

***COLLECTION OF  
TỪ CHƠN'S  
ARTICLES ON  
CAO ĐÀI  
PHILOSOPHY  
VOLUME II***



***His Holiness Hộ Pháp is preaching***

***Từ Chơn***

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>148</i>

## ***Preface***

*This book collects articles on Cao Đài philosophy by Từ Chơn. These articles have been posted on the author's or friends' websites. These are ideas based on the author's own study and experience and are not intended to be a guide for anyone.*

*This book is still waiting for the Tây Ninh Sacerdotal Council to approve. This draft is sent to friends for comments. Please do not print, translate and distribute without consulting the author.*

*Thank you.*

***Từ Chơn***

THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY  
BY  
HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP



Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc

## BEGINNING

When the Covid epidemic began to break out around December 2019, humanity had to deal with an epidemic that had never happened before. As of this writing (May 20, 2021), the number of deaths worldwide is more than 3.5 million (according to Reuters news agency) and there is no sign that the pandemic will end. This tragic event will probably make many people, theists and atheists alike, wonder: "*If there is a benevolent Supreme Being, why doesn't He save His children?*"

This question is due to a basic but very common misunderstanding of many people. I once heard a woman say that she no longer believed in religion because her husband who had cancer still died although she fasted and prayed for him to heal. In fact, the word "save" in religions should be understood as saving the soul, not the physical body, which will disintegrate and turn into other substances over time. There are also a few cases of people curing other people's illnesses with just their bare hands, but usually only great teachers or enlightened beings can do it and there are only a few in this world.

Personally, I, as a Cao Đài followers, as well as many other Vietnamese people, have no such questions because we have long heard the Vietnamese folklore of the prophecy of Saint Trạng Trình Nguyễn Bình Khiêm. "*Out of ten people, only three survive; then two more get killed before peace is achieved*". In addition, lots of noble ancestors of several religions have also taught that we must live ethically and prepare for an important change on this planet. Particularly, Cao Đài preaches that the

Supreme Being (also known as God, Allah, Jehovah, Buddha, etc.) established a new religion to save all living things for the next 700,000 years and humanity will endure many trials in a Judgement Day called Long Hoa (Dragon and Flowers). After that there will be a new period called the Holy Age, in which the survivors will begin a new, better period.



His Holiness's Book

Teachings about the Long Hoa Judgment Day can be found everywhere, in Cao Đài Divine Messages and scriptures, especially in the poem collection Thiên Thai Kiến Diện by His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc. This is a collection of Tang poems consisting of 77 poems, each of which has 8 lines of 7 words. The poems are presented in the Ô Thước Kiều style,

meaning the last two words of the previous poem will be the first two words of the next poem. According to Minh Tâm publishing house, this collection of poems was completed in the Year of the Cat (1927) and published in 1964 in Tây Ninh. Readers are invited to view the poetry collection at this link:  
<https://www.daotam.info/books/v/TuChon/thienthaikiendien2018.pdf>

All 77 poems tell the story of His Holiness Hộ Pháp's spiritual journey to the Divine Eternal Realm. On that opportunity, His Holiness witnessed numerous important events that were metaphors for what would happen on Earth 68, especially the following two poems numbered 24 and 25.

## THE TWO POEMS

### Bài 24

Nghe vang tiếng sấm nổ phương Tây,  
 Dị điều bay lên liệng cả bầu.  
 Mỏ ngậm lửa hồng, lôi điểu nhoáng,  
 Đuôi lửa thủy quái, võ phong gây.  
 Chờn vờn xé đất yêu gài rọ,  
 Lăn bản ngăn sông quỷ đóng chài.  
 Túng **tíu** lại cầu người chẳng tiếp,  
 Giao long chín miệng cắn nhai thây.

### Bài 25

Nhai thây còn sốt cũng nhiều người,  
 Bị trận mê hôn chết ngộp hơi.  
 Lẽnh nghễnh thây phơi nằm chật đất,

Loi noi hồn chạy khóc long Trời.  
 Có người đầu khỉ mang đai sắt,  
 Hóa phép Thiên Lung chiếu bóng người.  
 Che **bớt** nạn tai người sống rồn,  
 Dem vào Nam gởi để an nơi.



Strange-shaped birds gliding.

## SOME NECESSARY DEFINITIONS

Since these two poems contain lots of ancient terms or dialects from the South, Central, and North of Viet Nam, I had to resort to the Vietnamese Dictionary of the Khai Trí Tiến Đức Association, published in 1931. It is believed that this is the most valuable Vietnamese dictionary to date. Below are some difficult-to-understand Vietnamese words in the two poems, which are no longer commonly used today.



- Dị điều: birds with strange shapes.
- Liêng: gliding.
- Lôi điện nhoáng: loud explosions with flashes of electricity.
- Thuỷ quái: strange sea beasts.
- Võ phong gây: creating big storms.
- Rọ: bamboo fish traps.
- Đống (đóng) chài: Piling up a lot of dry sticks in the water to lure fish in, then using a net around it to catch them.
- Túng tíu: needy, not having enough.
- Giao long: a type of sea monster, said in books to resemble an ancient crocodile in China.
- Lẽnh nghễnh: messy, no lines.
- Khóc long trời: crying very loudly.
- Thiên lung: a very large cage.
- Sống rôn: live longer.

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION

(By Christopher Hartney và Từ Chơn)

Sincere thanks to Dr. Christopher Humphrey Hartney, Professor of Religion at the University of Sydney, Australia, for translating the poem collection Thiên Thai Kiến Diện into English..

### Poem 24

But then came thunder – a rumbling in the West.  
Huge flocks of birds circled in the sky and with  
Fire in their beaks! They rained down lightening.

Sea beasts stirred their tails whipping up wild storms.  
And evil spirits possessed the land laying out harsh traps,  
Damming up rivers, laying out their nets, and those caught -  
They screamed for help, but no one heard, no one cared.  
As the teeth of Giao Long, and his nine mouths crushed them all  
dead.

### Poem 25

Those who survived that horrid river monster  
Choked and died on the fumes that rose up and off  
A great Battle of Illusions – with corpses strewn to the horizons.  
The remaining souls cried themselves to death.  
But with his broad iron belt a monkey-headed man stepped  
forth. He wove through the world a magic so divine that  
He saved from those fumes the last of all men and  
Sent them to the south – knowing there they'd be safe.



## EXPLANATION

Some readers told me these 77 poems are masterpieces, but it is a bit more difficult to understand poems than prose. Therefore, I would like to re-write the above two poems as follows:

### **Bài 24**

In the West, I heard lots of loud explosions and saw flocks of strangely shaped birds flying around. From the beaks of these birds, sparks flew out accompanied by explosions. Their tails created powerful storm winds to trick the monsters of the sea. On the ground, monsters set large traps to catch fish and in the river they also blocked the flow of water, hoping to destroy the fish. A great number of people were in such dire need that they had to beg for help, but no one cared. In the end, they were eaten by a nine-mouthed dragon.

### **Bài 25**

After this massacre, a lot of people still survived. However, that is not all, they would then die of suffocation, in a situation they do not know how to deal with. Dead bodies were lying everywhere and living people were crying in pain. Finally, a man with a monkey-like face and an iron bracelet arrived. This person created a very large iron dome to protect people. Thanks to that, more lives were able to be saved and brought safely to the South.



Israel's Iron Dome, air-defence system which intercepted attacking rockets.

## CONCLUSION

Dear readers, the reason I transcribe these two poems is because I find the line "*they would then die of suffocation, in a situation they do not know how to deal with*" to be quite similar to the current Covid situation. The patients all started with difficulty breathing and died from lung damage. As for "*a situation they do not know how to deal with*", that is, falling into a chaotic situation because you do not know how to deal with it. It is true that, to date, it has been unknown for sure how long the vaccine will be effective, whether it will block new variants, when there will be a treatment and when this epidemic will end! As for the remaining lines of the two poems, to be honest, I only presented

the meaning of the words, but did not know clearly what it was. For example, "*the dragon with nine mouths*" or "*the monkey-headed man wearing an iron belt*" are all incomprehensible for me.

Such mystifying words are often found in the genre of oracles that great enlightened beings often leave behind for humanity, such as Nostradamus, Trạng Trình Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, etc. The reason for using these words is because of a famous rule passed down in the East: "*God's plan cannot be leaked*".

Additionally, according to Trạng Trình Nguyễn Bình Khiêm

Each sentence is a miracle,

Which only enlightened people can understand.

That is, oracles are only for "great heroes" or "extremely intelligent people" to calculate their paths in life. Therefore, normal people like us can only guess for fun. Usually, when an important event has happened, people quote a few sentences to prove that the oracle has been talking about it for a long time, but ordinary people are too fool to understand.

Thus, the question is what His Holiness Hộ Pháp write the oracles for. In my humble opinion, He first wants to encourage religious study and practice. Since, even though we do not fully understand what His Holiness means, we still can probably roughly know that terrible disasters will one day strike this 68th earth. Fear will make us more diligent with our practice. Second, this is also a type of test that confirms a person's level of religious study. Whoever clearly understands His Holiness's intention has achieved the state that the ancient priests called

Prajnaparamita, which the ancient Chinese translated as “*the wisdom that help us reach the other shore*” (the ultimate insight that free us from all suffering). So I would like to mention His two poems so that we can ponder over them together and then work side by side to concentrate on further religious study. If we are lucky enough to meet a noble spirit who explains them for everyone then that is truly a blessing.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn 20/5/2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>149</i>

THE PHENOMENON  
OF  
ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAISM  
MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE



Illustration of astral projection

Từ Chơn



## INTRODUCTION

A documentary on the Discovery Channel depicts a Tibetan monk meditating to the point of lifting his body about 0.5 meters off the ground. This controversial phenomenon is quite similar to a phenomenon in Cao Đài religion, which has caused lots of non-Caodaists to spread word of mouth that "*Successful Cao Đài practitioners can become Immortals and be able to fly!!!*" The truth is there is a method named Tịnh Luyện Xuất Chơn Thần (Esoteric Practice for Astral Projection). Thus, it is a bit of an exaggeration to say practitioners can fly.

Most Cao Đài followers know and discuss the phenomenon of "astral projection", but very few know in detail what it is and how it is related to contemporary human science. They collect information from various sources - both official and unofficial - which sometimes contradict each other to the point of absurdity. Therefore, this article aims to research, rearrange the information appropriately, clarify the issue, avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and give everyone a fairly complete view to move forward steadily on the path of religious study. The most important thing is any bad religious mystical thoughts will be avoided when the issue is thoroughly understood.

Perhaps a little comparison with other religions is needed to clarify the issue. Most of the world's religions have the same

basic model. First of all is an axiom that human life is full of difficulty and suffering. Then there is a method to overcome this difficulty and achieve enlightenment.



Illustration of spiritual enlightenment

Generally, religions have two ways to popularize their methods. One is the official way through a legal organization in which believers come together and govern themselves. The other is through small sects that are often not recognized by the main group. Usually, the main group, the most numerous followers with the largest temples, will try to hone their doctrines so that they can not be rejected by society. As for the sects, there often are secret methods. These groups often isolate themselves, so the information about their doctrines is kept secret internally. Therefore, outsiders often add mystical details to make their chats more attractive.

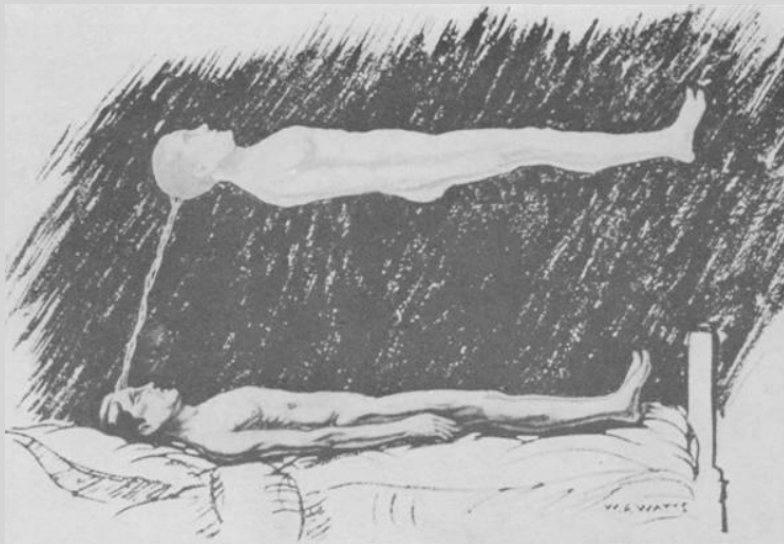
Believers of "mainstream" religions often chant prayers, pray, do good deeds, fast, and do charity work. In general, they follow relatively comprehensible methods that are considered "correct" by society. Other methods such as skewering sharp sticks through the body, chewing hallucinogenic leaves, practicing strange postures, doing spiritual dances, etc are considered unorthodox. These methods are often disregarded by "mainstream" religions.

Cao Đài attaches great importance to both types of methods mentioned above, of course according to its own rules. Right from the beginning of the religion, its philosophy clearly defined two types of practice. They are supported by a separate theoretical system, which is the concept of Exoteric Practice (rituals, prayers, charity work, dissemination of teachings) and Esoteric Practice (for practitioners in Meditation Houses). The Cao Đài Canonical Codes (1927) has a chapter of eight articles on Meditation Houses for esoteric practitioners. The most important evidence is the seven books of His Holiness Phạm Công Tắc's sermons. These sermons were recorded by the Tây Ninh Holy See Stenography Team and officially released internally in the 1960s. Another piece of evidence to support this is the religious establishments are also divided into two clear categories: the The Holy Temples for the Exoteric Practice and the Meditation Houses for the Esoteric Practice.

## MYSTICISM

Right from the first days of Cao Đài in 1926, the divine beings' teachings mentioned how to meditate to achieve astral

projection. At that time, the concepts of Exoteric and Esoteric Practice were not emphasized by a solid cause like later. The concept of Esoteric Practice can be found scattered throughout the divine texts from seances. Sometimes they are very incomprehensible classical metaphors, for example: chiết khảm điền ly<sup>1</sup> or luyện thánh thai<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes the explanation is quite clear: *“Disciples, your subtle body is the second body, which is the gaseous aura like a mold around your body. Its center is the brain and its entrance and exit is the fontanel, also called Vi Hộ. There, the Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) always stands and protects your soul during your esoteric practice, when your Tinh (body) unites with the Khí (mind), then the Khí will penetrate to and unite with the Thần (soul) for you to become a Saint”*.



Astral projection according to Carrington and Muldoon, 1929

Since the information is partially hidden like that, believers are even more curious to know what it is. At that time, among

---

<sup>1</sup> to extract 坎, to fill 離.

<sup>2</sup> to develop holy fetus.

believers, documents about esoteric practice passed from hand to hand. These documents often had unbeknownst origins and did not specifically talk about astral projection, which is the ultimate goal of the method. Lots of people tried it, for example Tuyệt Cốc or Tịch Cốc<sup>3</sup> group (1934) advocated by Mr. Ngô Đức Nhuận and Nguyễn Ngọc Điền. This group was called the “flying religion” because they claimed that they could fly. Of course it was just advertising! This group was not recognized by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council and later had extremist activities, so it was disbanded by the then French government and shunned by its supporters. Anyway, this is also evidence that there is an esoteric practice movement among believers.

As for the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council, official activities in the field of Esoteric Practice can be listed as follows. First of all, His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc officially systematized the concept of Exoteric and Esoteric Practice of Cao Đài. As one of the pioneer predecessors in this field, He is the one who publicly affirmed that there is a method of attaining astral projection. In particular, His series of sermons on the Esoteric Practice have left a deep impression in the process of developing Cao Đài's methods.

His Holiness Hộ Pháp affirmed three important ways of practicing Caodaism: being a preacher in the hierarchy of the Cửu Trùng Đài<sup>4</sup>, following the Phước Thiện<sup>5</sup> to create material

---

<sup>3</sup> these practitioners' food is vegetables only, without any grains.

<sup>4</sup> the Nine-Levelled Tower.

<sup>5</sup> the Cao Đài Charity.

wealth for the religion and practicing in the Tịnh Thất<sup>6</sup>. By definition, the first two methods are classified as Exoteric and the third Esoteric Practice.



Trí Huệ Cung

### **Trí Huệ Cung<sup>7</sup>** (Temple of Wisdom)

His Holiness Hộ Pháp, according to Cao Đài's Canonical Codes, heads the Hiệp Thiên Đài and takes charge of the Esoteric Practice. Therefore, it was He that directed the construction of the Temple of Wisdom. This is the first Cao Đài's retreat for women. In His sermon at the Lễ Trán Thần (the Ceremony of Sanctification) on December 15, Year of the Tiger (1950), He mentioned the method of Esoteric Practice to achieve astral

<sup>6</sup> the Meditation Houses or Retreats.

<sup>7</sup> There are three Cao daist Retreats: Trí Huệ Cung (The Temple of Wisdom), Trí Giác Cung (The Temple of Enlightenment) and Vạn Pháp Cung (The Temple of Multi-Dharma).

projection. On January 16, Year of the Cat (1951), He was the first person to meditate here for three months. It is said that His Holiness Hộ Pháp probably taught how to practice to a few close followers, but there is no evidence of widespread dissemination. Since His Holiness fled to Phnom Penh, the issue of Esoteric Practice has not been publicly mentioned anymore. Other high-ranking dignitaries have not mentioned the issue though they did know something about it. In addition, due to the Canonical Codes, they have no authority in this discipline. Up to now, what belongs to the practice method that His Holiness officially left behind is the book *Phương Luyện Kỹ*<sup>8</sup> (released on January 14, Year of the Pig - 1947) and the Twelve Physical Exercises. Nevertheless, these documents are too sketchy to fully convey the method of Caodaists Esoteric Practice. Currently, the believers who voluntarily manage the Temple of Wisdom and the Temple of Enlightenment know a little about the Esoteric Practice.

### **Trí Giác Cung** (Temple of Enlightenment)

Trí Giác Cung is also a retreat, but not as highly regarded as the Temple of Multi-Dharma and Temple of Wisdom. This is a charity of a Cao Đài follower, Giáo Thiện Đình Công Trứ. After Mr. Trứ had been mysteriously murdered, the Sacerdotal Council took it over. Some time later, this facility was classified as a retreat according to Order 285/VP-HP dated December 5, Year of the Horse, of His Holiness Hộ Pháp and is currently a nursing home. No one at this meditation house knows nor practices the esoteric method.

---

<sup>8</sup> How to religiously train yourself.



Vạn Pháp Cung

### **Vạn Pháp Cung** (Temple of Multi-Dharma)

Particularly the Temple of Multi-Dharma, considered a place of Esoteric Practice for men, does not have a very favorable development, at least according to His Holiness Hộ Pháp's intention. Legend has it that His Holiness and a few disciples went to the foot of Bà Đen mountain to find a location for the Temple of Multi-Dharma. After that, His Holiness had a blueprint made and workers recruited to prepare for the construction work. Nonetheless, then times changed unfavorably and the construction did not go as planned. One of his disciples, Giáo Thiện Võ Văn Đợi, gathered a number of fellow believers at the location to build a retreat for Esoteric Practice, but was not recognized by His Holiness. In one of his sermons, He called



these people the “mountainous monks” and metaphorically said that they were on the wrong path.

Currently, the descendants of the "mountainous monks" still follow the wishes of Giáo Thiện Đợi. They built a house at the foot of Bà Đen mountain and also named it the Temple of Multi-Dharma. However, now this retreat is a religious facility with its own rules and it is unclear whether it is under the management of Tây Ninh Sacerdotal Council or not. Similar to the Temple of Wisdom and the Temple of Enlightenment, no one at the Temple of Multi-Dharma knows anything about Esoteric Practice.

**The Esoteric Practice by Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung** (the Eighth Lady in the Jade Pond Palace)

Around 1979, appeared the document Esoteric Practice by Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung. This document was granted to Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới, the former stenographer of His Holiness Hộ Pháp, by means of automatic writing. Bát Nương taught Hiền Tài Mới the method of Esoteric Practice to attain astral projection. So far, this has been the clearest and most specific document mentioning Caodaist Esoteric Practice.

This document determines the practice schedule and clearly states the method of respiration and astral projection. What stands out is that astral journey, which was previously often mentioned mysteriously, is now clearly described. The subtle body, according to this document, is a semi-tangible part of a human that can separate and move outside the physical body. People often call it by other words such as soul, astral body, perispirit, consciousness, etc. Successful practitioners can export

their subtle body to travel throughout the universe, meet divine beings and return to the mortal body within fifteen minutes or so. However, the important thing is that only those who are predestined and greatly moral can practice successfully, not everyone! Bát Nương also says clearly that being able to take an astral journey is not attaining enlightenment and that this is only one of the three important methods of Cao Đài, not the most advanced one. Which method a believer chooses and whether or not he/she attains enlightenment depends on each individual's fate. This clearly refutes the notion of most believers who often think "doing charity work" is less valuable than "attaining enlightenment", or that "exoteric practice" is inferior to "esoteric practice".



*Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới, former stenographer of Tây Ninh Holy See*

Bát Nương ordered Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới to bring the document to the Tây Ninh Sacerdotal Council for Caodaists in

the Meditation Houses. Although he did so, the senior dignitaries in the Sacerdotal Council (at that time called the Governing Council) did not have much positive feedback! Currently, this document is passed on through Hiền Tài Mới's friends and mainly spread on the internet. Up to now, the Sacerdotal Council has not officially published any specific and complete documents on the method of Esoteric Practice.

## APPLIED SCIENCE

While the Cao Đài religion is at a standstill without any significant developments in the method of Esoteric Practice and the monasteries are either covered with moss or become "tourist attractions" and "flea markets", the situation in the West is much brighter. Theological researchers call this phenomenon soul travel, spirit walking or astral projection (these words are very close to Cao Đài's "exporting the perispirit or second body"). Scientists call it intentional out-of-body experience or OBE, roughly translated as feeling-from-outside-the-body.

Although theologians and scientists disagree in terms of approaches, experiments and terminology, in general their views coincide: "human mind" or "consciousness" is a part that can be separated from the human physical body, contrary to the classical notion that consciousness only exists inside the body. They even go so far as to say that, under certain conditions, "the mind" can separate and move outside the body. Cao Đài calls this phenomenon "an astral journey to the outside world".

First, in 1943 writer George Tyrrel used the word out-of-body experience in his work Apparition. Since then, scientific researchers have chosen this word to refer to the feeling of floating outside the body. Along with this feeling, one's consciousness can look back at his own body or see lots of other unusual phenomena.



Professor Olaf Blanke

Scientists study the cases of patients on the operating table. Some went into near death, but then came back to life. They describe the feeling of being detached from the body and floating in the air in this near-death period very similarly. Currently, scientists conclude that this feeling can be created in many ways, for example stimulating a part of the cerebral

cortex, using hallucinogenic chemicals or meditating to the deepest level. Particularly the meditation period that creates the feeling of OBE is very consistent with the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice.

The development process and scientific achievements of out-of-body experience (OBE) up to now can be listed as follows. Initially, Dr. Celia Green was the first person to conduct scientific research on OBE in 1968. However, this research was mainly theoretical based on thousands of interviews. Nevertheless, these are stepping stones for future research.

Next, Professor Olaf Blanke, from the Brain-Mind Institute, was the first person to create the OBE phenomenon in a patient. In 2007, while examining a woman with epilepsy, he accidentally touched an electrode to the junction between the right parietal and temporal lobes of the cerebral cortex. Immediately, the woman told him she was “out of her body” and saw her “body” from an outside position. This phenomenon will disappear if the stimulation is stopped. After that, Dr. Blanke performed more experiments, all of which proved that the human consciousness can be separated from the physical body.

Next, Dr. Henrik Ehrsson, Head of the Karolinska Institute's Brain, Body and Self Laboratory in Stockholm was the first person to conduct OBE experiments on healthy people in August 2007. Using virtual reality glasses, he once again demonstrated that a healthy, alert person can view his or her body from a location outside of his or her own physical body.



Dr. Jane Aspell

Most recently, in August 2013, Dr. Jane Aspell of Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge published her work in the journal *Psychological Science*. In one experiment, scores of volunteers wore virtual reality glasses. They could see their own bodies from behind. When their bodies flashed to the beat of their hearts for a few minutes, they claimed to feel like they were out of their bodies.

Through the above successes, it can be seen that even though science has not yet agreed with the theological theory of the soul, it has clearly publicly confirmed the most basic and

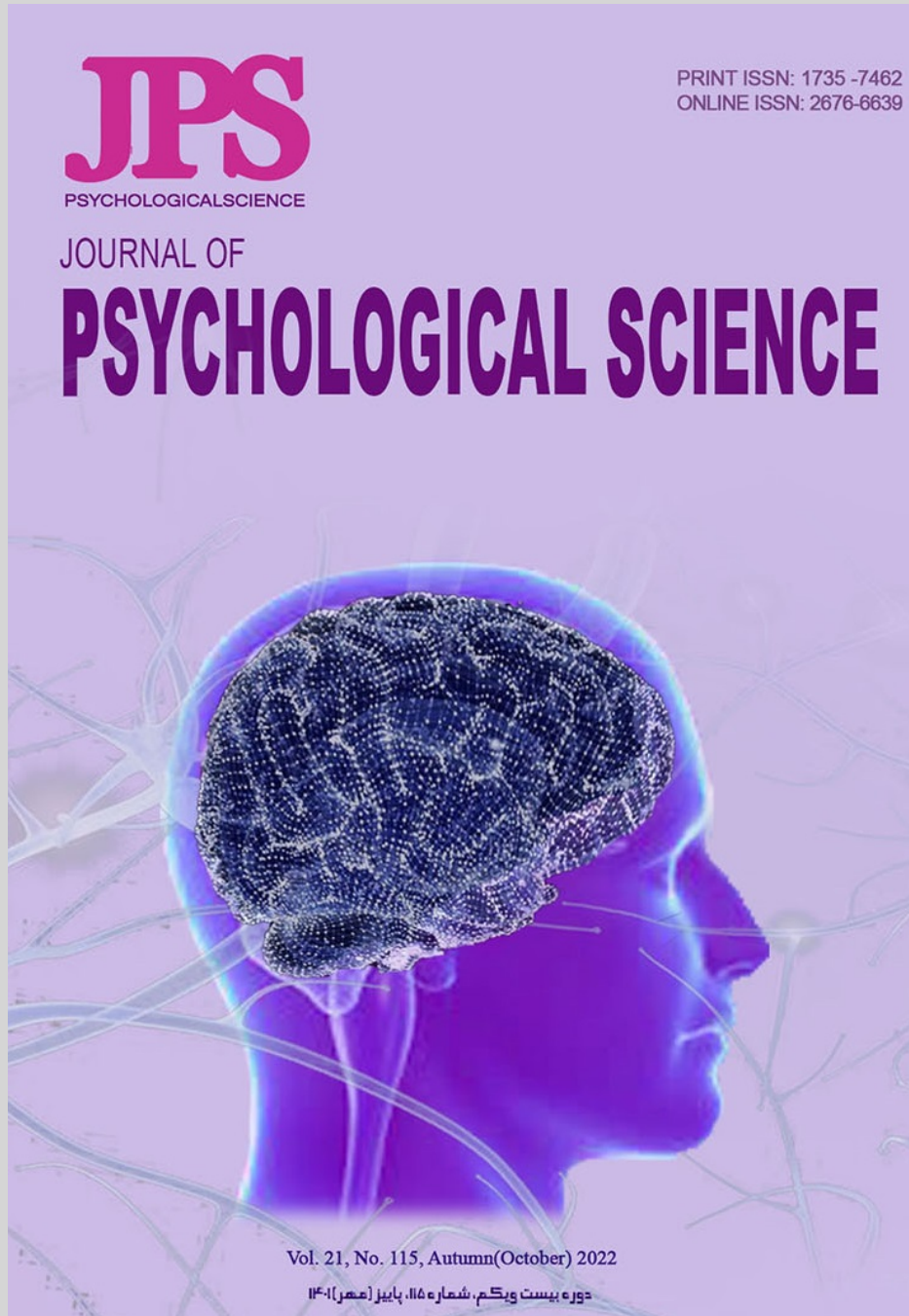
important step of theology: humans are not the only physical body, but the combination of two separate parts, physical body and consciousness. In particular, the Cao Đài religion goes further and in more detail when affirming that humans are the harmonious combination of three components: body, consciousness and soul. Just like proving OBE, one day science will also prove Cao Đài's theory. Then science and theology will converge in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

If Cao Đài mysticism and applied science are compared, the following lessons can be drawn. Cao Đài's Esoteric Practice has a theoretical part, but still lacks the implementation, so there have been no significant additions, developments and achievements. Believers lack accurate information, so they think this is something "secret" (partly due to the word "esoteric"), only for a few senior dignitaries. Non-Caodaists are half-believing and half-skeptical, so the method is considered illusory and unrealistic. In addition, the social environment in Vietnam is characterized by extreme conservatism, so there are still not enough conditions for the Esoteric Practice to develop.

On the contrary, Western scientists have more advantages while researching a problem. They all have high degrees and work in modern laboratories. The information about their research is published either in such scientific journals as Science, Nature, Psychological Science, etc or on leading media such as BBC, CNN, New York Times, Telegraph, Science News, the Guardian, etc. That is why they make steady progress toward their goals.

In addition, their social environment is ready to welcome new changes.





For the Cao Đài religion, Esoteric Practice is separating the conscious mind from the physical body to learn from divine beings and then progressing to the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment. For Western scientists, it is for application in numerous disciplines of life, first and foremost is healing. No matter which side succeeds first, the two rivers will eventually meet at a predestined place: proving to humanity that the soul and the afterlife are real.

As for the Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council, I hope that the religion and its influence will develop more and more. In fact, it is now international. This also fulfills the prophecy of God: "Cao Đài will spread abroad." Obviously, more than thirty years ago this development was unthinkable if we took into account the strength of the Sacerdotal Council in all aspects from finances to the level of dignitaries. Nevertheless, Cao Đài, thanks to the transformation from divine beings, now has Holy Temples in lots of advanced countries such as America and Australia. It is still difficult to preach Caodaism due to the language barrier.

A noteworthy point is that, in the West today, meditation is no longer a mystery and is increasingly popular. With that reality, I humbly think the Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council not only needs to focus on developing the Esoteric Practice but also publicizes the information for everyone to know. First, since Cao Đài still announces that its practice should be brought out to all believers instead of being hidden. Second, in today's IT age, hiding something is becoming increasingly inconsistent with the trends of the 21st century. Finally, with publicity, there will be lots of additional contributions and experiments to perfect the practice.

Please allow me to borrow His Holiness Hộ Pháp's words to conclude this article: *“Caodaist exterior is Exoteric Practice and its interior is Esoteric Practice. Both need to be developed in parallel to be called the true doctrine”*.

Từ Chơn

Email: [tuuchoon@gmail.com](mailto:tuuchoon@gmail.com)

Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/caodaismmeditation/>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....	4
2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....	16
3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....	36
4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....	50
5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....	76
6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....	107
7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....	120
8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....	134
9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....	150

# CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE



Từ Chơn

## INTRODUCTION

Annually, on the first day of the third month of the lunar calendar, the Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council celebrates the anniversary of His Holiness Cao Quỳnh Cư's death. He is one of the predecessors who blazed the trail on the early days of establishing the Cao Đài religion. Cao Đài history records His absolute trust in the Supreme Being or God. Having been ordered to set up Cao Đài, he immediately gave up his current comfortable life and committed himself to being the pioneer of Cao Đài for the Supreme Being. He was so devoted that His friends had to give advice, "*Teacher Tư, why are you so superstitious? Your only son is studying in France. Won't he be a dropout if you quit your job like that?*" Looking closely at His situation, we can see that this faith is indeed very rare for an ordinary person, whether in ancient Vietnamese society or even today.

Reading Cao Đài historical records, most Cao Đài followers know the biography and achievements of Him and his spouse, Đâu Sư Hương Hiếu, whom followers affectionately call Bà Tư (the Fourth Lady). Consequently, in this article, I would not repeat that story, but only discuss His very important role in the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice.

## THE SACRED IMPRINTS

First of all, let's talk about the sacred imprints that His Holiness left on the Cao Đài young generations. I would like to mention the ones related to the Esoteric Practice because most of other

authors' discussions are too sketchy to discuss the importance of these imprints.



The statue of Thượng Phẩm on the left

### **An important medium**

At the Holy Temple alone, which is the worldly symbol of the Bạch Ngọc Kinh<sup>9</sup>, two sculptures of His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm are displayed. One is a full-body statue standing on his throne to the right of the Hộ Pháp's throne in the Hiệp Thiên Đài. The second is a bust embossed on the ceiling of the Cung

<sup>9</sup> where the Supreme Being rules the universe.

Đạo<sup>10</sup>. This is rare if compared to other Caodaist trailblazers, who generally have only one statue.

The statue of Him standing on the throne, together with the statue of His Holiness Hộ Pháp, the statue of His Holiness Thượng Sanh, the letter Khí and the Seven-Headed Snake Throne, is a guide for the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice for Astral Projection. Everyone can observe those to find out their own method of practice. If you observe them without finding anything, then you are neither predestined nor eligible to take the third path of Cao Đài (Esoteric Practice). The first path is to join the Cửu Trùng Đài and the second path is to become a Phước Thiện dignitary. I would like to add that those ineligible for Esoteric Practice should not try to do it because it will be too difficult to succeed. However, I do not say they will not have a chance to attain enlightenment. In Cao Đài, there are still other ways of practice and with a suitable one for yourself, you can attain enlightenment. Since the early days of Cao Đài, lots of predecessors have attained enlightenment thanks to doing meritorious deeds without performing Esoteric Practice, for example Phối Thánh Phạm Văn Màng, Phối Thánh Bùi Ái Thoại, Thánh Phi Châu (Sĩ Tải Đỗ Quang Hiến), etc.

As for the bust on the ceiling of the Cung Đạo, some say it is of Hồng Quân Lão Tổ, the Supreme Saint of Taoism. However, I think it is not very logical to say so if you consider the theme of the bas-relief, which is about the ways of communication between humans and divine beings. Legend has it that His

---

<sup>10</sup> the Spiritual Spot, where Caodaist dignitaries communicate with divine beings through Ouija Board.

Holiness Hộ Pháp told Tá Lý Bùi Ái Thoại to use the image of His Holiness Thượng Phẩm as a model for this statue.



The bust of His Holiness Thượng Phẩm on the ceiling of the Holy Temple

Consequently, first of all, this statue can be thought to remind believers of the very important role of His Holiness Thượng Phẩm in the Cao Đài initiation. Since most of the "tipping table" sessions took place at His home and the important divine messages related to the Caodaist Canonical Codes (Cao Đài Constitution) were granted in the seances, where He and His Holiness Hộ Pháp were the mediums. Next, His Holiness was also the one who held the Đại Ngọc Cơ (the Great Jade Pen) when the Supreme Being exorcised Hộ Pháp's spirit from his physical body. Of all the first disciples, this ritual was performed



for Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc only. The other disciples only knelt and took an oath in front of the altar.

His Holiness Thượng Phẩm was such an important medium that after he left his mortal body to return to Heaven, on March 1st, Year of the Horse (1930), His Holiness Hộ Pháp said, "*Cao Thượng Phẩm has left for Heaven, bringing with him the means of canonization, ordination and preaching. Therefore, from now on, whenever there is a chance for Canonization, He will have Cao Tiếp Đạo hold the divine pen with His support, but the real means for Canonization is obviously no longer here. That is what makes me regret most.*" Similarly, Đầu Sư Hương Hiếu also said only when His Holiness Hộ Pháp and Thượng Phẩm held the divine pen would the Supreme Being descend. Therefore, since His Holiness Thượng Phẩm passed away, there has been no one to hold the divine pen for the Supreme Being to ordain and preach Caodaism anymore. His Holiness Cao Đức Trọng has had to replace Him.

In addition, the bust on the ceiling of Cung Đạo also symbolizes another thing. That is, His Holiness has one more important responsibility for the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice. This will be presented in the following section.

### **Important role in Hội Yến Diêu Trì** (the Jade Pond Banquet)

Second, today in Báo Ân Từ, where the Buddha Mother is worshipped, there is the statue of His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm kneeling under the statue of the Mother and the Nine Female Buddhas. As a result, inside the Holy See, there are three sculptures of His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm!



The statue of Thượng Phẩm kneeling under the Buddha Mother and the Nine Ladies in the Jade Pond Palace

According to Chinese legend, Emperor Wu of Han was the first person to be granted an audience with the Buddha Mother and His Holiness Hộ Pháp said, “*Emperor Wu of Han is one of the*

*incarnations of Daoist Immortal Zhongli Quan. In this Third Era, His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm is also the incarnation of Immortal Zhongli Quan, so it is more suitable to put the statue of Cao Thượng Phẩm in Báo Ân Từ*”. To put it another way, Immortal Zhongli Quan, one of the eight Immortals in Chinese legend, was born as Emperor Wu of Han and today is reborn as Cao Thượng Phẩm. Emperor Wu of Han received the Buddha Mother at his palace and the first Hội Yến Diêu Trì was held at the house of Cao Thượng Phẩm. Therefore, the statue of Thượng Phẩm welcoming Buddha Mother is based on this event. His Holiness Hộ Pháp repeatedly explains that Hội Yến Diêu Trì contains the secret method of liberation of the Cao Đài religion. Therefore, Cao Thượng Phẩm’s role in this third period is so important that every Caodaist needs to learn to free themselves from the cycle of endless birth and death.

## THE ROLE IN ESOTERIC PRACTICE

### **In charge of the Tịnh Thất** (Cao Đài Meditation Houses)

According to the Caodaist Canonical Codes, Thượng Phẩm is in charge of the Tịnh Thất, that is, He directly takes care of the practice there. In the initial period of Cao Đài, the Sacerdotal Council established the first Tịnh Thất in the wood near Báo Ân Từ for Him to rest after being severely tested by Mr. Tư Mất (Nguyễn Phát Trước). On October 15, Year of the Dragon (1928), the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council went to Thảo Xá Hiền Cung (Grass House For Good People) to take His Holiness Thượng Phẩm to this retreat. Now, nothing about this Tịnh Thất is mentioned anymore. Thus, the first person to enter Cao Đài Tịnh Thất was Cao Thượng Phẩm, also the person in charge.



### Trí Huệ Cung

Up to now, Cao Đài plans to have three retreats: Trí Huệ Cung, Trí Giác Cung and Vạn Pháp Cung. Vạn Pháp Cung has unofficially been built by a group of followers at the foot of Bà Đen mountain. During the 700,000 years of promulgation of Cao Đài, the Tịnh Thất are managed by His Holiness Thượng Phẩm even though he is not present in the world. Please remember that, according to the Caodaist Canonical Codes, a new Giáo Tông can be elected, but Hộ Pháp, Thượng Phẩm and Thượng Sanh cannot.

Anyway, currently the three *Tinh Thất* have not been completed yet and the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council has not organized any courses of Esoteric Practice. However, on February 1st, Year of the Pig (1947), His Holiness Hộ Pháp said, “*We can attain enlightenment because we have three interconnected bodies. Don't think we can't achieve it. As long as we can walk, we can keep going because there is a way everywhere. However, we must carry out the Esoteric Practice if we want to achieve enlightenment. At the beginning of Cao Đài, we must perform the Exoteric Practice. If we do not attain enlightenment later, it is like a person having pans but no shirt*”. (Volume 1 Sermon 15 - *Thuyết Đạo ĐHP* - Stenographer Team).

That is, to attain enlightenment, you must coordinate the three bodies of *Tinh*, *Khí* and *Thần* (body, mind and soul) by practicing the Esoteric Practice. In the initial stage of Cao Đài, you have to pay more attention to the Exoteric Practice (religious ceremonies), but later on, both the worshiping rituals and the meditation practice should be performed hand in hand. Thus, the opinion that Esoteric Practice has been exempted or even forbidden by the Supreme Being during this period of salvation is unfounded.

After all, in my opinion, we Caodaists have to wait a few hundred years until there are enough Twelve *Thập Nhị Bảo Quân* (Noble Academicians) to form the Cao Đài Academy. Then the Sacerdotal Council will be able to shape the Esoteric Practice for all Caodaist believers to participate. Currently (in 2021), it is known that numerous believers perform Esoteric Practice at home on their own. They are noble spiritual beings

worthy of respect. When these persons see the symbols at the Holy Temple, they immediately know what they have to do. Sometimes divine beings' teachings are transmitted directly into their mind. Provided that those persons follow the divine instructions and observe the Caodaist Canonical Codes, His Holiness Thượng Phẩm will support them. Note that it is difficult for ordinary people like us to know who these people are because they never tell everyone.



### The Cao Đài Academy

#### **Support during an astral journey**

His Holiness Thượng Phẩm also plays a very important role in the Esoteric Practice, which is to help the perispirit travel after leaving the body. Surely everyone remembers that on August 24, 1934, His Holiness descended into a seance and said, "*When I was still in this world, I was so angry at evil doers that I would have used my fan to blow them all to Phong Đô (Hell) without any exceptions had I been allowed.*" From that, it can be inferred thanks to His Long Tu Phiến (Dragon Beard Fan) He can help souls reach anywhere in the universe of the Supreme Being.

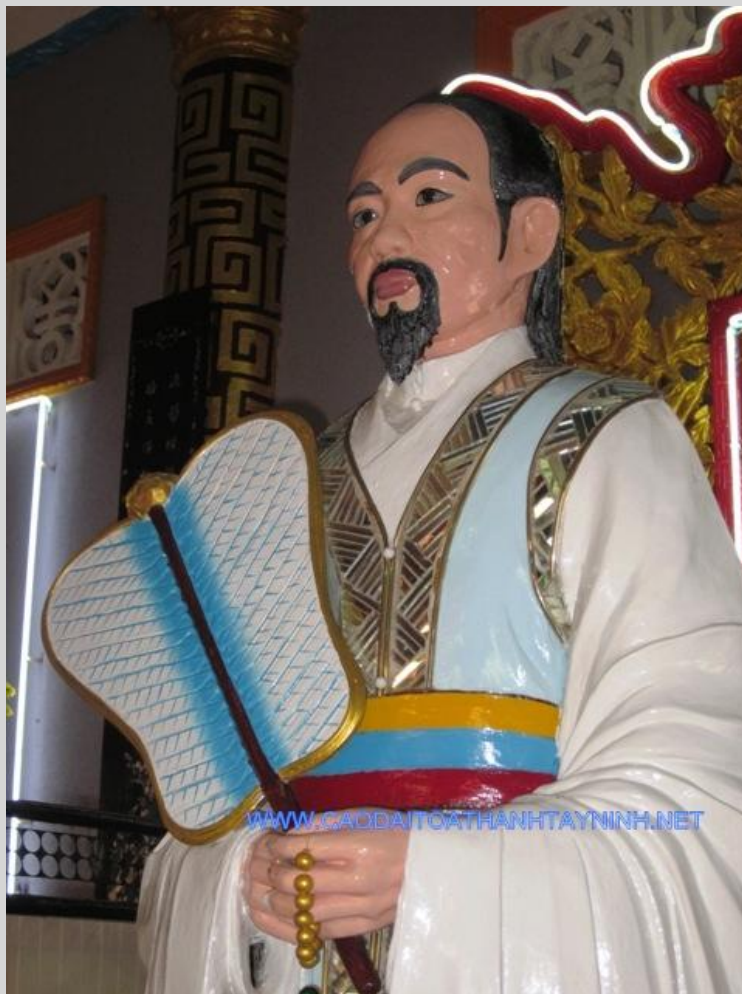
Additionally, in the book *Esoteric Practice*, Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung teaches that the practitioner can go wherever he wants to after leaving the physical body by praying to His Holiness Thượng Phẩm. He will send the practitioner's subtle body there with His Dragon Beard Fan. This tells us why His Holiness Hộ Pháp told Tá Lý Bùi Ái Thoại to use Thượng Phẩm as a model for the bas-relief on the ceiling of the Holy Temple in order to symbolize the way of communication with the spiritual realm.

Without His Holiness Thượng Phẩm, your perispirit will only wander around where you are after leaving the body. As a result, you will be unable to contact the divine beings for religious lessons. I would like to remind you that in Cao Đài Esoteric Practice, the ability of taking a soul journey does not mean you have attained enlightenment. This is only a chance for an esoteric practitioner to meet a divine beings, whom Zen Buddhism calls a wise master and Cao Đài calls a true master. This master will give you necessary instructions so that you will continue to practice until you attain enlightenment.

### **Help in returning to the old position**

His power is also very great for not only esoteric practitioners but also other method practitioners, such as doing meritorious deeds, doing charity, etc.. Here what His Holiness said more, *"But after I've left my mortal body and achieved the divine eyes, I deeply felt pity for them. I was afraid that I would lose very precious spiritual friends because they took the wrong way. Therefore, they should be pampered according to their mortal minds, guided and corrected step by step. If, unfortunately, we cannot guide them, we should be devoted to our responsibilities,*

*trying to prevent them from falling into Phong Đô (Hell). Then we should pray to the Tam Giáo Tòa (Three Religion Court) for their reincarnation to make amends". Thus, He is always ready to teach and help everyone depending on each person's destiny. Even for sinners, He also sought to help them avoid punishment or be reincarnated to atone for their sins. He also descended to preach after his death through the work *Luật Tam Thể* (The Three Body Law).*



**The statue of Thượng Phẩm holding the Dragon Beard Fan**

Also, on the night of March 7, Year of the Snake (April 16, 1929), the Supreme Being descended and said: "*Disciples, I have made it clear that the Thượng Phẩm had to return to Me*



*before you, but unfortunately, because of your laziness, you did not read the divine messages to understand that. The Tao is Vô Vi (nothing, non-action). Therefore, who will bring your souls into Heaven if the Thượng Phẩm does not return to His heavenly position?”*

From the divine messages mentioned above, it can be inferred that His Holiness has a very important responsibility in welcoming and arranging the positions in the eternal spiritual realm for souls returning after death. His Holiness is always waiting to help every soul with brotherly tolerance. Knowing this, everyone will feel more secure when returning to the previous positions. It can be temporarily understood that His Holiness is in charge of the Reward Department in Heaven.

## CONCLUSION

In short, although His Holiness Thượng Phẩm only practiced Caodaism for 4 years on earth, his current responsibility in the eternal spiritual world is very great. He helps returning souls attain their worthy positions and especially successful Cao Đài esoteric practitioners to meet the true master for more necessary religious instructions, which will help them achieve enlightenment.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn 11/4/2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....	4
2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....	16
3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....	36
4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....	51
5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....	77
6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....	108
7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....	121
8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....	135
9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....	151

# WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS



TỦ CHỜ

## THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE

All Cao Đài followers know the prophecy that was delivered at the house of Mr. Hồ Quang Châu and Ms. Phan Thị Lan on September 15, Year of the Tiger (October 24, 1926).

From now on, the race will not be divided into three.

I have gathered you all into one house.

South and North together and then abroad.

I am the only sovereign of the true religion.

Jade Emperor

Or Cao Đài Preacher in the South

(Collection of Divine Messages, volume I)

The poem reminds followers of the two important mottos of Cao Đài: "universality" (North and South together and then abroad) and "syncretism" (not divided into three), and prophesies the spread of the religion abroad.

Before further discussion, let me present my slightly personal feelings. When I was in Đệ Lục grade (7th grade now), my father took me to visit the Holy See for the first time in my life. I have read The Collection of Divine Messages before, so I know the above poem. Having gone around the Holy Land, I had a simple observation. All of the verses quoted above are understandable except for the third verse because preaching abroad was, for me at that time, such a huge task that it was almost impossible to accomplish. The religion was poor, most dignitaries were not highly educated and their religious qualifications were not as good as the Venerable, Priest or Pastor. I still remember vividly that the words under the drawings around the then Báo Ân Từ were all misspelled! Only

the sincere heart for the Supreme Being was clearly visible on everyone's faces. Everyone is enthusiastic about doing good deeds no matter how poor their circumstances are.



Cao Đài Temple in Phnompenh, Cambodia

However, with just that kind of heart, in my opinion, it is still not enough to promulgate Cao Đài abroad. At most, we could have a temple in Cambodia and that's it. Fortunately, it is true that we have had a Cao Đài Mission in Phnom Penh since 1927. At that time, I still did not know much about foreign religions but vaguely understood that. Later, as an adult, I had the opportunity to interact with people of several different nationalities and other religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam and had the opportunity to read their

important scriptures. Looking back now, at that time I only had a basic understanding, but I also felt how difficult Cao Đài's goal of "returning to the original" and "returning to oneness" was. As Professor Garry W. Trompf said in a conference in Sydney, Australia (December 28, 1989):

*“On the actual (or substantive) question about the unity of religions, you will have to forgive me that, as a Professor of Comparative Religion, I naturally become rather skeptical about mixing religions. As a scholar, of course, I get fascinated by the many points of similarity as well as great differences between religions. The real trouble with me is that I am a specialist in primal religion, and considering that there are 9,000 or so so-called primitive religions around the globe, it is very difficult for me to imagine how (or that) they could all be united”.*

The above statement makes us understand more clearly that Cao Đài's goal of "Uniting all visible religions into one" is, literally, extremely difficult. That is not to mention since its birth in 1926 until now 2021, the religion has never been able to unify its own sects, let alone "tangible religions"!

Then life kept changing and I had to follow the fate of the country, worrying about how to make both ends meet to the point that I could only vaguely remember a few divine messages. I am assured that in my lifetime, I will probably not have the honor of seeing the Cao Đài's flag flying in Western countries.

Around 2000, however, computers and the Internet began to popularize in Vietnam and communication with foreign countries began to become easier. My family's life slowly transitioned to an easier stage. Thanks to less worries about making a living, I had some time to study Cao Đài, which was my dream since childhood.



Professor Garry W. Trompf

Through the Internet, I learned that the Cao Đài religion had its first impressions abroad. Following the boat people movement, lots of Cao Đài followers reached progressive countries. The devout believers, led by the Hiền Tài of the Ban Thế Đạo, have contributed a lot to the first steps in a foreign land. They created websites to popularize religious philosophy, built Holy Temples, established associations, and produced Cao Đài radio and television programs in the US, Australia, Belgium, France, Canada, etc. In my opinion, these sages have already achieved great merit for the Supreme Being and Buddha Mother. Later, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council will definitely have to canonize those people.

I have to admit that when I see the flags of the Cao Đài Temples flying in Sydney, California, Houston, Toronto, etc, I never get tired of looking at them. Sometimes I do not even believe my eyes anymore. Oh! Master's prophecy after nearly half a century has come true. Consequently, right in this life, I can witness something that in the past I was still sure could never happen.

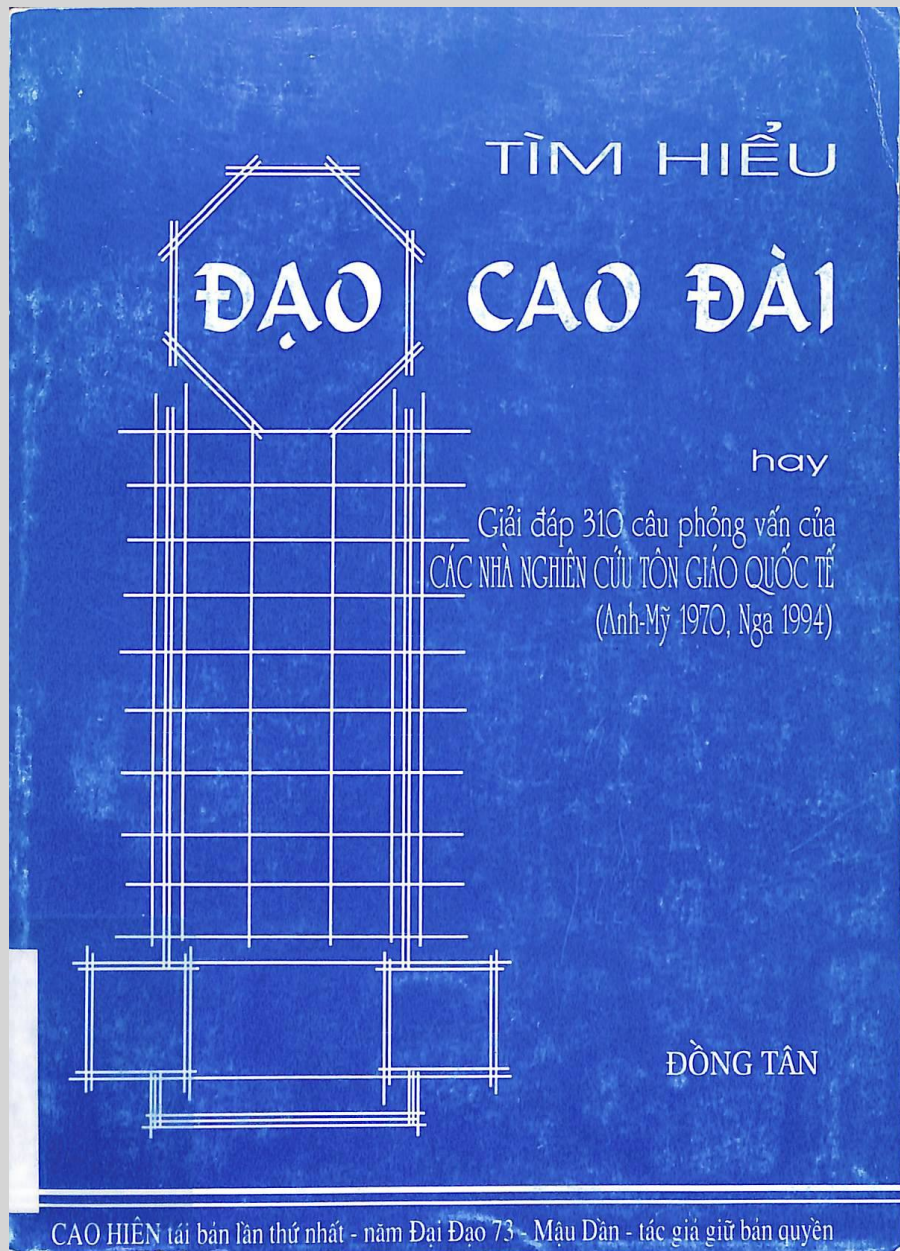
It is often said that spreading religion abroad is clearly done by divine beings and we mortals cannot do it. That's right ! And I think the Supreme Being has created conditions for His children to do meritorious deeds according to His promise.

### **SOME FIRST COLLISIONS**

Anyway, the problem for us Cao Đài followers today (in 2021) is what we should do. Of course, we still have to continue to do good deeds according to our strength, but we need to supplement a lot of knowledge and skills to suit the new situation. When our flag flies in another country, of course people will come to find out what it is, even go to Tây Ninh.

The first visible point is the differences in language and culture. Perhaps Cao Đài followers abroad realize this better than those in Vietnam owing to their direct contact with the different societies, so they need to be supplemented more urgently. However, those in Vietnam should also prepare themselves to receive foreign guests or communicate with them via cyberspace.





A book by **Đồng Tân**

Currently, numerous foreigners come to Holy Temples or visit Cao Đài websites to learn, but it is those who do research, such as University Professors of Religious Studies or graduate students writing Master's or Doctoral theses, that have big

questions. Actually, most of them are not learning for the sake of joining Caodaism, but their dissertations need new things that no one has researched before. Cao Đài is a new religion, so it is often the target they choose first. Even though they will not become believers, the treatises or books they wrote make a very strong impression in their communities. Currently, the number of such people is still small, but in the future it will increase.

What I want to say is language and cultural conflicts arise when these people do research. There are a great number of unfavorable reviews about Cao Đài, but I don't want to list them all here. I would just like to point out a few typical comments as follows.

Author Đồng Tân, in *Tìm Hiểu Triết Lý Cao Đài*, Cao Hiên Publishing House, Saigon 1974, wrote: At the Caodaist Culture Society on November 29, 1970, Professor Jeremy Davidson of the University of London said:

*“Besides the lengthy, complicated rituals and the one-sided dogma, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council never discusses philosophical topics.”*

At the same place on March 30th, 1971, Pastor Victor L. Oliver stated, *“Deeply examined, Caodaism seems to have an unclear basic doctrine.”*

I showed these comments to some devoted followers and almost everyone was quite shocked. After calming down, they usually have two different opinions:

Firstly, there is no need to listen to such comments. Cao Đài philosophy "covers" other religious philosophies because it is taught by the Supreme Being Himself. If someone wants to learn, he has to learn Vietnamese to read the scriptures for himself. If he still does not understand, it is because of his bad karma. What we Caodaists need to do now is to conserve the true doctrine. The Supreme Being will take care of the general salvation because Cao Đài will last for 700,000 years.



Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh, one of the First Disciples

Secondly, foreigners do not understand Caodaism because we believers do not know how to preach it. Universal salvation should be understood in the sense of bringing Cao Đài philosophy to as many people as possible, not trying to convince others to join our religion although that would also be good. We should see that universal salvation is our duty because that is our meritorious work in this third era. The Supreme Being only

gives a favorable condition and we have to work from preaching, writing poetry, translating, singing, drawing, sculpting, etc. Therefore, we believers have to self-study for ourselves to be qualified.

Having thought carefully, I want to lean towards the second view even though I am very lazy to study. Some people say you should chant the sutras, make offerings QID, attend funerals, do charity work and reach a higher level of the Cao Đài hierarchy every five years. If you do not die early, you will earn the title of *Đầu Sư*, which equals to *Địa Tiên* (Earth Immortal). It is safer to practice Caodaism like that.

Of course, everyone has the right to choose their own path of religious practice as long as it does not cause division. Cao Đài followers should imitate a group of ants. When clinging to their prey, they do not all turn in the same direction, but the prey will certainly move towards the target: their nest. Ants are different from people in the fact that they do not create schism despite their different personal opinions!

Personally, I consider myself incapable of holding a Cao Đài dignitary position because the tasks are very heavy. It requires a strong spirit, good health, a lot of talent and diplomatic skills. Additionally, I have to give up both family and real life job. Therefore, I choose the second view. Dear readers, if you have the same choice, please continue to discuss. Now to begin, let's consider what equipment we need for this way of doing meritorious deeds.



Cao Đài Dignitaries in front of Tây Ninh Temple

## EQUIP YOURSELVES

Some young believers tell me they will go abroad to do Religious Studies, get a Master's or Doctorate degree if possible, and then return to practice Caodaism effectively. I'm so happy! I hope there are lots of young people with such hope for religious purposes. Nevertheless, that is a long-term plan. What about middle-aged or old people like me who do not have the opportunity to go to University? Of course, we still have to continuously self-study even if we do not like it because as the

scriptures go, "It's better to study than to store gold in your house <sup>11</sup>".

In the current Covid pandemic, self-study via the Internet is the best. The means of accessing the Internet are now common. All you need is a fairly decent smartphone to do it. However, there have not been any academy specializing in Cao Đài. Where does the source of the lessons come from and who is the teacher? I do not dare to invite the Cao Đài Dignitaries because they already have duties. Just a small discussion with ordinary believers like myself. Therefore, while waiting for the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council to officially open the Academy, I would like to suggest the following three fields for research.

### **Knowledge of religions**

The first discipline is good knowledge of religions. It is unnecessary to study all 9,000 religions around the world as listed by Professor Trompf, but at least we should know the religions mentioned in the slogan "*Returning to the origins of the Three Religions, Unifying the Five Branches*". It is important to learn the philosophy of those religions because, as Professor Davidson or Pastor Oliver said above, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council does not discuss philosophical topics and the basic philosophy of Cao Đài is not clear. Through this it can be deduced that for Westerners, philosophy is the soul of religion. Without a specific philosophy, religion is just a miscellaneous club. Note that Western scholars have already researched an issue very carefully before commenting on it. As a result, it is

---

<sup>11</sup> The poem for the ceremony of Tứ Nương Diêu Trì Cung.

impossible to say that they comment on Cao Đài without having any knowledge of it !



The Cao Đài symbol of Three Religions

So the philosophy we often mention and the philosophy they require may apparently contradictory. Which point is that? That is we keep talking about Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, which they know maybe even better than we do. In my opinion, knowing the philosophy of "Three Religions and Five Branches" is only the first step, "returning to the origins of those philosophies and unifying them" are the ultimate goal of Cao Đài. Carefully examining everything, we have not been able to talk much about this. However, it is an extremely big task to discuss and apply the official philosophy of Cao Đài. Therefore, please allow me to discuss it in another essay. Now let's return to the knowledge of religion.

Why should we first study religions? Because otherwise we will easily get lost in the field of religious philosophy. We will

forever be passionate about discussing the wisdom of Prajna (Zen Buddhism), talking about the theory of Wu Wei (Taoism), diligently revolving around the Three Bonds and Five Content Virtues (Confucianism) or enthusiastically studying Yi Jing, Yin and Yang theory and Five Elements (Taoism), but still think that it is Cao Đài philosophy. Then, in the name of the word "unification", the terms of those religions are combined with the name Cao Đài, such as Cao Đài Zen, Pure Land Buddhism in Cao Đài and Cao Đài Yi Jing!

Everyone knows that Zen and Pure Land are two sects of Buddhism and Yi Jing is an ancient Chinese philosophy, later recorded in the Confucian book I Ching. Therefore, such unfavorable combinations make non-Caodaists say that we are using a hodgepodge-like philosophy.

In fact, if Cao Đài scriptures, especially the Sermons of His Holiness Hộ Pháp, are carefully examined, you can see that Cao Đài has its own religious terms and definitions. Additionally, it has a very specific practice method, which Western researchers really want to learn. Please remember, we should "unify all religions", not "mix" them together in a "mixed hotpot" style!

Even more terrible, due to a lack of religious knowledge a few people are bold enough to declare that Cao Đài philosophy is the theory of Separation of Three Powers (trias politica model) or even the theory of Men Seven, Women Nine! Actually, the Doctrine of Separation of Three Powers comes from John Locke (1632-1704) and Montesquieu (1689-1755) in the political field while Men Seven, Women Nine are just folk legends. Cao Đài



neither promotes political activities nor unscientific folk customs.



### Cao Đài online dictionary

In short, with a good insight into religious philosophy, we can avoid losing the characteristics of Cao Đài, which our predecessors had strenuously built. However, where to learn on the Internet? Today's cyberspace is endless, but also full of fake news to mislead or deceive users. According to my own experience, at a minimum you should research the following places:

#### Vietnamese

- Tự Điển Cao Đài - This is Cao Đài's first dictionary by Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Hồng or Đức Nguyên. The late author Đức Nguyên was a Mathematics Teacher who graduated from Saigon Pedagogical University and taught before 1975.

Although the book has not been approved by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council, in my opinion, the accuracy level of the book is up to 95 %. Furthermore, currently, there has been no book more trustworthy than this one. Other Cao Đài dictionaries are mostly compiled based on the data of this book. Please type this link into Google to read the book: <https://www.daotam.info/booksv/CaoDaiTuDien/index-CaoDaiTuDien.html>

- Centre for Studies in Caodaism - Sydney, Australia. Website of Đào Công Tâm, Library Specialist at the University of Sydney and Dr. Christopher Hartney, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia. Most of past and present Cao Đài's documents are available here, including works in English, French, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese. This is the oldest website and has the most complete and reliable information. <https://www.daotam.info>

### English

- Encyclopedia Britannica - Very famous British Encyclopedia, first published in 1768. Its information is accurate, constantly updated and of utmost value. <https://www.britannica.com>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - from Stanford University, California in the US. With accurate information, it is constantly updated and very valuable from the perspective of modern Americans. <https://plato.stanford.edu>
- Wikipedia - This is an open dictionary, whose information can be edited by any users. Therefore, you should be careful when using it, especially the Vietnamese translation. Usually, you should compare it with foreign university dictionaries

before using it. <https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=&go=Go>



His Holiness Hộ Pháp on His throne

### **Skill to preach Caodaism**

Once we have had a relatively complete knowledge of religion, we can begin to talk and write about Caodaism. As for this missionary work, Cao Đài scriptures have two different explanations. One, that is to cultivate one's speech to be gentle

according to goodness (Trên Đường Tấn Hoá - Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Tràng, 1963). Second, it is to spread Caodaism by sermons and articles.

I would choose the second way because His Holiness Hộ Pháp taught that this is one of the Tam Lập, i.e. three ways of practice: Lập Công is joining the Cửu Trùng Đài to do meritorious deeds. Lập Đức is following the Phước Thiện to do charity work. Lập Ngôn is preaching Caodaism to everyone. If Lập Ngôn is just speaking properly, then there is already a Fifth Precept (Do not lie). Therefore, there is no need to include it in the three practices. Moreover, the former definition means only training one of the many characteristics of a practitioner, not aiming at the ultimate goal of Cao Đài, so it cannot be compared to doing meritorious work and doing charity work in terms of practice.

Fortunately for us Cao Đài followers, high technology is now greatly common. Especially in the Covid era, we can preach Caodaism freely by writing posts on social networks, sending emails to fellow believers, recording talks and posting them on YouTube or Facebook, etc. It can be said to be easier to preach than in the past. What everyone needs is only a smartphone and that's it. It seems like the opportunity has come, and now the matter is whether we want to preach Caodaism or not.

In fact, nowadays many fellow Caodaists also think the same way, so they try to preach Caodaism on social networks, especially Facebook. However, when looking around online, I can have the following comment. A great number of fellow believers are not familiar with Western ways of discussion, so

sometimes inappropriate words are exchanged, leading to friction. Consequently, non-believers often say "those Cao Đài guys like to quarrel." Perhaps we will gradually get used to the new situation and in the long run we still have a lot to learn. In the meantime, I suggest learning two basic things that Westerners often use in discussion.



A warning against plagiarism

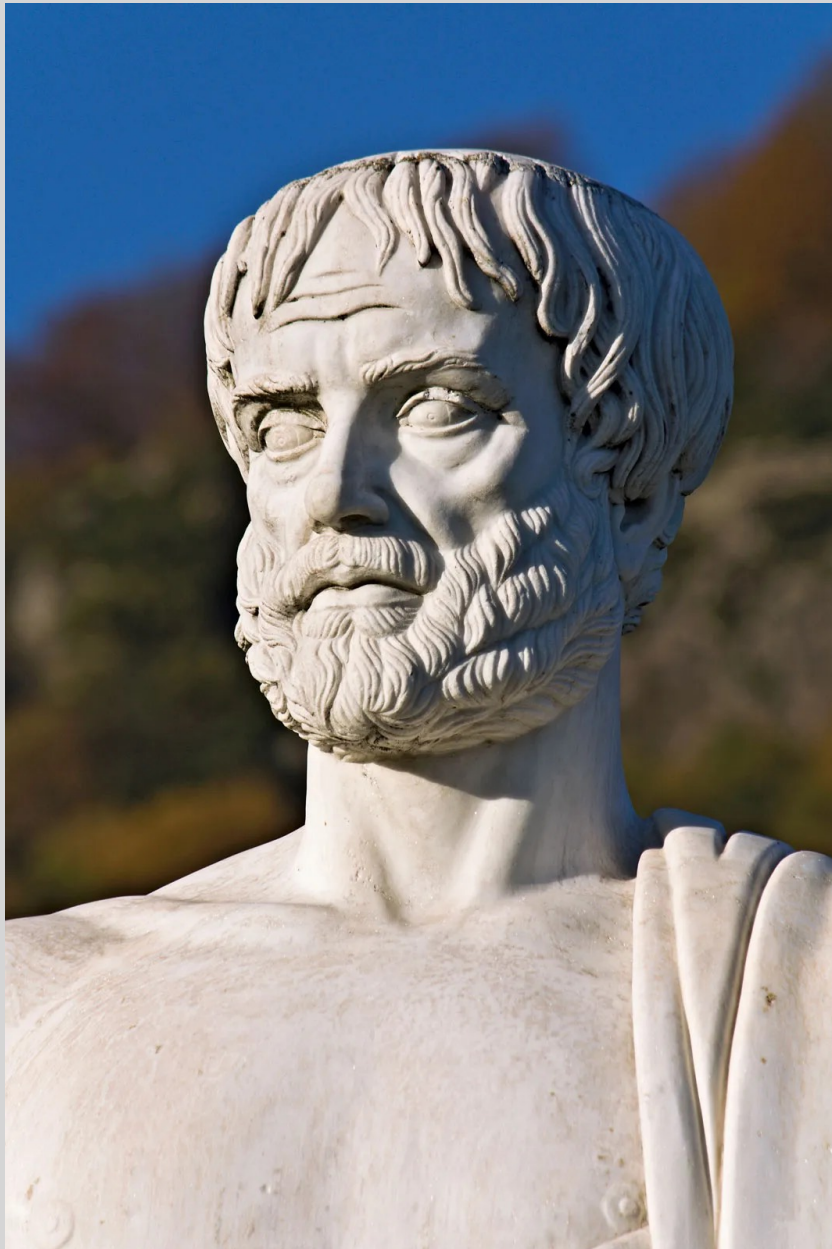
**The first thing is to avoid plagiarism.** Westerners consider reusing someone else's words or ideas without clearly noting the name of the author or work as theft. For them, stealing and lying are unacceptable sins. Depending on the environment and the type of violation, the plagiarist will be punished to a certain extent. In general, plagiarism is not good and whether punished or not, plagiarists are not tolerated. Therefore, we should clearly note the source of the information.

For example, here is a quote with a complete note: "*The practice of Buddhism seems to have gone completely wrong. It is almost like what evil religions do.*" (Shakyamuni Tathagata now proclaiming Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát - Hội Phước Pagoda, June 5, 1926 - Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển, Book I, Message 14).

Actually, there is no rule for noting, but in general, it is fine to let readers know where the information comes from. When readers discover that information is actually there, they will trust the writer more. Notes that are too sketchy, for example His Holiness Hộ Pháp's Sermons or quoted on the Internet, will make the article lose its trustworthiness.

**The second thing is to avoid fallacy.** Fallacies are intentionally making false arguments to prove one's opinion correct in an article or in a debate. For Westerners, after an opinion is expressed, it must be proven reliable through evidence or arguments. Evidence can be found in newspapers, books, or reputable documents, but the argument depends on the level of knowledge. If the argument is not correct (today it is called not

logic), then it is considered a fallacy or in popular parlance, "talking nonsense". Before 1975, 12 grade students in Vietnam were taught Logic to reason and avoid fallacies. Now it's 2021, the ways of reasoning have changed a lot. Readers can go to Google and type "fallacy" for more details.



Statue of Aristotle, Britannica

Historically, Aristotle (384 - 322 BC), an ancient Greek philosopher, was the first to assert that there were thirteen fallacies. Scientists later identified dozens more types. Within the narrow scope of this article, to avoid wasting time, I would like to summarize current information and present the simplest and most easily made fallacies.

1- The most common type of fallacy in debates on social networks is ad hominem (personal attacks). That is, instead of finding a way to prove the opponent's argument wrong, the writer (or speaker) turns to attack, sometimes personally scold the opponent in order to discredit the person. For example, "*You are too fool to talk about that*", "*Can you really do what you say?*", "*Mr. John Doe is too lazy to chant the daily scriptures. Don't believe what he says*" This is the type that causes the most friction and are often found in people with low education levels. In general, Caodaist practitioners should avoid using this type of fallacy.

2- Next, slippery slope fallacy is speculating about the future without any basis or evidence. For example, "*If we do not follow the true teachings, the youth will soon forget all morality, and the Cao Đài will disintegrate.*" There is no specific evidence in this argument. It is necessary to add some statistics from a certain Research Institute, etc.

3- Another fallacy is anecdotal evidence fallacy or giving personal evidence without scientific basis. For example: "*Don't practice Cao Đài Esoteric Practice because it's easy to go crazy. My uncle went crazy when he practiced it in 1972.*" This evidence lacks scientific basis because it is just your personal story. The advice will be more solid if you say more like this:



"Before practicing, my uncle had a normal mental examination at Chợ Quán Hospital. After the retreat, he went back to the same place to be examined and was diagnosed with Schizophrenia". Attaching the medical record is the best.



The most common fallacy

4- Another is the fallacy of false comparison. For example, *"Those who do not carefully study Caodaism are like the ones who destroy the religion."* This argument equates all those who are not familiar with Caodaism with those who seek to prevent the development of religion. Actually, maybe they do not have the conditions to research nor understand it. If they are intentional saboteurs, there must be some action that specifically hinders the spread of Caodaism. This statement needs proof, otherwise it is just a lame comparison, or rather slander.

5- There is also the fallacy of relying on appealing to tradition. This is the type of argument based on reason that everyone has done before, so it is of course correct. For example, "*Since ancient times, every religion has had lots of sects and branches, so the Cao Đài schism is natural.*" This argument is not sustainable because Cao Đài differs from other religions in that it preaches the need to unite all religions, so it cannot be divided.

6- It is called statistical fallacy if you deliberately fabricate statistics or take them from an unknown source to prove your argument. For example, when I asked a Facebook user why he misinterpreted the meaning of the Buddha Mother Sutra though he could easily look up the Cao Đài Dictionary online, he replied, "*It's easy to look up in the dictionary, but 90% of people online are ignorant. Such an explanation is too advanced for them to understand!*". This 90% number is definitely his!

7- The last one I mention is called the straw man fallacy. That is when someone tries to find ways to ridicule and distort his opponent's arguments instead of proving them wrong. For example, "*Cao Đài wants to unify all religions so that it can lead the spirit of the whole world.*" This is a typical distortion because Cao Đài only calls for the spirit of religious tolerance without requiring any leadership.

At this point, please allow me to stop describing the fallacies. Nowadays, in my opinion, just by avoiding these seven types of fallacies mentioned above, the author's article or argument is much more valuable than before. Non-Caodaists will not say "*Cao Đài people love to quarrel*" nor misunderstand Caodaism

anymore. This is just the beginning. If you want your writing on Caodaism to have lifelong value in history, then go to Google and learn more to avoid other types of fallacies.

### **Foreign languages**

Another skill without which one cannot go further in the matter of Lập Ngôn (preaching Caodaism) in the current situation is foreign languages, especially English. Needless to say, I have seen several families in Saigon send their children to international schools taught in English. They only want their children to speak enough Vietnamese for everyday activities. I neither praise nor criticize that, but if you want to preach Caodaism to foreigners, English is very necessary. Even if you do not come into contact with foreigners, going online to learn requires English. And it is never too late to learn English!

### **CONCLUSION**

This article is sent to Cao Đài followers with the same ideals. Those who do not see social networks like Facebook, Twitter, etc. as a place to deceive, entertain, trade, or slander others for fun, but as a school of meritorious work; those who are determined to offer their merit up to the Supreme Being and Buddha Mother regardless of any circumstances, whether they are standing in front of hundreds of people or just staying late at night alone in front of a computer screen or whether they are still healthy or just waiting for the day to return to the eternal world and those who only want to make merit to repent of their mistakes in their incarnations, hoping that the Supreme Being

and Buddha Mother will love and grant them wisdom to understand and practice religion so that in the next life they will remember to continue practicing and follow in the footsteps of the Supreme Being and Buddha Mother. Before ending, I would like to invite readers to recite the Cao Đài Five Prayers with me. Namô my first wish is to spread Caodaism. My second wish.....

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn 21/2/2021

### **Preferences**

- Wikipedia English
- Encyclopedia Britannica
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Tự Điển Cao Đài - Đức Nguyên
- Tự Điển Hán Việt - Thiều Chửu
- Centre for Studies in Caodaism - Sydney, Australia.
- Đồng Tân, Tìm hiểu triết lý Cao Đài, Cao Hiên xb, Sài Gòn, 1974.
- TRÊN ĐƯỜNG TẤN HOÁ - TIẾP PHÁP Trương Văn Tràng. Minh Tâm xuất bản, 1963.
- R.B.Smith, An introduction to Caodaism, Bulletin of the school of Oriental and African studies, University of London, vol. XXXII, part 2.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....	4
2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....	16
3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....	36
4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....	51
5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....	78
6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....	109
7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....	122
8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....	136
9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....	152

THE HIDDEN MEANING  
OF  
HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE  
DOOR TO THE  
LAND OF BLISS



## INTRO

### Origin

The series of sermons on the Divine Path to Eternal Life of His Holiness Hộ Pháp at the Holy Temple from August 13, Year of the Mouse (September 16, 1948) to March 30, Year of the Buffalo (April 27, 1949) is an important set of Holy Scriptures of Caodaism. This set of books is available thanks to the Stenography Team of Tây Ninh Holy See. Right from the first article, His Holiness Hộ Pháp stated, "*However, a privilege of the Supreme Being for Cao Đài religion today is a few Caodaist youngsters have tried to learn shorthand to record my sermons...*". Since at that time, recorders were still very expensive, shorthand (fast recording with symbols) was the only way to record His Holiness's sermons. Therefore, the Holy See Shorthand Team using Mr. Nguyễn Văn Mới's improved method for Vietnamese was formed. Every night, stenographers divided up to attend the sermons and tried to record them all.

Due to the constantly changing times, it was not until nearly 16 years later that stenographer Nguyễn Văn Mới was able to gather all the notes and campaign to print into a book. This set of books was then given to enthusiastic believers and the copyright was transferred to the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council, then led by His Holiness Thượng Sanh. Up to now (2021), after lots of changes, this book has been printed numerous times, passed around to read among believers and finally available on the Internet. Due to typing over and over again, it is inevitable to avoid unintentional errors, so sometimes the sermons deviate

from the original. In particular, some printed copies even flip the last part of sermon 25 into the one of sermon 26, causing confusion for readers. Therefore, I would like to introduce a place for fellow believers to get a complete set of books. Please visit this link:

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/TuChon/cdtlhs-bientap.pdf>

The books stored here have been adapted from the original and have annotations on difficult words for easy reference.



*Đức Hộ Pháp thuyết đạo tại Đền Thánh*

Hộ Pháp preaching a sermon in the Holy Temple

### **Importance**

First of all, these sermons are extremely important because His Holiness Hộ Pháp affirmed right in the first sermon, “... *these teachings are not by Mr Phạm Công Tắc but the Hộ Pháp. The Hộ Pháp preaches Caodaism on behalf of the Supreme Being to all of His children*”.



We all know that in Cao Đài religion, there are several methods of spiritual communication, for example Ouja Board and automatic writing. However, only disciples with sacred duties assigned to them are allowed to contact the divine beings. Ordinary believers are not encouraged to do so unless they have special grace from God. His Holiness Hộ Pháp is Ngự Mã Quân, that is, a disciple trusted by the Supreme Being, so what he learned from the divine beings is completely trustworthy, for example the Caodaist Canonical Codes was granted in the seances, where His Holiness Hộ Pháp and His Holiness Thượng Phẩm held the divine pen. In addition, Caodaist Canonical Codes stipulates that the Giáo Tông can be elected, but the Hộ Pháp cannot. Consequently, it can be deduced that in 700,000 years, there may be several Giáo Tông, but only one Hộ Pháp. Therefore, Hộ Pháp's sermons were delivered only this time.

Second, His Holiness also said, "*These sublime philosophies are only found in the Cao Đài religion.*" Indeed, all Cao Đài theological terminology can be found here. These terms set Cao Đài philosophy apart from any existing religion. These sermons completely destroy the notion that Cao Đài borrows the philosophies of other religions because, in addition to a few reused Eastern philosophical terms, a new language system appears. Moreover, it is accompanied by unprecedented perspectives on the universe and human life, not to mention the unique methods that cannot be confused with other religions. The Cao Đài scriptures proclaim that other religions' teachings have deviated, meaning they no longer keep the original way of practice, so Cao Đài has new dharmas (ways of practice), with

new and typical names. These teachings will be developed and practiced up to 700,000 years into the future.



The Huệ Quang Khiếu or the Third Eye (Hinduism)

Third, His Holiness Hộ Pháp affirmed, "*The path by which the souls leave and return to the Supreme Being is the Divine Path to Eternal Life. My Huệ Quang Khiếu (spiritual wisdom) was opened by the Supreme Being, so I was able to return and meet with Him and learn a lot of important things.*"

This is the first time in Cao Đài history when a leader officially has acknowledged something that had long been controversial among believers. Some believe that esoteric practice is forbidden while the rest believe that it is one of the three main methods of practicing Caodaism. Through the above mentioned statement, His Holiness Hộ Pháp has affirmed the legitimacy of the method of practice for astral projection that Cao Đài calls Esoteric Practice. He not only acknowledged it but also publicly announced that He himself had successfully implemented it. No other senior dignitaries have made such a specific statement.

Finally, the most important thing that every Cao Đài follower needs is the firm promise of His Holiness, "*I strive to finish my sermons as quickly as I can, so the Supreme Being's children can have a treasure in their hands. Consequently, one day they will be able to find a way to attain enlightenment.*"

From the above points, you can be completely confident that the book the Divine Path to Eternal Life is not simply an entertaining story to tell in your free time, but is an important guide on how to achieve enlightenment, which people also call attaining dharma, becoming Buddha, having seal of approval, etc. In short, it is a guide on how to successfully practice on the path of Caodaism. Thus, Cao Đài believers must consider

reading and understanding the book to act correctly and move towards the goal of attaining enlightenment right in this life. If you read it without any practical applications, in the next reincarnation you will forget everything, so it is impossible for you to continue practicing.



Buddha entering Nirvana

## ETYMOLOGY

First, it is necessary to carefully study the definitions of some Eastern theological terms used in the story because most of these words are Sino-Vietnamese. Nowadays, Sino-Vietnamese are less popular in Vietnam, so it is important to affirm the meaning of these words to shorten the path to success.

### **Niết Bàn**

The root of the term is Nirvana (Sanskrit) and Nibbana (Pali), literally meaning “extinguishing”. According to ancient Indian religious ideology, Nirvana is the final result of a concentrated thinking process, when people have "extinguished" or put an end to greed, hatred, ignorance, pain and suffering. Furthermore, they extinguish the endless cycle of reincarnation. Currently, Nirvana is considered the ultimate goal of Buddhist practitioners. In other words, people who practice Buddhism will think about everything in life in a certain way until they eliminate worldly emotions as mentioned above, then they will achieve a state called Nirvana.

### **Cực Lạc Thế Giới (World of Ultimate Bliss)**

This word comes from the Sanskrit word Sukhavati, literally meaning "pure place", and the Vietnamese often call it the Tây Phương Tịnh Độ (Western Pure Land), also known as the Pure Land. Dear readers, please allow me to talk around a bit to trace the origin of this word.

After Lord Shakyamunī, (meaning the wise man of Shakyas, whom the Vietnamese pronounce as Thích Ca Mâu Ni) passed

away, his disciples sat together and recorded what he had taught. These notes became the massive Buddhist scriptures today. Despite studying the same sutra, just a few hundred years later, due to different understandings, the disciples were divided into many sects. One of those sects is Mahayana Buddhism, a branch of which was formed based on the Sukhavatvyuha Sutra (Pure Land Sutra). According to this sect, called the Pure Land Sect, if believers recite the name of Lord Amitabha (Amitabha Buddha) and pray to Him for salvation before passing away, He will allow them to be reincarnated in a place called Sukhavati or Pure Land. That place is a thousand times better than the world we live in, so people also call it the World of Ultimate Bliss.



Chinese Statue of Dharma Protector

Thus, depending on their own beliefs and practices, all Buddhist practitioners aim at the ultimate goal of achieving the state of Nirvana, which means ending their greed, hatred, stupidity, suffering and reincarnation while they are still alive or being born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss or the Western Pure Land in the next life. His Holiness Hộ Pháp called it "the World of Bliss or Nirvana". That is, he combines these two goals into one for ease of understanding.

### **Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector)**

According to research, Dharmapala (Sanskrit) or Dharma Protector, was first worshiped in Tibet around the 8th century. People told each other by word of mouth that the great master Padmasambhava first spread Buddhism to Tibet and subdued the evil gods here. These gods then made a vow to protect Buddhist Dharma, so they are called Dharmapala or Dharma Protectors.

Dharma Protector is also worshiped in Hinduism, Bon religion in Tibet and among folk in many countries. There are hundreds of legends describing Dharma Protectors in Asian countries, so people create various images to worship depending on their own cultures. Usually that is a statue of a martial general wearing armor and holding a weapon depending on each country. Due to the impression of the word "protector", the statue of Hộ Pháp is usually placed in front of a temple or pagoda.

In Cao Đài, Hộ Pháp is the head of Hiệp Thiên Đài, one of the three main organizations of the religion. The other two are Bát Quái Đài under the authority of the Supreme Being (God) and Cửu Trùng Đài under the authority of Giáo Tông. In terms of

administration, Hiệp Thiên Đài is the intermediary department, receiving orders from Bát Quái Đài through Ouija board and automatic writing seances and handing them over to Cửu Trùng Đài to execute. In terms of law, Hộ Pháp is responsible for all Cao Đài judicial issues within the community of followers. In terms of dharma, He runs the retreats specializing in the Esoteric Practice. Finally, in terms of symbolism, Hộ Pháp represents the thoughts (mind) of a normal person while Giáo Tông the body and the Supreme Being the soul.



His Holiness Hộ Pháp on the throne in the Holy Temple



Also according to Cao Đài, in Heaven, Hộ Pháp is in charge of three continents, Nam Thiệm Bộ Châu, Đông Thắng Thần Châu and Tây Ngưu Hoá Châu. The fourth continent, Bắc Cù Lư Châu, is for demons. The divine message on August 12, Year of the Tiger (September 17, 1926) said that these four continents are called the Four Great Continents and their positions in the universe are described as "*in the air, that is, they are not stars.*" Hộ Pháp also manages the "*eight kinds of souls*", from the lowest, the material soul, to the highest, the Buddha soul. To put it another way, He controls all souls in this universe. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Hộ Pháp's divine authority over souls is extremely great.

### **Chữ vạn** (Swastika)

The Chinese call the symbol 卐 萬字 (wànzi), meaning “symbol of all things”. The Vietnamese pronounce it as "vạn tự" or "chữ vạn". Actually, this symbol, which is the Sanskrit word swastika meaning "to create prosperity", has its roots in the Eurasia continent. It has been used since 500 BC in scores of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in India. In the West, it is also used in many different cultures and religions to refer to luck. Even Hitler's Nazi Party used it, but turned it around, like this 卐, and placed it on its side. Depending on religion, culture, and purpose of use, the swastika is drawn clockwise or counterclockwise and explained in lots of different ways.

In Cao Đài religion, the swastika is engraved on the Bell Tower, Drum Tower of the Holy Temple and Bell Tower of Báo Ân Từ. It is unknown whether there is any official document of the

Caodaist Sacerdotal Council explaining this or not. There is public opinion that because of this swastika, the French arrested His Holiness Hộ Pháp together with five other dignitaries and exiled them to Madagascar, using the excuse that Cao Đài had links with the Nazis. This still needs future Cao Đài historians to find evidence to confirm.



Giáng ma xử 降魔杵

*Giáng Ma Xử imagined by Chinese artists*

In short, the swastika is an ancient, sacred religious symbol in many countries around the world and interpreted depending on the opinion of each individual or religious group.

### **Giáng Ma Xử**

Giáng = subjugate; Ghost = devil; Xử = an ancient Chinese weapon, somewhat similar to a mallet. Chinese legend says that each god has an animal to ride and uses a weapon called a magic to suppress demons. According to Cao Đài, Hộ Pháp has two mystical weapons: Giáng Ma Xử and Kim Tiên (golden rod).

## **ESOTERIC PRACTICE**

### **Why metaphor?**

In the story *The Divine Path to Eternal Life*, His Holiness Hộ Pháp described six stops, each of which has a story with its own

metaphors. In Cao Đài terms, each outer dharma contains an inner dharma. Believers or non-believers can find the meaning (inner dharma) for themselves to practice until they attain enlightenment. There is also a question as to why His Holiness Hộ Pháp did not directly say what to do to attain enlightenment but instead had to imply it? Actually, there are a few reasons.

First of all, before the French colonial period Vietnamese people did not have their own writing, so they had to learn Chinese characters and Chinese books were the only way of education. The ancient Chinese loved stories in which real people live with gods and demons. For example, in Fengshen Yanyi, there are not only real characters such as King Zhou, Daji, Jiang Ziya, etc. but also imaginary characters such as Leizhenzi, Shen Gongbao, etc. or legendary gods such as Nezha, Cihang Zhenren, etc. Another example, in Journey to the West, in historical reality, monk Xuanzang went to the West (India) to learn Sanskrit (ancient Indian language) and then bring Buddhist scriptures back to translate them into Chinese, but Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing and the evil characters who harass them are all fictional.

However, in ancient China as well as Vietnam, where educated people read and believed in Fengshen Yanyi and Journey to the West more than other stories, an integration between religious messages and such stories are the most effective way to convey religious philosophy. Not only that, folk tales are better preserved than any library because, as Vietnamese saying goes, "*a stone stele wears away after a hundred years, but oral stele remains inert after a thousand years*". Therefore, with the same

model, Cao Đài philosophy is also incorporated into the story of The Divine Path to Eternal Life to achieve high efficiency.



Statue of Amitabha Buddha in Japan

Second, studying religious philosophy is not the same as the work at an ancient school in China or Vietnam, where students crammed everything. Then they needed to repeat 100% of what teacher taught without any mistakes to graduate. Religion studies require thinking and applying it in life. As a result, an entire human life is sometimes not enough. So you have to read, think, search to understand the issue and then do it correctly to be successful. Therefore, the story The Divine Path to Eternal

Life presents images that have a very high thought-provoking power, helping religious practitioners easily reach the ultimate goal.

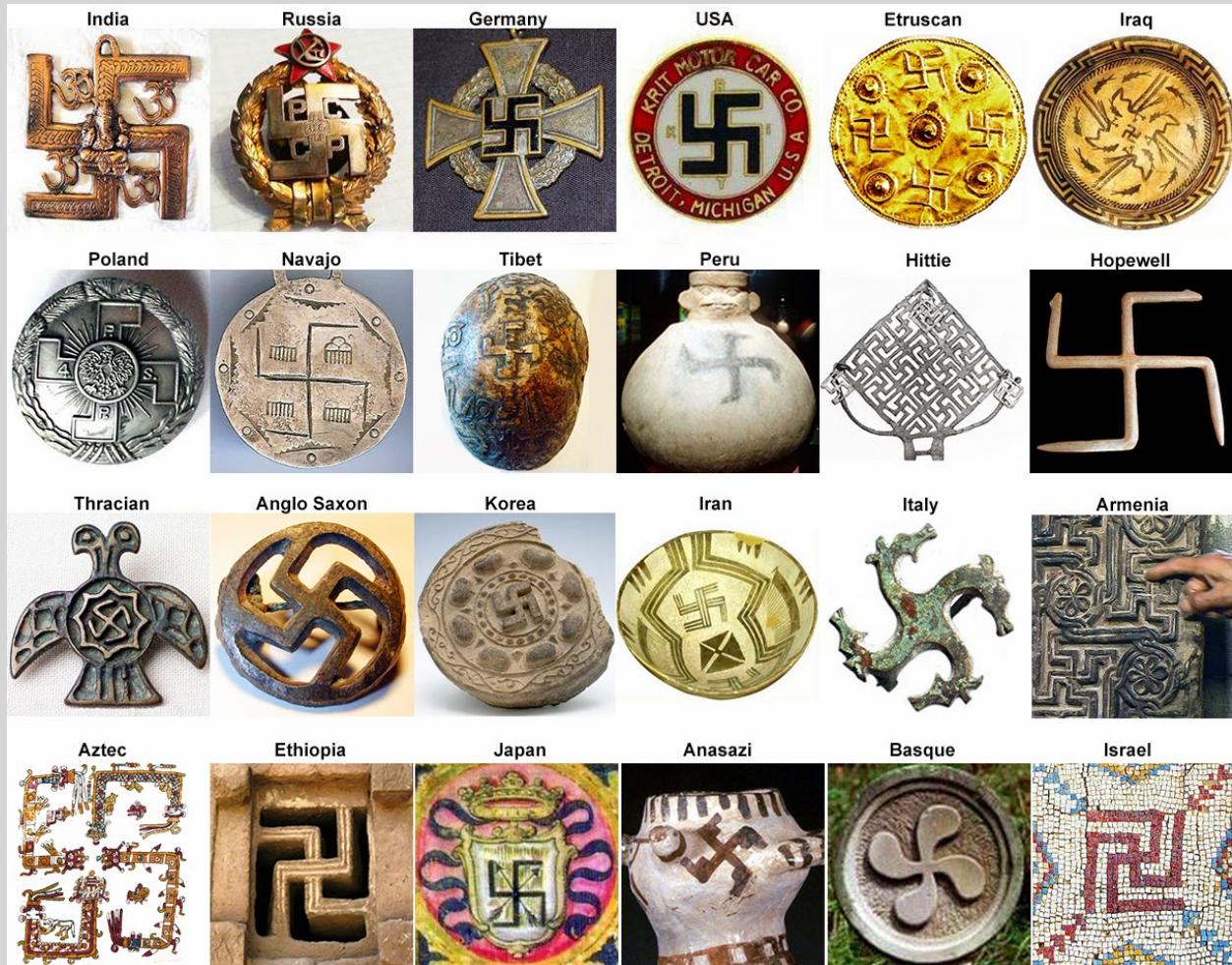
Finally, Cao Đài's principle of Heaven and Man as One (Hiệp Thiên) teaches that Man must train the Tinh (body) to transform it into Khí (mind), then train Khí to transform it into Thần (soul). Finally, Heaven will "restore the soul" for Man to attain enlightenment. Transforming Tinh into Khí is having pure food and exercising well enough to have a completely purified body. Transforming Khí into Thần is to think at a high level to match the soul that the Supreme Being has assigned to each person. Only then will there be a chance to attain enlightenment in this world.

### **Hộ Pháp opens the door to the Land of Bliss. What's the implication of that?**

One of the very interesting stories in the Sacred Path to Eternal Life is "the Hộ Pháp opens the door to the World of Ultimate Bliss". The story is scatteringly told from sermon 30 to 33 in the book. To focus on this article's topic, I would like to summarize the story as follows:

By order of the Supreme Being, His Holiness Hộ Pháp goes to open the door to the Land of Bliss. At the Outer Bliss Gate, He sees a great number of people of all ethnicities gathering. They are religious practitioners, non-practitioners, normal people and weird-shaped people. In front of these two doors (one white, one pink), there are two huge pinwheels spinning very fast, so no

one can enter the Land of Bliss. At worship time, a lot of monks sit down and chant sutra, looking very worried and miserable.



### Swastika from the world

Seeing that, His Holiness holds the Giáng Ma Xử and points at a door, causing the pinwheel to stop. Immediately, some people from outside flood in. Then His Holiness points at the second door. This pinwheel also stops and the remaining people continue to rush in. After the two pinwheels have stopped, they are seen as two huge swastikas. A little later, a Buddha standing

in the air makes a mudra and throws it down. That makes the two swastikas continue their harsh cycle. At this point, His Holiness concludes that the Supreme Being has ordered Him to open the door for those who practiced religion in the previous period of closed dharma to enter.

Now, please join me in finding the metaphor of the story. Before further discussion, however, I would like to sincerely share one thing. That is, what I am about to tell you is my personal opinion. Therefore, the idea may be difficult for some readers to understand and I do not intend to convince any readers at all. On the contrary, I would be very happy if readers have their own opinions about this story because studying religious philosophy is completely subjective and no personal opinion is absolutely correct.

If you readers wonder how we know which opinion is correct to follow if everyone has the right to express their own opinion. Here is my answer: Any viewpoint that is not contrary to the Caodaist Canonical Codes can be applied. However, whether or not you achieve enlightenment depends on your merit and the grace granted by the Supreme Being.

As in the definition, Hộ Pháp symbolizes the thoughts (mind) of an ordinary person. At the beginning of the story, the Supreme Being (soul) orders Hộ Pháp (mind) to open the door to the Land Of Bliss. Consequently, it is our thoughts, which the ancient Vietnamese often called "heart", that will open the door to the Pure Land or Nirvana, that is, help us achieve enlightenment. Of course you have to think in a certain way, or

there will not be any changes if we think like we have always done.



**His Holiness Hộ Pháp making a mudra in the Holy Temple**

According to His Holiness Hộ Pháp, the people waiting outside the Land of Bliss are those who practiced during the period of closed religious path, that is, before the initiation of the Cao Đài religion. In my opinion, however, even after it is reopened, there



will still be many more people waiting there because His Holiness says then the two swastikas continue to rotate.

Anyway, please return to these waiting people, who include all kinds of people from all over worlds, not just our planet 68. There are people who join a certain religion, who do not practice religion and who have strange ideas, etc. Everyone is waiting here because they are looking for happiness for themselves and others. That happiness is symbolized by the Land of Bliss.

Even scientists, politicians, environmentalists, religious cults, etc. all want to create a society without suffering even though some people's methods are sometimes a bit ridiculous. For example, some people advocate giving each person an equal amount of property! They think this is absolutely fair because everyone will not suffer unhappiness when there is no more fighting for more wealth! His Holiness Hộ Pháp says "*Some with shaved heads, some with long beards, and some with very weird appearances.*" At last, all of them have had to sit and wait there since the religious path was closed until they meet His Holiness Hộ Pháp.

Of course, the outstanding lesson here for us believers is that the admission to the Land of Bliss is not the privilege of monks of all kinds. It is not only for those who wear robes, chant sutras and pray. In life, we have seen a lot of people whose personality and morality are more respectable although they do not practice any religion. Shouldn't such people be allowed to go here?! His Holiness Hộ Pháp shows us that virtuous people who have

fulfilled their human duties have the same spiritual rights, but they can only come to the entrance and sit there waiting!

Of course, liars or Heaven's law violators cannot go there because right in the first stage of the Divine Path to Eternal Life, they have already fallen into the Bích Hải (Turquoise Sea), that is, reincarnated on earth.



The statue of Devil God in front of the Holy Temple

Now let's discuss the power of Hộ Pháp. Why is it not the Giáo Tông or the Supreme Being who opens the door to the World of Ultimate Bliss, but the Hộ Pháp? Because the physical body (Giáo Tông) cannot return to Heaven and the soul (The Supreme Being) has been handed over to each of us, only waiting for the perispirit (Hộ Pháp) to join to attain enlightenment. Consequently, the Hộ Pháp opens the door to the Land of Bliss, meaning one's own mind, thoughts or thinking is the most important factor in achieving enlightenment.

Please observe how His Holiness Hộ Pháp opens the door. He uses Giáng Ma Xử to point at the two doors in turn. The rotating pinwheels stop, revealing their original forms as two large swastikas. The two doors are the dualistic system of our thinking, meaning we humanity always think everything arises from two opposing forces, such as Yin and Yang, Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, Male and Female, etc.

All of our activities in the world are governed by a dualistic system that we are almost unaware of. An interesting example is that Cao Đài followers like to stand in front of the Holy Temple to take pictures and everyone chooses to stand in front of the statue of the Good God, not the Evil God. 100% do so and no one notices or wonders why. This proves how heavily the law of duality affects our thinking, even affecting our subconscious.

Another obvious example is duality always exists in human emotions of "love and hate". If someone joins a group with different ideal from ours, then that person becomes an "enemy". We naturally attribute all the worst qualities to that person. On

the contrary, those who share the same group are considered to have good virtues and are forgiven no matter what mistakes they make. If we look closely, everyone has either their own "enemies" or ones instigated by others.



Statue of Dharma Protector holding Giáng Ma Xử by Chinese artists

Such thoughts are natural displays of dualistic thinking. As for Giáng Ma Xử, it is an invisible mystical weapon, meaning it only exists and can only be used in thoughts. To put it simply, it is the power of will. That Giáng Ma Xử points to the two doors

means we should be aware of the harsh dualistic nature of our thoughts and use willpower to "escape" it. Please note, the word "escape" is temporarily used because it also has a dualistic origin.

Let me tell you more about *Giáng Ma Xử*. It is said that this mystical weapon is shaped like a mallet or a mace. So this weapon has the function of smashing, but smashing what? It is not used to smash an "enemy" because that does not help you go beyond duality. It should be used to break your own stubbornness. One obvious stubbornness is that we human only listen to what we like, not what our "enemies" like. However, for most people, "smashing an enemy" is easier to understand and do. That is why there are constantly wars of all kinds.

Furthermore, this stubbornness can be very cleverly transformed and disguised under beautiful words. For example, it is sometimes boring to fight and kill each other, so you feel the need to "get along" with the "enemy". As a result, you set up a group, calling on people to "reconcile" for this or that reason, but really, deep in your soul, that is just a luxury because the solution to this reconciliation has to be on your terms. This is a very interesting example, we Cao Đài followers all know we have to unite the Cao Đài sects, but we still fail no matter how many meetings we have held!

Thus, what is hidden deep inside our mind that prevents ourselves from loving our "enemies"? You have to ask yourself this because only you know why. Each person will have their own reason and some people die without forgetting that reason.

This act of asking yourself is called reflection in philosophy and when you know what makes you unable to "love" your "enemy", then it is time to smash it to pieces with the Giáng Ma Xử. Once we truly "love" our "enemies" like the ending of the story of the two brothers, Good God and Evil God, we have "erased" dualistic thinking, that is, we have passed through the gate of the Land of Bliss.



Good God in front of the Holy Temple

Anyway, back to the story, when the two pinwheels stop, they have the shape of two swastikas. That means when the right-and-wrong thinking no longer has an impact, the truth is revealed. That is, it is the same thing (swastika), but people give it innumerable different names depending on culture or preference (hence the swastika always rotate). The notable point is that every name is very beautiful with an extremely fantastic

supporting theoretical system, so it also attracts numerous "fans". For example, the term Cao Đài will have a dragon head or a phoenix tail or something like that.

Those different names are also the cause of conflicts between individual versus individual, association versus association, sect versus sect and nation versus nation. Every time a new name is given, another source of conflict arises right according to the true spirit of dualism. This has happened in the phenomenon of sects of religions in general and Cao Đài schism in particular. Dualistic thinking makes people divide into groups, but once in a group, it is easy to "hate" but difficult to "love". This trait is so difficult to be eliminated that it requires the power of Giáng Ma Xử.

In the story His Holiness Hộ Pháp told, every time His Holiness points to a pinwheel, it stops and some people will rush in. Having been pointed twice, the pinwheel continues to spin. Thus, the moment to enter the Land of Bliss is so short that people have to rush in. Indeed, the moment when we truly love our "enemies" are neither commonplace nor long enough. The ancient priests called such moments "unity" because there is no longer the dichotomy of "love and hate". It is at that time that we enter the Pure Land, step in the Nirvana Realm, attain enlightenment, attain dharma or whatever you want to name it.

### **In short**

At this point, let me summarize the way to attain enlightenment or enter the Pure Land as discussed above. First of all, find out for yourself a situation where you are dominated by dualistic

thinking. That situation must be your real story. In spiritual practice, there is no room for fiction, such as imagining a story in which you are the main character.



Buddha in Nirvana

In the previous section, I temporarily borrowed the story of "loving your enemies" to make it easier to imagine. In fact, each person will have and encounter a different situation countless times in life. In short, you should find the situation that negatively affects your life the most, causes the most discomfort and gives the most bitter experience. For example, I do not like doing a certain job, but still have to do it; what I consider right is ignored by everyone; or some people criticize my religion while for me, theirs are the evil, etc.

When you find the "two doors" or the cause of your dualistic thought, then take out the *Giáng Ma Xử*, that is, ask yourself why with all the strength you have. This question usually does not have an immediate answer and sometimes it takes a lifetime



to get it. Zen Buddhism calls this question a koan. You have to find as many answers as possible and think about which ones can help erase that dualistic contradiction and reverse your situation. Keep persevering like that until one day you accidentally see the reason why you are miserable. Everything suddenly becomes as clear as crystal and you easily escape that confusing net of duality. Before, you did not like your job, but now you are passionate about every moment of work. Before, you refused to admit it, but now you see the mistakes that people often say about yourself. Before, you called others the evil cult, now you see that their religion is as respectable as mine, etc. That's it. Entering the Land of Bliss is like that.

It is absolutely necessary to be 100% honest in this thinking process because even one falsehood will block your chances of entering the Pure Land. The difficulty is that several times we lie without knowing it. For example, you still see someone who is a bit... a bit evil, but for the sake of opening the door to the World of Ultimate Bliss, you will leave it alone, consider him the right sect and respect their teacher a little bit. Note that even a tiny bit of such a thought passing through your mind is a huge obstacle.

Therefore, in the past, religious practitioners needed a true master (wise teacher) who had attained enlightenment to point out this place. Today this is extremely difficult because how do we know whether someone has attained enlightenment in an environment where Kim Quang Sú (the Devil) is allowed to borrow the name, and sometimes the authority, of the Supreme Being to deceive? Don't worry! Cao Đài scripture advises to look at "my throne" and not listen to "my name", which means

listen to your conscience, not to the people with high positions or famous reputations. Because "my throne" or conscience is the Supreme Being. Please refer here to learn more about "my name" and "my throne".

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/TuChon/phanbietgiuadanhtavangaita.pdf>



The tomb of Monk Huệ Mạng Kim Tiên, Bà Đen Mountain, Tây Ninh

Again, each time the swastika only stops spinning for a split second. Maybe of a million times like that, only once do you have the opportunity to rub shoulders with someone else and rush through this door. Sometimes it is only a few times, but this is very rare. Is it too difficult, dear readers? Nevertheless, how

can anyone who becomes a monk become an Immortal or a Buddha? As the Cao Dai scriptures say, "*Therefore, you should consider how many Immortals and Buddhas there have been in this East Asian region for the past two thousand years. You only know that there is only Huệ Mạng Kim Tiên.*" August 21, 1926 TNHT. However, I personally think it is neither difficult nor easy, but the right time and right place is what counts.

## CONCLUSION

At the Vatican, Rome, Saint Peter's Square is built in the shape of a key because Jesus said he would give the key to the Kingdom of Heaven to Saint Peter. Similarly, the Supreme Being also left many keys to open the door to the heavenly Bạch Ngọc Kinh at the Bạch Ngọc Kinh on this earth, which is the Cao Đài Tây Ninh Holy See. The problem is whether His children see and know how to open the door or not. One of those keys is the two statues of Good God and Evil God at the entrance, symbolizing our dualistic ideology. And in the story of the Sacred Path to Eternal Life, the Hộ Pháp has already taught us how to open the door.

Actually, the Patriarchs of the Three Religions already left the way open a long time ago. Confucius taught the Doctrine of the Mean, Lao Tzu taught Wu Wei, Buddha Shakyamuni taught Form means Emptiness and etc. All are ways to "avoid" the siege of duality to achieve the state called Nirvana or entering the Pure Land. However, because thousands of years have passed and cultures have changed, sometimes we read the Three Religions' scriptures without understanding anything or

understanding them the way we want to, so it is very difficult to follow them. This third time, in addition to the teachings of His Holiness Hộ Pháp, we are also favored with an additional gift, which is "the spirit returned by The Supreme Being" and this is truly the deciding factor for those who want to leave the cruel cycle of reincarnation.

The matter just discussed above is just how to enter the gate of the Land of Bliss, but how to stay there requires another essay. However, anyone who gets in knows exactly what to do next. Maybe they will open a new universe for themselves, or they can also come down to earth to be a small grasshopper on the grassland. His Holiness Hộ Pháp often calls it "establishing a career" on the Sacred Path to Eternal Life.

Chant: “Nam Mô Tam Châu Bát Bộ Hộ Pháp Thiên Tôn”.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn 30/4/2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>153</i>

# THE POWER OF PRAYERS



**Từ Chơn**

## Introduction

At the moment these lines appeared on the computer screen one after another, Saigon had been in the so-called social distancing for about ten hours. The city wears an old and strange outfit: people still go to work but are filled with worries. I wonder whether anyone at work has F0 or F1. I wonder if I will see guard posts preventing people from entering my neighborhood when I return home this afternoon. Not only in Saigon, the Corona virus has killed many people and disrupted all human activities around the world.

As an ordinary citizen, in addition to having to follow the regulations of the current local government, I only know how to do something that a religious person does when I am helpless or desperate: praying. It is the most ancient gesture at the dawn of humanity's religion. Even today, prayer is indispensable in any religion. According to American philosopher William James, without prayer there is no religion. An Islamic proverb also says that Muslims must pray. Sadhu Sundar Singh, an Indian esoteric practitioner, also said that prayer is as important as breathing. (Britannica).

## Power

So what is prayer and how powerful is it?

First of all, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, prayer is human communication (conversation) with the Supreme Being, divine beings or the supernatural world. Usually, people pray

for good health, wellness, long life, more wealth or success in their careers.



Israel in Egypt (Edward Poynter, 1867)

And the power of prayer according to the teachings of Jesus is: [*Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea,” without a doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours*]. (Mark 11:23-26)

### **The story in the Bible**

On the occasion of talking about prayer, fellow believers, please review a story in the Torah (Old Testament), book two (Book of Exodus). In 1956 this story was adapted into the famous film *The Ten Commandments*.

According to the Bible, at that time, the Jews lived together with the Egyptians. The Egyptians had an army equipped with



modern weapons, so they were the masters. The Jews were slaves, using their labor to build lavish temples and palaces for the Egyptians. However, the Jews were breeding more and more, causing the Egyptian king to fear that one day he would be overthrown. Therefore, he ordered that all Jewish children be killed and thrown into the Nile River. Saint Moses was born into a Jewish family. Upon hearing the king's order, Moses' mother knew she could not keep her newborn child, so she could only hide baby Moses in a reed bush on the riverbank and pray.

Fortunately, an Egyptian princess went to bathe in the river and saw the baby, so she brought it to the palace to raise. Moses grew up to become an Egyptian prince and knew nothing about his real family. Then the king also discovered his Jewish origin, so he expelled him from the royal family and exiled him to live in the arid desert. He got married and raised sheep for a living.

It was at this time that the Supreme Being descended to him and told him to return to Egypt to save his Jewish people. Being hesitant because of the huge disparity between the two sides, on one side the powerful Egyptian army, on the other side the undernourished Jewish slaves, he asked to refuse the mission. Since the Supreme Being promised to help, he returned to Egypt alone.

When he met the king and asked for permission to take the Jewish people out of Egypt, of course, everyone knew the answer. How could the person sitting on top give up power so simply! If he lost all his slaves, who would serve his family and

royal family? Luckily, the king did not kill Moses because in the past, when they were still princes, the two were brothers.



Moses speaking to Pharaoh

Devastated with defeat, Moses returned home and in despair he had to pray to the Supreme Being for help. The Supreme Being told him to return to the palace and tell the Egyptian king that if he did not agree to let the Jews leave, he would be punished.

The second time he went to see the king and was rejected as cruelly as before. Immediately after that, punishment came to the Egyptians through 10 phenomena:

1. The water of the Nile River turned into blood.
2. Frogs were everywhere.
3. Mosquitoes appeared densely throughout the country.

4. There were too many flies.
5. Disease killed many livestock.
6. All Egyptians suffered from scabies and unbearable itching.
7. Hail, thunder and fire everywhere.
8. Locusts appeared and destroyed crops.
9. The sun was obscured for three consecutive days, forcing everyone to live in darkness.

Of course, only the Egyptian people suffered, but the king, ruling officials and rich people in the golden palace were unharmed. The kings and officials had neither pity for their Egyptian people nor reason to change their minds about letting the Jews leave. Not only that, the king ordered increased repression of Jewish slaves, forcing them to work overtime, increasing taxes, and beating and imprisoning those who did not obey orders. Finally the 10th punishment decided everything. That is, every firstborn son of every Egyptian family died.

In this tragic disaster, the king's eldest son also died. And this made the king panic. The throne, the palace, gold, silver, jade, and servants could not stop Death from taking his son away. As a result, the king reluctantly agreed to let the Jews leave. In contrast, Jewish families were not similarly punished. Therefore, to this day, every year in every Jewish family celebrates this event with Passover, reminding that on that day in the past, the Jewish people "overcame" punishment.

Being set free, all the Jews carried each other across the desert following Moses' instructions. Whenever he did not know the way, Moses went to a quiet place and prayed for the Supreme

Being to show him the way. Nevertheless, when they reached the shore of the Red Sea, the group of people temporarily stopped because they did not know what to do anymore while the land the Supreme Being promised to take them to was still nowhere to be seen. Urgently, bad luck still pursued these unfortunate people because the Egyptian king now changed his mind, thinking that if he could not use it, then destroy it. Therefore, he personally mobilized powerful soldiers to chase with the intention of massacring all Jews.



Moses parting the Red Sea

In an extremely dangerous situation, in front of Moses was the roaring waves of the Red Sea and behind him was a cloud of dust and sand flying into the sky, signaling a storming army in

pursuit. Looking back at the group of starving, defenseless slaves, everyone can see that the situation is desperate and that the Jewish people will surely be 100% wiped out from now on. On the beach, while everyone was trembling and waiting to die, some even cursed Moses for sending them to death, Moses stood up, raised high the stick given to him by the Supreme Being and prayed.

Miraculously, the clouds in the sky began to spin violently and the sea suddenly split in two, revealing a path to the other shore. Everyone hurried along that road across the sea. When the last men reached shore, the first group of Egyptian cavalry arrived and, following the king's orders, they poured down that road in pursuit. Nonetheless, when the murderous army reached the middle of the sea, the sea surface closed, burying the entire pursuing force. At that time, Moses and the Jewish people knew for sure that they had survived.

### **Modern prayer**

The story "The 10 Commandments" shows that the power of prayer has come true like Jesus' teachings. What about in our world today? Does prayer still have the same power to tilt heaven and earth?

In fact, a young man told me that he prayed to the Supreme Being for him to win the lottery. He would use part of this money to take care of his family, the rest would be donated to the local poor Holy Temple and he himself would go there to do

meritorious work. He has been praying sincerely and buying lottery tickets for 10 years, but has not won any!



Another woman also said she no longer believed in prayer because, knowing her husband had terminal cancer, she became a vegetarian and prayed every day at the temple for 5 years, but he still could not survive despite intensive treatments.

Another monk also prayed to see the Buddha and said that if he did not see the Buddha on this full moon day, he would return to the secular world. As a result, he saw nothing so he quit practicing, got married and did business like everyone else.

In my opinion, having read the story of Saint Moses mentioned above, perhaps everyone wants their prayers to be divinely answered like that, but that does not always happen. Since, first, there is one important thing we do not take into account. We are not great spiritual beings like Saint Moses and our circumstances are also very different. Second, Jesus taught that we must believe absolutely for prayer to be effective. Thus, maybe we ourselves think it is absolute, but compared to the divine standard, it is not enough. Third, according to the law of cause and effect, we must make up for the sins of our previous lives. Perhaps the compensation has not been finished yet, so praying is fruitless!

On the contrary, there are also lots of people who pray and have their wishes fulfilled. Perhaps those people have met the three conditions mentioned above. We often meet these people bringing offerings to a temple and offering thanksgiving, according to Asian customs. Especially in the context of the Covid epidemic, according to CNN (June 17, 2020), Rob Kochon in Florida tested positive for coronavirus and then became seriously ill. He had cardiac arrest three times because his lungs were frozen and unable to function. During his illness, his wife Carol, along with the help of the church and family, prayed every day. Now he has recovered. Both he and his wife said that praying saved him from death. And also according to CNN, PEW Research Center said that up to 55% of American adults pray for the Covid epidemic to end quickly.

Science is also trying to research what prayer does for people. Professor Brad Bushman of Ohio University said, "People pray

when they feel they have no control over a situation and need help from Someone Above. Therefore, praying during a pandemic is normal."



Professor Kevin Masters

Even so, the results of scientific research on prayer helping to heal illness are still very modest. Currently, science has only proven that prayer has psychological effects such as reducing stress, feelings of loneliness and fear. According to Professor Kevin Masters, Department of Clinical Health Psychology,



University of Colorado, Denver, psychology is closely related to the body's biological processes, including the function of the immune system. Therefore, prayer can impact human health.

So in our time, prayer may either bring desired results or not because there are many conditions that need to be met. However, the immediate results are sure to have a good impact on human psychology.

### **Conclusion**

Personally, as an ordinary Cao Đài follower, I think there are two important things to pay attention to right now. First, natural disaster phenomena quite similar to those in the “Ten Commandments” have reappeared in many parts of the world. Have we humans violated the laws of nature without wanting to correct them? And these natural disasters, including the current Covid epidemic, are punishments from Mother Nature and at the same time a sign of the Long Hoa Judgement Day?

Nevertheless, I am just one human being among the 7.825 billion inhabitants of this planet (2020), with no power, abundant finances nor special abilities, so I think praying is the most suitable way when I am helpless and desperate. Furthermore, as cited above, prayer helps me reduce stress, feelings of loneliness and fear or, as the ancients say, "*a less agitated mind*". Once "*the mind no longer moves*" then the matter of life and death will resolve itself.

If you don't know how to pray, I would like to suggest the following: according to Cao Đài teachings, there are five important prayers to recite every day. Fellow believers, who have the same thoughts as mine, please recite the Five Prayers.

1. Namô, first I pray for Caodaism to spread.
2. Namô, second I pray for all sentient beings to be saved.
3. Namô, third I pray for my sins to be forgiven.
4. Namô, fourth I pray for peace in the world.
5. Namô, fifth I pray for security in the Holy Temple.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn, June 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>154</i>

# AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI



Statue of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva in India, 9th century

Từ Chơn

## Introduction

First of all, according to the Buddhist dictionary, Guanyin is the name given by the ancient Chinese people. Actually, his name in Sanskrit (ancient India) is Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. The Chinese translate it as 觀世音菩薩 and the Vietnamese read it as Quán Thế Âm Bồ Tát.

But that's not all, in ancient China, people avoided the word Thế for fear of insulting the royal family because the name of the Chinese king of the Tang Dynasty was Lý Thế Dân. Thus, Thế was omitted, only Quán Âm was left and over time transformed into Quan Âm. In Cambodia, he is called Lokeshvarak and in Japan Kanzeon or Kannon.

## Legend

To be honest, he has never been seen, but only known about through Buddhist scriptures. Consequently, he is described in many different forms. Each country in Asia has its own folktales about his origin so old that no one knows who told the story and where it came from.

In India, people build statues of him with a thousand hands and eyes or statues of bodhisattvas holding lotus flowers. In China, Japan and Vietnam, she is a female Buddha, dressing in white and holding a poplar branch in one hand and a vase of holy water in the other.

There are a great number of stories about Guan Yin circulating in China. According to the novel *Fengshen Yanyi* (by Chinese author Xu Zhonglin or Lux Xixing), Guan Yin is Cihang Bodhisattva. In Vietnam, everyone knows the story of Quan Âm Diệu Thiện and Quan Âm Thị Kính (or Thị Mầu Thị Kính). Nowadays, with the popularity of the Internet, it is easy to find and read these stories, so I take the liberty of not mentioning them here.



Avalokiteśvara painting from a Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscript. India, 12th century

The extreme richness of legends proves one thing: he was admired and worshiped by many people of different ethnicities. Generally, people think they will be saved when they are in danger if they pray and recite his name.

## True meaning

For those of us Cao Đài believers, however, who are determined to practice religion, we must get to the root of the problem to understand the philosophical meaning. That is more important for our short lives than following untrue folk tales even though those stories also provide good examples to practice virtue.

First, Shakyamuni Buddha was real in history whereas Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva was not. It is recorded that Shakyamuni Buddha mentioned his name and later Buddhist disciples recorded it in scriptures for us to read. As for the legends, they are passed down among people and no one knows who the author is. From now on, please allow me to use the true name, which is Quán Âm instead of Quan Âm.

Research shows that his name appears in seven Buddhist sutras, especially the two sets of Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra (Lotus Sutra) and Prajnaparamita Sutra (Heart Sutra).

This is an excerpt from the Lotus Sutra. When Aksaya-mati Bodhisattva asked why there was the name Avalokiteśvara, Buddha Shakyamuni replied, *"If unhappy beings wholeheartedly call the Bodhisattva's name, he will understand and save them immediately, so he should be called Avalokiteśvara."*

And here is an excerpt from the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra. In this sutra, monk Xuanzang translated Avalokiteśvara as Guanzizai, *"When Guanzizai Bodhisattva has reached the*

*highest level of wisdom, he saw that human thoughts and feelings were not real. Consequently, he overcame all suffering."*



Four-armed Tibetan form of Avalokiteśvara.

Although there are scores of different translations, you will see the common points, such as: Bodhisattva - understanding - cry -



thinking - no more suffering. From there, plus practical research, I see that people have two ways of understanding the name Avalokiteśvara as follows:

In the first trend, there is a Bodhisattva named Avalokiteshvara who understands all the cries of distressed sentient beings. Anyone who suffers too much should pray to him. He will help them overcome their suffering. This is the most popular accessible trend of thinking. Therefore, in China, Japan and Vietnam, innumerable huge statues of Guan Yin are set up everywhere and lots of people come to burn incense, worship, and pray. This way of thinking is prevalent in the Pure Land school of Buddhism, according to which practitioners learn to use the divine power of prayer (reciting the Buddha's name) to be saved by the Buddha.

The second less popular trend is the title Quán Thê Âm (Avalokiteśvara) is also a dharma (way of practice). Quán means thorough understanding, Thê Âm is the cry of the world. Therefore, people who practice this will use their own Prajna or wisdom to clearly understand their thoughts and feelings. If you reach the required level, you will see that all of those things are unreal and from there you will overcome all worldly suffering. This type of practice is similar to the idea in Zen Buddhism, according to which practitioners use their own thinking power to contemplate the meaning of life.

Often, people argue that one sect is superior to another, but in reality there is no such assertion. To prove this, let's talk a little more about the Lotus Sutra (full name is the Wonderful Dharma

Lotus Sutra). This sutra records the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha at Vulture Mountain around the time the Buddha was about to leave the world. Buddha Shakyamuni mainly teaches that all methods of practice are just a means to achieve dharma. He only uses appropriate teaching methods depending on the listener's circumstances. In the sutras, the Buddha uses a very fantastic illustration. He tells the story of a father who wants to save his children from a house fire. Since the children refuse to run out, the father has to promise to give each child a gift of their choice; a deer to the first, a goat to the next, and a buffalo cart to the other, etc. Only then do they agree to leave the house.



Bronze statue of Avalokiteśvara from Sri Lanka, ca. 750 CE

The story's implication is quite transparent: the father is the Buddha and the children sentient beings. The Buddha has to please sentient beings by promising all kinds of things to reach the ultimate goal of saving them. Therefore, even if the Buddha's teachings lead to differences, they are also suitable for all levels of sentient beings. Whether you pray to Buddha for salvation or use your wisdom to contemplate, you will ultimately achieve the goal of liberation from all worldly suffering.

Personally, I prefer the second way. The Buddha will surely help people when they have suffering under the condition of reciting Buddha's name, specifically in this case, Avalokiteshvara. In my opinion, however, reciting the Buddha's name is not simply a matter of whispering the Buddha's name as many times as possible. "Reciting" in Buddhist scriptures has a much more positive meaning. As in this case, when "reciting" you must "contemplate"; that is, you have to think thoroughly. Avalokiteshvara means thinking deeply about the sounds of the world, that is, the cries of humanity. If reciting the Buddha's name lots of times and then you will be liberated, it would be too easy, wouldn't it, ladies and gentlemen? Due to thinking like that, a lot of people now use tape recorders to record the phrase "Namo Amitabha Buddha" and then play it day and night. If "reciting the Buddha's name" is really effective, then in the end, will whoever has more "batteries" be liberated?

Surely all of us understand that reciting the Buddha's name innumerable times does not bring any positive results. The story of monk Pháp Đát in the Platform Sutra is a vivid example of this idea. The story goes that monk Pháp Đát looked very

arrogant when he met the Sixth Patriarch Huineng because he was proud that he had recited (read aloud) the Lotus Sutra three thousand times. However, he could not give any answers when the Sixth Patriarch asked more about the meaning of the sutra. After listening to the Sixth Patriarch's explanation, the monk was immediately enlightened and declared, *“I have recited the sutra three thousand times without understanding anything, but the Patriarch enlightened me with only one statement”*.



Statue of Guanyin in China

Furthermore, reciting the Buddha's name is just a habitual, unconscious action. How can non-consciousness help us realize the magic of the universe? In Cao Đài religion, everyone knows that being unconscious means losing the Khí (mind). A human with only Tinh (body) and Thần (soul) cannot unite to return to

the Supreme Being. Additionally, the Supreme Being teaches that God and Man must be one. If we just sit, reciting names and wait for God to save us, then we only rely on God, without Man.

In short, reciting Avalokiteshvara's name means practicing His teachings. That is, you have to listen to the world's complaints (or any words) and ponder them thoroughly. By doing so, you will have a chance for self-liberation. For example, when you hear the sick complaining. That's the sound of the world. Now consider how you feel. Please do not rush to conclude that it is the sound and form that you, as a Buddhist practitioner, need to stay away from, so you do not feel anything. With such a conclusion, you refuse to ponder or to "contemplate". That signals you are not suitable for this method.

If you are willing to "contemplate", you will feel a deep sympathy, which is the sincere human love that the hustle and bustle of life has long deprived us of. This is a positive start in this practice. And human love will gradually ignite the bright fire of wisdom.

## **Avalokiteshvara in Cao Đài**

In Cao Đài, the name Avalokiteśvara is mentioned in the requiem prayer, and in sermons about the Sacred Path to Eternal Life by His Holiness Hộ Pháp. Particularly important, in this third period, He is one of the Tam Trấn Oai Nghiêm (Three Dignified Governors):

1. The First Dignified Governor and also the Giáo Tông of Cao Đài is the Great Immortal Li Bai on behalf of Taoism.
2. The Second Dignified Governor is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva on behalf of Buddhism.
3. The Third Dignified Governor is the Holy Emperor Guan on behalf of Confucianism.



The Three Dignified Governors in Cao Đài

In terms of meaning, governor = a person who is in charge of an organization and dignified = deserving respect. From these definitions Tam Trấn Oai Nghiêm have really great power to

prevent worldly people from breaking the laws of heaven in the Third General Salvation. Their power is like a Permanent Official in human society. A proof is the funny story His Holiness Hộ Pháp told in his sermon at Báo Ân Từ on September 15, 1946. Around 1927, there was a ban on using Ouija Board for divine communication, but the Cao Đài senior dignitaries still tried to get divine messages. As a result, those who broke the law, including His Holiness Acting Giáo Tông, His Holiness Hộ Pháp and Phôi Sư Bính, were punished by His Holiness Li Bai. This shows that with his power, the First Dignified Governor does not miss any small mistakes nor have any regard for anyone.

In his sermon on the Sacred Path to Eternal Life at the Holy Temple on the night of September 29, Year of the Rat (October 31, 1948), His Holiness Hộ Pháp also clearly stated the function of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in Heaven, which is to row the Prajna boat back and forth across the Milky Way and the sea of suffering to save sentient beings.

Please note the following implications:

Maitreya is the Chief Examiner of the Long Hoa Judgement Competition.

"Saving sentient beings", according to Cao Đài, is giving mental and material help to living people and "saving the dead" is helping the soul of the dead.

The Prajna Boat symbolizes wisdom, the ultimate insight of an enlightened person.

The Milky Way symbolizes the separation between suffering and happiness.

The sea of suffering is the worldly life.

Therefore, the story told by His Holiness Hộ Pháp implies that in this Third Universal Salvation, Avalokiteśvara is the most popular method to bring wisdom to those who are still alive. Whoever achieves this insight will overcome all suffering, that is, attain enlightenment in this world.

In addition, in the sermon on June 28, Year of the Tiger (1938), His Holiness Hộ Pháp taught that the Three Governors are examples of Compassion, Wisdom, and Courage for humanity to learn in this Third Period. Great Immortal Li Bai teaches Wisdom, Guan Yin Courage and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva compassion. We Cao Đài believers must have mercy on all living beings because in this Dragon Flower Judgement Day, the wails of humans will be far greater than those before. As of now (2021), humanity is caught up in the COVID-19 epidemic with a record number of deaths compared to previous epidemics and scientists still cannot know when the pandemic will end. Even more terrible, if this virus mutates and the vaccine is ineffective, then the situation will be true to the prophecy that has been around for a long time in Vietnam, "*Out of ten people, only three will survive and at last only one will survive to enjoy eternal peace*".

In summary, what we Cao Đài followers need to think today, and at any time, is whether we are ready to practice what Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva teaches or not. This question is for those who sincerely want to ignore all incitements to worldly disputes, all the allure of titles and profits both in religion and in real life and truly want to practice and study religious doctrine to liberate themselves from the cycle of birth and death.



TỪ CHỜN

Sài Gòn, 25/1/2021

**Tham Khảo**

Wikipedia

Britannica

Diệu Pháp Liên Hoa Kinh

Bát Nhã Tâm Kinh

Pháp Bửu Đàn Kinh

Tự Điển Hán Nôm - Thiều Chửu

Bộ sách Thuyết Đạo của Đức Hộ Pháp - Ban Túc Ký TTTN.

Con Đường Thiêng Liêng Hằng Sống - Ban Túc Ký TTTN.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....</i>	<i>155</i>

# EASTERN ZEN

# WESTERN

# ZEN



Từ Chơn

## Introduction

The other day, a young reader emailed me, asking how are meditation and mindfulness different? At that time I was busy with something else, so I just gave a simple answer, just enough to understand the problem. I knew that this brief answer would not satisfy that reader. Young people today always have higher requirements when trying to learn something than they did decades ago. Furthermore, many young people know "critical thinking", which means judging a problem through objective analysis. Gone are the days of whatever the former generation say is right. Nonetheless, that's something to be happy about! The next generation should stand on the previous generation's shoulders, as Newton said. Thus, I promised myself I would research and write an article about the above question.

Today, research can be done thanks to the Internet. It is a global computing network, permanently providing a huge amount of information. Nevertheless, since there is so much information, much experience plus a solid amount of basic knowledge is necessary to handle it. That's not to mention the types of fake news that are a scourge on the Internet today. Now, just type "Meditation" on Google and you will get more than ten million results. It is difficult just to choose which article to read. On YouTube, there are more Zen masters lecturing on all sorts of topics than the grains of sand on the Ganges River. Perhaps throughout your lives you cannot listen to all those talks, let alone apply them. Therefore, the key is to know how to choose, little but true news, not fake news.

Anyway, while writing this article, I intend to summarize the information from the most prestigious Websites in the world, such as VOA, BBC, CNN, Reuters, Encyclopedia Britannica, Webster, Stanford Encyclopedia, or Universities in the US. Those are where information is collected seriously and systematically. The religious issues mentioned in these pages are very objective and based on modern scientific arguments. Then I rewrite it, omitting the traditional Sino-Vietnamese terms still used when talking about Zen to make it more intelligible. Hopefully this short, comprehensible information will help Cao Đài followers, at least, catch the main features of Zen without getting lost in the vast knowledge of humanity. Furthermore, I pray that there will be lots of people who will get enlightened and achieve ultimate wisdom to guide everyone into the Age of Wisdom and Virtue.



Campus community members at Cornell University can participate in regular weekly offerings of meditation classes around campus or online to destress and recenter themselves.

## How to approach

Recently, in Saigon, I have heard that there are a lot of practitioners in Zen classes taught by foreign teachers, especially British and American. Perhaps this is the source of the question about the term mindfulness in the introduction. I also know that a great number of young and highly educated Cao Đài followers are very diligent practitioners there. It is ironic that the label "Western Teacher" has erased the paradox: Westerners teach Easterners a method originating from the East!

No one can deny that European and American (Western) societies are more advanced than Asian (Eastern) countries in terms of science and technology. Unlike Eastern people, Westerners have made rapid progress thanks to scientific methods when approaching any problem. Please see more about the Scientific Method here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific\\_method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method)

Westerners are not afraid to find new paths as long as they achieve their goals. If they are not successful, their compatriots will simply forget and ignore it. No one harshly condemn them as "losing their roots", "crazy" or "failing to keep the true tradition" at all. That is to say material progress, what about spiritual progress? How do they approach Eastern religious and spiritual issues? Is the pace of progress in this field as fast as in science and technology? Will the sentence "The Tao comes from the East" be concluded with the sentence "The result happens in the West"?



*A class of meditation in Sài Gòn*

Obviously, Westerners have made great progress thanks to their approaches to handle problems in life. In our previous society, people only practiced religion when they wanted to get out of the rat race. On the contrary, Westerners think Zen, a multi thousand year old method, must have something useful, so they seriously study and apply it in life. Thus, it is important that we Cao Đài followers find out how they approach and practice Zen. From there we can learn something for ourselves. Especially for Cao Đài, a religion that is not more than 100 years old and also has a quite similar method to Zen called Esoteric Practice.

## **Development**

Researchers still believe that Japanese Professor Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki was instrumental in bringing Zen to the Western

world through the book *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. In the past half century, lots of scholars have gone to Eastern countries to study Zen. First of all, they were overwhelmed by a bunch of Zen sects with all kinds of names and methods. From Hindu Zen, Indian Buddhist Zen, Tibetan Buddhist Zen (Tantric), Chinese Buddhist Zen (Chan), Japanese Buddhist Zen (Zen), Taoist Zen (T'ai Chi) etc. Not to mention, in the same country there can be many Zen lineages, sometimes conflicting with each other. There are various ways, from sitting in the full lotus, half-lotus, cross-legged positions to lying down; from closing eyes, opening eyes to focusing on a certain symbol; from breathing in one way to another (It is said that up to eight ways of breathing have been practiced, possibly more); from thinking to answer a koan to not thinking at all; from visualizing an image to reciting sacred mantras and from opening the "chakras" to clearing acupuncture points and meridians.

Faced with the extreme richness of such genres, first of all, Westerners use the word meditation, meaning contemplation, to call them all because they are all basically based on meditation. The word meditation is translated from the Sanskrit word Dhyana (concentrating thoughts), then Japanese people read Dhyana as Zen, Koreans as Seon and Chinese as Chan. Previously, Vietnamese people used Chinese writing and read Chan as Thiền and anyone who sit cross-legged, close their eyes and count their breaths, was called "ngồi Thiền" (Zen sitting). In Vietnam, we have not heard of any scientific works related to Zen. Only Buddhist academies admit Zen students and publish journals on Zen studies.





### Meditation and a relaxation technique to lower blood pressure - Harvard Medical School

Western science began studying Zen in the 70s and recognized that meditators could control their pulse and breathing rate, naturally reducing headaches and high blood pressure. In America since the early 80s, people have begun to favor a type of Zen called mindfulness. By the 90s, scores of research institutes used Zen to support the treatment of psychological diseases. Nowadays, more and more people are practicing meditation to improve their health and strengthen the immune system.

Through research, practice, and comparison of results, Westerners have come to the following important conclusions:

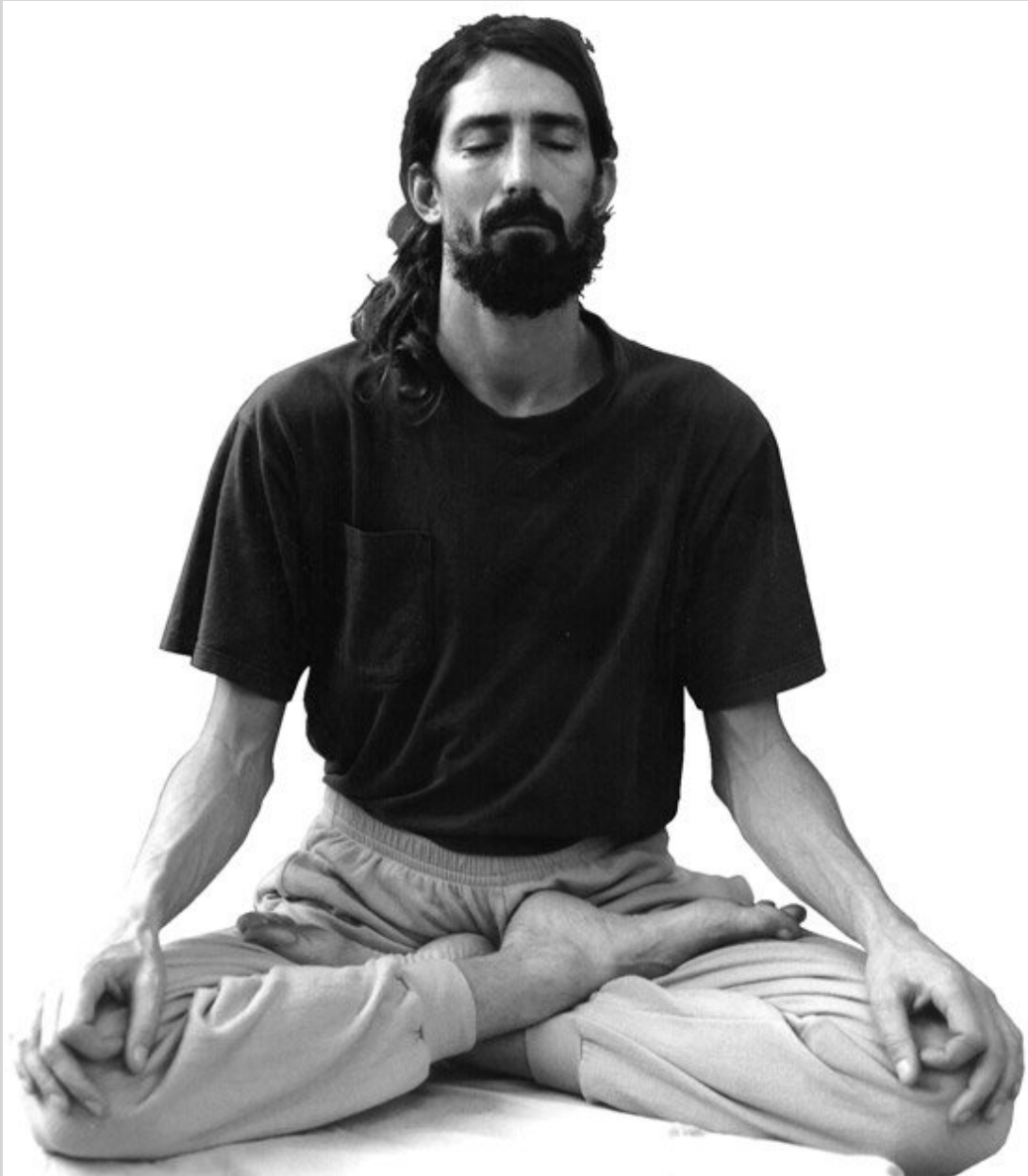
### **Definition**

Meditation is controlling the body and mind to focus on immediately happening events in order to gain complete awareness. For example, when I drive, I pay attention to shifting gears, stepping on the accelerator, turning the steering wheel, etc., not driving while listening to music, talking or thinking about the can of beer I will drink later.

It is not necessary to be a monk to practice Zen because it is a part of human life. (This opinion may be difficult for traditional monks in our country to hear, but in the West they think like that).

Mindfulness means considering something without other interfering thoughts, criticism, correction, comments, that is, calmly accepting that thing. For example, when I read on Facebook that someone is attacking me, I clearly understand that is an attack, but do not reply, react, criticize or praise.

Therefore, mindfulness is a way of Zen that Westerners, especially Americans, are very fond of today. Please note, I did not translate the word mindfulness into Vietnamese because until now, Vietnamese people have only used one word: Thiền. Some people try to translate it into a new Vietnamese noun, like "giác sát" or "thiền chính niệm". However, I think those nouns only make it more complicated and difficult to understand, so I temporarily call it mindfulness meditation.



Lotus position

### **Classifications**

Westerners temporarily divide Zen into 4 types for comprehensibility.

- Meditators focus on an object or event.

- Meditators think in a way that extends love to everyone, including enemies.
- Meditators receive feelings and thoughts without judgment.
- Meditators focus on a topic, usually assigned by a master.

In fact, practitioners can mix those four types of Zen during practice or alternate with each other, depending on the teacher's instructions.

### **Positions**

The traditional posture is to sit in the lotus position, but practitioners can also sit in the half-lotus, cross-legged, kneel, sit on a chair, or lie down as long as they keep their spine straight and feel comfortable.

### **Result**

There are many articles from the scientific community recognizing the achievements of Zen. To put it short, I would like to summarize the article by author Jen Rose Smith of CNN (June 3, 2021) as follows. Meditation has five great benefits:

1. You will concentrate better, so whatever you do will be more effective. (According to Amishi Jha, Professor of Psychology at Miami University).
2. It can reduce chronic pain. This will help patients avoid becoming dependent on painkillers. We know that a side effect of painkillers (usually opium derivatives) is addiction. (According to Eric Garland, Professor, Associate Dean, University of Utah College of Social Work).
3. Good treatment for insomnia. Therefore, it will be supported by at least 35% of adults who are tormented by insomnia.

(According to research by Mindful Awareness Research Center, University of Los Angeles).

4. It can reduce stress, a modern disease. If people are stressed for a long time, they will fall into worse psychological conditions. (According to Professor Diana Winston of Mindful Awareness Research Center, University of Los Angeles)

5. It can reduce anxiety, especially in the current Corona epidemic situation when people are almost at a loss. (According to Susan Johnson, Professor of Psychology, University of North Carolina).



Professor Susan Johnson at University of North Carolina at Greensboro

**Be careful**

According to Professor Susan Johnson, do not consider meditation as a cure-all medicine although there are more and more studies confirming its benefits. Sometimes, there are still some studies do not meet the strict regulations of the scientific community. A 2021 analysis in the UK says more research is needed on more subjects and needs to be done longer term. However, even though she is quite skeptical of research on Zen, Professor Susan Johnson still believes that it is useful and she herself practices it regularly. Professor Diana Winston says mindfulness meditation is not effective for everyone. She says that Zen research is still very rudimentary even though many of the results appear to be very intriguing.

## Differences

From the above information, the differences between Western Zen and Eastern Zen can be recognized. First of all, since Western science has not yet proven the miracles of religions, the religious factors from Zen are removed. It is viewed as a type of exercise for the body and mind, but the results, as stated above, are scientifically recognized. Therefore, Westerners zen practitioners are not required to be strict vegans, to avoid violating taboos, to seek enlightenment, to pray to contact gods, to kowtow or to perform religious rituals.

On the contrary, Eastern ideologies all begins with religious philosophy, so there has been a suggestion that if in the West it is called philosophy, in the East it will be called mysticism. The results of Eastern Zen, which is often called "enlightenment",

including achieving profound understanding, liberation from samsara, communication with the Divine, treating incurable diseases of others, knowing in advance what is about to happen, etc. is still not recognized by the scientific community.



Enlightenment in Buddhism

## What to do now

On Facebook, I recently encountered something very thought-provoking. Someone asked the question "*I have taken the oath of initiation to join Cao Đài. May I meditate?*" Immediately, lots of people responded. In general, the answers can be divided into three groups: The first group objected to meditation with very convincing arguments, the second group encouraged implementation with very favorable arguments and the third group only talked nonsense. The problem will not be resolved because the person was not interested in what he practiced for

and neither was the person who answered. In my opinion, we should ask the questioner's purpose before introducing a type of Zen to him. As stated at the beginning, there are various types and each type has its own purpose. Meditation is not a comprehensive religious practice.

Similarly, a Cao Đài fellow sent me an email, asking why sometimes it is called acupuncture points and sometimes chakras. I have answered like this. They belong to the concepts of two different philosophies, so they are not equivalent. Acupuncture points are mentioned in traditional Chinese medicine and Taoism based on the philosophy of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements while chakras are used in Hindu Yoga. Both belong to two completely different systems. If you practice according to a system, you must rely entirely on it until you succeed. If you want to change to another method, you have to start from scratch. It is impossible to arbitrarily mix the two practice methods like mixing food.

The two stories above highlight the problem that lots of Cao Đài followers only know about Zen through a few verses of the Divine Messages or a few popular articles, but are very enthusiastic about discussing and even debating about Zen. In my opinion, perhaps it is better to read Professor Suzuki's Essays in Zen Buddhism before forming an opinion. The best Vietnamese translation published before 1975 is by Trúc Thiên and Tuệ Sĩ.



## Conclusion

In short, if you want to meditate now, you must first determine your purpose and then find a suitable meditation method. Let me emphasize this. "Suitable" is not "easy to succeed". For example, if you want to relieve pain, reduce anxiety, treat insomnia and improve your health without being involved in religion, you can participate in Mindfulness Meditation, temporarily called Western Meditation. There will be questions about who teaches and what school does. It is easy if you are in the US or European countries. Just go to a University with a Meditation Center. These centers are usually managed by full-time professors and professional instructors. Learners will have to pay tuition, but the lessons are guaranteed to be good and safe in terms of health. However, as stated above, "meditation is only good for some, not everyone", so no one can guarantee 100% success. As for other places, I do not dare answer until I have specific information.

As for practicing Zen according to a certain religion, you have to decide what category you want. If you need to reach a deep understanding of all issues, you must follow the Zen method of Buddhism; If you want to contact the divine to learn, follow the Tịnh Luyện of Cao Đài; If you want to be healthy, practice alchemy according to Taoism; If you want to live a long life, practice Tai Chi; If you want to have magical effects on your body, practice Indian Yoga, etc. Please remember, there is no universal method for all religions. So the prerequisite here is to join a certain religion, then practice according to its system. If

asked how to find a good religious master, I would like to answer "It depends on your fate".

Personally, as an ordinary Cao Đài believer, I am taught that the Cao Đài teachings for this period (called the Third Era) are presented at the Tây Ninh Holy See and through the Divine Messages. The problem is I have to observe and learn to find my own method. In particular, the Tịnh Luyện or Esoteric Practice, which some people mistakenly call Cao Đài Zen, is still a matter of fierce debate among believers. Perhaps until there are enough Twelve Cao Đài Academicians, they will be able to research and design Tịnh Luyện sessions for all believers to participate. Speaking of this, perhaps someone will say, *"I'm too old to wait. Now I want to practice Esoteric Practice immediately."* I would say the first stage of Tịnh Luyện is still doing meritorious work, doing charity work and preaching Caodaism. So let's start those three things first wherever you can. If you practice enthusiastically, these three things may be enough for you to attain enlightenment.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn, during the Covid pandemic, 16 June 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....	4
2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....	16
3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....	36
4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....	51
5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....	78
6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....	110
7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....	124
8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....	139
9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....	156

# SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI



**Từ Chơn**

## INTRODUCTION

For religious people, in addition to the living world, there are at least two more worlds after death. One is for good people called Heaven and the other for bad people: Hell. For Cao Đài believers, there are even many universes coexisting. What about scientists? The multiverse theory, notably that of Everett (1957), has attracted lots of scientists and we wait to see many changes in human approach to the space outside the earth that Cao Đài calls Earth 68.

Therefore, humans have long sought the ways to contact those worlds. Caodaism was founded on this foundation. Its spiritualistic communications includes praying, table-tipping, Ouija boards, automatic writing, etc. In Cao Đài, these methods have been raised to a noble level called Bửu Pháp (literally precious ways of doing things). In Tây Ninh Holy See, the space between the altar of God and the thrones of the Giáo Tông, Chưởng Pháp and Đầu Sư is called the Cung Đạo (seance spot). This is where high-ranking dignitaries communicated with the divine realm in the past. Standing here and looking straight up at the ceiling of the Holy Temple, you will see the symbols of these spiritualistic tools.



Đại Ngọc Cơ (Great Jade Planchette)

## SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS

First, there is an oval radiating rays of light and inside are several embossed shapes. There have been no official documents from the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council that clearly explain these images, so I have done my own research by collecting information from various sources, including interviews with older believers, to get the following explanations.

In the middle is the Thiên Nhãn (Divine Eye) symbolizing the Supreme Being of this universe, whom Cao Đài followers call Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát, Đức Chí Tôn, Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế, Đại Từ Phụ (Cao Đài Immortal Great Bodhisattva Mahasattva, Supreme Being, Jade Emperor, Great Compassionate Father) or simply Teacher.

Below the Divine Eye is an image of an elderly Asian man, who looks like a Taoist Immortal, with a long beard on the background of a globe. I found various explanations about this image, such as God, Hồng Quân Lão Tổ (Hongjun Laozu), Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư and the symbol of humanity.

Now, please apply a little reasoning to learn more about it. First of all, let's confirm the theme of this relief. Obviously, this relief is about the tools humans use to communicate with the other worlds, which Cao Đài believers call the eternal spiritual realm. Hence, the ideas that go beyond this topic will be eliminated.

To begin with, if the bust is said to be God, then there is already the Divine Eye symbol, which is unreasonable! Furthermore, Caodaism teaches that God has no form. If it is said to be Hongjun Laozu, the supreme God in Taoism, who appeared first after the formation of the universe, then this description is equivalent to that of God, which is also unreasonable.

If it is considered to be His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm, then there are no Caodaist documents mentioning this. Only the female author Nguyễn Thủy said that His Holiness Hộ Pháp told Tá Lý Bùi Ái Thoại to create the bust according to the image of His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm. But why? Dear readers, please read the explanation in the astral projection part of this article.

In the end, there is only one weak hypothesis left, but consistent with the theme, that this bust represents humanity. Humanity uses the tools in the picture to communicate with God. This is

temporarily consistent with the theme of the relief until there is an official explanatory document from the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council.



Two mediums using the Đại Ngọc Cơ

The remaining objects are definitely tools for spiritualistic communications and are considered in turn from top to bottom as follows:

- **Đại Ngọc Cơ:** (Great Jade Planchette) First of all, above the Divine Eye is a very typical tool of Caodaism called Đại Ngọc Cơ. This is a woven bamboo basket. On its mouth a mulberry bar is placed across the center. The wooden stick extends outward, whose end is carved into the shape of a bird's head. This is the pen for writing.



When in use, two people lift the basket with its mouth facing down. Then the attendants pray for communication. When a spiritual communication is established, the bird's head will write on the table, or sometimes on paper. Since the slow communications such as table-turning or Ouija Board sometimes take all night for a message, divine beings taught Cao Đài disciples to make Đại Ngọc Cơ to faster receive more information. Currently, the Đại Ngọc Cơ is kept at the house for the Female Đầu Sư in the Tây Ninh Holy See.

- **Xin xăm:** (Chi chi sticks or fortune sticks) On the left side of the Divine Eye is an embossed image of a tube and a pair of yin and yang blocks (Jiaobei or moon blocks). The former is usually a cylindrical bamboo tube about 0.15m high. The sticks in the tube, each of which has a sequential number, are also made of bamboo.

If people want to ask a divine being something, they first kneel in front of the altar, raise the tube up to their eyebrows and silently think of their question. Then they shake the tube in a prescribed way. Usually after a few minutes a stick will fall out of the tube.

Now people will ask whether the number on the stick is granted by the divine being by dropping the yin and yang blocks. They are two pieces of wood in the shape of a bean split in half that fit in the palm of a person's hand. People also raise them across their eyebrows to pray then drop them to the

floor. If the two pieces are opposite, (one face down, one face up), the number is approved.



### Tiểu Ngọc Cơ (Little Jade Planchette or Ouija Board)

Finally, people get the answer, usually a short poem with the same number as that on the stick. The short poem tells about a Chinese classic story and a comment below. People relate this story to themselves and guess the answer.

Anyway, this practice is common at temples and Buddhist pagodas across Vietnam. Before 1975, it used to be performed at the Buddha Mother Temple in the Tây Ninh Holy See. After

1975, this practice was considered superstitious and banned by the Communist government. However, in Saigon, it is still allowed at the Tomb of Tả Quân Lê Văn Duyệt (Lăng Ông Bà Chiểu) and recently, according to the Internet, Vạn Phật Pagoda in District 5 has just had a Chi chi stick machine imported from Taiwan.

- **Huyền Bút:** (Miraculous Pen) Between the Chi chi sticks and the border of the oval is a pen placed on a stack of paper. This is another way to obtain divine messages called Huyền Bút.

According to *Treatise on Table-tipping & Ouija Board* by Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Hồng (2005), in this communication, no mediums are needed, but a pen is hung under a bamboo branch so that the tip of the pen touch a piece of paper. After praying, the pen itself moves and creates words on the paper. In the above-mentioned relief, the stack of papers has the following verses in Chinese:

I try writing a divine poem in an earthly style,  
So I continue to maintain what God assigned.  
To change the world...

The full text of the poem was delivered by His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch, the Giáo Tông of Cao Đài, in the seance at Báo Ân Từ, October 15, Year of the Buffalo (November 17, 1937) as follows:

I try writing a divine poem in an earthly style,

So I continue to maintain what God assigned.  
 I preach the holy scriptures to change the world.  
 I use the magic pen to eliminate evil spirits.  
 Look! Phoenix is singing on Kỳ mountain  
 And the country of Lỗ has transformed into a unicorn.  
 I would try to govern Vietnam  
 To give the people happiness.



shutterstock.com · 1022436175

Xin xǎm (Chi chi sticks)

- **Chấp Bút:** (Automatic writing) Below the Huyền Bút is an image of a hand holding an ink brush, writing a few Chinese verses on a surface:

The divine book has been finished,  
 Appointing the time to establish Caodaism.  
 Be eager and strong to join...

The full poem was given by the Supreme Being to Mr. Nguyễn Văn Ký, whose name is the first word of the poem, in a seance on October 29, Year of the Tiger (December 3, 1926), as follows:

The divine book has been finished,  
Appointing the time to establish Caodaism.  
Be eager and strong to join it  
And try to practice until you succeed.

Chấp bút is the spiritualistic communication for high-ranking dignitaries in Caodaism. According to Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Hồng in *Treatise on Table-tipping & Ouija Board* (2005), only a few early disciples were divinely allowed to perform this, such as His Holiness Acting Giáo Tông, His Holiness Hộ Pháp, His Holiness Thượng Phẩm, Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Hiền Pháp Trương Hữu Đức, Khai Đạo Phạm Tấn Đãi and Chánh Phối Sư Thái Thơ Thanh. Later, according to the book *The Esoteric Practice* by Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung (1979), Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới (the ex stenographer of His Holiness Hộ Pháp) was also taught how to perform by Bát Nương.

In this way, the user takes a stack of paper, numbers each piece and places it right in front of him. Then he kneels in front of the altar, holds a pen (any type) with his dominant hand, raises it to his eyebrows and prays. If divinely allowed, his hand will go numb and automatically lower to write on the paper.

At this time, the writer falls into a state of half consciousness. When he finishes writing on one side of the paper, the other hand will automatically turn the paper over to continue writing. That's why the pages must be numbered first so that they can be put together into a text later.



A pair of Yin Yang blocks (Moon blocks)

- **Tiểu Ngọc Cơ:** (Little Jade Planchette) Right below the yin and yang blocks is a Latin alphabet board. This is a very popular means of spiritualism in Western countries. People use a small piece of wood shaped like a heart and a roller ball can be installed at the bottom to make it easier to move. That's the planchette, which is placed on an alphabet board.

During a seance, two people need to place their index fingers or hands on the planchette and pray. When a soul enters, the planchette will move in a circle (usually counterclockwise if in Vietnam). Whichever letter the point of the heart points to will be written down to combine into text. It is also used in Cao Đài and called Tiểu Ngọc Cơ.

- **Bói Dịch:** (I Ching Divination) To the right of the Divine Eye is a small plate above a book tied with a string and inscribed with the words Tứ Kinh (the Fourth Classic). This is a traditional Chinese way of spiritualism. Among the Five Confucian Classics, the fourth one is the I Ching, which explains the ancient Chinese concept of changes in the universe.

Working this way, people toss a few coins or dice on a plate when they want to ask a divine being something. From there a number is obtained. This number indicates one of the 64 hexagrams recorded in the I Ching and the answer can be deduced. In Vietnam this method is similar to fortune sticks or Kiền fortune telling.

- **Huyền Cơ:** (Miraculous Planchette) Across from the plate is an image of an object that looks like two boards or a box with a lid. This is a very difficult object to identify, so I have to speculate about it. It cannot be a pair of boards because I have never seen or heard of anything like that being used for spiritualistic communications. If it is a box with a lid, it is similar to a method called Huyền Cơ.



The three-legged table in the early seances

According to Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Hồng in the *Treatise on Table-Tipping & Ouija Board* (2005), this method does not require a medium to hold a pen. A piece of blank paper is put in a desk drawer or an envelope after praying. Not long after, the piece of paper is taken out and now there is writing on it. Hopefully, this speculation is reasonable. If



not, we will have to wait until there are enough Twelve Cao Đài Academicians to decide. Anyway, on the surface of this Huyền Cơ are also the following Chinese characters:

For all eternity, I have been in control.  
Please practice religion to enjoy my grace.  
Miraculous teachings are spread everywhere...

This is the quatrain given by the Supreme Being during the seance on Christmas Eve 1925. The original text is as follows:

For all eternity, I have been in control.  
Enthusiastically practice religion to enjoy my grace.  
Spreading my miraculous doctrine everywhere,  
You'll win everlasting fame.

- **Xây bàn (also Sai bàn):** (Table-turning, table-tipping, table-tapping or table-tilting). Right below this Huyền Cơ, there is a three-legged table symbolizing the method of table-tapping. This table is designed so that one leg is shorter than the others. Therefore, it is bumpy and can tap on the floor to make noise.

In a communication with the supernatural world, an unlimited number of people will sit around the table, placing their hands on it and praying together. They sometimes chant a poem asking for contact with the spiritual realm. When a soul joins, the table moves and taps its feet on the floor.

According to Vietnamese traditions, tapping one beat is to say the letter A, two beats is Ă, three Ẫ, etc. Just like that, the letters will combine into words and then an essay or poem. Among the first disciples, Messrs Cao Quỳnh Cư, Cao Hoài Sang and Phạm Công Tắc used this method to contact the Heaven.

Currently, a four-legged table is kept in the Female Đầu Sư's House in Tây Ninh Holy See and a three-legged table in Thảo Xá Hiền Cung. In the past, the former was used to get divine messages at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house and the latter at Mr. Cao Hoài Sang's house.



The four-legged table

- **Sóng âm:** (Sound waves). On the right side of the three-legged table close to the border, is a human ear. This is a symbol for communication by sound waves, meaning to hear some gods speak directly. However, only those who are authorized to communicate can hear it. Other people will not hear anything even if they are in the same place.

For Christians, this phenomenon is not strange. Our Lady has contacted and talked to lots of believers in Fatima, La Vang, Mexico, etc. Currently, Our Lady is talking to many visionaries (i.e. people who see Her), most notably Mrs. Mirjana in Medjugorje village in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This phenomenon can now be easily viewed via YouTube.

- **Xuất Chơn Thần:** (Astral projection or astral journey). Now, please return to the statue of the His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm. As stated in the introduction, I interpret this image as humanity because the theme of the painting is "Humanity and ways to communicate with the spiritual world".

However, according to the explanation of female author Nguyễn Thuỷ, His Holiness Hộ Pháp told Tá Lý Bùi Ái Thoại to take His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm as a model. Therefore, I boldly speculate that is the symbol of the most advanced way of communication in Cao Đài: astral projection.

The reason is because, first, this is also a way of communication of Cao Đài, but not mentioned in this relief

yet. Second, because in the divine messages teaching against drinking alcohol in the Year of the Dragon (1928), there is a passage: *"Children, I say that the perispirit is your second body, which is your temperament (le sperme évaporé). It covers your body like a mold. Its heart is the brain and its entrance and exit are the fontanelle. It's traditionally called Vi Hô, where the Dharma Protector always stands, protecting your soul. If you succeed in your esoteric practice, it will unite with the Khi, then go through and unite with the perispirit for you to become a Saint"*. Consequently, the image of a human head is meant to symbolize this way of communication because the perispirit emerges from your fontanelle at the top of the head.



The bas-relief on the ceiling of the Holy Temple

Third, the separation of the perispirit is often the result of the esoteric practice in Cao Đài Tịnh Thất (Meditation Houses). According to the Caodaist Canonical Codes, His

Holiness Thượng Phẩm presides over all the three Meditation Houses.

Furthermore, in the *Esoteric Practice* (1979), after the practitioner is able to release his perispirit, Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung says: "*As for where you want to go and whom you meet, you must ask the Thượng Phẩm. If allowing, He will use the Long Tu Phiến (the Dragon's Beard Fan) to send your perispirit there*". Obviously, His Holiness Thượng Phẩm is very important in this way of communication. This explains why His Holiness Hộ Pháp had the statue of Thượng Phẩm carved to symbolize the astral projection.

In astral journey, people directly contact the spiritual realm by thinking. There have been no official documents of the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council that clearly mentions this method. The Caodaist Canonical Codes only record that the believers who have practiced vegetarianism ten days a month and above will be admitted to Tịnh Thất and shown how to practice Tam Bửu (Esoteric Practice).

To learn more about Tịnh Luyện, please read *The Esoteric Practice of Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung* by Từ Huệ on the internet. For now, this is the most comprehensible document. In my opinion, in a few hundred years, when the the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council convene enough Twelve Cao Đài Academicians, all relevant documents will be considered for the most suitable general esoteric program.



The statue of His Holiness Thượng Phẩm

## MEDIUMS

Regardless of the method, the most important factor is still the performers. In Cao Đài, the early disciples who can perform the

above communication methods are often called mediums (psychics). In particular, only certain disciples called Ngự Mã Quân can receive God's teachings. At the beginning of Caodaism, God appointed seven pairs of mediums:

1. Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc.
2. Cao Hoài Sang and Cao Quỳnh Diêu.
3. Trương Hữu Đức and Nguyễn Trung Hậu.
4. Trần Duy Nghĩa and Trương Văn Tràng.
5. Ca Minh Chương and Phạm Văn Tươi.
6. Phạm Tấn Đãi and Nguyễn Thiêng Kim.
7. Huỳnh Văn Mai and Võ Văn Nguyên.

These gentlemen brought Đại Ngọc Cơ to lots of seances in Vietnam so that the divine beings could preach God's words and admit followers. Later, since the spiritualistic communications were so abused, there was a general ban on seances among believers. The Tây Ninh Caodaist Sacerdotal Council in particular still had seances until 1975. After that, the government banned this activity.

### CLASSIFICATION OF MESSAGES

According to Cao Đài divine messages, the above-mentioned ways of spiritualistic communication often create essays or poems which are classified into Tiên Cơ, Tà Cơ and Nhơn Cơ (Divine, Evil and Human Messages). The boundary among those types is very ambiguous, so they are extremely difficult to be determined. In general, it is very hard to find a psychic and even harder to find a valuable divine message.

1. Tiên Cơ (divine message)

When you receive good writings, poems or profound teachings, these messages are considered to be of Tiên Cơ origin.

2. Tà Cơ (evil message)

When the message contains bad intentions or unethical words that incite people to dispute, that is the result of Tà Cơ.

3. Nhơn Cơ (human message)

When the medium himself controls the tool to speak his own thoughts without any divine beings, that is Nhơn Cơ. This often happens to people who crave fame or title. Usually, if you are fond of a position, it will be as desired.

## CONCLUSION

Since it is extremely difficult to distinguish between those sorts of messages, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council does not encourage followers to perform those above methods. Believers who want to learn the doctrine should, first of all, read the Collection of Divine Messages I and II. This is an important official document recording the divine messages during the initiation period of Cao Đài. Currently, this book is officially published by the Tây Ninh Caodaist Sacerdotal Council.

Từ Chơn

Saigon, April 12, 2007

Edited and supplemented on December 10, 2020

Translated on March 31, 2024





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE TWO POEMS OF PROPHECY BY HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP .....	4
2. THE PHENOMENON OF ASTRAL PROJECTION IN CAODAIISM MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE .....	16
3. CAO THƯỢNG PHẨM IN CAO ĐÀI ESOTERIC PRACTICE.....	36
4. WHAT CAO ĐÀI BELIEVERS NEED FOR THE JOURNEY IN HEAVY SEAS .....	51
5. THE HIDDEN MEANING OF HỘ PHÁP'S OPENING THE DOOR TO THE LAND OF BLISS .....	78
6. THE POWER OF PRAYERS .....	110
7. AVALOKITESVARA IN CAO ĐÀI .....	124
8. EASTERN ZEN WESTERN ZEN .....	139
9. SPIRITUALISTIC COMMUNICATIONS IN CAO ĐÀI .....	156