, was head of the Hiệp-Thiên Đài (the organization of mediums), whilst Lê Văn Trung was the highest member of the administrative organization, the Cửu-Trùng Đài. As we have seen, Tương and Trang held the slightly lower grade of chánh-phối-sư in the latter organ. But in addition, by 1932 Phạm Công Tắc had created his own inner sect, the Phạm-Môn, which was named after his own family and consisted of at most 500 of his own closest followers.[43] The conflict came to a head during the first half of 1933. In January of that year, Lê Bá Trang and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương sent out a circular requiring adepts to obey the French administration. It was possibly at this time that Nguyễn Phan Long intervened with Governor Krautheimer to secure the reopening of 92 Cao-daist oratories which had been closed: the date of that event is unfortunately not clear.[44] What is certain is that Tương and Trang saw some show of obedience to the French as essential if their holy see was to recover its position. In April 1933, Phạm Công Tắc and Lê Văn Trung decided to use this fact against them, and held a secret council meeting to condemn Trang and Tương as Francophiles. But they were not yet strong enough to carry the day: on 16 April a formal meeting

of the Thượng-Hội council was held at Tây-Ninh, at which Lê Văn Trung and Phạm Công Tắc were condemned (in their absence).[45] In September, Lê Bá Trang made complaints against Trung in the French tribunal at Tây-Ninh town, and actually went as far as to have another of his opponents Lê Văn Bảy arrested at Phnom-Penh.[46] The situation was such that by the end of the year Lê Văn Trung and Phạm Công Tắc had to come to terms with Trang and Tương, and an agreement was signed between them on 27 December 1933.[47]

Such an agreement was, however, of no permanent value in a situation of this kind, and it is not surprising to find that once he was strong enough to do so, Lê Văn Trung denounced his rivals once again. It would seem that Lê Bá Trang and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương were much weaker now than formerly, and in March 1934 Tương withdrew from Tây-Ninh. He went first into seclusion in Bà-Rịa province, then to his home at An-Hội (Bến-Tre, where he began to organize the creation of his own holy see and the reform of Caodaism: he called his new branch of the religion Ban-Chỉnh-Đạo.[48] The first assembly of adepts at An-Hội had just begun in November 1934, when news arrived of the death of Lê Văn Trung at Tây-Ninh. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương now recalled the agreement which he said had been made between himself and other leaders as long ago as 1928, to the effect that he himself was to be the successor of Lê Văn Trung in the highest office of giáo-tông.[49] But Phạm Công Tắc, although not strong enough to seize

the position of giáo-tông for himself (he remained hộ-pháp as late as 1950), was able to prevent Nguyễn Ngọc Tương from succeeding to it. It was at An-Hội, therefore, that Tương was inaugurated as giáo-tông on 9 May 1935.[50] In November of that year, Phạm Công Tắc held his own council at Tây-Ninh, at which he had himself proclaimed Lê Văn Trung's successor as Caodaist superior.[51] Whilst the Tây-Ninh group alleged later that the Bến-Tre centre was supported by a mere few hundred adepts, the biography of Nguyễn Ngọc Tương insists that (to begin with at least), he was supported by 96 out of the grand total of 135 Caodaist oratories. Whatever the truth of these claims, it would seem that by November 1936, Tắc had restored the fortunes of Tây-Ninh sufficiently to be able to attract 20,000 people there to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the religion.[52]

By 1935, therefore, the original group which had founded Caodaism at Tây-Ninh nine years earlier had split into four different and rival centres: Tây-Ninh, Mỹ-Tho, Bạc-Liêu, and Bến-Tre. In addition there was a dissident group at Cầu-Kho (Saigon) which did not claim the status of a toà-thánh or holy see. But this does not account for all those who called themselves Caodaists at this period. There was in addition a sixth group which was probably quite as important but about which very much less is known, at least before 1936. It is sometimes referred to as the Tiên-Thiên sect of Caodaism; but it is also known as the Tây-Tông Western Sect, supposedly to differentiate it from the original group at Tây-Ninh which in

this connexion (but in none of their own literature) is referred to as the Đông-Tông Eastern Sect.[53] Its leaders were Nguyễn Bửu Tài (b. 1882) and Nguyễn Hữu Chính. Of the former, we know that he was a native of the Ba-Tri district of Bến-Tre province and that he became a school-teacher, first at Bến-Tre and later at Biên-Hoà. He also became interested in religion, and is said to have been a tu-đơn, a kind of religious practitioner. When Caodaism was founded at Tây-Ninh in 1926, Tài (who was apparently in touch with Ngô Minh Chiêu and Lê Văn Trung) founded his own new sect, the Tây-Tông, in his own province. If this account is correct, then one cannot say he split off from the Tây-Ninh Centre. Chính on the other hand, possibly in 1927, is said to have left Tây-Ninh in order to establish a sect of his own at Mỹ-Tho.[54] It would seem that the Tiên-Thiên was much less organized than the Eastern Sect, or at least less openly organized. It did not acquire its own toà-thánh until 1957, when one was established at Sóc-Sải: at that period the sect seems to have expanded, whilst the Tây-Ninh Caodaists were in decline, and it was then that Nguyễn Bửu Tài finally took the title giáo-tông.[55]

Whilst the Tiên-Thiên sect seems to have had few if any connexions with Tây-Ninh in the 1930s, it would seem to have been in closer contact with the Caodaists of Mỹ-Tho and Bạc-Lieu, and also with the esoteric group at Cần-Thơ. In 1936 these various groups formed a Caodaist Union, the Liên-Hoà Tổng-Hội, with its centre at Cầu-Kho (Saigon).[56] An

attempt to create some kind of union had already been made two years previously, with the participation of Đoàn Văn Bản and Vương Quan Kỳ (both at Cầu-Kho), Nguyễn Văn Kiên (at Mỹ-Tho), Cao Triều Phát and Trần Đạo Quang (both at Bạc-Lieu), and also several other people including Phan Trường Mạnh. But all these people belonged to what seems to have been essentially a single group anyway, since both the Mỹ-Tho and the Bạc-Lieu Caodaists had been associated from the start with the oratory at Cầu-Kho. In 1936 two new elements in the situation made possible a more worth-while union. First, the initiative was taken by a leading Conseiller-Colonial Nguyễn Phan Long, whose sympathies with Caodaism had been well known since he defended the religion in his newspaper *Écho Annamite* in 1927, but who had not previously played any ostensible role in the movement. He now became openly a Caodaist, and presided over the Liên-Hoà Tổng-Hội. Second, this new union had also the participation of the Tiên-Thiên sect, and Nguyễn Bửu Tài and Lê Kim Tỵ were amongst those mentioned as its leading members. It is not clear how deep the union was, but they seem to have played a full part in the first achievement of the Liên-Hoà Tổng-Hội, which was to spread Caodaism to Tourane (Đà-Nẵng) and other parts of central Việt-Nam.[56]

Thus by 1936 one can discern three broad alignments in the Caodaist movement: the Tây-Ninh group, led now by Phạm Công Tắc, with an important branch in Phnom-Penh presided over by Trần

Quang Vinh; the Bến-Tre group, led by Nguyễn Ngọc Tương; and the Liên-Hòa Tổng-Hội, embracing the Tiên-Thiên, the Minh-Chơn-Lý, and the Minh-Chơn-Đạo, whose followers were mainly in the centre and west of Cochinchina. Given the material at present to hand, that is as far as one can reasonably hope to take the attempt to compile a detailed account of the history of Caodaism. More recent developments can only be studied when more inside information becomes available.

PART IV

One major question concerning the early history of Caodaism remains to be raised: that of its origins and antecedents. The whole tenor of Caodaist publications is to emphasize that this was a new religion, which suddenly burst upon the world in 1926 and attracted immediately a large following of ordinary people. But when we come to examine the doctrines of the religion it will be clear that there was much in Caodaism that had deep roots in Sino-Vietnamese tradition, and that it must be seen against the background of earlier religious movements. We know that several of the leading Caodaists had had religious interests and experiences before 1925-6, notably Ngô Văn Chiêu and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương. Did they do so entirely outside any previously existing religious organization? On the face of things, it seems unlikely.

That secret organizations of a religious (and also political) nature had existed in South Việt-Nam in earlier periods is well known. They were

particularly prominent in the periods 1860-85 and 1905-16. In the former period, the French conquest of Cochinchina was opposed most strongly by a group identified as a religious sect with the name Đạo-Lành.[57] Following a French decree of 1873 prohibiting that sect, it is said to have reorganized under the name Đạo Phật Đường. It was held responsible for rebellions in Mỹ-Tho and other provinces in 1874 and 1878, and for the disturbances of 1885 which included an attack on Saigon.[58] But the French do not seem to have penetrated the organization of the movement, and there is no account of it in any printed or archival source-material I have seen. Concerning the secret society movement of the years 1905-16, which culminated in another abortive attack on Saigon, followed by a great many arrests, there exists the fascinating account by Coulet, based on detailed police records. But even there we do not have a detailed picture of whatever religious organization underlay the movement: Coulet gives only occasional translations of captured documents, and reproduces a number of amulets written in Chinese characters. The religious propaganda of Caodaism was certainly a new phenomenon amongst Vietnamese secret sects, and because we have no comparable material concerning earlier groups it is impossible to make detailed comparisons, in such matters as doctrine, ritual, or organizational hierarchies. We cannot say, therefore, to what extent (if at all) these earlier movements represent an earlier stage in the same line of development which eventually produced Caodaism. Nor is

there so far any evidence to link the personalities of Caodaism with earlier movements: a fact which in itself proves nothing, of course, because it was unlikely that a newly organized sect would choose its leaders from amongst those whose leadership of the earlier movements was already well known to the police. There is, however, one interesting detail which should not be allowed to pass unnoticed, and which suggests that there may indeed have been connexions between these movements of different periods. In a Caodaist tract, published in French by Phan Trường Mạnh in 1950, there is a reference to a spirit-séance held at Cao-Lãnh in 1908, in which a message was received from the spirit of the laureate (thủ-khoa) Huân, a leading figure in the revolt of 1874-5 which the French had attributed to the Đạo-Lãnh sect. The message, moreover, includes two references to the Cao-Đài.[59]

That same tract has another reference which suggests a slightly different line of inquiry in our search for Caodaist antecedents. Another amongst several earlier references to the Cao-Đài, cited by Phan Trường Mạnh, comes in a prayer which he says has been recited for about 40 years (i.e. since about 1910) by adepts of the religious sect called Minh-Sư.[60] We have already met references to this sect in the early careers of Nguyễn Ngọc Trang, who came into contact with it around 1920, and Ngô Minh Chiêu, who is said to have been friendly with a high dignitary of the Minh-Sư around 1919.[61] But it was in fact only one of a number of sects of this kind

which were associated with Caodaism. In the English edition of Gobron, there has been added a list of the various phái divisions of the religion, including the Minh-Chơn-Lý, the Minh-Chơn-Đạo, the Tây-Tông, and so on, which is then followed by a list of the five chi branches of Caodaism, together with the names of their heads:[62]

Minh-Lý -> Âu Kích

Minh-Sư -> Trần Đạo Quang

Minh-Tân -> Lê Minh Khá

Minh-Thiện -> Đạt and Mùi

Minh-Đường -> Lê Văn Lịch

We have already met two of these men in connexion with Caodaism: Trần Đạo Quang (later founder of the Minh-Chơn-Đạo at Bạc-Liêu) and Lê Văn Lịch, who were amongst the signatories of the letter seeking French recognition for the new religion in October 1926.[63] Concerning the Minh-Đường, the Minh-Tân, and the Minh-Thiện, there is no other information. But the Minh-Lý figures elsewhere in Gobron's account. It was to this sect that one of Lê Văn Trung's relatives belonged in 1925, and possibly through this connexion that Trung was first introduced to spirit-séances. At a later stage (the date is not given) we find Phạm Công Tắc insisting on the distinction between Caodaism and Minhism: the latter is separated from us by a mystical and philosophical point of view.[64] His vagueness on the actual doctrinal differences suggests that he had some political reason for making the distinction, but we have no means of knowing what it was. All these

references to the Minh branches relate to the period after about 1919: they nevertheless seem to suggest that when Caodaism first emerged there already existed a number of sects in which some of its doctrines and rituals were already familiar. Might not these sects have existed for long before, and have provided the religious background to earlier movements? There is one last piece of evidence concerning the Minh-Sư which seems to point in that direction. Ngô Minh Chiêu, following his return to Saigon in 1924, spent a good deal of time at a temple in Đa-Kao (a suburb of the city) called the Ngọc-Hoàng-Điện Jade Emperor Palace. That temple had been built in the years 1900-6, by a Chinese businessman called Lưu Minh, a member of the Minh-Sư vegetarian sect which in China was at that period dedicated to the cause of overthrowing the Manchu dynasty and restoring the Minh.[65] Do we have here a clue to the real roots of Caodaism?

NOTES:

[1] Graham Greene, *The quiet American* (Penguin Books, 1962), 81.

[2] B. B. Fall, *The political-religious sects of Vietnam*, *Pacific Affairs*, XXVIII, 3, 1955, 235-53]

[3] The best-known of these works is G. Gobron, *Histoire du Caodasme*, Paris, 1948 (English translation, Saigon?, 1950); except where otherwise stated, references here will be to the English version, which includes additional material but omits an important

chapter] See also Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *Lược sử Đạo Cao Đài: A short history of Caodaism* (in Vietnamese, French, and English), Tourane, 1956]

[4] *Đông Tân, Lịch-sử Cao Đài*, 1. Phần Vô Vi, Saigon, [1967, referred to in subsequent pages as *Lịch-sử*; Anon], *Tiểu sử Đức Giáo Tông*, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Saigon, 1958, referred to subsequently as NNT]

[5] *Revue Caodaque*, IIIe An., décembre 1950; this periodical should be carefully distinguished from *Revue Caodaste*, published in the years around 1930] I have not seen any copies of the latter, but it is cited in Gobron, op] cit., and in *Contribution*, VII (see n. 6 below).

[6] *Gouvernement-Général de l'Indochine, Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine française*, VII] *Le Caodasme*, Hanoi, 1934, referred to subsequently as *Contribution*, VII]

[7] G. C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, Yale, 1964, 66-73, 290-4.

[8] *Écho Annamite*, 19 November 1926; Gobron, op. cit., 29.

[9] *Contribution*, VII, 33-4.

[10] *La Dépêche d'Indochine*, 28 and 30 August 1930.

[11] *Contribution*, VII, 64-7.

[12] There is a very full account of his life in *Đông-Tân, Lịch-sử*]

[13] *Lịch-sử*, 53 ff.

[14] *ibid.*, 66 ff.; this episode is also mentioned briefly in Nguyễn Trung Hậu, op] cit., 7-8.

[15] Lịch-sử, 82-92; Nguyễn Ngọc Tương is not mentioned there, but his conversion late in 1925 is indicated by NNT, 13]

[16] NNT, 5-6.

[17] *ibid.*, 13.

[18] Lịch-sử, 88 ff.; Gobron, 20-1, refers to this group without mentioning names]

[19] The fullest account of Phạm Công Tắc's early career is in Contribution, VII, 87-90]

[20] On Lê Văn Trung, see *ibid.*, 27-32; also Gobron, 26 ff.

[21] Lịch-sử, 91.

[22] Contribution, VII, 29-31, and Gobron, 26-7; both it would seem based, at this point, on material in Revue Caodaste, no] 3, p. 315.

[23] Lịch-sử, 91.

[24] Contribution, VII, 81.

[25] Lịch-sử, 108-10, gives the Vietnamese text of this letter and a full list of the actual signatories; there was an additional list of 247 adepts, but I have not seen and record of their names, Cf] Contribution, VII, 32, 81, where it is noted that no formal recognition of Caodaism was given at this time, despite Caodaist claims]

[26] Gobron, 151; cf. *infra*, p. 349.

[27] Gobron, 27.

[28] Lịch-sử, 129 ff.

[29] Écho Annamite, 13 June 1927; La Presse Indochinoise, 9 June 1928 (comment by the editor Monri-bot on an article in L'Opinion)]

[30] Contribution, VII, 80-1. Tây-Ninh controlled

100 thánh-thất in 1931, and 128 in 1932, but it is not clear whether dissident oratories at that time are excluded from these totals]

[31] Gobron, 28.

[32] Contribution, VII, 81.

[33] Gobron (French edition), 98 ff.: a whole section of this edition, relating to schisms within the movement during the period 1928-31, was omitted in the English version, for reasons which can only be guessed] Cf. also NNT, 20]

[34] La Presse Indochinoise, 9 June 1928, citing a recent article in L'Opinion] The Frenchmen referred to were Captain de Larclauze and Lieut. Lesage, who were killed in an attack on Tây-Ninh by 2,000 Cambodians in June 1866; A] Schreiner, Abrégé de l'histoire d'Annam, Saigon, 1906, 277.

[35] Contribution. VII, 35-7.

[36] e.g. by R. Vanlande, L'Indochine sous la menace communiste, Paris, 1930, 118-19] For an account of the disturbances in Cochinchina, between May 1930 and March 1931, see Gouvernement-Général de l'Indochine, Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine française, IV, Hanoi, 1934]

[37] Écho Annamite, 23 May 1930.

[38] Gobron (French ed.), 98 ff. There is a slightly different account in Hickey, op] cit., 292-3, which says that Ca left Tây-Ninh in [1931 after receiving a spirit-message instructing him to do so and that he went first to Rạch-Giá before settling at Mỹ-Tho in 1932] Hickey's information presumably came from

Caodaists he interviewed at Khánh-Hậu (Tân-An province), where the Mỹ-Tho sect had some members in 1958]

[39] NNT, 21-4; the letter written by Trương to inform the Governor of Cochinchina of the change of direction is there reproduced, dated 1 September 1931]

[40] Contribution, VII, 90.

[41] *ibid.*, 86-7, 90-1.

[42] Gobron (French ed.), 101 ff.; cf. *Revue Cao daque*, IIIe An., décembre 1950, 93-107]

[43] Contribution, VII, 86-90.

[44] *ibid.*, 92; *Revue Cao daque*, IIIe An., décembre 1950, 67-92.

[45] Contribution, VII, 93; NNT, 31.

[46] Contribution, VII, 94, 100.

[47] NNT, 32-4.

[48] *ibid.*, 34, 37.

[49] *ibid.*, 41-5.

[50] *ibid.*, 48.

[51] Gobron, 71-2.

[52] *ibid.*, 74.

[53] The only account of the Tiên-Thiên sect which does more than merely note its existence is the biographical notice on Nguyễn Bửu Tài contained in a recent monograph of the former Bến-Tre province: Huỳnh-Minh, *Địa-linh nhơn-kiệt: Kiến-Hoà xưa và nay*, Gia-Định, 1965, 196-9]

[54] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 20.

[55] Hickey, *op. cit.*, 293-4. The Tiên-Thiên sect appears to have co-operated closely with the

Communists since 1960: one of its leading members, Nguyễn Văn Ngôi, sat on the Central Committee of the National Front for the Liberation of South Việt-Nam from 1961 till at least 1964; Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*, Cambridge, Mass], 1966, 429.

[56] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 20; *Revue Cao daque*, IIIe An., décembre 1950, 67-92]

[57] According to some sources (e.g. Coulet, 122 ff., cf. *infra*), this is Đạo-Lãnh, which would mean Religion of the Good; but according to others (e.g.) a report by the Administrateur of Sóc-Trăng in 1883) it should be Đạo-Lãnh, which might mean Way of the Leader]

[58] A. Schreiner, *op. cit.*, 315; G. Coulet, *Les sociétés secrètes en terre d'Annam*, Saigon, 1926, 122 ff]

[59] Phan Trường Mạnh, *La voie du salut Cao daque*, Saigon, 1950, [48-9]

[60] *ibid.*, 48.

[61] *Lịch-sử*, 57.; cf. *supra*, p. 339.

[62] Gobron, 151.

[63] *supra*, p. 340, n. 35.

[64] Gobron, 108 ff.

[65] Vương Hồng Sển, *La Pagode de l'Empereur de Jade à Dakao*, Notes et Documents (Bull. de l'Association Viet-Nam France), janvier 1963, 26. Part of the material on which this article is based was collected during a visit to Saigon in 1967, financed by the London-Cornell Project for East and South East Asian Studies, financed jointly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Nuffield Foundation.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CAODAISM
 II. BELIEFS AND ORGANIZATION [1]

By R. B. SMITH

The religion of Cao-Dai is fundamentally, and deliberately, syncretic. Since it includes Christ and Moses (but for some reason, not Muhammad) in its pantheon, the Western student might be tempted to see it as essentially an attempt to bridge the gulf between East and West by finding a sort of middle way between Christianity and Buddhism. It is possible that some Caodaists who have acquired a thorough Western education in France but maintained their religious belief do in fact see it in those terms, but most of the Caodaist literature indicates that the real basis of the syncretism is an attempt to bring together the three religions of the Sino-Vietnamese tradition. In this attempt, Christianity has only a peripheral position, and nothing has been adopted from Christian teachings that would seriously clash with the

underlying doctrinal tolerance of East Asian religions. The most important feature of Caodaist syncretism is that it brings together elements of Taoist spirit-mediumship with a concept of salvation that was originally Buddhist. If any one of the three Sino-Vietnamese religions may be said to be dominant in Caodaism it is religious Taoism; but since the Caodaists themselves frequently refer to their religion as reformed Buddhism, that is a point which must be demonstrated rather than taken for granted. I propose to analyse some of the most obvious elements of Caodaism under four headings: spirit-mediumship; the Cao-Đài and other spirits; salvation and the apocalyptic aspect; and hierarchy and organization. A concluding section will deal briefly with the possible relationship between Caodaism and certain religious sects in China. [2]

I. SPIRIT-MEDIUMSHIP

It is hardly surprising that in the account of Caodaism compiled by Gabriel Gobron, the spiritist element stands out very sharply, since he himself appears to have become aware of the Vietnamese religion through his interest in French spiritism. [3] Probably the same was true of Paul Monet and other Frenchmen who attended séances in Saigon and agreed to propagate the religion in France. This being so, neither is it surprising to find occasional references in Vietnamese writing to the European spiritist movement. French spiritism, as an organized movement, had come into being at the same period as the French moved into Cochinchina. Its founder, L. H. D.

Rivail (1804-69), better known from 1856 till his death by the pseudonym Allan Kardec, was the proprietor of a school in Paris and a proponent of the ideas of Pestalozzi, at whose Swiss school he had been educated. He fell in with the fashion of playing with tables tournantes which developed in France about the years 1854-5; but he took it more seriously than most and in 1856 published a book, *Le livre des esprits*, consisting of answers to his questions about philosophy and ethics received at a number of séances. [4] It was followed in 1861 by his *Livre des médiums*, and in the meantime he launched the *Revue Spirite* at the beginning of 1858. By his death, he had created an organization capable of surviving him, which still existed in France in the 1920s. It was a distinctive feature of the spiritism of Allan Kardec (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon spiritualism) that messages from the beyond were always received in written form, by means of the table tournante, the ouija-board, or the corbeille à bec. Caodaism too accepted only this form of communication with spirits, and it would seem that these European methods were sometimes used at Vietnamese séances. In particular it is noted that the Phò-Loan group of Phạm Công Tắc, when it began to hold séances in 1925, practised the European method; and it is worth recalling in this connexion that the ouija-board was perfectly suitable for the Vietnamese language, once it had begun to be written in the roman script of quốc-ngữ instead of in characters.

However, it would be a serious mistake to

conclude from the evidence of this connexion with French spiritism that the Caodaists, or any other Vietnamese, owed either the idea or their techniques of spirit-mediumship to the mission civilisatrice. The practice of spiritism can be traced far back into the past of the Vietnamese and Chinese traditions; and whereas in the West the orthodoxy of Christianity was thoroughly opposed to spirit-mediumship, as a black art, in China the Confucian orthodoxy never attempted to stamp out spiritism as such. De Groot, one of the few Western writers to be interested in the practice and not merely the texts of Chinese religion, was able to supplement his own observation of spirit practices in nineteenth-century Fu-kien by reference to several textual accounts of earlier times. A document relating to the Tang period describes how it was customary for the people to take a wicker rice-tray and dress it with clothes, and insert a chop-stick into it by way of beak, which they caused to write on a platter covered with flour in order to divine. [5] An early form, indeed, of the beaked basket. Further evidence of Chinese mediumship by means of automatic writing is found in Mr. A. J. A. Elliotts account of spirit cults in Singapore, based on observations made in the years 1950-1; he emphasizes that it is quite separate from the speaking-kind of mediumship, in which the medium talks while possessed by a spirit, which is the main subject of his book. He describes a technique in which a Y-shaped stick is held by two people, one of them a medium, and writes out messages on a tray of sand, one character after another. It

is necessary, of course, to have an interpreter to identify the characters at great speed. [6] Sometimes, he says, this kind of mediumship leads to the formation of associations of people willing to follow the injunctions received by way of spirit-writing. Very often, however, the invocation of spirits has no deeper motive than the simple desire of those attending to ask questions about their own future. In China, under the Ch'ing (and doubtless earlier), scholars would consult the spirits in this way to find out whether they would pass the examinations: an example occurs in Wu Ching-tzu's *The scholars*, where the spirit of Kuan Yu, conqueror of the devils, foretold the future of one of the characters in the novel. [7] Another description of a Chinese spirit séance worth mentioning is one by W. A. Grootaers, who attended a Buddhist séance in Peking in 1948, when messages were received from three Buddhist deities of the Western Paradise. [8] It is clear that spirit-mediumship was not the monopoly of any one of China's three religions but was judged compatible with all of them.

There are no detailed accounts of Caodaist séances by outside observers like de Groot or Grootaers, and so no comparison can be made on that level. But it seems clear from the vocabulary of Vietnamese writings on Caodaism that they fit into the Sino-Vietnamese tradition. Two phrases occur noticeably often: *cầu-tiên* (Chinese *ch'iu-hsien*), meaning to invoke the spirits (literally, immortals); and *đàn-cơ* (Chinese *t'an-chi*), meaning the place at which the séance took place, or perhaps more specifically the

tray on which the spirits wrote their messages. The Caodaists appear to have used the word *cơ* where the Vietnamese dictionaries (related most closely to the North Vietnamese dialect) would give *kê*; it seems to indicate a traditional Sino-Vietnamese technique of spirit-writing, but it is possible that the same word was used also for the European type of planchette as well. The use of the term *đàn* in this context, may have some significance; it is also the term used for the altar on which the imperial sacrifices to Heaven and Earth were made, and it is not inconceivable that spirit-mediumship originally partook of the nature of a sacrifice to spirits as well as communication with them. The terms *cầu-cơ* and *cầu-đàn* also occur in the Caodaist literature. [9]

It would seem that there were certain places in Cochinchina that were especially noted as important *đàn* (or *đàn-tiên*) where communication with spirits could be most effectively made. One of these was at *Cái-Khế* (*Cần-Thơ*), and was where Ngô Minh Chiêu held some of his early séances in the period 1917-20; several *đàn* are mentioned there in the period 1907-37, notably the *đàn Quang-Xuân*, which appears to have been subsequently renamed the *đàn Hiệp-Minh*. About 1931, Ngô Minh Chiêu established another, the *đàn Chiếu-Minh*. [10] Another famous centre of mediumship was *Cao-Lãnh*; at the *đàn* there, established early this century, it was well known that Lý Thái Bạch came to write verses. [11] There is no reference, in the documents used for the present study, to Caodaist séances being held there;

but that possibility can certainly not be ruled out. Nor should it be forgotten that Cao-Lãnh was an important centre of unrest in 1930, in which Caodaists were accused of being involved. Indeed spirit-mediumship of this kind may well have been more wide-spread than any of the source material on Cochinchinese history before 1920 indicates. Phan Trường Mạnh mentions a séance at Cao-Lãnh in 1908, when Thủ-khoa Huân communicated a message. [12] Is it not possible that spirit-mediumship was also an element in the secret society activity of 1912-16, about which we have only French source material? Was there, for example, any connexion between spirit-communication and the making of the amulets which Coulet regarded as so important? There is one small clue pointing in that direction in Đồng-Tân's account of Ngô Minh Chiêu's early career: after he had sought a cure for his mother by invoking spirits, about 1917, Chiêu and a number of friends used a technique of spirit-writing in order to obtain amulets to be used for medicinal purposes. [13] The curious composition of some of the amulets illustrated by Coulet might be explained more easily, if they were actually produced at séances; but at present this can be no more than a speculative suggestion.

The theology underlying the spirit-mediumship of the Chinese and Vietnamese tradition is a subject which has been very little studied, and which cannot be thoroughly investigated here. But there is one passage in Gobron which suggests that, in spite of his own emphasis on French spiritism, the

Caodaist séances were based on Taoist beliefs about the nature of spirits. He indicates the importance of âm and dương (Chinese yin and yang) in the arrangement of offerings to the spirits; a little later he speaks of the tam-tài, or three essential elements of the universe (Heaven, Earth, and Man), and then of the three constituent elements of man: tinh matter, khí vital essence, and thần spirit, soul. [14] This is the vocabulary of religious Taoism, and it was the Taoists in the Chinese tradition who knew most about how to deal with spirits of all kinds. Amongst their beliefs was the notion that the best person to communicate with spirits was a young boy in whom the dương male element was very strong: such a medium was called đồng-tử, meaning literally a boy who had just attained puberty. The Caodaists also refer to their mediums as đồng-tử, though in practice they were by no means always young boys. It is unfortunate that no copy seems to be available, outside Caodaist circles, of the book which Ngô Minh Chiêu used as his source of the technique of mediumship. It is referred to under the title Vạn-pháp quy-tông. [15] But the mere fact of reference to that manual indicates that the Caodaists depended mainly on Sino-Vietnamese knowledge of mediumship, and that the existence of such practices amongst a small minority of Frenchmen in the 1920s is merely incidental to an understanding of the religion.

II. THE CAO-DAI AND OTHER SPIRITS

As with the techniques of mediumship, so with the identity of the spirits invoked, Western

impressions of Caodaism tend to place special emphasis on the European figures whose spirits have entered into the séances, and far less attention has been paid to Chinese and Vietnamese spirits. Particularly prominent amongst the former is Victor Hugo; another often mentioned is Jeanne d'Arc. [16] Hugo's writings, especially *Les misérables*, made a deep impression on French-educated Vietnamese readers; and it would seem that he also had the reputation amongst Caodaists of having been himself interested in spiritism. (He was an exile in the Channel Islands during the 1850's and 1860's, but may well have indulged there in a pursuit which was fashionable in many parts of France at the time when Allan Kardec founded his movement.) But one cannot dismiss the possibility that the main reason why early Caodaists mentioned Hugo so frequently in talking with Europeans was a desire to impress them with their high degree of loyalty to French culture, and perhaps thereby to cover up the more essential features of their cult. For men like Ngô Minh Chiêu and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Vietnamese and Chinese spirits must surely have been more important than those of any Frenchman.

It is possible for almost any spirit to be invoked, or to reveal himself, at a séance; usually, it would seem, the name of the spirit is not known until it has been communicated, and Caodaists do not set out to obtain messages from particular spirits decided upon by themselves in advance. Obviously we have information about only a small number of the spirits

who revealed themselves at Caodaist, and pre-Caodaist, séances in the period 1917-37. Moreover, it is likely that only politically unarmful spirits would be mentioned in published accounts of the early séances. Phan Trường Mạnh records a message received from the South Vietnamese patriot Thủ-khoa Huân at Cao-Lãnh in 1908; Thủ-khoa Huân being the leader of a famous rising against the French in Mỹ-Tho province in 1874. [17] It is not impossible, despite the absence of documentary evidence, that the Caodaists also received communications from spirits of that ilk. Might there, one wonders, be some significance in the fact that Ngô Minh Chiêu (on Phú-Quốc) and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (at Hòn-Chông) developed their early interest in spirit-mediumship in places which had been associated with the resistance movement of Nguyễn Trung Trực in 1867-8? [18] This possibility can be the subject only of speculation; it is the religious and literary figures whose spirit-revelations appear in the published sources.

One of the most frequently mentioned of these is the Tang poet Li Po, known in Vietnamese as Lý Thái Bạch. According to Gobron, it was Lý Thái Bạch who appeared at the first séance attended by Lê Văn Trung in 1925; it was his spirit too which propounded the principal doctrines of Caodaism at a séance attended by several Frenchmen in January 1927. [19] Mention has already been made of the association of that spirit with the đàn at Cao-Lãnh. Clearly he was of considerable importance for the early Caodaists, for at Tây-Ninh his spirit was made

titular Giáo-Tông or head of the religion earthly occupants of the office being regarded as merely temporary incumbents. [20] The reason for his prominence is not made clear in the Caodaist literature. The poet was however a well-known Taoist: Arthur Waley's short biography of him describes how in the 720's he met the Taoist master Ssu-ma Cheng-cheng (d. 735), patriarch of the Shang Ch'ing school, and also how he qualified for a Taoist diploma at a temple in Shantung about 745. [21] If nothing else, the importance of his spirit in Caodaism is another indication of the Taoist, as opposed to Buddhist, affiliations of the religion. Another Taoist spirit who is mentioned in Caodaist works is Kuan Ti, the Chinese god of war: in Vietnamese, Quan-Thánh-Đế-Quân. One of his messages, received by a Caodaist group in Châu-Đốc province at an unspecified date, is printed by Phan Trường Mạnh. [22] We know too that Ngô Minh Chiêu grew up very close to a temple dedicated to that deity, and that as an adult he venerated (thờ) Kuan Ti especially. [23]

The most important of all the Caodaist spirits was of course the one who called himself Cao-Đài Tiên-Ông His Excellency the Grandfather Immortal. The term Cao-Đài, which in some contexts has the literal meaning of high tower or high palace, is commonly used in Chinese as a term of deepest respect, and as such was chosen by the Protestant missionaries as a translation of Jehovah in the Old Testament. [24] Tiên (Chinese hsien) is usually translated as immortal; but as we have seen, in the phrase cầu-

tiên it is used by Caodaists to mean spirit, where others might have preferred the word thần (Chinese shen). Ông is a Vietnamese word, without Chinese derivation, which in current usage often means simply Mr., but in this context denotes extreme respect of the kind usually accorded to a grandfather. It is similarly used in other spirit connexions: for example, Ông Táo is the hearth god found in some form or other in all Vietnamese households, whilst Ông Cọp is the Tiger in his spirit-manifestation, widely venerated by Vietnamese. The curious thing is that none of these words indicates any specific identity for the supreme Caodaist spirit: was this a spirit which never had any previous existence before his appearance at séances around 1919? Or can he be identified with a spirit already recognized by Taoists in China and Việt-Nam? The former impression is created by some accounts, which emphasize the gradualness of the way in which he revealed his identity to those who became his first Vietnamese adepts. Gobron, speaking of Ngô Minh Chiêu's invocation of spirits on Phú-Quốc in 1919 (an error for 1920), says that among the communicating spirits he discovered one named Cao-Đài, in whom he became particularly interested. [25] This discovery is described in greater detail by Đồng-Tân. [26] Gobron also reports the early séances of the spiritist group which included Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc in 1925: One of the communicating spirits became particularly noticeable by his high level of moral and philosophical teachings. This spirit, who signed himself under the pseudonym "AAA" [in

fact, A=A(-Â, the first three letters of the Vietnamese alphabet, with different diacritical marks] did not wish to reveal himself in spite of the entreaties of his hearers. [27] The spirit did eventually reveal himself as the Cao-Đài Tiên-Ông. But Nguyễn Trung Hậu describes how this latter revelation came about, in greater detail than Gobron, and in so doing he indicates the real identity of the Cao-Đài spirit: at a séance on Christmas Eve 1925, this spirit announced his name as Ngọc-Hoàng Thượng-Đế viết Cao-Đài giáo-đạo Nam-Phương. The English version of his account translates this as Emperor of Jade, alias Caodaist God for the South', but a more literal rendering would be Jade Emperor, Supreme Deity, alias Cao-Đài, religious teacher of the Southern Quarter. [28] The Cao-Đài Tiên-Ông was in fact none other than the Supreme Being himself, and Đồng-Tân confirms this by his references to the spirit as Cao-Đài Thượng-Đế. The Jade Emperor was the Supreme Being of the Taoist pantheon, a personal deity of the highest order. Đồng-Tân also tells us that when Ngô Minh Chiêu returned to Saigon in 1924 he stayed some of the time at a temple in Da-Kao called the Jade Emperor Palace, which seems to confirm his connexion with the cult of this deity. [29] That temple is arranged as a Taoist temple. Here again, careful study of Caodaism seems to indicate that its origins were Taoist.

III. SALVATION AND THE APOCALYPTIC ASPECT OF CAODAISM

It lies beyond the scope of the present study

to attempt a full analysis of the spirit-messages, which form the principal source for all the details of Caodaist belief and symbolism. One element in those beliefs, however, is indicated by the very title of the religion, and is of key importance: the belief in salvation and in the imminent end of the world as we know it. It will be recalled that when Ngô Minh Chiêu parted company with Lê Văn Trung and the other Caodaist leaders in April 1926, the former established the vô-vi section of the religion, whilst the latter established the phở-độ section. [30] The full official name of Caodaism, as used at Tây-Ninh, at Bến-Tre, and also by the United General Assembly of 1936, is Đại-Đạo Tam-Kỳ Phổ-Độ the Great Way of the Three Epochs (or Third Epoch) of Salvation. The idea of three epochs of spiritual development is a Buddhist rather than a Taoist idea, at least in origin, and amongst Mahayanists is often associated with belief in the three Buddhas: of the past (Amitabha, Vietnamese Di-đà), of the present (Sakyamuni, Vietnamese Thích-Ca), and of the future (Maitreya, Vietnamese Di-Lặc). Some Buddhists (by no means all) regard the coming of Maitreya not as a distant event, of no immediate concern to the present, but as an imminent day of judgement which could come at any time. The essentials of this apocalyptic form of Buddhism were incorporated into Caodaism. But in place of the coming of Maitreya, the Caodaists believe in the inauguration of the third epoch by the Cao-Đài spirit (that is, the Supreme Being or Jade Emperor) at their séances, beginning around 1920. Since this

epoch of salvation has already begun, the salvation of souls is of the greatest importance for all mankind, but above all for the Vietnamese since it was in Việt-Nam that the Cao-Đài chose to reveal himself. The question of the precise meaning of the term *phổ-độ* salvation in the Buddhist context, and differences between it and the Christian idea of salvation, are matters which must be left to specialists in Chinese Buddhism.

Of the Caodaist writings used for the present study, those of Phan Trường Mạnh place the greatest emphasis on this apocalyptic element of Caodaism; it occurs more briefly in the short history of Nguyễn Trung Hậu. Both writers were associated with the Liên-Hòa Tổng-Hội of 1936, and by 1950 with the Institut Caodaque in Saigon, rather than with the Tây-Ninh branch of the movement. There is not enough evidence, however, to conclude that the division between these two groups in the 1930's had any doctrinal cause. In 1950, Phan Trường Mạnh published (in French) a tract entitled *La voie du salut caodaque*, which contained translations of some of the most important messages from the Cao-Đài and other spirits. One of these is particularly interesting since it outlines the creation of the world by the Supreme Being, and then goes on to describe the three manifestations de la miséricorde divine, or alliances (between the Supreme Being and Man?) which have occurred in the history of the world. The first of these saw the sending to earth of les archangel des trois sectes: Amitabha (Di-đà), the spirit Thái-Thượng, and the

mythical first ruler of China Fu Hsi (Phục-Hi). In the second manifestation, made necessary by man's moral decline since the first, each of these three beings appeared again in a new form: Amitabha as the Sakyamuni Buddha, Thái-Thượng as the sage Lao Tzu (Lão-Đam), and Fu Hsi as Tổ-Vương, identified by Mạnh as Confucius. Here we have the figures usually recognized as the founders of the three religions united in Caodaism. The message goes on to explain how, also in this second epoch, God sent his only son to earth in the West, to reveal his teaching. In the third manifestation there is no indication of a triad, nor even a mention of Maitreya, who would have been the logical third manifestation of Amitabha and Sakyamuni. There is, however, a noticeable emphasis on the fact that the Supreme Being on this occasion chose to reveal himself to the Vietnamese, which made them a sort of chosen people. [31]

The central position afforded to the Thái-Thượng spirit and Lao Tzu in these triads may well signify that, as the founders of Taoism, they were slightly superior to the Buddhist and Confucian figures named. The Thái-Thượng spirit is mentioned in at least one other Caodaist context: Dr. Hickey found that he was one of the deities honoured by the Caodaists of the Ban-Chỉnh Đạo and the Tiên-Thiên sects in the village of Khánh-Hậu (Tân-An province); his festival was on the fifteenth day of the second lunar month, and the former sect referred to him as Thái-Thượng Lão-Quân. [32] The pattern of three sacred figures in each epoch also suggests affinities with the

Tam-Thanh three holy ones of the Taoist pantheon. [33] It would seem that the Caodaists have combined into a single system the Buddhist concept of three ages and the Taoist concept of three deities, and in this respect their religion is a genuine fusion of at least two Chinese religions.

In another work, an article in the *Revue Cao daïque* of the Institut Cao daïque, Phan Trường Mạnh discussed the progress of the newly-dawned third epoch of salvation and predicted that the era of incarnation would be superseded by the era of disincarnation in the year 1978; a war of 18 years would then be followed by a golden age beginning in 1996. [34] It was in this article that he discussed the significance of the term long-hoa (Chinese lung-hua, meaning literally dragon-flower), which symbolizes the forthcoming end of the world. The term also occurs in Nguyễn Trung Hậu's short history, where the three epochs of salvation described in approximately the same terms as those of Phan Trường Mạnh's tract are called the three dragon-flower assemblies: long-hoa hội. [35] Dr. Topley found references to the dragon-flower as a symbol of the coming of Maitreya in her study of sects in Singapore. She explains that the third Buddha will judge men's souls whilst sitting under a tree of which the long-hoc will be the flower. [36] Phan Trường Mạnh attempted to deduce the date of the forthcoming end of the world (1978) from the structure of the two Chinese characters making up this phrase.

IV. CAODAIST ORGANIZATION

The pattern of three, and also patterns of five and nine, are reflected very strongly in the organization of Caodaism, as it is described both by the English edition of Gobron (relating especially to Tây-Ninh) and by Nguyễn Trung Hậu (presumably with reference to the groups associated with the union of 1936). Their accounts are not identical. According to Nguyễn Trung Hậu the three principal organs of the religion were the Bát-Quái Đài, the Cửu-Trùng Đài, and the Hiệp-Thiên Đài. [37] Gobron (or rather, the editor of the English edition) also lists three organs, but he omits all reference to the Bát-Quái Đài; his third organ is called the Cơ-Quan Phước-Thiện. [38] For reasons which will become apparent, I propose to regard the former of the two frameworks as the more fundamental grouping of three organs.

(1) Bát-Quái Đài Eight Trigrams Palace.

Nguyễn Trung Hậu calls this the vô-vi non-action palace, governed by the Supreme Being (Thượng-Đế), which implies an association between this organ and the v6-vi side of Caodaism established by Ngô Minh Chiêu in 1926 when he withdrew, leaving Tây-Ninh to become the centre of the phổ-độ salvation side. This might explain why there is no mention of the Bát-Quái Đài in Gobron's account relating specifically to Tây-Ninh. The union of Caodaists to which Nguyễn Trung Hậu seems to have belonged did in fact include the Chiêu-Minh group at Cần-Thơ, and hence had closer links with the vô-vi. The eight trigrams were another element of traditional Chinese (Taoist) symbolism that was incorporated into

Caodaism. Nguyễn Trung Hậu reproduces a photograph of Ngô Minh Chiêu in his white ceremonial robes, on which the eight trigrams are clearly inscribed. They are also marked on the white robes worn by Nguyễn Ngọc Tương in at least one picture taken after he had become Giáo-Tông at Bến-Tre.

(2) Cửu-Trung Đài Nine Spheres Palace.

This organ, again according to Nguyễn Trung Hậu, is the palace of hữu-hình, the material world. The phrase cửu-trùng is sometimes used to indicate the nine spheres of the universe, associated with the eight cardinal points and the centre; it is also used in connexion with the nine steps before the imperial throne. In Caodaism the Cửu-Trùng Đài is the administrative organ, or executive body, and is headed by the highest-ranking Caodaist, the Giáo-Tông. An editorial addition to the English version of Gobron lists the nine ministries (viện) amongst which the various executive responsibilities were divided, from rites to education to public works. Gobron's own account indicates a more important division of the Cửu-Trùng Đài into three larger sections. Each of these three sections is identified with one of the three religions; it also has a name and a colour, as shown in the table which follows. The table also gives the names of the people who, under Lê Văn Trung, occupied the highest filled positions in the three sections in 1931. Their religious names comprise three elements: the name of the section (for it would seem that individuals were assigned to a particular section for life); the personal (third) name of the individual; and

lastly the word thanh, meaning 'puré, which may also have been an appellation for life, or may conceivably have reflected a status which would change. Lê Văn Trung's religious name was Thượng Trung Nhật, which indicates that he belonged to the Taoist (Thượng) section; the element Nhật means sun. [39] It is interesting to find that the colour symbolism recorded by Gobron is found confirmed by one of the few published colour photographs of a Caodaist ceremony at Tây-Ninh, taken about 1961. [40] The Cửu-Trùng Đài

Division Colour Religion Functions Phối-sư in 1931

Ngọc Jade red Confucianism personnel rites order Ngọc Trang Thanh (Lê Bá Trang)

Thái High yellow Buddhism finance building works Thái Thơ Thanh (Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ)

Thượng Supreme blue Taoism interior education charity Thượng Tương Thanh (Nguyễn Ngọc Tương)

The Cửu-Trùng Đài embraces nine grades (phẩm) of adepts of the religion; the higher grades are limited in numbers, but their complements are not necessarily full at any particular date. [41]

Giáo-Tông -> 1

Chưởng-Pháp -> 3

Đầu-Sư -> 3

Phối-Sư -> 36

Giáo-Sư -> 72

Giáo-Hữu -> 3,000

Lê-Sanh -> no limit

Chức-Việc -> no limit

Nhơn-Sanh -> no limit

Gobron's list contains twelve grades, because he counted as a separate grade the three Chánh-Phối-Sư principal Phối-Sư, and also counted separately the three sub-grades within that of Chức-Việc. [42] The grade of Chánh-Phối-Sư was certainly in existence by 1931, when it was one of the highest effective grades since the higher ones were for the most part unfilled. Trần Đạo Quang, who had left Tây-Ninh in 1928 and later founded the Minh-Chơn-Đạo, was apparently Chương-Pháp before he went, a high position which he may have owed to the fact that he was already a sort of priest at the time when Caodaism was inaugurated in 1926. [43] Before 1933, Lê Văn Trung himself was only a Đầu-Sư, and he was the highest dignitary at Tây-Ninh in 1931, being followed by the three Chánh-Phối-Sư whose names are given in the table on p. 583.

(3) Hiệp-Thiên Đài Union with Heaven Palace.

Nguyễn Trung Hậu says that this organ stands between the Bát-Quái Đài and the Cửu-Trùng Đài, being the palace where the Giáo-Tông goes to communicate with the Supreme Being (Đức Thượng-Đế), and with the Buddhas (Phật), the Holy Ones (Thánh), and the Immortals (Tiên), in order to establish the way to salvation (phổ-độ) and the release of souls (siêu-rỗi toàn-linh). He goes on to say, the Bát-Quái Đài sets forth the pháp and establishes the đạo; the Cửu-Trùng Đài maintains the pháp and executes the đạo; the Hiệp-Thiên Đài protects the pháp and

defends the đạo. [44] The terms pháp and đạo are important for the structure of this third organ, because together with thế they occur as the names of the three sections (chi) into which it is divided. Thế, in this context, clearly means the material world; đạo probably means here the practice of religion; and pháp might be translated as rule or method, since the translation law implies a meaning closer to the Christian concept of divine law than is ever found in Chinese and Vietnamese religions. In fact, pháp seems to refer to the techniques or methods of mediumship, and the French version of Nguyễn Trung Hậu translates Hiệp-Thiên Đài as palais de médiumnit ; the officials of this organ were probably all mediums. Thus Phạm Công Tắc, who, held the position of Hộ-Pháp by 1934 and still held that position during later years when he was referred to in English-language sources as Pope, was the chief medium. As such he could hold a position not open to Lê Văn Trung. There is no firm evidence of any overlapping of personnel between the Hiệp-Thiên Đài and the Cửu-Trùng Đài, though it is impossible to be certain that there was none at all, since full lists of office-holders are not available. Indeed the relationship between the two organs is an important problem upon which the sources I have used throw very little light. There is no indication of any correspondence between the three sections of one and the three sections of the other, nor any suggestion of any colour symbolism in the Hiệp-Thiên Đài. Nor is it clear which of the two bodies was superior in practice. It is

not impossible that precisely this question was at issue in the conflict between Phạm Công Tắc and Nguyễn Ngọc Tương during the years 1932-5.

The Hiệp-Thiên Đài

Pháp section (Method, i.e. mediumship) Đạo section (Religious practice) Thế section (Material world):

(1) *Heads of sections: Defenders*

Hộ-Pháp

Thượng-Phẩm

Thượng-Sanh

(2) *Protectors Bảo-Pháp Bảo-Đạo Bảo-Thế*

(3) *Administrators Hiến-Pháp Hiến-Đạo Hiến-Thế*

(4) *Propagators Khai-Pháp Khai-Đạo Khai-Thế*

(5) *Continuators Tiếp-Pháp Tiếp-Đạo Tiếp-Thế*

The third organ in the English edition of Gobron, the Cơ-Quan Phước-Thiện, is not mentioned by Nguyễn Trung Hậu, and not a great deal can be said about it. [45] Its name means literally Organ of Good Works, and it is described as a charitable body. Twelve grades of membership are listed, the head being called Phật-Tử; the highest actual office-holder at the time of writing (1949-50) belonged to the seventh grade, Chí-Thiện, but his identity is not given. It seems that the principal work of this body concerned the development of the social community of Caodaists at Tây-Ninh, established in 1930, and it probably did not play any important role in the politics of the movement. The same addition to Gobron goes on to describe briefly the provincial hierarchy of the religion. There were at this time (1949-50) five

trấn (provinces or circuits), each headed by a Khâm-Trấn-Đạo who must be of the grade of Giáo-Sư. Below them came, in order, the châu, the tộc, and the hương; and below that the hamlets. These terms are not exclusively Caodaist; trấn and châu are found in the vocabulary of traditional Vietnamese imperial administration at different periods; toc means in other contexts clan or lineage; and hương (in Cochinchina) seems to have been interchangeable with xã, since the village officials are known as hương-cả, hương-chủ, etc. [46]

Finally, returning to the account of Nguyễn Trung Hậu, it is possible to note the existence of a number of different kinds of Caodaist assembly. [47] Starting at the lowest level and working upwards, they were (and presumably still are)

(i) **Hội-Nhơn-Sanh:** comprising the lowest grades of adept, up to and including the Lễ-Sanh; it is not clear whether its meetings involved the attendance at Tây-Ninh (or any other centre) of adepts from the provinces, but that would seem very likely.

(ii) **Hội-Thánh:** the Sacred Assembly, comprising the grades from Giáo-Hữu up to and including Phối-Sư. It is interesting to note that in Gobron's account of the elevation of Phạm Công Tắc to a position of leadership at Tây-Ninh in 1935, it is stated that he was entrusted with the task by the Hội-Nhơn-Sanh and the Hội-Thánh, and no higher councils are mentioned. [48] Conceivably it was by using these assemblies against the higher ones that Phạm Công Tắc had been able to outpace his rival

Nguyễn Ngọc Tương.

(iii) **Thượng-Hội**: the High Assembly, comprising the highest grades of the Cửu-Trùng Đài, upwards from Chánh-Phối-Sư. It cannot therefore have included more than ten people at any one time, and was probably much smaller than that.

(iv) **Đại-Hội Vạn-Linh**: the Great Assembly of the Ten Thousand Souls, embracing all the other three assemblies. It was at a meeting of this assembly that Nguyễn Ngọc Tương denounced Lê Văn Trung and his group in June 1933, following on from an earlier denunciation in the Thượng-Hội in the previous April. [49] It is mentioned on that occasion that the Hộ-Pháp) (Phạm Công Tắc) was absent, which presumably implies that he could have attended. Since the assemblies are described in terms of the grades in the Cửu-Trùng Đài, it is once again difficult to know what their relationship was to the offices of the Hiệp-Thiên Đài.

V. CHINESE ANALOGIES

If nothing else, this discussion of beliefs and organization has shown that Caodaism, for all its claims to be an entirely new religion, has affinities with older religious movements. It seems indeed to belong to a sectarian tradition which developed in China over many centuries. This is reflected in the existence, both in China and amongst the overseas Chinese of the Nanyang, of a number of similar or related cults in the twentieth century. A notable example is the Tao Yiian sect (also known, in its charitable work, as the Red Swastika Society), which was

established at Tsin-an in 1921 and which spread to the Nanyang during the 1930s. [50] It claims to unite five religions Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam but at its core stands belief in a supreme spirit, not unlike the Cao-Đài spirit. In this case the supreme being is T'ai-i Lao-jen, who at a series of spirit-séances has revealed the truth and established the means to salvation. Neither the terminology of this religion nor its administrative structure resemble very closely those of Caodaism, but the similarity of the fundamental tenets of the two religions suggests that they belong ultimately to the same tradition.

Another sect, or group of sects. with some similarities to Caodaism, has been studied by Dr. Marjorie Topley in Singapore: they are known sometimes as p'u-tu (phổ-độ) sects, and sometimes by the name Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao (Tiên-Thiên Đại-Đạo). [51] The adepts of this group of sects place great emphasis on salvation through self-purification, abstinence, and vegetarianism, and like the Caodaists, they believe in the imminence of the third epoch of salvation. The Buddhist (or rather, salvationist) element is much stronger here than in Caodaism, and the Taoist element is not at all prominent. The symbolic figure of three seems to relate entirely to the three epochs, and the greatest emphasis is on the three Buddhas, Dipankara, Sakyamuni and Maitreya. Whereas the colour symbolism of Caodaism relates to the three divisions within the religious structure, in the Hsien-t'ien religion the three colours of blue, red, and white are

related respectively to the three salvation periods. Dr. Topley is able to show, moreover, that the famous White Lotus society of Chinese tradition originally belonged to a similar religion, in which white was the symbol of the coming of Maitreya. The sects which she found in Singapore traced back their origins far into the past: with some degree of credibility to the seventeenth-century patriarch Lo Wei-ch'un, but also far beyond that period to the sixth Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist patriarch of the Tang period, Huineng. However, the line of patriarchs is not the only source of authority within the religion: there is also an element of spirit-mediumship, even here, and the adepts follow the dictates of a spirit called 'Mother' (Wu-sheng Lao-mu, also known under other names), who reveals her intentions at séances with the planchette. (This same spirit was also important in the cult of the Peking group one of whose séances was described by Grootaers as mentioned above.) Again there is no direct correspondence of terminology or structure between the Hsien-t'ien sects in Singapore and Caodaism in Viet-Nam, but the basic similarities are obvious. Moreover, there exists in South Viet-Nam one branch or sect within Caodaism which calls itself the Thiên-Thiên. [52] Unfortunately very little is known of its beliefs or organization, which may not necessarily be identical with those described in the present article.

Reference has already been made to the writings of de Groot. He too found evidence of sects, in Fu-kien and elsewhere, which appear to have

belonged to the salvationist-spiritist tradition. Two of them he describes in some detail, under the names Hsien-t'ien and Lung-hua. [53] Once again, neither resembles Caodaism in detail, but an indirect relationship might be postulated. Recent research into the history of rebellion in China has found evidence of sects of this kind in much earlier periods. As early as 515 and 613, for example, there were revolts in which belief in the apocalyptic coming of Maitreya played a prominent part; and the same belief is found amongst many of those who rebelled against the Yuan dynasty in 1351. [54] Revolt by a Taoist sect is found as far back as A.D. 184, when adepts of the Way of the Five Bushels of Rice rose under Chang Heng and established a hierarchy held together by veneration of the Spirit (Kuei). [55] No doubt the potentially rebellious political activities of the various kinds of sects that appeared in traditional China is part of the explanation why the Confucian officials sought to prevent them from developing; and precisely because of that, information about their internal organization and beliefs is so limited. Caodaism, then, fits into a long religious tradition whose roots lie deep in Chinese history. The question naturally arises: how far was it Vietnamese at all, and how far was it merely a Chinese accretion? How, indeed, did it arise in Việt-Nam at all? One aspect of Caodaism deserves special emphasis in this respect: Caodaism was peculiar to the area which the French called Cochinchina. Where it appeared in central and northern Việt-Nam, it was as a result of attempts to spread it there from the

south. [56] It was not therefore a direct product of the Nam-Tiên movement of the Vietnamese, by which that people gradually expanded to settle in areas further and further south, from the fifteenth century onwards. Nor should it be confused with other spirit-mediumship cults in other areas of Viet-Nam, such as those studied by Durand in Tongking, in which the medium was possessed by the spirit and spoke its words, rather than writing them down. [57] It seems highly probable therefore that the antecedents of Caodaism are to be found amongst cults introduced directly into Cochinchina by migrants from China: Such migration began in the seventeenth century, with the establishment of Chinese colonies at Biên-Hoà, Mỹ-Tho, and Hà-Tiên; and the first Chinese to settle in those places were none other than political refugees from a South China recently conquered by the Ch'ing, who were quite likely to have had connexions with secret religious societies. Other Chinese migrants followed, and by the late nineteenth century they were coming in considerable numbers. If not in the seventeenth century, then at some later date it would seem that the Chinese introduced the syncretic tradition to which Caodaism belonged, and in particular the Minh sects out of which it grew. [58] It will be recalled that the founder of the Ngọc-Hoàng temple at Đa-Kao was a Chinese; and Âu Kịch, head of the Minh-Lý sect by 1950, was a minh-hương half-Chinese, half-Vietnamese. [59] Nevertheless, the Chinese were quickly assimilated into the Vietnamese society of Cochinchina, and this would explain why

any cult introduced by them could very easily become Vietnamese, accepted by people without any Chinese blood. The long establishment of sects of this kind in Cochinchina, combined with an element of Vietnamization, would also explain why the actual structure and terminology of Caodaism were quite different from those of similar sects elsewhere.

It will be evident that the foregoing study has not by any means answered all the questions that ought to be asked about the nature, origins, and history of Caodaism. My purpose has been to suggest lines of inquiry which might in time be followed up by other researchers. Nor should Caodaism be seen as of interest merely to specialists in the history of South Viet-Nam. It is very probable that in due course a comparative study relating it in closer detail to the various Chinese sects will also throw some light on the origins and development of the latter.

GLOSSARY

Using Vietnamese sources it is not always possible to be certain of the Chinese characters corresponding to quốc-ngữ words. The following, however, would appear to be the Chinese equivalents of the most important of the terms used in the foregoing article:

Bát-Quái Đài
 Cao-Đài
 cầu-tiên
 cơ (kê)
 Cửu-Trùng Đài
 Đại-Đạo Tam-kỳ Phổ-Độ

Đàn
 Đạo
 Giáo-Tông
 Hiệp-Thiên Đài
 Hộ-Pháp
 long-hoa
 pháp
 thể
 Thượng Đế
 Tiên
 Tiên-Thiên
 vô-vi

NOTES:

[1] For part I see BSOAS, XXXIII, 2, 1970, 335-49.

[2] I am very much indebted to conversations with Dr. Marjorie Topley and Mr. Michael Saso for several of the ideas followed up in the present article; neither of them, however, should be held responsible for any particular statement herein, save where directly acknowledged; still less for any errors.

[3] The word spiritism will be used here merely because it was preferred by the French spiritists, with whom the Caodaists had much closer contacts (and more in common) than with AngloSagon spiritualists.

[4] cf. Allan Kardec (L. H. D. Rivail), *Oeuvres posthumes*, Paris, 1912, which includes a biographical memoir reprinted from *Revue Spirite*, mai 1869; and Allan Kardec (L. H. D. Rivail), *The spirits' book*, translated with an introduction by Anna Blackwell,

London, 1875.

[5] J. J. M. de Groot, *The religious system of China*, repr., Taipei, 1964, VI, 1310.

[6] A. J. A. Elliott, *Chinese spirit-medium cults in Singapore*, London, 1955, 140-5.

[7] Wu Ching-tzu, *The scholars*, English translation, Peking, 1964, 126 ff.

[8] W. A. Grootaers, *Une séance de spiritisme dans une religion secrète à Péking en 1948* *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, IX, 1948-51, 92-8.

[9] For all these Vietnamese terms, see, e.g. *Đông-Tân*, *Lịch-sử Cao-Đài*, I. Phần Vô-vi, Saigon, 1967, referred to subsequently as *Lịch-sử*, 53 ff.

[10] *ibid.*, 53, 129 ff.

[11] Huỳnh-Minh, *Cần-Thơ xưa và nay*, Gia-Định, 1966, 222.

[12] Phan Trường Mạnh, *La voie du salut caodaïque*, Saigon, 1950, 48.

[13] *Lịch-sử*, 57.

[14] G. Gobron, *History and philosophy of Caodaism*, Saigon, 1950, 135, 124.

[15] *Lịch-sử*, 57-3; *Gouvernement-Général de l'Indochine, Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine française*, VII, Hanoi, 1934, referred to subsequently as *Contribution*, VII, 54-5.

[16] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 46, 51 ff.; *Contribution*, VII, 58-9.

[17] cf. *supra*, p. 576.

[18] Nguyễn Phút Tấn, *A modern history of Vietnam*, Saigon, 1964, 410-22.

- [19] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 26, 31 ff.
 [20] *ibid.*, 149 ff.
 [21] Arthur Waley, *The poetry and career of Li Po (701-762)*, London, 1950, 7, 29-31.
 [22] Phan Trường Mạnh, *La voie du salut*, 101-4.
 [23] *Lịch sử*, 43, 58.
 [24] *Contribution*, VII, 27.
 [25] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 19.
 [26] *Lịch-sử*, 59 ff.
 [27] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 21.
 [28] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *Lược sử Đạo Cao Đài: A short history of Caodaism, Tourane, 1956*, 8. The word *viết* is here the Vietnamese form of the Chinese *yueh*, meaning to say, namely.
 [29] *Lịch-sử*, 81-2; cf. BSOAS, XXXIII, 2, 1970, 349.
 [30] cf. BSOAS, XXXIII, 2, 1970, 341.
 [31] Phan Trường Mạnh, *La voie du salut*, 50-8; it is worth noticing that Dr. Topley found the pattern of three Buddhas in the sects she studied in Singapore, but with Dipankara in place of Amitabha, BSOAS, XXVI, 2, 1963, 371.
 [32] G. C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, New Haven, 1964, 69, 71.
 [33] For this comparison, and information about the Taoist San Ch'ing (Tam-Thanh), I am indebted to Mr. Saso.
 [34] *Revue Caodaque*, III e An., décembre 1950, 67-92.
 [35] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 10-11.
 [36] M. D. Topley, *The organization and social function of Chinese women's chai-tang in Singapore*

- (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1958), 131.
 [37] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 17-19.
 [38] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 153 ff.
 [39] *Tiểu-sử Đức Giáo-Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương*, Saigon, 1958, referred to subsequently as NNT, 19 ff.
 [40] *National Geographic Magazine*, CXX, 4, 1961, 464-5.
 [41] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 18.
 [42] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 154.
 [43] NNT, 19; he belonged to the Ngọc division.
 [44] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 18.
 [45] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 156-7.
 [46] *ibid.*, 157-8.
 [47] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 19.
 [48] Gobron, *op. cit.*, 71.
 [49] NNT, 31.
 [50] Hou Su Shuang, *Important points of Tao Yuan at a glance*, Singapore, 1932; I am grateful to Dr. Topley for drawing my attention to this source.
 [51] Marjorie Topley, *The Great Way of Former Heaven: a group of Chinese secret religious sects*, BSOAS, XXVI, 2, 1963, 362-92; the subject is treated more fully in her unpublished thesis cited above, p. 581, n. 36.
 [52] cf. BSOAS, XXXIII, 2, 1970, 345-6.
 [53] J.J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and religious persecution in China*, repr., Taipei, 1963, I, ch. vi-vii.
 [54] Y. Muramatsu, *Some themes in Chinese rebel ideologies*, in A. F. Wright (ed.), *The Confucian*

persuasion, Stanford, 1960, 246-8.

[55] Vincent Y. C. Shih, *Some Chinese rebel ideologies*, *T'oung-Pao*, XLIV, 1-3, 1956, 150-226.

[56] Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *op. cit.*, 21 ff., deals at some length with the mission to establish Caodaism in central Việt-Nam from 1937 onwards. There were also a few Caodaists in Hải Phòng and possibly Hà Nội.

[57] M. Durand, *Technique et panthéon des médiums vietnamiennes*, Paris, 1959.

[58] cf. *BSOAS*, XXXIII, 2, 1970, 348-9.

[59] According to a relative.