

Printing Cosmopolitanism, Challenging Orthodoxies: Cao Đài Journals in Twentieth Century Vietnam

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Abstract

In the first part of the twentieth century, some members of the French- or Chinese-educated but indigenous religious, economic, and political elite in southern Vietnam (Cochin-China) intensively engaged in spirit-medium practices. Many of them set up or joined the new Cao Đài religion and its spirit-medium séances. Integrating in their pantheon religious figures from Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and even Catholicism, Cao Đài leaders deliberately challenged the orthodoxies at that time, tactically undermining the local religious elites, but also proposing a universal theological redemption and moral reform through the publication of their new set of spirit medium messages. Very quickly after the creation of Caodaism in 1926, various groups branched off, borrowing and adapting this reformed and orthodox posture within the Cao Đài community itself. While the Cao Đài canon may be well-known to scholars, Cao Đài community journals have yet to be examined in detail, although they often served as incubators for the Cao Đài quest for orthodoxy and a modern path to salvation. Based on archival studies and field research trips to the relevant areas, this paper aims to show how collective and individual actors of these Cao Đài groups have mobilised institutional, rhetorical, ideological, media-based, and other resources to assure and legitimise their authority. Simultaneously, we will see how the Cao Đài religion emerged from very unique kinds of “redemptive societies,” combining both Western and Eastern esotericism to articulate new Asian expressions of orthodoxy, universal values, and cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: Cochin-China, Cao Đài religion, Caodaism, colonial period, Press, printing culture, spirit-mediumship, orthodoxy



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Introduction¹

The researcher's relationship to orthodoxy and orthopraxy, to the 'true referent' (in doctrinal and in practice terms, respectively) is never, and here I follow Michel Foucault (1970), a relation of 'contemplation' of this 'transcendent truth.' A researcher is not supposed to accept an orthodox or orthopraxical position of a group² without taking into account so-called 'heterodox' and 'heteropraxical' variations within the studied group.

The production of discourses is a way of imposing meanings; a manner of identifying and saying what is true and what is false, what is good and what is wrong, what is superstitious and what is rational, what is orthodox and what is heterodox, what is orthopraxical and what does not follow the prescribed rituals, etc. Moreover, it is a way to share, to distribute responsibility and legacy. Because leadership and charismatic situations are by definition never stable, there are internal struggles in the whole of the religious landscape in Vietnam between those who are in a position to impose meanings and those who are deprived of such a position. It goes without saying that State-religions relationships, which were often in conflict in twentieth-century Vietnam, intensified the competition within and between the different religious denominations. The colonial support of Catholic people and institutions was in that sense typical of the situation of inter-faith conflict during the colonial period (Morlat 2003; Keith 2012).

It is clear that the case of Cao Đài (*gāo tái* 高臺; literally, 'high altar') religion or Caodaism, which appeared in the 1920s during the French colonial period in Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam), perfectly reflects this debate. As an autochthonous religion, Cao Đài doctrine and political ambitions were first meant to address the Vietnamese people who received the mission to spread syncretistic, humanistic, and millenarian spirit-messages all over the world for the acquisition of merit (according to a Buddhist definition) and less heavy punishments at the time of the Last Judgment (*Phán xét cuối cùng*; *zuìzhōng pànjúé* 最終判決) and the End of the World (*Tận Thế*; *jǐnshì* 盡世). Subsequently, the Cao Đài movement offered a rare case in Vietnam of mass-conversion and disciplinary framework largely in the hands of a group of mediums, thereby transforming the religion as a social protagonist and a decisive mediator in the process of decolonisation (Werner 1981; Blagov 1999; Jammes 2014; Hoskins 2015).

In this kind of ideological framework, proselytising (*truyền đạo*, *chuándào* 傳道, or *truyền giáo*, *chuánjiào* 傳教) becomes a source of salvation, and printing Cao Đài

¹ I am extremely grateful to Lê Anh Dũng, Liam C. Kelley, Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, Shawn F. McHale, John Phan, Janet Hoskins, Nguyễn Phi Vân, Lukas Pokorny, and Nickolas Roubekas for their respective encouragements and insights along the writing of this paper.

² In the religious field, orthopraxy refers to a practice or a behaviour that follows the prescribed rites of a religion, whereas orthodoxy concerns with doctrine, dogma, or theology.

spirit-messages and exegesis come to be a major missionary activity. While the Cao Đài canon may be well-known to scholars, Cao Đài community journals have yet to be examined in detail, although they often served as incubators for a definition of Caodaism and a modern path to salvation. Following the work of Elisabeth L. Eisenstein (1983: 51-57), these journals can be approached in their capacity and role into the standardisation of Cao Đài vocabularies, rituals, canonical texts, exegesis, stories, and history. Similar efforts and processes of uniformisation affected Cao Đài architecture, costumes, and ritual practices, but these ramifications of standardisation would go beyond the limit of this paper. At an early stage of my research, I felt that the Cao Đài journals—and their idioms, that is, the French language and *quốc ngữ* (romanised Vietnamese)—were formative of the Cao Đài discourse on orthodoxy and I thought it deserved more attention.

In this paper, I question how a community of Cao Đài exegetes, journalists, and publishers can emerge from a series of books, journals, and spirit-medium texts, along with ‘an imagined readership,’ and all together create and make sense of a heterodox imagined community by challenging some orthodoxies. The following peripheral Cao Đài people and groups were connected through print during the French colonial period and, with the emerging public sphere, formed a “visible invisibility” (Anderson 1983: 44)—the embryo of the religious imagined community of the Cao Đài religion from the 1920s to the 1950s.

This paper is an exploratory research, largely inspired by my fieldwork data (1996–2014) and readings on the interaction between *Print and Power*³ in the colonial Vietnamese context in general, and the Cao Đài religion in particular. By 1920, in Indochina, modern print technology had replaced the old and slow woodblock way of disseminating ideas and beliefs. This technological shift

accompanied a remarkable transformation of print culture and helped engender the rise of a public sphere of debate and exchange. [...] Between 1922 and 1940 alone, French source state that Vietnamese published 13,381 different books and tracts. [...] From 1918 to 1939, at least 163 Vietnamese-language periodicals appeared in Saigon. Thirty-seven appeared in 1938 alone (McHale 2004: 18).

Based on archival studies (especially private and temple libraries) and field research trips to the relevant areas, this paper aims to show how collective and individual actors of these Cao Đài groups—and especially some Cao Đài exegetes with a jour-

³ I quote here the title of Shawn McHale’s book (2004). My research was also inspired by the works of David Marr (1981), Nguyễn Văn Ký (1995), and Philippe Peycam (1999) in Vietnam; Benedict Anderson (1983) in Indonesia and Thailand; and, of course, by Elisabeth L. Eisenstein (1979 and 1983), Roger Chartier (1990), and the *School of Annales* for the history of the ‘book’ during the French Revolution.

nalistic style—have mobilised institutional, rhetorical, ideological, media-based, and other resources to assure and legitimise their authority.

Setting the Scene: Cao Đài Multi-Polarity

I have been conducting research on Cao Đài history, exegesis, spirit-medium rituals, and (auto)biographies for the last twenty years, and first began to be concerned about the topic of this paper in the late 1990s after reading a French article in the nascent *Revue Caodaïste* (Caodaist Journal) of August 1930 (No. 2, pp. 10-15).⁴ The paper entitled “Why I am a Caodaist” (“*Pourquoi je suis caodaïste*”) was written by a fifty-odd years-old man, Lê Thanh Vân, recently converted to the Cao Đài religion. This six-page article, constructed as an autobiography, describes in French a ‘rational conversion’ of a believer in the Cao Đài religion. The four sub-sections of the paper—“What I was before my conversion”; “My conversion”; “Spiritism in the Orient”; “Two revealing spirit-messages”—designate spirit-mediumship at the core of the liminal process of conversion.

Recognising his former selfishness (p. 11) that pushed him to punctually search for luck in popular Sino-Vietnamese religions (for instance, at the Minh Sư Jade Emperor pagoda of Dakao, then at the Black Lady pagoda in Tây Ninh), the author points out the identity issue he faced before conversion just as other Vietnamese trained under French education system did—“neither Westerners, neither Asians” (p. 11). He claims that his conversion helped to bridge his Eastern and Western education. A friend of two Vietnamese who received Cao Đài spirit-messages from Western spiritism séances in late 1925, the author sees in the Cao Đài spirit-mediumship (that he called “Oriental spiritism”) a tool to revitalise and engage in the world the Asian religious values (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism): “Spiritism is for the Annamites a means rather than an end” (p. 13), whereas spiritism is seen in the West as

a science or even a doctrine that treats of the nature, of the origin, of the the destiny of the Spirits and of their relationships with the corporal world. [...] These explanations are [already] found in the Chinese Daoist or Buddhist books and volumes (*Revue Caodaïste* 1930, No. 2: 12, my translation).

The purpose of this autobiography was twofold: to convince that a rupture must be made with the religious traditions and practices present on Vietnamese land in the

⁴ The colonised Vietnamese regularly used the French word *revue*, which can be translated as ‘journal’ in English. It refers to an internal publishing instrument of a Cao Đài organisation, such as a temple, a specific branch, or sect. It should not be confused with a ‘newspaper’ (*journal* in French), which targets a wider and profane audience. The Cao Đài religion has not produced any newspapers.

years 1920–1930 (an orthodox claim); and that the conversion to the Cao Đài religion is inescapable—from a Cao Đài point of view—because it would be the most rational choice that would lead to the return to the source or, put differently, to a ‘true’ and unique⁵ religious practice (an orthopraxical claim). In other words, this 1930 article offered both an orthodox and an orthopraxical point of view with respect to the ancient Asian religious traditions (“Three Teachings”; *Tam Giáo, sānjiào* 三教). It proposed a comparative regime of truth (*régime de vérité*) with respect to different religious groups that were present and held authority in then colonial Vietnam (the so-called ‘religious mainstream’).

This 1930 article is understandable in the context of the perceived decline of Buddhism and Confucianism in Cochinchina in the 1920s (Nguyễn Duy Hinh 1999; McHale 2004: 74-95; 143-172; DeVido 2007). Among several reformist movements inside and outside Buddhism, and part of a wider Buddhist Revival (*chấn hưng Phật giáo*)—as the Theosophical Society, the Sino-Vietnamese or Vietnamese Minh redemptive societies for instance—the rise of the Cao Đài religion “siphoned away Buddhist believers” (McHale 2004: 158).⁶ Cao Đài leaders have chosen the phonetic transcription of the Vietnamese language, the *quốc ngữ*, for the publication of their prayers (mostly imported from Minh redemptive societies) and their exegesis. Publishing in this script (and no longer in Chinese characters or even in *chữ Nôm*) was part of the programme to reform Buddhism’s modes of expression, as well as a proselytising tactic as it allowed for a broader and quicker diffusion of ‘regimes of truth’ beyond the sinological circles of Vietnamese monks, Daoist priests, scholars, and intellectuals.

At the same time, some members of the French- or Chinese-educated indigenous religious, economic, and political elite in southern Vietnam (Cochinchina) intensively engaged in spirit-medium practices. Many of them set up or joined the new Cao Đài religion and its spirit-medium séances. Instructed by the spirits, Cao Đài leaders had integrated in the Cao Đài pantheon religious figures from Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and even Catholicism. The doctrinal foundation of the Cao Đài religion is essentially the same as that of the Xiāntiān Dào Chinese redemptive societies tradition, namely: The worship of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pond, Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu (*Yáochí jīnmǔ* 瑤池金母) as the supreme female deity; the universalist syncretism of the Three Teachings; and a tripartite eschatology with the first dispensation associated with Moses and Fú Xī 伏羲 (Phục Hy), the second with Buddha Śākyamuni (Thích-ca Mâu-ni), Confucius (Khổng Tử), Lão tử (Lão Tử), Jesus (Giê-su), and Muḥammad, and the third period to be ushered in by the Master Cao Đài, that

⁵ The spirit-messages he quotes in his article raised up in himself “the idea of one unique God, creator of the universe, almighty, eternal” (*Revue Caodaïste* 1930, No. 2: 14).

⁶ The Cao Đài religion emerged out of a Cochinchinese network of Minh (Ming 明) spirit-writing groups and Xiāntiān Dào 先天道 (Tiên Thiên Đạo, or Primordial Way) salvationist tradition originating in Guǎngdōng 廣東 Province, China (see Jammes and Palmer 2018).

is, the Jade Emperor. Encouraged by the countdown of the end of the world and its Final Judgment, Cao Đài followers deliberately challenged the orthodoxies of that time, tactically undermining the local religious elites, claiming to cleanse the practice of the Three Teachings for the purpose of an universal theological redemption—The Great Way of the Third Period of Salvation (*Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*; *Dàdào sānqī pǔdù* 大道三期普度)—while offering a moral reform through the publication of their new set of spirit-medium messages. The first compilation of these messages gave birth to the Cao Đài dogma and exegesis endorsed and followed by all adherents, irrespective of the branch they belonged to.

Indeed, as a mass movement, the Cao Đài religion has never been homogeneous, mono-vocal, or monolithic in its organisations and discourses. Very quickly after its creation in 1926, the Cao Đài discourse spawned new institutional entities or branches (*chi phái*; *zhīpài* 支派), which borrowed and adapted this reformed and orthodox posture within the Cao Đài community itself. Due to numerous schisms that appeared since 1926, with the ‘first follower’ Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878–1932) and the formation of his meditative and divinatory denomination, Chiêu Minh (Unify and Lighten),⁷ some of these places became independent, while some others were eventually connected to established congregations (*hội thánh*, *huì shèng* 會聖; literally, holy assembly; *tòa thánh*, *zuò shèng* 座聖; literally, Holy See). A dozen of Cao Đài Holy Sees have developed their own story and networks of solidarity at different administrative scales (village, hamlet, district, province) with a specific political, economic, and religious agenda bound to the ambitions of their dignitaries (Oliver 1976: 55-62).

Significantly, all the actions and decisions taken by the leaders of these religious organisations have been guided by some spirit-messages received in séances, subsequently giving birth to a massive production of archives (of these spirit-writings), administrative papers (relaying the orders from the spirits), and exegesis. Many of these printed texts were to explain and defend the creation of schisms within the Cao Đài communitarian space—which is largely the consequence of a tension between different kinship relations and political agendas, relayed by new sets of spirit-medium texts received in the respective branches. Schismatic leaders justified their rupture with the first Holy See of Tây Ninh (located in the province of Tây Ninh, close to the Cambodian border) by claiming that they follow a ‘right’ religious ethic and new orders from spirits (based on messages or oracles received by their own mediums) (Meillon 1985; Blagov 1999; Jammes 2014: 187-188). In other words, to produce, select, and finally give to spirit-messages and exegesis a visibility in printing played a key role in the very inner dynamic of the Cao Đài community and the production of

⁷ About Ngô Văn Chiêu, the *Revue Caodaïque* (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý*, No. 6, 1947: 13; 33) considers him as “the creator of the Cao Đài religion” (*người sáng lập Đạo Cao Đài*). His “holy name” (*thánh danh*)—Ngô Minh Chiêu—was translated into French as “I Lighten and I Unify” (*J’éclairer et j’unis*) by the *Revue Caodaïque* (No. 5, 1948–1949: 10).

discourses on Cao Đài orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Publishing became a fundamental and diffused form of domination by which Cao Đài leadership was exercised and a certain Cao Đài orthodoxy was proclaimed.

Picture 1: Covers of some Cao Đài journals



There is an epistemological challenge here in order to recognise the multiplicity of forces, discourses, and tactics (in the usage of print technology in the scope of this paper)—and even a situation of multiple poles of power within the Cao Đài community. Multipolarity in production of official discourses or ‘orthodoxies’ (much less in orthopraxis) has always characterised the Cao Đài religion, especially because of its division into branches or denominations and the localised clientelism of patron-client ties and nepotistic relationships and strategies of power (Jammes 2014: 143-147; Jammes 2016). The creation of Cao Đài journals examined in this paper echoes the

reality of many Cao Đài organisational centres in perpetual crises of legitimacy, competing with one another to disseminate ‘one’ orthodoxy claimed by a branch or a group of branches.

Genealogy of Cao Đài Journals

Print culture in colonial times deals with the relationship between the technology and communication shift and other developments conventionally related with the Vietnamese transition to modernity. In that sense, Cochinchina in the 1920s typified Walter Benjamin’s (1969) age of mechanical reproduction, in which print knowledge (religious or secular) lived by reproductivity and dissemination (and secularisation of the scriptworld; cf. Phan 2016). However, the shared experience of new ideological supports in Indochina, such as printing, gave rise to an “initially small and somewhat segmented” printed market (McHale 2004: 19). This market reflects both the emergence of a new generation of “indigenous intelligentsia,” which was trained by the French education system, and the continuation of the French freedom of printing in Cochinchina, due to its status as a colony. In terms of the repression or liberalisation of the public sphere,

Tonkin and Annam tended to lag behind Cochinchina. As southern Vietnamese successfully launched legal challenges to press restrictions in Cochinchina, the South became far more open than the center and the north (McHale 2004: 51).

There were many Cao Đài adepts committed to press activity and journalism without explicitly addressing to the Cao Đài movement. That was especially the case with the Cao Đài followers involved in the Constitutionalist Party (Đảng Lập Hiến Đông Dương), founded in 1923 with the financial support of Cochinchinese landowners. This party gathered together young modernist bourgeois moderates who promoted the emergence of a proper and autonomous Vietnamese capitalism with the support of the colonial system, targeting a gradual decolonisation and semi-independancy or autonomisation of French Indochina after the model of British Empire Dominion. Among the leadership of this party were men who were freemasons (Bùi Quang Chiêu), Cao Đài believers (Nguyễn Phan Long), or both (Đương Văn Giáo) (see Jammes 2014: 174–181).

Nguyễn Phan Long (1889–1960) was a member of the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party. In June 1922, he bought from Lê Thành Tường the Francophone newspaper *L’Écho annamite*, and he became its director from June 29, 1922 to October 1928. In addition, he also founded and ran the following newspapers published in Saigon:

La Tribune Indochinoise; *L'Écho du Việt Nam*; and *Đuốc Nhà Nam* (1928).⁸ Dương Văn Giáo (1892–1945), who graduated with a doctorate in law and political science in France, co-founded the Constitutionalist Party. He actively wrote in the following newspapers: *La Lutte*; *La Cloche fêlée*; *Đông Pháp*; *Thần Chung*; *Mây*; and *Dân Chúng* (Lý Đăng Thanh 2016). He was often the lawyer defending—in vain—newspapers that were sued and then banned by the French government.

Although not a convert to the Cao Đài religion, Bùi Quang Chiêu (1873–1945) was sympathetic to the new religious movement and many of his best collaborators were Cao Đài adepts. Bùi Quang Chiêu founded in 1926 the Francophone press newspaper *La Tribune Indochinoise* to support the ideas of his Indochinese Constitutionalist Party (Smith 1969).

Moreover, the hagiography of the Cao Đài pope Lê Văn Trung (religious name: Thượng Trung Nhựt; 1876–1934) was written in 1934 by the famous Constitutionalist journalist and lawyer Diệp Văn Kỳ (1895–1945). As far as the Cao Đài pope was concerned, Lê Văn Trung's name was famous before his conversion to the Cao Đài religion for his political and economical activity within the French colonial government. A former student of the francophone *lycée* Chasseloup-Laubat, Lê Văn Trung co-founded in 1911, with the *Conseiller colonial* Đỗ Hữu Phương, the first *collège de Jeunes Filles Annamites* (later *Collège Gia-Long*, Trường Nữ Trung Học Gia Long) in Saigon (Đức Nguyễn 2001: 13). Involved in various businesses, in 1914 he was promoted to member of the Conseil du Gouvernement de l'Indochine (Nghị viên Hội Đồng Soái Phủ Đông Dương), and then member of the *conseil privé* of the Governor Maurice Cognacq at the beginning of the 1920s. Among many activities, Lê Văn Trung was co-owner of the economical newspaper *Nông Cổ Mìn Đàm* from 1920 to 1924 (Lý Đăng Thanh 2016).

Sharing some affinities or common interest with some journalist, a few collaborations were less obvious but still active. It is for instance the case of Đào Trinh Nhất (1900–1951; born in Thái Bình province). A famous journalist from Tonkin, he worked as editor and writer for many newspapers in Saigon during French colonial times. Đào Trinh Nhất significantly wrote on the emergence of the Cao Đài movement in 1929, *Cái Án Cao Đài* (The Cao Đài Case). Like many Cao Đài followers, Đào Trinh Nhất showed personal interest in Western spiritism and, in 1931, he translated into Vietnamese Allan Kardec's (1804–1869) *Le Livre des Esprits* (Book of Spirits) with the title *Thần Tiên kinh* (literally, The Book of Spirits and Immortals).

As for Nguyễn Thế Phương (1906–1978), he entered journalism in 1925 and co-founded *L'Action Indochinoise* (*Hành Động Đông Dương*) with Nguyễn Phan Long (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 450; 452). He is less famous for his Cao Đài conversion than his writing of many novels, especially detective ones. Since the age of seventeen,

⁸ Emperor Bảo Đại eventually named Nguyễn Phan Long prime minister of the State of Vietnam (1949–1955) from January to April 1950.

another Cao Đài follower, Cao Văn Chánh (1903–1945), wrote a series of journalist articles criticising French colonial rule and the puppet imperial court of Huế. He founded or actively contributed to some activist newspapers, which were later banned by the government. To my knowledge, both Nguyễn Thế Phương and Cao Văn Chánh did not write about the Cao Đài movement in Cochín-Chinese newspapers during colonial times. However, the first journalistic testimony of a Cao Đài adept “À Propos du Caodaïsme” (About Caodaism) appeared on August 23, 1928 in the weekly newspaper founded by the Caodaist Nguyễn Thế Phương and Nguyễn Phan Long, *L’Action Indochinoise*, which devoted five pages to the question in an informative style.

Last but not least, the French-speaking newspaper *La Vérité* (printed in Phnom Penh) published a twenty-three-pages “special report” (*Reportage inédit*) on the Cao Đài religion. On the one hand, the report is actually a testimony of a French ‘progressist’ (alined with the Front Populaire’s posture at that time) and his attendance at spirit-medium séances organised by Minh Lý adepts (at the temple of the Three Doctrines, Tam Tông Miếu) in Saigon in 1926; on the other hand, it offers his interpretation of the Cao Đài religion as a revivalism of the Three Doctrines. Interestingly, the newspaper published a letter of the Chief of the Mediums at the Holy See of Tây Ninh, Phạm Công Tắc (1890–1959), who explains the similarity and difference between Caodaism and the “Minh-list movement” (*La Vérité* 1937: 6-8). The editorial is not naïve about the missionary agenda of this publication:

New religion, or more exactly a new form of very ancient religions, Caodaism uses widely, to make itself known and to expand its conquests, this formidable modern propaganda tool that the press is. Who would dare to criticize it? Let us imagine what the progress of the Teaching of the religions’ founders would have been, in the past, of Confucius, of Lao Tzu, of Christ, if they had at their disposal thousands of newspapers, the cinema, the *T.S.F.* [*transmission sans fil*, wireless communication] to announce their gospel to the four corners of the Earth, to touch each day, by the writing, by the image and by the word, millions of minds (*intelligences*) and hearts. Had the propagation of their doctrine not been a hundred times faster? [...] Caodaism benefits from this complicity that modern science brings to thought (*La Vérité* 1937: 1-2, my translation).

Starting in 1928, Cao Đài doctrinal and political ideas in favour of religious freedom and political autonomy were expressed in about twenty-two Cao Đài journals by 1975, ranging from the fascicule of a few pages to the illustrated magazine of about thirty or even fifty pages long. The following Table summarises some information on these periodicals and their diversity.

Table 1. Tentative Overview of the Cao Đài Periodicals (1930–1975)

<i>Name of Journal</i>	<i>Dates of Publication</i>	<i>Periodicity</i>	<i>Caodai Editor in Chief</i>	<i>Caodai Branch</i>
<i>L'Action indochinoise</i> [organe de discussion et d'information] [<i>The Indo-chinese Action</i> (Organ of Discussion and of Information)] (<i>Hành Động Đông Dương</i>)	August 23, 1928 to December 1928	Weekly	Director: Nguyễn Thế Phương (aka Nam Đĩnh) Editor-in-Chief: Cao Chanh	Holy See of Tây Ninh
<i>Revue Caodaïste</i> [Caodaist Journal]	July 1930 to July 1931 (closed for nine months due to financial and schismatic issues) May 1932 to 1933 (No. 22)	Monthly	Founder: Nguyễn Văn Ca (Caodai archbishop of Tây Ninh Holy See until 1931; of Minh Chon Lý branch in 1932 onward). Editor-in-Chief: Nguyễn Trung Hậu, spirit-medium (Báo Pháp) of Tây Ninh Holy See	Holy See of Tây Ninh (1930–1931) Holy See of Trung Ương (Mỹ Tho) (1930–1931) But redaction at Cầu Kho temple, Saigon
<i>Đuốc Chơn Lý</i> [‘The Torch of Truth’]	July, 15 1935 to 1941 (No. 44)	Tri-monthly	Director: Nguyễn Văn Ca (archbishop)	Holy See of Trung Ương (Mỹ Tho)
<i>Đại Đạo</i> [The Great Way (of Cao Đài)]	June 12, 1936 to 10 October 1937 (No. 10)	Monthly	Manager: Lê Thế Vĩnh (Tiếp Thế, or spirit-medium)	Holy See of Tây Ninh (Toà Thánh Tây Ninh)
<i>Đại Đạo Qui Nguyên</i> [‘Back to the Primordial Unity of Great Tao’]	1936 to 1938			Cao Đài Đại Đạo Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (‘Central Union for the Great Way of Caodai Alliance’)
<i>Đại Đồng</i> [‘The Universal Alliance’] or <i>Đại Đồng Thống Nhất</i> [‘The (Caodai) Union among the Universal Alliance’]	October 1, 1938 to December 1940–January 1941	Irregular	Manager: Võ Văn Tương (or Nguyễn Văn Tương). From No. 10 onward on January 1940, the manager was Lê Văn Sanh	Press of the Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (‘Central Union for the Caodai Alliance’)
<i>Tiên Thiên tuyên bố</i> Subtitle: <i>Cơ quan quy nguyên và bảo tồn Cao Đài Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ</i> [Organ for Completely Converging and Conserving the “Great Way of the Third Cycle of Universal Salvation of the Highest Platform”]	1 August 1938 to May 1940 (No. 19)	Monthly	Manager of the news: Lê Kim Ty Finance Manager: Lâm Quang Ty (from Tây Ninh Holy See)	Tiên Thiên Branch
<i>Đại Đạo</i> [The Great Way]	First and last Issue: August 1, 1945 (just before the Japanese Coup on September 3, 1945)	Monthly	Founder: Nguyễn Văn Hối (chief of the impression)	Holy See of Tây Ninh (Toà Thánh Tây Ninh)
<i>Cao Đài Giáo Lý</i> [The Doctrine of Cao Đài] or <i>Revue Caodaïque</i> (Caodaic Journal)	February 1947 to April–May 1948 (No. 11)	Monthly	Founder: Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (bishop of Tây Ninh) Manager: Phan Trương Mạnh (Cầu Kho temple)	Holy See of Tây Ninh
<i>Duy Tâm</i> [‘Idealism’ or ‘Spiritualism’]	May, 2 1948 to June 22, 1949	Ab.: 2 or 6 editions PW week, From May 1949 onward: weekly	Manager: Nguyễn Thanh Danh (Nguyễn Thanh Phương) Editor: Huỳnh Văn Tuy (since May 1949: Dương Tân Trương)	Holy See of Tây Ninh

Đường sáng [The Enlightened Path]	1948 to September 19, 1948 (No. 3)		Manager: Cao Hải Đễ	Patriotic Communist Propaganda Press of Central Vietnam (Ủy ban Trung) Caodaism is described as the religion which “saves the Nation by unifying the 12 Caodai branches” (Cao Đài Cứu quốc Mười hai phái Hợp nhất)
Nội san [Internal Bulletin]	December 31, 1950	Annual (following the General Congress)	Head: Bùi Thị Liên	Press of the du ‘Executive Committee of the National Central Caodaist bringing together the 12 branches’ (Ban Chấp hành Trung ương Cao Đài Cứu Quốc 12 phái Hiệp thông Nhất)
Đại Đạo [The Great Way] Subtitle: <i>Nghị luận, đạo học, xã hội</i> [Essay, Theology, Society]	June 20, 1953 to June 20, 1955 (No. 13)		Director and Editor-in-Chief: Cao Đức Trọng (Tiếp Đạo or spirit-medium) Editor-in-Chief then Manager (at the No. 7, April 30, 1954): Trần Quang Vinh (Bishop) Manager: Huỳnh Văn Tuy	Head office: library of the Holy See of Tây Ninh
Đạo Đời [Religion and Secular or Religion and Life]	1953 to December 1954	Bimonthly	Director: Phan Trương Mạnh (Cầu Kho temple) Editor-in-Chief: Nguyễn Hữu Đắc Manager in chief: Trần Nguyễn Lượng Manager: Nguyễn Văn Phụng	Cơ Quan Truyền Bá Office: house of Phan Trương Mạnh: 130 Boulevard Marchand, Saigon
Nhân sinh [Human Life]	September 15, 1954 to May 15, 1955 (No. 9)	Monthly	Head: Trần Luyện	Holy Assembly [or Church] of Caodai Diffusion in the Center of Vietnam (Hội Thánh Truyền giáo Cao Đài Trung Việt)
Tôn giáo Xã hội [Religion and Society] Subtitle: <i>Cơ quan đạo đức, văn hóa, xã hội</i> [Organ of Religious Morality, of Culture and of Society]	1954 to May 1, 1955 (No. 11)	Monthly, then bimonthly	Director: Trương Kế An Editor-in-Chief: Phạm Thành Mai Redactor: Trương Kế An Manager: Trương Nhứt Tân	
Hành Đạo [Preaching the Dao]	February 1962 to early 1970s	Trimonthly And some special issues	Manager: temple (thánh thất) An Hội, Kiến Hòa (1962–1964) that was renamed after 1965 into “Holy See of the Holy Land of Bến Tre” (Tòa thánh, Thánh Địa Bến Tre)	Holy See of Bến Tre But printed by Hòa Chánh, No. 16 Cống Quỳnh, Saigon

Đại Đạo nguyệt san [Monthly Review on the Great Way]	December 30, 1963 to September 1965 (No. 13)	Monthly	Advisor: Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Trảng (spirit-medium) Director: Bửu Đà Nguyễn Thanh Trắc Manager and Editor-in-Chief: Bửu Chơn Võ Tông Lục (student-priest or Lê Sanh) Vice secretary: T. L. Thiên Giang (of Hiệp Thiên Đài: Phan Văn Tân) Manager: Tôn Văn Diễn	Holy See of Tây Ninh
Nhân sinh [Human Life] Subtitle: “Religion, Culture, Society”	July 4, 1964 to December 19, 1964 (No. 19)	Weekly (on Saturdays)	Founder: Huệ Lương Trần văn Quế	Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo Cao Đài Trung Việt
Cao Đài Giáo Lý [Cao Đài Doctrine]	December 1965 to March 1975 (No. 95)	Monthly Until January 1972: about 16–24 pages. Between 1972 and 1975: about 50–64 pages	Editor-in-Chief: Trần Văn Quế	Cơ Quan Phổ thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo
Thế Đạo đặc san [Special Issue on the Social Moral]	1969 to 1974		Director 1969–1970: Trần Văn Rạng (Hiền Tài of the Cultural Institute, Trưởng nhiệm Văn hoá BTĐ, of the Cơ quan Thế Đạo) Director 1970–1974: Lương Hữu Tổng	Holy See of Tây Ninh
Thông Tin Cao Đài [Cao Đài News] Extension of <i>Đại Đạo nguyệt san</i>	February 1970–1975	Bimonthly (on the tenth and twenty-fifth day of Lunar months) but occasionally printed bulletins	Editor-in-Chief: Phạm Tấn Đài (spirit-medium Khai Đạo)	Holy See of Tây Ninh

Sources: Nghệ Dữ Lan 2000 and personal investigation in public and Cao Đài libraries (1997–2013).

By the 1920s, two cities in Indochina, Saigon and Hanoi, “monopolized the production of printed matted and acted as the centers of literary, religious, and political debates” (McHale 2004: 7). All these Cao Đài journals had their own publishing organisations, sometimes associated with a specific temple (like the one of Cầu Kho and Tiên Thiên), mostly in Saigon but also in new and semi-urbanised centres of intellectual and religious production, like at the Holy See of Tây Ninh.

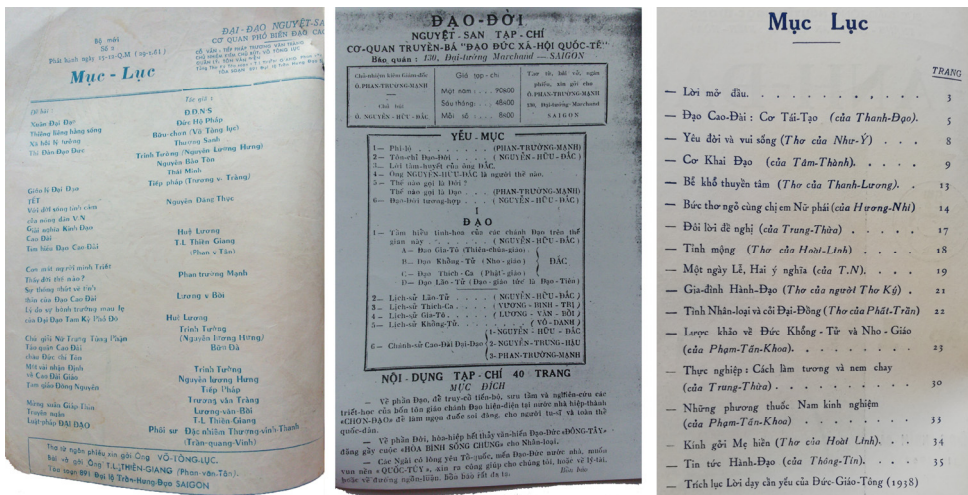
From what I have observed in a sample of fifteen journals, the editorial scheme of these publications is generally similar. These journals are oriented towards the moral

perfection of individuals and society, through texts written by human beings and gods. With the exception of spirit-messages written in verse, their articles are written in modern vernacular language (*quốc ngữ*), in French, or with a bilingual format, having a cover illustration, table of contents, information about the publication, and list of contributors.

Picture 2: Editorial of the *Dại Đạo nguyệt san*, January 1964

Picture 3: Editorial of the *Đạo Đời*, September 1954

Picture 4: Editorial of the *Hành Đạo*, No. 1, 1962 (left-to-right)



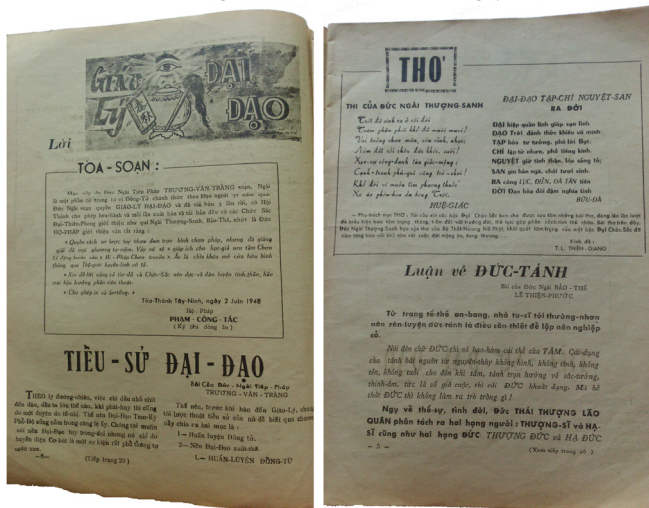
Cao Đài journals are not used as a direct platform of debate on schismatic divergence nor on Indochina's socio-political or economical development. As far as the themes are concerned, Cao Đài journals contain: an editorial; statements of faith; theological correspondence both between dignitaries and between deities; (self) biographies of dignitaries who have had 'spiritual revelations'; testimonies on the early stage of the Cao Đài movement; lectures on Vietnamese traditions (the New Year, the Mid-Autumn festival, etc.); (Cao Đài) esoteric comments on some (Buddhist-, Confucian-, Daoist-, Spiritist-borrowed) theological concepts; revelations of deities; poems written by adepts or deities (at spirit-medium séances); doctrinal articles and commentaries on 'orthodox' texts of the Cao Đài religion;⁹ short quotations ("the golden words" or *Paroles d'or*) from exemplary people (mystics, scientists, artists) in the world; news about temple activities; book reviews advertisements; letters to publish-

⁹ Especially on the *Pháp Chánh Truyền* (*Fǎzhèngchuán* 法正傳, Orthodox Dharma), the *Tân Luật* (*Xīnlǜ* 新律, New Code), and the *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (*Shèngyán jíquán* 聖言集全, Compilation of Holy Words).

ers; some congratulatory notes from readers; list of donors; and, occasionally, drawings or photographs. Letters by readers bring a lighter and more personal note, with poems and moody columns. Cao Đài magazines are very often supplemented by Vietnamese translations and commentaries or news on spiritist or theosophical publications outside Vietnam. When (very few) articles approach the situation of schism within the Cao Đài religion, the content tends to be descriptive (listing the name and place of the branches) but it never offers a theological or ritualist comparison between the branches.

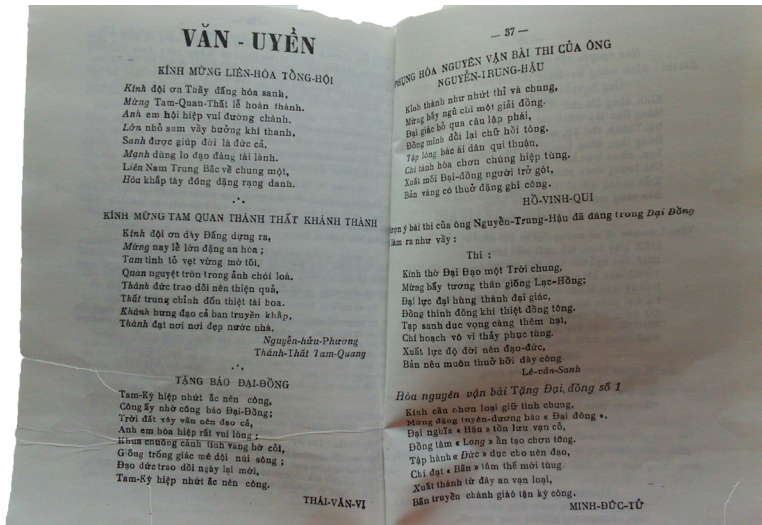
The content of these Cao Đài journals are part of a collective effort of a formal canonisation of the new Cao Đài Scriptures, reflecting the situation of schism and the multiplication of local interpretation and versions of orthopraxis of these canonical texts. A shared holy canonical corpus is highlighted by all the branches in order to claim their belonging to a common pre-schismatic theological heritage, while disseminating their internal spirit-messages and interpretation of the Scriptures. In Weberian words, I would argue that the production and dissemination of these journals contribute to the “closure of a canon” (Weber 1995: 214) but also give opportunity to Cao Đài groups to claim their “quality of a sacred authenticity” (ibid.: 213) at the historical, theological, and spirit-mediumship levels.¹⁰

Picture 5: Biography of the spirit-medium Trương Văn Trảng, with an introduction by the Chief of the Mediums, Phạm Công Tắc, in *Đại Đạo nguyệt san*, No. 2, 1963. Picture 6: Poem of the Seventh Immortal Vương Thị Lễ (1900–1918), the daughter of one of the founders of the Cao Đài religion, Vương Quan Kỳ (1880–1940) at the service of the Mother Goddess Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, received by the medium Cao Hoài Sang (1901–1971) (*Đại Đạo nguyệt san*, No. 2, 1963)



¹⁰ Such schismatic dynamics about canonical orthodoxy have been elaborated by Weber 1995: 212-214.

Picture 7: Pieces of poems written by some Cao Đài temples and individuals to congratulate the reunification effort of the Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (Đại Đồng, No. 2, 1938)



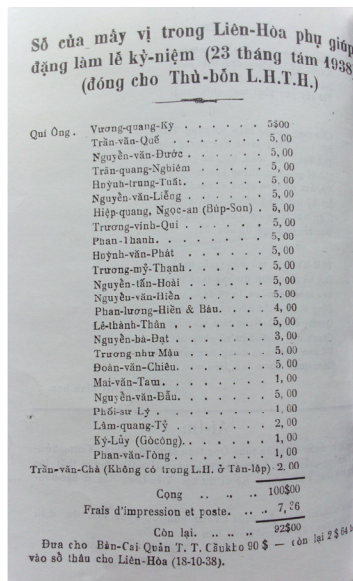
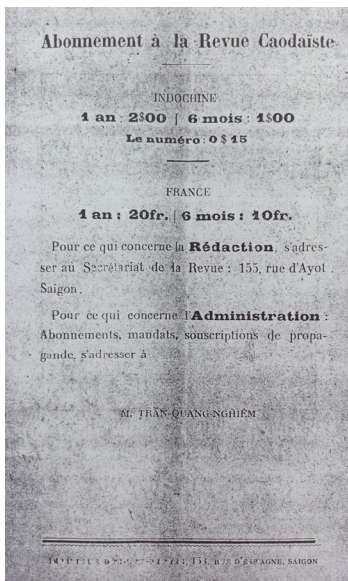
The editors of these journals naturally showed a missionary zeal to give substance and legacy to their ‘young’ religion: They wanted to convince the secular community or other Cao Đài branches to rally the Cao Đài reunification cause; simultaneously they sought to justify the right to exist and to practice their worship. All these journals are structured along a spirit-writing-centric approach, publicising a number of spirit-messages, from short to long texts, and explicitly localising spirit-medium production (such as Cao Đài branch, such temple). Most of the branches used their journals to widespread the spirit-messages received during their own séance; but they also gave a substantial place to spirit-messages received before the first schism of 1926, inscribing their own production in the continuity and orthodoxy of the origin.

The journal articles were voluntary contributions by Cao Đài intellectuals, lay people, dignitaries, or simple believers. They are presented as “people who study religion, self-cultivate themselves and preach” (*học đạo, tu thân, hành đạo*, in *Hành Đạo* 1962, No. 1: 1). The publicists and intellectuals of these Cao Đài journals have since committed themselves to the translation into French and Vietnamese of the spirit-messages and their comments. Their ambition was to make studies of the Cao Đài religion the status of a ‘true’ and autonomous theological discipline, recognised as such by both a Vietnamese and French audience. The indigenisation by the translation of the Chinese and *nôm* writings into *quốc ngữ*, easier to access by the people, was an effort to encourage a new impetus in religious studies. The other objective of these translations was the popularisation and dissemination of the religious corpus for eschatological purposes, that is, for the salvation of the faithful.

Overall, the tone is ecumenical and Cao Đài writers try to overcome post-schismatic conflicts. These journals incorporate news about other Cao Đài branches and temples, messages from a variety of deities, Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian text discussions and concepts. Their goal is to revitalise the traditional Sino-Vietnamese moral culture which is portrayed as having been rapidly eroded by secular materialism and the contact with Western ideas and science. The Cao Đài religion is consequently presented as a credible alternative where religious thoughts would be aligned with scientific truths thanks to spirit-mediumship and “direct communication with the wisdom of spirits”—applying in the Vietnamese context the credo of Allan Kardec’s spiritism. Thus, these magazines are conscientiously restorative and apologetic. Their columns frequently defend the validity and importance of religious faith and ethical principles. They also suggest that religion and science could complement each other better.

Picture 8: Membership fees of the *Revue Caodaïste* in 1930

Picture 9: List of donors to the journal *Đại Đồng* (No. 2, 1938), with the significant names of Vietnamese and French citizen Vương Quang Kỳ (1880–1940) (friend of the “first follower” Ngô Văn Chiêu), Professor Trần Văn Quế (1902–1980) (pro-active in the Cao Đài reunification programme), the engineer Phan Thanh (1898–1952) (a member of Cầu Kho temple and advisor at Tiên Thiên branch), etc.



These journals were theoretically free, but in fact they were offered in exchange for financial support for publication in the form of a donation to the temple that published the volume.¹¹ The names of the generous donors and the sum appeared in a list at the end of some issues. These contributions were counted as religious merits that can be collected by any donor or participant in this religious edition. Journals were distributed by mail or by hand. They have been present in the temples, which serve as points of relay or (free) loan texts. Their place in religious libraries regularly served as a clue for me to detect the relations of temple with its branch or the other branches.

The idea that the Cao Đài journals were programmatic and exegetical rather than reporting on socio-political/economical developments of Vietnamese people, and that Cao Đài writers were printing for themselves rather than in order to engage the public opinion, provide some explanation in regards to the problem of the funding of Cao Đài journals as well as their precarity. Moreover, running a journal was definitely not a profitable business, especially because the Cao Đài tradition shares with Buddhism the idea that individuals can gain merit by propagating their religious texts and glosses.¹² The early commitment and dedication of Cao Đài mediums and dignitaries to writing and publishing encourages us to define print culture as a Cao Đài orthopraxis; for example, a prescribed and recommended practice that advances the writer, and subsequently the reader, to salvation. For the same reasons, all the Cao Đài journals studied struggled with maintaining their activity: “with old press, little money, and competition, few publishers lasted more than a few years” (McHale 2004: 20).

The following developments trace the role played by two Cao Đài figures—Nguyễn Trung Hậu (1892–1961) and Phan Trường Mạnh (1895–1967)—in relation to the emergence of the *Revue Caodaïste* (1930) and later of the *Cao Đài Giáo Lý / Revue Caodaïque* (1947) and, broadly speaking, of the Cao Đài periodical occultist printed culture.

The Occultist Colonial Culture in the Mirror of the Cầu Kho Temple

Occultist Groups in Cochín-China

While the Cao Đài religion is, in many ways, an ideal-typical redemptive society, at the same time it emerged from a distinctly occultist colonial culture, producing a

¹¹ And I agree here with Shawn F. McHale’s remark on printed Buddhism in the 1920s–40s when he stated that “the impetus behind the explosion of cheap (and even free) Buddhist texts was not print capitalism” (McHale 2004: 171).

¹² And in the case of Buddhism, Shawn F. McHale (2004: 171) writes that “with the recent spread of modern print technology (which is far easier to use than woodblocks), Buddhists found it easier than ever to do so.”

movement and some practices which clearly fall into the same category as spiritism and theosophy. The *Revue Caodaïste* was one printed vehicle of this Cao Đài approach and practice of Western esotericism or occultist colonial culture.¹³

I refer here to Jean-Pierre Laurant's (1992) definition of "occultism" as a label for a constellation of spiritual and religious groups active in the nineteenth century onwards. These groups came from the transformations in the rationalist thought of the Christian West at the end of the nineteenth century and they based their regime of truth and legitimacy on a scientific or scientistic discourse and the systematic practice of re-interpreting and recasting supernatural phenomena, shamanistic experience, spirit-mediumship activities, and all sources of knowledge through the filters of modern scientific methods and instruments.

French occultist networks spread to Indochina under the colonial regime. Among these networks were those that practiced what was known in French as "spiritisme" (spiritism or spiritualism). The spiritist movement arose directly from its first theoretician, the French teacher and medium Hippolyte L. D. Rivail (alias Allan Kardec), who aimed to study the invisible world and to prove the existence of reincarnation and of a rational communication with the dead, the "non-incarnated souls." In the 1920s, in Cochinchina, spiritist brochures, books, and groups became available to French-speaking Vietnamese people. Hence, Kardec's teachings and spirit-mediumship techniques entered the public consciousness (both French and Vietnamese). The presence of famous French practitioners of spiritism in Saigon—such as Eugène Dejean de la Bâtie (1898–1948), Latapie, and Captain Monet, among others—and their close relationship with the Cao Đài movement has been noted in many sources (Meillon 1984: 164; Peycam 1999: 100; Đức Nguyên 2000, Vol. III: 1536).

The first Cao Đài followers preferred practicing spiritism (*thần linh học, shénling xué* 神靈學; literally, "study on the spirits and the souls of dead"), which they conceived as more "rational" and "scientific" than the traditional Vietnamese spirit-possession cult (*lên đồng*), and thus closer to their understanding of an omnipotent and omniscient God. Since mid-1925, a group of Cochinchinese civil servants (who eventually were to become the mediums of the new Cao Đài religion) practiced the spiritist method of the turning tables.

Parallel to spiritism, the Theosophical lodges followed a particular process of settlement in Cochinchina, although its religious practices and worldview are very distinct from Freemasonry or spiritism. Founded in New York in 1875, the Theosophical Society sought to understand the mysteries of universal sacred books by filtering them through a syncretic approach and, at the same time, a Christian and Buddhist conceptualisation. This movement played a political role in India, participating in the

¹³ The temple libraries I visited in my fieldwork in Vietnam, France, Canada, and Cambodia also contained large collections of occultist, spiritist, and theosophical literature in French from the 1920s and 1930s. Clearly, these movements have been playing an important role.

training of its religious and political elites during the path of independence after the First World War (1914–1918). Their members became famous through their activist contribution to the rebirth of Buddhism in Ceylon, of their traditionalism in India (supporting the Sanskrit language and the Buddhist schools), and for their sense of social reform (fighting for an improvement in women's social conditions, of parias and prisoners, etc.). It is clear that the Cao Đài religion found an area of agreement with the Theosophical Society (*Thông thiên học, Tōngtiān xué* 通天學; literally, Studies of the Communications with Heaven): both shared a similar millenarian vision (from the popular Christian and Buddhist theology, respectively) as well as a common religious and comparative literature. It is not surprising that many Cao Đài followers attended theosophical circles until their prohibition in 1975; at the same time, many theosophists came to preach in Cao Đài temples.

Genealogy of a Printing-Divinatory House: Cầu Kho Temple

The *Revue Caodaïste* (Caodaist Journal), founded by Nguyễn Văn Ca (1875–1956), appeared at a time when, following the anti-communist repression of 1930–1931, Cao Đài membership expanded rapidly. But in the aforementioned context of sectarian rivalry and schism, the Cao Đài religion was already broken into five branches: Chiếu Minh Vô Vi; Cầu Kho; Minh Chơn Lý; Tiên Thiên; and Thông Thiên Đài. Their leaders attempted to establish their legitimacy through, for instance, new oracles (produced by new mediums) or their own religious virtue. More particularly, each of these branches were to position themselves against the first and decisive (at least demographically) Holy See of Tây Ninh. The emergence of schisms starting from the very beginning of 1926 developed a religious revival inside the community itself. Branches claim to hold a new theological 'orthodoxy,' although the Holy See of Tây Ninh continues to look like the historic common-core.

Different branches adopted different strategies but all organised their own spirit-writing séances to receive orders or 'royal edicts' (*chiếu chỉ, zhào zhǐ* 詔旨) from the Jade Emperor (or Master Cao Đài). The foundation of the *Revue Caodaïste* took place at this critical schismatic moment and in the configuration of power relations based on spirit-mediumship knowledge and legitimacy.

The name of the provincial chief, wealthy landowner, and medalist of the Legion of Honor, Nguyễn Văn Ca, is representative of the schismatic tensions within Caodaism. With the Minh network and legitimacy of the Daoist priest (converted to Caodaism), Trần Đạo Quang (1870–1946),¹⁴ Nguyễn Văn Ca founded, with the medium Nguyễn Hữu Phụng (1877–1940), the Minh Chơn Lý (The Bright Truth) branch (or branch of Mỹ Tho) in 1931. The Cao Đài journal named *Hành Đạo* (1962, Vol. III: 19) is explicit about the orthodox claims that may have provoked this

¹⁴ About Trần Đạo Quang, see Jammes 2014: 133-134; 166-168.

schism: “*Cơ bút* [spirit-mediumship] produced the Minh Chơn Lý branch by questioning the [hierarchical] relations between the dignitaries [of Tây Ninh and other branches].” After the collapse of the *Revue Caodaïste* in 1933 (apparently for economic reasons), Nguyễn Văn Ca sponsored a proper journal to his branch, *Đuốc Chơn Lý* (The Torch of Truth), between 1935 and 1941.¹⁵

The *Revue Caodaïste* was actually published in the context of the emergence of two distinct approaches to spirituality within the growing Cao Đài religion, the ‘esoteric’ and the ‘exoteric.’ While these two approaches are described in theological terms in Cao Đài scriptures as complementary and mutually reinforcing, they correspond to divisions and tensions within the Cao Đài religion, as it evolved from a small group of elite cultivators into a proselytising religion of universal salvation that rapidly attracted millions of followers. While ‘exotericism’ (*ngoại giáo công truyền*; *wàijiào gōng chuán* 外教公傳) was claimed by the Holy See of Tây Ninh to be its responsibility—in developing social activity and “universal salvation” (*phổ độ*; *pǔdù* 普度)—the Chiêu Minh branch was described by this same Holy See as the ‘esoteric’ side (*nội giáo vô vi tâm truyền*, *nèijiào wúwéi xīn chuán* 內教無為心傳; literally, “heart-to-heart transmission through non-interference”) of the Cao Đài religion (Jammes and Palmer 2018).¹⁶ From the 1920s until today, the Holy See of Tây Ninh instrumentalises this original schismatic division by claiming the monopoly of proselytism and social action, as well as by presenting itself as the sole possessor of the ‘exoteric knowledge’ (*thể pháp*; *tǐ fǎ* 體法; the ‘Law of the Life’).

Interestingly, the Cầu Kho branch,¹⁷ founded in 1926, used an ‘exoteric’ and proselytising vehicle (the mass-media printed journal) to locate themselves in the esoteric and occultist map of Cochinchina. Its creation of the *Revue Caodaïste* aimed to federate the believers around another esoteric and occultist body of knowledge, diffusing a selection of spirit-medium texts (received at séances organised mostly by Cầu Kho, Chiêu Minh, and Tiên Thiên temples), and a set of exegesis and translation works (from the *Institut caodaïque* or *Học viện Cao Đài*, based at the Cầu Kho temple).

¹⁵ The Holy See Định Tường of this branch is located in the village of Cầu Vỹ, in Mỹ Tho (Tiền Giang Province).

¹⁶ Chiêu Minh branch or Chiêu Minh Tam Thanh Vô Vi (*Zhàomíng sānqīng wúwéi* 照明三清無為; literally, Radiant Light of Non-Interference of the Three Purities) is characterised by a small and restricted number of members. Founded by the ‘first follower’ Ngô Văn Chiêu, its main temples are located at Cần Thơ, on the island of Phú Quốc, as well as in Saigon, focusing on achieving ‘spontaneity’ through meditation (*vô vi*; *wúwéi* 無為).

¹⁷ *Cầu Kho* refers to a district in downtown Saigon. This temple was located at 42 Général Leman Street in Saigon (today, 102 Trần Đình Xu, District 1, Hochiminh City). The address moved in 1945 to 122–124–126–128 Général Marchand Street in Saigon (today, 124–126 Nguyễn Cư Trinh, District 1, Hochiminh City). Regarding the history of this temple, see Huệ Nhẫn 2005: 443–446.

Since it was the place where 147 persons gathered and signed the first official declaration of the Cao Đài religion on September 29, 1926, Cầu Kho temple holds a powerful symbolic value for the adherents (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1950, No. 12: 31-32). The initiative of this temple came from a school principal, Đoàn Văn Bản (1876–1941), and the District Chief (Quan phủ) Vương Quan Kỳ. Among the most prestigious and vocal members this temple gathered were: Professor Trần Văn Quế; the publicist Nguyễn Phan Long (1889–1960); the former Colonial Councilor Cao Triều Phát (1889–1956); Đốc Phủ Sứ Nguyễn Văn Kiên (1878–1960); Secretary of Safety Võ Văn Tường (1879–1926); Honorary Chief of District Nguyễn Văn Duộc; Deputy Station Chief Nguyễn Văn Phung (1893–1961); as well as the rice farmer and journalist Phan Trường Mạnh (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1949, No. 8: 398).

If the nascent organisation of Tây Ninh seemed to have been little affected by these departures, these were the precursors of future theological or personal rivalries and discontents that have divided the hierarchy of the Holy See of Tây Ninh and its relationship with other Cao Đài branches and leaders (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1949, No. 8: 398). One may remember, for example, a sermon of the Tây Ninh's Chief of the Mediums, Phạm Công Tắc, in October 1948. He explained how his perisprit left his body (*xuất chơn thân*; *chū zhēn hún* 出真魂) to go into the spheres of the invisible where he met the diseased Vương Quan Kỳ, one of the founder of Cầu Kho temple. Phạm Công Tắc took the opportunity to express his concern and criticism of the departure of Vương Quan Kỳ and of any other forms of deviation vis-à-vis the directives from orthodoxy or “pure religion” (*chánh giáo*) emanating from Tây Ninh. Phạm Công Tắc eventually considered the schismatic positions of Vương Quan Kỳ (and implicitly of Cầu Kho members) as heterodox ideas, and even “heresy” (*tả đạo*; *xiédào* 邪道) (Phạm Công Tắc 1995 [1948]: 11). Broadly speaking, this example illustrates the distant, moralising, and somehow sarcastic way the Holy See of Tây Ninh treated the schismatic situation in its publications.

The Cầu Kho temple (which changed its name on October 30, 1948 to Nam Thành thánh thất or thánh thất Cầu Kho Nam Thành) brought together, near the banks of the Saigon River, colonial officials, local notables, men of erudition, and Cao Đài poets. All sources, other than those emanating from Tây Ninh, present this circle as a space of fruitful and studious intellectual exchanges. It is likely that it was a forum for lively debates and visions of the future. Its ‘Cao Đài Institute, the ‘[Centre of] Psychological, Philosophical, Metaphysical Studies’ (*Institut Caodaique. Études psychologiques, philosophiques, métaphysiques*), aimed to bring studies on the Cao Đài religion to the status of a true theological discipline. To that end, it actively participated in ‘Vietnamising’ the knowledge emanating from spirit-writing séances. The members of this Institute translated Chinese texts and commentaries into Vietnamese and French. They justified this constant flow of texts in the two languages as based on the need to popularise and propagate the religious corpus for the salvation of Viet-

names and French followers. The collaborators of the Institute took on the mission to engage in the comparative study of religions, the esoteric analysis of symbols and rituals, and the scientific description of spirit writing séances. The activities of Cầu Kho branch were significantly involved in many attempts in the 1930s and the 1940s to restore unity within the religion, hoping to prevent the formation of new sects among the fresh recruits (Jammes 2014: 262-270).¹⁸

In 1938, the Cầu Kho temple took the initiative to patronise a “Congress of the Cao Đài Union” (*Liên Hòa Tổng Hội*) with the goal to organise twelve sessions and a “Fraternal Union” (*hòa hiệp* or concord) with all the Cao Đài branches. There, a “pure doctrine” (*chánh giáo*) was taught

to serve as a hyphen between the Sects called to return to the Original Unity [*sự hiệp nhất*], to publish periodicals to spread Caodaism: the ‘Journal of the Unity in Belief’ (*Đại Đạo Qui Nguyên*)¹⁹ and the ‘Universal Brotherhood’ (*Đại Đồng*), to maintain ongoing relations with the Human Rights League (*Hội Dân quyền*) in France with a view to defending the freedom of conscience of the Cao Đài [religion] in the Centre of Vietnam (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1949, No. 8: 399-400, my translation).

The next year, the Cầu Kho temple set up a reunification movement: the Cao Đài Union in the Universal Brotherhood (*Đại Đồng Thông Nhất*), supported by more than 5,000 members and with a redemptive society (Minh Sư-Vĩnh Nguyên Tự) temple based in Cholon as its headquarters (*Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1949, No. 8: 401; Huệ Nhân 2005: 434-438). All the religious ambitions of the Institute were concretised by the launch of the *Revue Caodaïste* in 1930, and then with the *Cao Đài Giáo Lý / Revue Caodaïque* journal (in 1947) that was published bilingually (Vietnamese and French).²⁰

Some Occultist Editors-in-Chief

In July 1930, the spirit-medium Nguyễn Trung Hậu became the editor of the first *Revue Caodaïste* (1930–1933). This monthly magazine, published in French, was sold at a price of 0.15 piastre per issue, “which presupposes an economically comfortably

¹⁸ I have traced the trajectory of one of the most vocal and pro-active members of Cầu Kho branch in Cao Đài reunification movement, namely Trần Văn Quế (Jammes 2016).

¹⁹ Actually, just after the closing of the Congress, the *Đại Đạo Qui Nguyên* journal (that I translate as “Back to the Primordial Unity of Great Tao”) has been re-named *Đại Đồng Thông Nhất* (Union in the Universal Brotherhood); see *Cao Đài Giáo Lý* 1950, No. 10: 52; 86.

²⁰ The role of the archbishop Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (see table), who was already seventy-four years old in 1947, in the revival of the *Revue Caodaïque* seemed to be mostly financial (generous donation to serve the religion and prepare his salvation) and symbolic (to provide the endorsement and patronage from Tây Ninh to this publication). Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (1873–1950), and his concubine Lâm Ngọc Thanh (1874–1937), both wealthy land owners and entrepreneurs, happened to be the main sponsors in the building of the Holy See of Tây Ninh.

off readership.”²¹ His participation in the first Cao Đài journals was perceived by the Cao Đài historian Đức Nguyên (2000, vol. I: 254) as a way for him to “popularise” (*truyền bá*) the Cao Đài doctrine among a Francophone readership.

The contacts of this spirit-medium of Tây Ninh with the public and even cosmopolitan world remain surprising, but not exceptional. The Chief of the Mediums and Guardian of the Dharma (*Hộ pháp*), Phạm Công Tắc, did the same (Hoskins 2015; Jammes 2016).

Nguyễn Trung Hậu became a Cao Đài adept at the end of 1925. Western occultist thought (especially spiritism and theosophy) penetrated all his work and exerted an attraction on him since his discovery of the Cao Đài tradition. It was in January 1926 that Nguyễn Trung Hậu first ventured into the spiritist circle led by Cao Quỳnh Cư (1888–1929), Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang.

Nguyễn Trung Hậu, an amateur of Western spiritism and occult sciences, naturally moved towards theosophical readings, as evidenced by the title of one of his poems, *Dưới chơn Thầy*, “Under the Feet of the Master,” published in 1927, which explicitly refers to a famous theosophical work telling the initiatory narrative of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), a major theosophical figure in the mid-1910s. The 1920s marked the beginning of the Theosophical Society’s establishment in Cochinchina, aiming to revitalise and rationalise Buddhist teachings and practices, especially its millenarian, meditative, and philanthropic traditions.²²

Nguyễn Trung Hậu has written and published a large number of works in the form of exegesis on Cao Đài doctrine. They include the booklets *Châu Thân Giải* (The Beautiful Words to Free the Body from Its Condition, 1955), *Thiên Đạo* (The Heavenly Way, 1955), written with Phan Trường Mạnh (see below), and *Luân Hồi Quả Báo* (The Transmigration and Revenge of Karma, 1956), written with the other spirit-medium Phạm Tân Đãi (1901–1976). In 1932, Nguyễn Trung Hậu founded a second monthly magazine, the *Đại Động*, more oriented towards a Cao Đài readership than to a French one, as it is mostly written in modern Vietnamese romanisation script (*quốc ngữ*).

The other key figure for the establishment of the Cao Đài journal system seems to have been the journalist Phan Trường Mạnh, who had devoted a large part of his time to Cao Đài reunification, as well as to the production of articles and conferences. His works are in Vietnamese and French, often published in bilingual versions. Unfortunately, there is still no extensive biography of the founder of the monthly *Revue Caodaïste*. A publicist practically ignored by scholarship, Phan Trường Mạnh is one of the first to have established, during nearly thirty years of journalistic practice, a regular chronicle of the life of the Cao Đài, intertwined with religious, political, and cultural

²¹ Interview with François Thierry, curator at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Department of Coins, Medals and Antiques, Paris, in 2001.

²² In a forthcoming paper I focus specifically on the settlement of the Theosophical Society in Cochinchina. See Jammes (forthcoming).

events in the colony of Cochin-China. He and his works were constantly quoted to me by my exegetical interlocutors who try to continue his work of proselytism.

Phan Trường Mạnh was born in the village of Ô Môn, in the Mekong Delta (province of Cần Thơ). His parents are Mr. Phan Trường Thọ and Mrs. Trần Thị Tích. He married with Mai Thị Trâm (1902–1970) and they had six children. After his secondary school in Cần Thơ, he was trained in geodesy, but worked in the information industry (film censorship). For a short period, he joined a series of Cao Đài branches—Minh Chơn Lý, Tiên Thiên, Minh Chơn Đạo (Bạc Liêu), Minh Tân, Liên Đoàn, Liên Hòa Tổng Hội, Trung Hòa Học Phái, Cầu Kho Tam Quan, successively—thus being able to extend his networks among the Cao Đài community and echo the multi-polar identity of this community throughout his editorial activity. Finally, he became cardinal (*Đầu Sư*) at the Cầu Kho Tam Quan branch in 1960. He passed away on December 24, 1967 and the Bàu Sen temple (in fifth District, Hochiminh City)—well-known among Caodaist for its Christmas celebration and its ecumenical spirit—organised his funeral (Huệ Nhẫn 2008: 540–541).

This important figure made a name for himself during the social turbulence experienced by Saigon in 1926. On March 21 of that year, Phan Trường Mạnh was the spokesman of the “Youth Party of Annam” (*đảng Thanh Niên*) and participated on the editorial board of its magazine “Young Annam” (*Annam trẻ*). He was affiliated to the temple (*thánh thất*; *shèng shì* 聖室) of Cầu Kho since 1928, in which he founded the “Caodaic Institute” (*Institut caodaïque, Cao Đài Giáo Lý Viện*) with the engineer Phan Thanh.

In 1947, he started again the bilingual magazine *Cao Đài Giáo Lý* (“The Doctrine of Cao Đài”). Its aim was to explain the Cao Đài teachings (*giáo lý đạo Cao Đài*), the teachings of the Three Doctrines (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism) and the “mystic and mysterious science” (*Khoa học thiêng liêng thần bí*), that is, the spirit-messages received by various Cao Đài branches. Interestingly, his exegesis was recorded in French for the radio *Đài Pháp Á* (*Radio France Asia*) in 1949, then published bilingually in *What is Caodaism? (Qu'est ce que le Caodaïsme?)*, a fifty-pages booklet. Between 1953 and 1954, he ran with his maternal-uncle, Trần Nguyên Lượng (1877–1968), the journal *Đạo Đồi* (Huệ Nhẫn 2008: 403, note 177), and with the significant contribution of Nguyễn Hữu Đắc (1897–1973). A member of the Minh Lý redemptive society, a former *conseiller municipal* of Chợ Lớn, Nguyễn Hữu Đắc is famous for being the cousin of the Caodaist Pope Lê Văn Trung. In 1928, he founded with Nguyễn Thế Phương (1906–1978) the newspaper *Bảo An* (“To secure the peace”) and, at the same time, accepted to become the principal (between 1928 and 1934) of the first Cao Đài school (primary and secondary) *Đạo Đức Học Đường* (*Dàodé Xuéxiào* 道德學校; literally, “School of virtue and morality”) at the Holy see of Tây Ninh. In his book *Đạo Giáo*, or Daoism, Nguyễn Hữu Đắc (1935) offered a translation and his comments of Albert de Pouvoirville’s (1861–1940) occultist work,

aiming to merge Western rationality with Daoism (Jammes 2014: 164-165; 404; 463; 471-473). With no doubt, the role of Nguyễn Hữu Đắc as editor in chief of the journal *Đạo Đồi* increased the occultist dimension and the reference to esoteric Buddhism and Daoism, spiritism and theosophy.

In 1954, Phan Trường Mạnh published “The Way of Caodaic Salvation” (*La Voie du Salut Caodaïque, Đường Cứu Rỗi Đạo Cao Đài*), a bilingual work that influenced Cao Đài exegetes and especially those who tried to translate Cao Đài thought into French and into spiritist and theosophical pseudo-scientific concepts (like perispirit, clairvoyance, etc.).

As a journalist and theologian, he was also a great traveller and a cosmopolitan who frequented the cultivated salons of Saigon and the colonial political notables. I need to further elaborate here on the acquaintances (regularly mentioned along the issues of the *Revue Caodaïque* between 1947 and 1949) between this magazine and the famous French publisher René de Berval (1911–1987), himself being close to Buddhist reformist circles like the Theosophical Society. René de Berval ran a perennialist journal printed in Saigon (and after 1954 in Japan). *France-Asie* focused on philosophical and religious questions which were discussed by comparing Western and Asian systems of thought (religions, sciences, and aesthetics) on issues of spirituality, materialism, psychology, or science. By channeling an East, South, and South-east Asian readership and networks of authors committed to the diffusion of the hypothesis of René Guénon (1886–1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), this journal “inverted the postcolonial gaze by taking an Asian perspective” on Western occultism or “in reaction to the paradigms of modern science” (Bourdeaux 2010: 181).

Deeper are the ties of Phan Trường Mạnh with Georges Vial-Mazel, the president of the Alliance Française in Saigon. In fact, several Cao Đài followers can be found in the cultural association as pointed out in a public address by the chairman of the committee of the French Alliance in Cần Thơ, Lê Quang Nghi. The latter was himself a Caodaist of the Chiêu Minh branch, whose mausoleum is located in the same city (*Revue Caodaïque*, February-March 1949: 24-26). Moreover, the magazine *Cao Đài Giáo Lý* (November 1948: 34-38) quoted letters of encouragement sent by Émile Bollaert (1890–1978; High Commission of France for Indochina, *haut commissariat de France pour l'Indochine*), Dallas Morse Coors (1917–1996; United States Vice Consul), the Head of the Chinese Kuomintang Delegation (a certain Trình Muội Lâm), A. S. Mehta (Consul of India), and other figures of the Saigon diplomatic life at the time. It has to be emphasised that these Cao Đài exegetes, spirit-mediums, and theologians attended these receptions that placed them in the ‘good society.’ Their attachment to these nodes of social networks connects them to the endless Cao Đài quest for institutional legitimacy.

“Phan Trường Mạnh was not a gifted speaker, but he wrote very well,” said the Cao Đài historian and journalist Lê Anh Dũng (interview, March 2001). In my view,

his apologetic texts are not exceptional in the context of religious literature because they only allegorically interpret the sacred texts with the aim to extract, with a great exaltation and a certain lyricism, speculations about the divine powers on a supreme law that would govern the world—on “God, on the Word (the Logos)” to use his own words. However, all of his work presents the significance of scientific argumentation in relation to his theological ideas. This scientific character easily finds its definition in the three examples which I reproduce below from the *Revue Caodaïque*—one could multiply in numerous ways the forms and the quotations. In his reflection on the “Metaphysical Reason of the Five Prohibitions,” on the theme “Not to Commit an Act of Luxury,” Phan Trường Mạnh shows an originality in his approach to karma and lust. He wrote (in French):

The body of man, one could say, is made up of a considerable mass of living beings. It is the same plants that feed on it, such as vegetables, fruit trees, cereals, etc., because if it were otherwise, how could they live, grow and keep their freshness? If they dry up and disintegrate, it's because life has come out of it. It should be noted that cooking is only an antiseptic process, because the living cells of food substances, thus subjected to the action of fire, do not perish at such a low temperature. The food, after having undergone in the stomach first work of elaboration, turns into a liquid (chyle) which, in turn, turns into blood. The blood thus contains a great quantity of living beings which, by the effect of the conception, can take a human form. (Thus the procreation of the human species is explained.) The lust leading to the elimination of a large number of these beings, who perish thus before term, is therefore a great sin that we must avoid on pain of attracting a cruel karma (my translation).

Later in the same text, under the theme “Do Not be Greedy,” Phan Trường Mạnh continues his ‘rational’ and occultist approach to religious prohibitions:

When God created men, He gave them an astral body made in his image (it was the men of the first race (Adamic race) symbolised in Christianity by Adam). Living first of the astral life, they were not obliged to feed themselves and to clothe themselves. Little by little, yielding to the attractions of the material world, they ended up living a material existence. They then felt the need to feed themselves (this is probably what the Bible says when it teaches that Adam tasted the forbidden fruit) to dress and indulge in sensuality. This resulted in their fall into the materiality from which the instinct of possession and domination was born (my translation).

Finally, like so many others after him, Phan Trường Mạnh proposed to interpret the rules of the vegetarian diet according to the same scientific grid, this time explicitly referring to scientific experiments. He calls the respect of the vegetarian diet an act of “Kindness to Plants” (*bonté envers les plantes*):

No one is ignorant of the services rendered to us by trees of every kind. Silent benefactors of man, not blaming either his ingratitude or his cruelty, they shelter indifferently, from their shade, all those who come to sit at their feet, the weary traveller as well as the wicked woodcutter. Sandalwood is said to scent the ax that strikes it. Plants are a real natural pharmacy where we

draw all kinds of panacea to heal our ills. What lessons of goodness and sacrifice can we not draw for ourselves! The recent scientific experiments of Sir Bose, a scholar of India,²³ have shown that plants live like man, that some, and the most sensitive among them possess a nervous system more sensitive than ours to physical impressions. What do we think of he who likes to break a tree branch or uproot a plant? If the necessities of material life oblige us to use plants, the kindness we owe to these ‘candidates for animality’ recommends that we never mutilate them or destroy them unnecessarily (my translation).

The writings of Phan Trường Mạnh unveiled an at least complex and sometimes contradictory character, oscillating throughout his career between the conservatism of the society from which he evolved and a certain cultural liberalism, open to exchanges with foreigners and their religious, philosophical, and scientific thoughts. His work and action follows a certain progressivism, encouraged by the desire to see a large number of his (French and Vietnamese intelligentsia) audience having access to knowledge in various fields. While such an attitude unquestionably contributes to a wider process of a democratisation of access to knowledge, it is nevertheless tempered by a constant religious moralisation of the subject. On several occasions, Phan Trường Mạnh felt the need to discipline his fellow citizens in their religious, cultural, philosophical, etc. choices and tastes, clearly conveying a constant tension between knowledge and power.

Contrary to orientalist representations, it goes without saying that these citations underline the dynamic interactions between European and Asian cultures and religions in the modern era. Religious innovation always struggles against an established order that attempts to absorb or suppress it, but in the colonial context this struggle had additional implications. The publications of Phan Trường Mạnh became a way to revitalise older religious traditions with infusions of ‘science’ that refreshed earlier ideals, dogmas, and rules. Through his writings, French occultism appears as a “modernist” discursive veneer, used to reformulate and explain the teachings and practices in a more legitimate, scientific language, and, through the translation and exegetical process, to erase former genealogies in the construction of Cao Đài doctrine (meaning the genealogy of Chinese Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist heritage).

²³ Behind the generic English honorific “Sir” hides the person of Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858–1937), friend of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Indian poet, mystic, physicist, and botanist, known for his work on the role of electromagnetic radiation on the plant growth. In particular, he made a recorder of movements of very low amplitude to know the growth rate of plants. He is also known for his “scientific demonstration” of radio wave transmission in 1895 at the Calcutta City Hall, before Marconi, the “inventor” of the radio. Author of the idea that “the poet communicates with the truth, while the scientist approaches it painfully,” the reference to this scientist is part of the repertoire also found among scientific of the Theosophical Society. We must not confuse “Sir Bose,” quoted by Phan Trường Mạnh, with Satyendranath Bose (1894–1974), mathematician and physicist also, but highly famous for his Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921 and his contributions in the field of static mechanics, collaborating on this theme with Albert Einstein (1879–1955). Phan Trường Mạnh seems to want to play on ambiguity, which is not unusual in occultist writings.

Conclusion

Despite the small circulation and the fragility of some of these magazines, their political and religious utility is indisputable. Naturally, they served as means of making famous Cao Đài writers known or revealing new talents. They were also ways of training religious leaders: It is in that role that they forged their first weapons; they had to routinise a new Cao Đài community by the standardisation of their theology and ritual; and they had to convince non-Caodaist readers to understand their new faith. My analysis of Nguyễn Trung Hậu and Phan Trường Mạnh reflects how these two exegetes were able to evaluate, channel, and manage the new possibilities offered by print technology in the dissemination of the Cao Đài doctrine, but also to shape a proper Cao Đài writing and reading culture. These brief biographical elements—including names cited in the table—demonstrate the presence of ‘experts in printed technology’ since the rise of the Cao Đài movement in the mid-1920s, who used their writing, designing, fundraising, and managing skills for the diffusion of theological visions of the Cao Đài religion channeled by their selection of spirit-messages from different Cao Đài branches or temples.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the Cao Đài religion’s relation to orthodoxy can be understood in the Cao Đài printing production of ‘discourse.’ Thus, it is by making or by “fabricating discourses” (*fabriquer des discours*) that Cao Đài subjects were able to elucidate and problematise the meaning of their practices and their mode of being in the world. But the question of orthodoxy, like that of truth in the Foucauldian paradigm, is always linked to the question of power. ‘Discourses’ that can be recognised as orthodox in any given period are still “places of confrontation” (*lieux d’affrontement*).

As an “endogamic media” (*médium endogamique*, Debray 1991: 281), Cao Đài journals reflect the theological positions of their publishers (e.g., a temple, a specific branch or sect) and thus echo the internal tensions between temples and branches. By their principles of selection of spirit-medium texts and exegeses, Cao Đài journals were an internal mechanism for controlling orthodox Cao Đài religious discourse. Religious publishing is in itself an activity that contains powers and conflicts. It is the site of struggles, dominations, loyalty, etc. A conception of a systematic multiplicity and multi-vocality allows one to visualise a bundle of interests, strategies, and actions in situations that are themselves undergoing evolution. Polycentrism and movement are part and parcel of the multipolarity of power relations. They activate a network of authors and literacy (translating, writing, publishing, and reading) practices—what Trần Trọng Dương (2018) named a “mandala of literacy practices” in premodern Northern Vietnam Buddhist temples context. While shaping an autonomous realm of Cao Đài discourse, printed production is also a battlefield, a place of confrontation, a stake of power. Spirit-medium production is at the same time controlled, selected,

organised, and redistributed by a number of writing procedures whose role is to ward off the dangers of scattered medium production and to master the diversity of interpretations.

This paper has aimed to provide an exploratory map of the phenomenon of Cao Đài journals, and further research may be conducted on the literary style of these journals. Although “the rise of the Cao Đài from 1926 on marked a turning point in discussion about the Buddhist Revival” (McHale 2004: 158), the relationship and tensions between the Cao Đài and the Buddhist Revival movement (*chấn hưng Phật giáo*) have largely been neglected. The intensive Cao Đài printed exegesis of the Three Teachings, along with the numerous and well-structured conversions of Buddhist monks and their clientele to the Cao Đài movement (Jammes 2014: 160-169), were able to directly threaten Buddhist adherents and force “believers to fight back” (McHale 2004: 158). The concurrent circulation of Cao Đài journals with this Buddhist Revival and, broadly speaking, in competitive proselytising during colonial period (including the printed production of Catholicism, Protestantism, and other reformed Buddhist movements), need further investigation.

Certainly, the choice of the idiom in theses Cao Đài journals—Vietnamese and/or French—is not accidental but highly political. Through the emergence of a printed public sphere in colonial Vietnam, “French became the language of power and prestige, while Vietnamese gained a reputation as an inferior, even womanly, tongue” (McHale 2004: 30). The choice of idiom also impacted the way Cao Đài exegetes appropriated and disseminated, through these journals and the printed culture at large (booklets, pamphlets, translation works, exegesis), modern lay concepts (‘class,’ ‘society,’ ‘policy,’ and so forth) by using spiritist and theosophical ways of naming the invisible realm and the new technological environment brought by the colonisers (printers, thermo-dynamics, electrons, electro-magnetism, etc.). How have such terminological innovations shaped the Cao Đài perception of Vietnamese heritage?

Aware of the power of printing, the Cao Đài editors of the *Đại Đạo* (The Great Way) magazine developed their own motto inscribed on the cover of the journal: “*Vì lý do nhà in...*,” “Because Reason Depends on Printing...” The word *lý* (理) can be traced ambiguously from both its Chinese Confucian background and its French Enlightenment conceptualisation. It might be surprising for a religious magazine to use it as a motto, unless we take into consideration this hybridisation and the ambition of the Cao Đài tradition to become a “scientific religion,” in which the Confucian and/or Enlightenment ‘Reason’ draws on the printed culture, applying here the relationship of Western spiritism with printed culture in the nineteenth century. It is by such complex printed usage of a colloquial tone and rhetorical skills that Cao Đài journals were able to convert Vietnamese to their new faith, on the one hand, and to consolidate an emergent community sentiment among the newly formed “Cao daists” (*những người tin đồ Cao Đài*) on the other.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ab	At the Beginning
PW	per week

GLOSSARY

<i>Cao Đài</i>		high altar; high tower
<i>Cao Đài Giáo Lý Viện</i>		Institut of the Cao Đài Doctrine” (translated “Caodaic Institute” by Francophone Caodaist)
<i>chấn hưng Phật giáo</i>		Buddhist revival
<i>chánh giáo</i>		Pure religion
<i>chi phái</i>		Branch
<i>chiếu chỉ</i>		royal edict
<i>Chiếu Minh</i>		Unify and Lighten (Name of Cao Đài branch)
<i>Chiếu Minh Tam Thanh Vô Vi</i>		Radiant Light of Non-Interference of the Three Purities
<i>Chơn thần</i>		Perisprit, Astral body
<i>chữ Nôm</i>		Southern characters (logographic writing system using classical Chinese characters to write the Vietnamese language)
<i>chuándào</i>	傳道	Proselytising the way
<i>chuánjiào</i>	傳教	Proselytising the religion
<i>Dàodào sān qī pǔdù</i>	大道三期普度	The Great Way of the Third Period of Salvation (or Caodaism)
<i>Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ</i>		The Great Way of the Third Period of Salvation (or Caodaism)
<i>Đại Đồng Thông Nhất</i>		The [Caodai] Union among the Universal Alliance
<i>Đảng Lập Hiến Đông Dương</i>		The Constitutionalist Party
<i>Đảng Thanh Niên</i>		Youth Party of Annam
<i>Đạo Đức Học Đường</i>		“The school of virtue and morality”
<i>Dàodé Xuéxiào</i>	道德學校	“The school of virtue and morality”
<i>Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu</i>		Golden Mother of the Jasper Pond
<i>Fǎzhèngchuán</i>	法正傳	The Orthodox Dharma (also translated the Constitution of Caodaism by Francophone Caodaist)
<i>Fú Xī</i>	伏羲	Ancient Chinese cultural hero
<i>gāo tái</i>	高臺	high altar; high tower
<i>Giê-su</i>		Jesus
<i>Hội thánh</i>		Holy assembly (head of a Cao Đài branch)
<i>Huì shèng</i>	會聖	Holy assembly (head of a Cao Đài branch)
<i>Jadō</i>	邪道	Heresy
<i>Jìn Shì</i>	盡世	The End of the World
<i>Khổng Tử</i>		Confucius
<i>Lão Tử</i>		Lǎozǐ

<i>lên đồng</i>		to mount the medium (Vietnamese spirit-possession)
<i>lĩ</i>	理	Reason
<i>Liên Hòa Tổng Hội</i>		Congress of the [Cao Đài] Union
<i>lý</i>		Reason
<i>Míng</i>	明	Light
<i>Minh</i>		Light
<i>Nèi jiào wúwéi xīn chuán</i>	內教無為心傳	heart-to-heart transmission through non-interference (Esotericism)
<i>Nghị viện Hội Đồng Soái Phủ</i>		Council of the Government of Indochina
<i>Đông Dương</i>		(Conseil du Gouvernement de l'Indochine)
<i>ngoại giáo công truyền</i>		Exotericism
<i>người sáng lập Đạo Cao Đài</i>		the creator of the Cao Đài religion
<i>nội giáo vô vi tâm truyền</i>		heart-to-heart transmission through non-interference (Esotericism)
<i>Phán xét cuối cùng</i>		Last Judgment
<i>Pháp Chánh Truyền</i>		The Orthodox Dharma (also translated the Constitution of Caodaism by Francophone Caodaist)
<i>phổ độ</i>		Universal salvation or redemption
<i>Phục Hy</i>		Ancient Chinese cultural hero
<i>pǔdù</i>	普度	Universal salvation or redemption
<i>quốc ngữ</i>		national language script (Latin script-based writing system for the Vietnamese language adding diacritics to create additional sounds and to indicate the tone of each word)
<i>sānjiào</i>	三教	Three Teachings
<i>Shèng shì</i>	聖室	Holy house or Temple
<i>Shèngyán jíquán</i>	聖言集全	Compilation of Holy Words
<i>Shénlíng xué</i>	神靈學	Western spiritism
<i>sự hiệp nhất</i>		the Original Unity
<i>tả đạo</i>		Heresy
<i>Tam Giáo</i>		Three Teachings
<i>Tân Luật</i>		The New Code
<i>Tận Thế</i>		The End of the World
<i>Thần linh học</i>		Western spiritism
<i>Thần Tiên kinh</i>		Book of Spirits and Immortals
<i>thánh danh</i>		Holy name
<i>Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển</i>		Compilation of Holy Words
<i>Thánh thất</i>		Holy house or Temple
<i>thể pháp</i>	體法	Law of the Life (Exoteric knowledge)
<i>Thích-ca Mâu-ni</i>		Buddha Śākyamuni
<i>Thông thiên học</i>	通天學	Theosophical Society (studies of the communications with heaven)
<i>tỉ giả</i>	體法	Law of the Life (Exoteric knowledge)
<i>Tiên Thiên Đạo</i>		Primordial Way
<i>tòa thánh</i>		Holy See (of Tây Ninh)

<i>Tōngtiān xué</i>	通天學	Theosophical Society (studies of the communications with heaven)
<i>truyền bá</i>		proselytising
<i>truyền đạo</i>		proselytising the way
<i>truyền giáo</i>		proselytising the religion
<i>vô vi</i>		Non-action (meditation)
<i>Wài jiào gōng chuán</i>	外教公傳	Exotericism
<i>wúwéi</i>	無為	Non-Action (meditation)
<i>Xiāntiān Dào</i>	先天道	Primordial Way
<i>Xīnlǜ</i>	新律	The New Code
<i>Yáochí jīnmǔ</i>	瑤池金母	Golden Mother of the Jasper Pond (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu)
<i>Zhào zhǐ</i>	詔旨	royal edict
<i>Zhàomíng sān qīng wúwéi</i>	照明三清無為	Radiant Light of Non-Interference of the Three Purities
<i>Zhēn hún</i>	出真魂	Perisprit, Astral body
<i>zhīpài</i>	支派	Branch
<i>Zuìzhōng pànjúé</i>	最終判決	Last Judgment
<i>Zuò shèng</i>	座聖	Holy See (of Tây Ninh)