

***COLLECTION OF  
TÙCHƠN'S  
ARTICLES ON  
CAO ĐÀI  
PHILOSOPHY***

***VOLUME IV***



## 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

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# PUBLICLY SEEN ASCENSIONS



**TÙ' CHON**

## *Starting*

Someone honestly tells me that lots of Caodaist believers would be ready and willing to leave their families and wholeheartedly practice Caodaism if God allowed them to win the lottery so that they could feed their families. He even deduces everyone would be absolutely religious and there would be no evil in the world at all if God's miracles were seen publicly. It sounds like a familiar idea, doesn't it ? You yourself might have the same idea sometimes, right ? However, if completely pondered, the question still is whether everyone would be completely moral persons after witnessing God's miracles or whether there would be no more evil. That is just like the argument that there would be no bribery or corruption if all civil servants were hugely paid. Obviously, you never have a game changer for those problems !

When it comes to religion, there are naturally two major trends. First, educated people who are interested in philosophy. There are not many of them and they easily become atheists. They tend to rely on another "God" called objective science. Second, commoners who pay much attention to miracles. As the majority of the population, they are God-fearing people, even religious fanatics sometimes. They absolutely loyal to their religions, most of which worship amazing, supernatural miracles usually said to be made by supernatural beings. For instance, Jesus Christ healed the sick, three children in Fatima saw apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary back in 1917, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, God taught Caodaists through Ouija Boards and most recently the phenomenon of Our Lady of

Medjugorje in Bosnia and Hercegovina, which can be seen on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5lZFesKjyQ>



### Medjugorje, where Our Lady was seen

In Caodaism, in addition to the publicly known Ouija Board and Automatic Writing, lots of miracles have been told everywhere, but they have not been officially recognized. Vatican's process for canonization, however, is very complicated in order to avoid superstitious phenomena. The sighting of Our Lady in Fatima,

Portugal was first reported on 13/5/1917, but not until 1930 did Vatican officially recognize it.

Presently, Caodaism has no agencies to take care of such miracles, so the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council only indirectly recognizes the descent to earth of heavenly beings by publishing *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển 1&2* (the Collection of Divine Messages 1&2), which contains the teachings from Ouija board sessions. Lots of divine messages have not been permitted to be published. In the future, when there are enough positions in the Caodaist Academy, there might be official decisions to recognize all of the divine messages as well as the miracles.

All of the divine messages (published and unpublished) can be read at:

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/pdf/pdf2/TNST-TB.pdf>

### *From a sermon*

Presently, as prophesied before, various local and overseas groups calling themselves Caodaism mushroom for different purposes. They unrepentantly ignore God's instructions that division among adherents is a major sin. Ironically, they urge everyone to be cautious about falling into the trap of the Devil, saying their miracles are uniquely holy or their divine messages are authentic. Also, they even say they are the ones who are God's real disciples.



### The statues of Good and Evil

In the beginning of Caodaism, God prophesied a huge schism within the community where disciples would criticize each other, even take their religious brothers to court, but it was historically unavoidable. Thus, I now understand why the heavenly beings had the statues of Ông Thiện Ông Ác (Good and Evil) put on both sides of the door of the Tây Ninh Temple. I personally think this is the metaphor that says “*Resolve the matter of right and wrong before entering the Bạch Ngọc Kinh (Heaven)*” or “*These statues are the key to Heaven*”. Someone



will hastily says *“That’s easy. I would resolve the matter by saying I’m always right”*. Of course, that answer will let him nowhere.

While waiting for the official decision about which miracles are authentic by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council, what you Caodaist believers have to do is to rely upon the officially recognized Divine Messages or the Senior Dignitaries’ sermons. Now please read an extract from Đức Hộ Pháp’ sermon on the Divine Path to Eternal Life, in Tây Ninh Temple, on 9/2/1949.

*“It is usually said that you will be able to make lots of miracles after enlightenment. For example, you can “Bạch nhật chi thăng”<sup>1</sup>. No, it’s untrue ! That’s only something to cheat you ! If that had been true, Đức Tam Tạng<sup>2</sup> wouldn’t have left his corpse in the river. We can become spiritually enlightened, not physically. Our physical bodies which are still animals cannot become enlightened. They must follow the physical law, that is they are born, grow up, become old and die. Only our second bodies (usually called spiritual bodies) become enlightened in the Eternal Life.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Rise to Heaven in front of everyone.*

<sup>2</sup> Xuanzang (Chinese: 玄奘) (6 April 602 – 5 February 664), a 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler, and translator, who is known for his journey to India in 629–645 CE to bring over Buddhist scriptures to China. Wikipedia 2023.

*Therefore, in Ngọc Hư Cung<sup>3</sup> which rules the universe, all souls follow the spiritual laws. The laws are unlike those of the earthly world. That is why the governmental agencies of the universe are different from those on earth though their politics are closely related to each other. The laws on earth cannot be imposed on your souls or vice versa”.*



**His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc on the Seven-Headed Serpent Throne**

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<sup>3</sup> The Huge Gem House - (roughly translated). The Cao daist term for Heaven.

## *Etymology*

In the above extract, the Chinese Vietnamese phrase “Bạch Nhật Chi Thăng” may somehow trouble contemporary readers, even Vietnamese ones. I have searched Chinese Vietnamese dictionaries and found these: Bạch Nhật - during daytime, i.e. seen by lots of people. Chi Thăng - rising to Heaven. Consequently, the translation should be “Publicly seen ascension”. I keep wondering, however, where the phrase come from, who coins it and what it really means.

I have looked it up online and asked my friends, but not until recently did I find it. One day, I happened to find a book online that contains the answer. It was *Tính Mệnh Khuê Chỉ*, translator Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ, published by Nhân Tử Văn in 2002, California, USA. The translator used to be a Major, military doctor in the Southern Vietnamese Army. In 1982 he settled in the US and passed away in 2014. The book is available in the US, Vietnam and at this address:

<https://nhantu.net/TonGiao/TMKC/DanNhap.htm>

Before showing the answer I found in the book, I would like to give a brief rundown on some essential details. According to Chinese legend, Đức Lão Tử<sup>4</sup>, the founder of Taoism, served as the royal archivist for the Zhou court. As an enlightened being,

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<sup>4</sup> Laozi (/ˈlɑːʊdʒə/, Chinese: 老子), a semi-legendary ancient Chinese Taoist philosopher, credited with writing the *Tao Te Ching*. He is considered the founder of Taoism. Wikipedia 2023.

he felt bored with the moral decay of life, so he rode a blue water buffalo to the West. At the western gate of the kingdom, the guard Doãn Hi<sup>5</sup> stopped and begged him for instruction on religious practice. The guard's great enthusiasm won at last, so Đức Lão Tử stayed, wrote *Đạo Đức Kinh*<sup>6</sup>, gave it to Doãn Hi, then went into the desert and disappeared.

Thanks to the book, Doãn Hi practiced religion and become successfully enlightened. He then taught lots of disciples, who wrote how to practice Taoism in “*Tĩnh Mệnh Khuê Chi*”. The book was printed in 1670 and now translated into Vietnamese by Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ.

In chapter 51 of the book, there is a drawing named as Phi Thăng Đồ<sup>7</sup>, in which many people are admiringly watching a man riding a crane in a cloud. Chapter 52 is Phi Thăng Thuyết<sup>8</sup> saying that the ones who practice Taoism successfully can:

1. 飛升沖舉 .rise to Heaven with their families
2. 坐化尸解 die while sitting still
3. 投胎奪舍 enter a different corpse

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<sup>5</sup> Yinxi.

<sup>6</sup> The Tao Te Ching (UK: /ˌtɑʊ tiː ˈtʃɪŋ/, US: /ˌdɑʊ deɪ ˈdʒɪŋ/) a Chinese classic text and foundational work of Taoism. Wikipedia 2023

<sup>7</sup> the drawing of people rising to Heaven.

<sup>8</sup> talking about how to fly up to Heaven.



### Chapter 51 - Ascension Image in “*Tính Mệnh Khuê Chi*”

As for how to ascend, the book reports those enlightened people can ride a dragon, a cloud, a fish, a bird, a crane or a gust of wind. They even fly up together with their family, their house and possessions. Another book titled “*Khảo Liệt Tiên Phổ Truyện*” says more than 10,000 Taoists became Immortals and 8,000 flew to Heaven with their family.

Please remember translator Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ adds “*I find the ascensions told in this book greatly bizarre, not to say*

*absolutely unbelievable. No one has ever seen such weird phenomena before. They should not be taken seriously.”*

Personally, I agree with him 100%. Anyway, I have found where the phrase comes from and what it really means. Consequently, Đức Hộ Pháp means it is rumored that a successful Taoist can rise to Heaven in front of a lot of people.

### ***Cao Đài philosophy***

Let's reread the above extract from the sermons on the Divine Path to Eternal Life. The view here clearly states the authenticity of Cao Đài philosophy. In the East, legend has it that enlightened beings can make lots of miracles, for example turning into another person, touching to heal the sick, knowing what other people are thinking, prophesying the future, even taking off like an airplane, etc.

Đức Hộ Pháp openly refuses to accept those legends, calling them fake dharma or cheats. He also says all physical bodies must follow the biological laws on earth. Enlightened beings' bodies must too. Only their spirits gain success in Heaven. He affirms earthly and heavenly laws are not interchangeable.

In fact, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council sent Notice 67 to all Caodaists on 31/12/1930, saying that:

*“...This Giáo Hữu Chính (or Ngọc Chính Thanh) enchanted other adherents, making them vow loyalty, writing them funny*

*amulets, pretending to train them to fly and practicing lots of eccentric work.*

*Also, this Ngô Đức Nhuận, 41 years old, from Mỹ Tho, who had joined the Minh Sư<sup>9</sup>, but now converted to Caodaism, enticed other Caodaist believers into eating only vegetables and fruits instead of rice. He told them to do superstitious things like having tattoos on their faces or noses.*

*The Caodaist Sacerdotal Council planes to expel these two persons together with their followers. Only when they repent of what they have done will the Sacerdotal Council reconsider them for their membership”.*

*“...The noble purpose of the true Caodaism is to teach people to worship spiritual beings, to live a moral life and to gradually become saintly persons...”*

Obviously, the result of practicing Caodaism is to achieve morality, not to gain miraculous powers.

### ***Fantasy and reality***

Somebody may wonder who believe in practicing religion with amulets and miracles in the 21st century. Unluckily, lots of people, even the highly educated, do ! Once, I was asked to meet Master John Doe, who was said to be able to make me leave my

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<sup>9</sup> A division of Buddhism in China, which was spread to Vietnam.

physical body right away. That way I could go to Heaven without practicing vegetarianism and meditation for a long time. I have never read any Caodaist Divine Messages that tell the same story, so I found a polite way to refuse it.

People still are so thirsty for miracles that they do lots of eccentric things. I myself witnessed one in 2021. While reaching the Báo Ân Từ<sup>10</sup>, I saw five Caodaists or so kneeling in front of the temple. Being afraid of the security guards, they hurriedly took out a tiny boat made out of cardboard, put it on the ground, kowtowed to it and cried bitterly. I overheard them saying: *“Mother! Nobody wants to take the Bát Nhã boat<sup>11</sup> anymore”*. Since childhood I have witnessed similar strange events, for example, some guys sneaked into the temple and sat on the seven thrones. For me, those guys did not practice Caodaism. They are nuts !

What about the fact that some divine beings did prescribe the sick effective medicine via Ouija board, correctly prophesy some events or make some unexplainable things ? Aren't they miracles ? I do not reject those because I myself have witnessed some. In my experience, miracles are really granted to the chosen, not everyone. Only the chosen ones can experience them, but cannot show to others.

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<sup>10</sup> The Gratitude Temple, near Caodai Temple in Tây Ninh, Việt Nam, which is temporarily used to worship Phật Mẫu (God the Mother). The Main Temple for Phật Mẫu will be built in the future.

<sup>11</sup> Prajna boat - the boat of Wisdom, a Buddhist metaphor for the ultimate human wisdom.



Anyway, you cannot find miracles; they themselves will find the way to you. Usually, if officially recognized by an established congregation, they are more credible.

To prove what Đức Hộ Pháp said, I would tell a true-to-life story. This priest John Doe prayed to Buddha for a sight of miracle so that he would practice Buddhism more enthusiastically. Then he practiced meditation and put one of his hands into the flame of a kerosene lamp, hoping the Buddha would prevent the flame from burning it. Consequently, he was rushed to the hospital and had that hand amputated ! Though his brave is respectable, he underestimated the widely known rule in the world: flesh is burnt in a fire. Additionally, he forgot another important thing: no Buddhist scriptures say you will be safe in such situations.

*End*

Consequently, I can sum up what I have had so far. First, as a Caodaist, I should try to work for the Caodaist community, observe the Caodaist moral laws and write papers to spread its philosophy without having any disputes with anyone, making any criticism, bringing someone to court or establishing a sect. If I were lucky enough to witness a miracle, I would never tell anyone about it because I do not need fame or praise.

Second, I will not immediately believe if someone shows off some miracle. It is necessary to examine to see if it is dark magic. My worldly thoughts do not allow me to know whether it is an enlightened person or a cheater. Beside, His Holiness Hộ

Pháp says there are no publicly seen ascensions. Joining Caodaism means you secretly try to change yourself for the better for your life without hoping for any miracles, noble titles, fame, or even enlightenment. Although such idea can offend some people, I think that exactly is religious practice.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn July 11 2022

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WESTERN PRAGMATISM  
AND  
THE LETTER KHÍ  
AT THE CAO ĐÀI HOLY  
TEMPLE



Từ Chơn

## An old story

I would like to begin this article with an old story, told according to the memory of Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới, religious name Từ Huệ, a former stenographer of Tây Ninh Holy See. In 1950, when His Holiness Hộ Pháp went to Hà Nội to preach Caodaism, after a lecture at a university, a priest wrote down three questions for a student to ask His Holiness Hộ Pháp:

- Dear sir, you said that the Supreme Being, that is, God, opened the Cao Đài Religion. So God is the Supreme Patriarch of Cao Đài. Can you show me the Supreme Being?
- Practicing Caodaism turns one to what "Divine Being"?
- If you practice Caodaism to become a "God", what is the method of practice? If we also preach love, compassion and charity and teach living beings to do good, avoid evil, cultivate the mind and nurture nature, previous religions have been doing it for more than 2,000 years.

Faced with three questions with the intention of challenging at such a high level, His Holiness Hộ Pháp answered:

*"You asked three questions which is a bit too much. Say, to answer just the first question, I need to write a book for you to understand it. We don't have time here, so when you have a chance to come to Saigon, please come to Tây Ninh and visit the Holy Temple. There will be an answer for you because the Holy Temple is the body of the Supreme Being on earth with not only a voice but also the answer to any question."*

That student's name was Nguyễn Bảo Trị, later Lieutenant General of the Republic of Vietnam Army. Around the 1960s, when he was Commander of Tactical Region III, he visited Tây

Ninh Holy Temple to find the answers. The results of the visit were recounted in the book at:

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/TuChon/TS-HT-NguyenVanMoi.pdf>

If you have time, please read it. In this article, I will not repeat that story, but only focus on the point that His Holiness Hộ Pháp taught that the Holy Temple has the answer to any question.

It is true as Cao Đài Divine Messages teach: "...the Bí Pháp<sup>12</sup> must be revealed, no longer hidden". All methods of practice during the third great amnesty period will be kept at the Holy Temple. Anyone, with high or low level of education and spirituality, can find a method that suits them. The problem is whether we learn and practice it thoroughly or not. So, I would like to present next a symbol that every Cao Đài follower knows.

### **The word "KHÍ" in the Holy Temple**

One of the very visible symbols at the Holy Temple is the word KHÍ behind the statue of Hộ Pháp. Some details about the word KHÍ have been described in this article. Please read more if you have time:

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

In this article, I will only summarize a few main points as follows. Although this character is pronounced "qi", it is not the same as the Chinese character 氣. Some people say it is in cursive writing (a quick way of writing Chinese characters).

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<sup>12</sup> Esoteric Practice.

Some people say it is a talisman. Whatever the word is, when placed behind the statue of Hộ Pháp at Hiệp Thiên Đài, it is related to two things.



Firstly, it is related to the human brain or human spirit because Hiệp Thiên Đài represents the Qi (mind), Cửu Trùng Đài represents the Tinh (body) and Bát Quái Đài represents Thần (soul). Second, according to the Sino-Vietnamese dictionary, this word means "air" or "breath", so it is definitely related to those

two things. In short, this symbol refers to the relationship between breathing and human spirit.

This is further confirmed by the excerpt from the document explaining the word KHÍ dated April 1, 1953 by His Holiness Hộ Pháp: "*Saluting the word KHÍ means greeting the entire Tam Qui Thường Bộ Pháp Giới, that is, greeting our lives, not just greeting the Hộ Pháp and Thập Nhị Thời Quân* <sup>13</sup>". Obviously, our breath and mind are "our life".

In short, after bowing to the altar, that is, paying homage to the Supreme Being and the divine beings, all believers must turn around to the statue of Hộ Pháp and the word KHÍ. It is a reminder to believers: an important dharma of Caodaism is symbolized here.

### **Believers' thoughts**

However, that is only the minimum information that believers receive. There are even many people who still don't understand and still think that doing so is paying homage to gentlemen Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Quỳnh Cư and Cao Hoài Sang. What most of us have done for nearly a hundred years is that after the ceremony, the word KHÍ completely disappears from our minds. There are so many things that occupy the brain that no one thinks about breathing and air anymore.

Besides being too busy with daily life, there is another thing worth paying attention to. That's probably because we are used to living in Asian culture, where putting questions to superiors

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<sup>13</sup> the Ten Zodiac Deities, the 12 senior dignitaries of the Caodaist Judicial Body.



such as grandparents, parents, teachers, and officials is considered disrespectful. Therefore, in front of religious symbols, we only show respect and do not dare to ask any questions. I remember an American friend, who was my colleague, said: *“Teaching English in Vietnam is very easy. No need to prepare the lessons”*. When asked why, he said: *“Vietnamese students don't ask back. They absolutely respect what you say. That's it”*. How sorry for all Vietnamese students, but I have to agree with my American colleague because for over a thousand years under Chinese rule, Vietnamese people were only taught to memorize as much as possible, not to creatively invent anything new. Although it sounds sad, now we probably understand why Westerners are thousands of times more civilized than us. They always ask questions to understand and think of ways to get things done, not easily bowing their heads to listen for fear of being rude.

### **Western pragmatism**

In general, among us Vietnamese, most still use the number of times we worship, chant sutras or do charity work to calculate the results of a person's practice. A monk having vegetarian meals and chanting sutras for several decades is definitely "about to become a Buddha" better than a person who has just come to the temple to sweep Bodhi leaves for some days. Rarely do we think deeply to achieve the state that the ancients called enlightenment. But what is deep thinking? Basically, ask many related questions and then find ways to answer them. Look at Western people, when they encounter difficulties, they immediately think of something and apply it to see what the

results are. If this method doesn't work, they immediately change to another. After achieving results, they still look for ways to improve and are not satisfied to stop.

The difference between the West and the East can be obviously recognized everywhere. For example, we Vietnamese are taught by the Cao Đài that the word KHÍ is important, but we only respectfully bow to it and that's it. In an opposite manner, when the COVID-19 epidemic broke out, Westerners immediately saw the core of the problem: the human respiratory system was attacked and left behind consequences. In addition to creating vaccines, they immediately researched and discovered that the way ancient Indians and Chinese people breathed was useful, not simply a religious ritual. Most recently, they discovered that breathing is related to the brain. The COVID-19 epidemic has led them closer to the meaning of the word KHÍ placed behind the statue of Hộ Pháp than us Caodaists.



## Brain activities can change under the influence of breathing.

So, by the way, I would like to introduce the Vietnamese translation of an article on the Neuroscience website by Erik Driscoll. This is a website specializing in research on human nerves and cognition. This site is headquartered in Texas, USA, but does not receive sponsorship from any government or company. That helps make the scientific research posted on this site objective and trustworthy. The original can be found at this address:

<https://neurosciencenews.com/breathing-brain-21796/>

### **How does breathing affect the brain?**

*“Breathe in...Breathe out...” “Breathe deeply and count to ten.”* We've probably heard people tell us to do this to stay calm in stressful situations. Now Professor Micah Allen of the Clinical Department of Aarhus University (Denmark) has gone even further in understanding how breathing affects the human brain. The professor and his colleagues took the results of more than a dozen studies on rodents, monkeys, or human brain scans to create a computer model to explain how breathing affects thinking. Professor Micah Allen explains: In many behaviors of different animals, brain rhythms are closely related to breathing. We are more responsive to the outside world when we inhale and less responsive when we exhale. People have applied this to sports that require precision, for example, professional shooters are trained to pull the trigger at the end of their exhalation. Research shows that we breathe not just to live. The brain and breathing are much more closely related, influencing our

emotions, attention, and how we deal with things. Professor Allen's model shows that there is a mechanism in the brain that links breathing to everything.



Aarhus University (Denmark)

### **Respiration can impact mental health**

Understanding how breathing affects the brain, and more specifically, how it affects mood, thinking, and behavior is an important goal in treating and preventing mental illnesses. From the fact that shortness of breath is linked to a risk of mood disorders such as anxiety and depression, we know that respiratory disease is linked to mental illness.

Professor Micah Allen explains that the research shows there is a possibility that in the future it may be possible to treat mental

disorders by reorganizing brain and breathing rhythms instead of treating individual parts as currently done. Stabilizing the mind through breathing is now traditional methods such as yoga or meditation. New research clarifies the brain's role in this. It has been discovered that there are three ways the brain controls the link between breathing and its own activity. In addition, breathing methods also make the brain more sensitive, meaning nerve cells are more active during a certain period.



Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA)

### **There will be more research**

This research has outlined a new goal. It's a study of people with respiratory illnesses or mental disorders. Professor Micah Allen

and his team have already begun a research project. He said they are carrying out various projects based on this model. Malthe Brændholt, a PhD student, is examining human brain scans to understand how breathing affects emotions and visual perception.

His team also collaborates with the pulmonary team at Aarhus University Hospital. Here people are using experimental equipment to find out whether people with post-Covid syndrome lose the connection between breathing and the brain. Professor Micah Allen added that there will be many more projects coming soon. Photographs of humans and animals will be used to study how breathing affects the brain and how drugs affect it. In the future, we hope to research activities such as stress, sleep, or even swimming in the winter.

### **Intersection**

Perhaps here, we see that the attitudes of Western and Eastern people are very different. Our believers solemnly bow to the letter "KHÍ" and then leave and forget. And Professor Micah Allen is enthusiastically starting to research how breathing and nerves are related. In the future, there will certainly be many useful discoveries and applications for humanity. Particularly Harvard Medical University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA) and the prestigious Johns Hopkins University of Medicine (Baltimore, Maryland, USA) have introduced the belly breathing method to help people with post-COVID-19 symptoms, people with chronic pulmonary congestion, or people with high blood pressure.

Perhaps any family with a recovering COVID-19 patient has been instructed by doctors in this breathing method. Please read more here.

<https://umcclinic.com.vn/tin-tuc/y-hoc-thuong-thuc/cac-bai-tap-tho-tot-cho-nguoi-benh-covid-19>

It is worth noting that these prestigious universities use terms such as deep breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal or belly breathing, among which “belly breathing” is exactly the term Bát Nương Điều Trì Cung<sup>14</sup> taught in *Bí Pháp Luyện Đạo*<sup>15</sup> 37 years earlier. These two breathing methods of medicine and meditation are 99% similar.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 epidemic is another lesson for humanity about the importance of the word KHÍ. Although the situation appears to be calming down, the future remains uncertain. According to WHO (World Health Organization), by the end of 2021 the number of deaths from Covid-19 has been 14.9 million and this number is unlikely to be the last. Mutations still appear regularly and no one knows when they will stop. Let's try to imagine a little. If there is a mutation and the vaccine is no longer effective, what will be the result? So the outstanding question for us ordinary Cao Đài followers is what we should do now

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<sup>14</sup> the Eighth Female Buddha in The Jade Pond Palace.

<sup>15</sup> Caodaist Esoteric Practice.

after we have vaguely understood the meaning of the word KHÍ behind the Hộ Pháp's statue. In my opinion, as an ordinary believer, the following suggestions are worth pondering.

First, we should continue to learn more about religious philosophy because our own abilities are limited but religion is endless. Especially we should learn Western research results to supplement our own shortcomings. Soon the symbols at the Holy Temple will be discovered more and more and then humanity will know more and more about Cao Đài. Only then can we save humanity for the third time according to God's will.

Second, we should apply what we learn as much as possible. For example, the word KHÍ gives us breathing exercises to regulate our minds. So every night, practice abdominal breathing and keep a diary to track our body's changes to gain experience for future generations. If you don't have enough merit to practice Bí Pháp Luyện Đạo Cao Đài<sup>16</sup>, it is still beneficial for your health.

Từ Chơn

Saigon November 22, 2022

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<sup>16</sup> Practice Caodaist Meditation.



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# HOW TO OFFER YOUR THREE TREASURES



**TÙ CHƠN**

## STARTING

Every day, Cao Đài followers chant three bài thài<sup>17</sup>: Offering Flowers, Offering Wine, and Offering Tea after the daily prayers. The poem is a quatrain poem (4 lines, 7 words each), ancient Vietnamese poetry composed according to the poetic rules of the Tang Dynasty in China. The poem is recited word by word with the music of Đảo Ngũ Cung, a traditional Southern Vietnamese folk music genre. If you fellow believers like, you can listen to the Flower Offering Poem here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqTc468Nep8>

Perhaps most believers know that this is one of the important rituals of Cao Đài. Today let us learn more about this ritual called Dâng Tam Bửu<sup>18</sup>. If understanding all the necessary theological meanings, we can practice wholeheartedly, and sincerity combined with faith is the first step in practicing a religion.

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<sup>17</sup> A kind of Vietnamese traditional song.

<sup>18</sup> Offering your three treasures.



A Cao Đài altar at home.

### SOURCE

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (British Encyclopedia), from the very beginning of religious awareness, humans have had sacrifices offered to Divine Beings in rituals. Evidence of sacrifices has been discovered in the ruins of lost cultures around the world. Although researchers do not agree on the reasons why sacrifice is necessary, they find that people often offer what is considered valuable to Divine Beings.

Analyzing the history of religions in the world, people classify sacrifices as follows:

1. Animal or human blood. People sacrifice blood because they believe it is the most valuable source of life force. Without blood, living things will die. To get blood, of course, one must kill a person or an animal. This is the oldest human sacrifice and is currently performed by tribes living far from

civilization. Most modern civilizations view this type of ritual as barbaric. In Vietnam, people can still see traces of this ritual through the Buffalo Stabbing festival of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands such as Ba Na, Ê Đê, Gia Rai...

2. Drinks, vegetables and fruits. Many religions require the use of water, fruit juice or wine as offerings. Today this is the most popular sacrifice.
3. Even a certain God can be used for sacrifice. For example, in the Holy Path (Christianity), Jesus sacrificed his own body to atone for humanity's sins.



Where the Aztecs used humans for sacrifice

### THREE BÀI THÀI<sup>19</sup>

Cao Đài followers also have a sacrificial ritual called Dâng Tam Bửu<sup>20</sup>. Cao Đài Divine Messages teach that each individual has three treasures (three most precious items) to offer to the Supreme Being. These are Tinh (body), Khí (mind) and Thần (soul).

This ritual is performed in two parts. First, offerings are displayed on the altar including: five types of fresh flowers symbolizing the body (Tinh), three cups of white wine for the spirit (Khí), and one cup of tea for the soul (Thần). Second, believers or Đồng Nhi<sup>21</sup> chant the three poems. The author of these three poems is Mr. Bảo Văn Pháp Quân Cao Quỳnh Diêu, whose poem was edited by the Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung<sup>22</sup> in a seance.

#### Dâng bông

*Từ bi giá ngọc rạng môn thiên  
Đệ tử mừng nay hữu huệ duyên  
Năm sắc hoa tươi xin kính lễ  
Cúi mong Thượng Đế rưới ân thiên*

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19 A kind of Vietnamese traditional song.

20 Three Treasures Offering.

21 The children's choir.

22 the Eighth Lady Buddha in the Jade Pond Palace.

## Translation

The Supreme Being's arrival makes our Temple shine brightly.  
 We are happy and lucky  
 To respectfully offer Him five types of flowers  
 May He grant us His grace.

**Dâng rượu**

*Thiên ân huệ chiếu giáng thiên minh  
 Kính lễ trường xuân chúc tửu quyền  
 Lạc hỉng khẩu cung giai miễn lễ  
 Thoát tai bá tánh ngưỡng ân sinh*

## Translation

Dear Supreme Being, please bless our Temple  
 We respectfully offer a cup of precious wine.  
 We happily and sincerely celebrate.  
 Everyone lives in peace thanks to your blessings.

**Dâng trà**

*Mai xuân nguyệt cúc vị trà hương  
 Kính lễ thành tâm hiến bửu tương  
 Ngưỡng vọng từ bi gia tế phước  
 Khai minh đại đạo hộ thanh bường (bình)*

## Translation

A cup of tea fragrant with the scent of apricot blossoms and  
 chrysanthemums.  
 We sincerely pay our respects to the Supreme Being.

We hope you bless us,  
Open the Cao Đài religion and give us peace.

### **THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING**

Nearly a century has passed, many of us believers only check whether the offerings on the altar are enough and whether they are arranged according to the instructions of the dignitaries. After that, we chant the poem together in accordance with the rhythm of the song *Đạo Ngũ Cung*. Then, we are satisfied with ourselves because we have offered the three precious treasures to the Supreme Being. However, if you carefully study the meaning of this ritual, offering *Tam Bửu* is not as simple as that.



**Cao daist followers prepare the flowers to offer.**



First of all, His Holiness Hộ Pháp explained the reason why Tam Bửu must be offered in great detail during the times he preached at the Holy Temple. Please re-read those precious teachings in *Hộ Pháp's Sermons* (06 volumes, recorded by the Shorthand Board of the Holy See and published by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council). You can download it at the following reliable address:

<http://www.caodaism.org/60/tdhp.htm>

In this article, I would like to add my own personal thoughts. Initially, I would like to put two questions as follows:

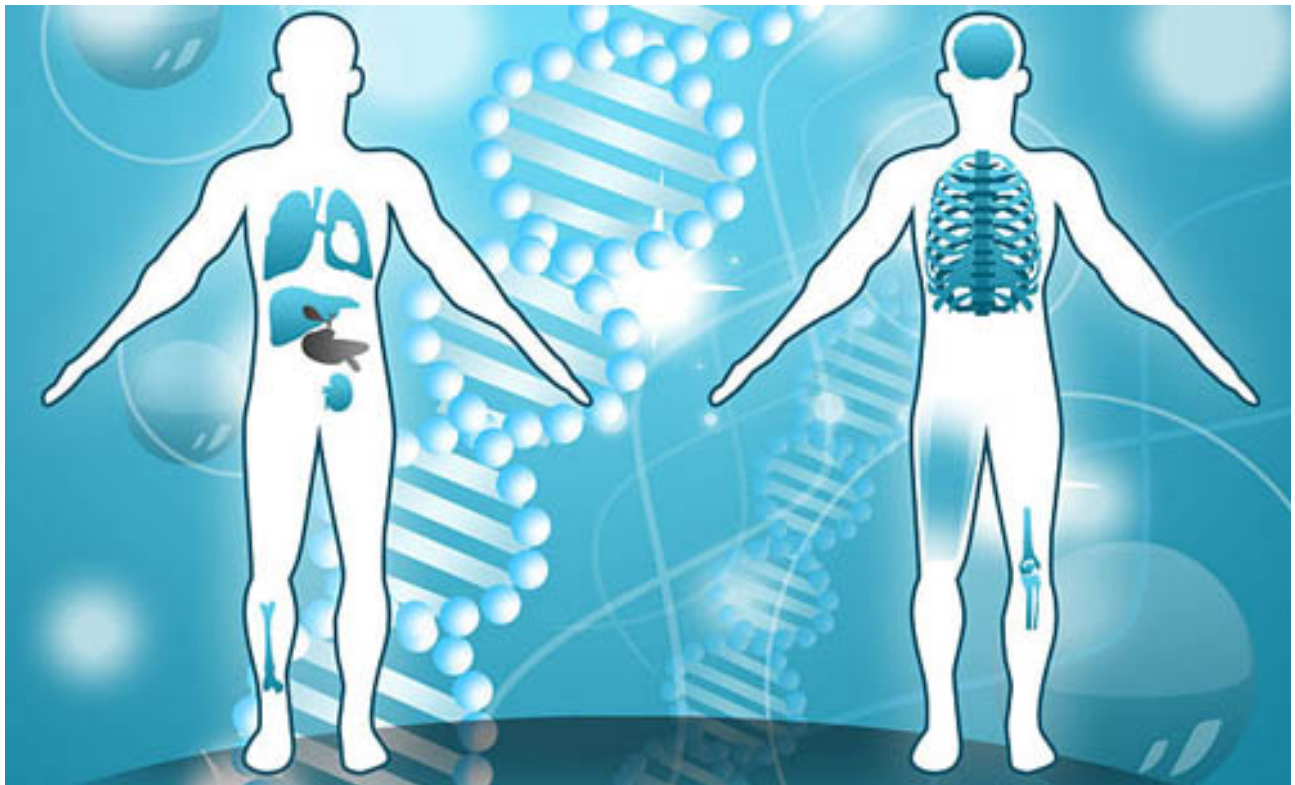
- How should we prepare the offerings to be worthy to offer to the Supreme Being?
- The Supreme Being certainly does not need our Three Treasures because He can give birth to us. So why does the ritual forces us to do this four times a day?

### **Issue 1**

Since ancient times, sacrificial offerings have been chosen very carefully. They should be high quality items to be brought to the altar to demonstrate sincere reverence. Therefore, now we also have to prepare the offerings of Tinh, Khí, and Thần carefully before offering them to the Supreme Being. It is too careless to say that Tam Bửu is naturally precious and purified enough to be offered without preparation. Let me say about each part in more detail.

First of all, the first offering is Tinh. Nowadays, on the Internet, we see a series of definitions of Tinh as this and that in all kinds of ways. This is because the concept of Tam Bửu originates from

Taoism in ancient China. Taoism has now developed into thousands of different sects, each of which offers its own teachings. Sometimes the difference is only in terminology! We Cao Đài followers do not have time to study and compare all those theories. To save time, His Holiness Hộ Pháp and Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung Nữ Phật taught us: Tinh is our physical body. (Hộ Pháp's Sermon, September 1, Year of the Ox - October 22, 1949 & Bí Pháp Luyện Đạo - Từ Huệ 1979).



### Tinh or human physical body

So if you want to offer your body to the Supreme Being, what must you prepare? To answer this question, let's look at the illustration of offerings on the altar: These are five types of fresh flowers, symbolizing the five organs (heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys) in the human body. This is the concept of the Five

Elements in Traditional Chinese Medicine applied to the human body. Fresh flowers represent the most complete stage of plant development when it is ready to pollinate, bear fruit, and produce seeds for life to continue in Heaven and on earth. That means the organs of your body should be at a peak stage and coordinate best for a healthy body. So the first step is to offer this healthy body to the Supreme Being.

If you want to have a healthy body, first of all, it is widely known that you should stay away from debauchery such as drinking, using drugs, etc. Next, you need to learn how to eat and exercise, according to the standards of either the West or the East. Furthermore, the most important thing is to be a vegan for 10 days a month or for life. I think I will be able to boldly chant the poem, offering flowers to the Supreme Being if I can do those things.

Someone may complain: “*I unfortunately suffer from constant illness. How can I have a healthy body to offer to the Supreme Being?*” This is a very pitiful situation that any of us can encounter in life! In this case, I think we should think a little more flexibly. Even though we are sick, we are still "healthiest" in some moments when we feel rather comfortable and calm. That is when we can offer our physical body.

Some people also ask if it is okay to wash before worshipping? Very good, but that's just external cleanliness. If you want the Tinh to be completely pure, you should start with eating and exercising, especially vegetarianism. However, you should practice vegetarianism with enough nutrients so that you will not

become malnourished. If not, the path to the cemetery will be shorter than the path to enlightenment.

Some sisters also ask whether they should perform the ritual while menstruating because they are then not pure enough. Let me answer this with a true story from Cao Đài history. Giáo Sư Hương Hồ<sup>23</sup> did not come to a seance one day. When asked by Bát Nương Nữ Phật, she replied she did not dare to come because she had had her period. Bát Nương Nữ Phật gave her the following poem:

The human mortal body is inevitably impure,  
 But it never conflicts with the soul.  
 Things like yin and yang, male and female, flowers and  
 butterflies follow natural law.  
 They symbolize love and harmony like water and duckweed.  
 The Creator is like an excellent builder,  
 Who gives living beings pretty faces and shapes.  
 He never criticizes any religious rituals.  
 Whether it's pure or not depends on your mouth.

The Eighth Lady Buddha  
 (History of Caodaism - Trần Văn Rạng)

The opinion hidden in the poem was a very new perspective in the then Vietnamese society, which considered menstruation and sexual intercourse dirty. Bát Nương Nữ Phật said it is just a natural thing and whether it is dirty or clean depends on human

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<sup>23</sup> a Cửu Trùng Đài dignitary.

thought. Until now (2022), under the light of science, we understand that Bát Nương's teachings are absolutely correct.

Interestingly, divine beings clearly know that both sick and healthy people cannot control their bodies 100%. The body has its own voice and even determines our lives. For example, when attacked by the Covid-19 virus, we cannot order our immune system to kill all the viruses even though it can produce its own antibodies to destroy them. The production of antibodies is completely determined according to a mechanism that science still does not fully understand. As we can see, in spite of living in the same family, some people are seriously infected with COVID-19, the others are not. Fortunately, science can now make vaccines to stimulate the body to produce antibodies. Otherwise, we have to wait for luck!

In short, we do not have complete control over our body, so we can only offer some part to the Supreme Being! Therefore, only in the *tiểu đàn* and *đại đàn*<sup>24</sup> Caodaists are forced to offer flowers, wine, and tea. Every day, we only offer wine during the hour of Horse (11:00-13:00) and Rat (23:00-1:00), and tea during the hour of Cat (05:00-07:00) and Rooster (17:00-19:00). That is, we only offer the *Khí* (mind) and the *Thần* (soul). There's no requirement to offer the *Tinh* (body).

For the second offering, which is *Khí*, there are also preparatory steps required. Caodaism defines *Khí* as our mind, meaning the part with which we can use thought to interact. In this part, we

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24 minor and major rites.

rely on two things: one, the object that represents Khí is white wine. Second, the statue of Hộ Pháp on the Ngai Thất Đầu Xà.<sup>25</sup>



The Seven Headed Serpent Throne

Wine is an interesting metaphor. Today, science knows that tiny organisms, i.e. wine yeast, transform sugar into alcohol. Then people distill it to get alcohol and throw away the residue. The same goes for the tiny organisms in our bodies that convert food into energy. Thanks to this energy, we can live and know everything. When you know, emotions arise. So emotions are the final result of the process of "Tinh changing into Khí" just like alcohol is the result of fermentation.

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<sup>25</sup> The Seven Headed Serpent Throne.



**Hộ Pháp sitting on the Seven Headed Serpent Throne**

However, if letting these emotions sway us, we will commit a sin. An obvious example is that love is a feeling that brings positive aspects to life, but sometimes we love someone so much that we do not care whether it is right or wrong. We even commit a crime to keep that feeling. In short, you must know how to control your emotions for Khí to develop its full power.

These feelings are like alcohol. If you drink a little, it is good for the blood circulation. If drinking too much, you will have health problems, not to mention addiction, which is incurable. Observe

the statue of Hộ Pháp putting both hands and feet on the four serpent heads of Nộ, Ó, Dục, Bi,<sup>26</sup> but let the three heads of Hỉ, Ái, Lạc<sup>27</sup> rise up to look at the top of his head. This is a metaphor that you should suppress anger, jealousy, greed, and excessive sadness while allowing joy, love, and satisfaction to a sufficient degree. Doing so creates conditions for the Khí to develop to its fullest. At that time, we can offer it to the Supreme Being.

Like the Tinh and Khí, the Thần is also metaphorically expressed by offering tea. Perhaps some of the following details will clarify why using tea symbolizes the soul. According to Katie Hunt writing for CNN's health section on May 23, 2021, tea is now such a popular drink that the United Nations chose May 21st as "International Tea Day". And Professor Stefan Borgwardt, Head of the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at the University of Lubeck, Germany, said that tea reduces anxiety, benefits memory and increases human brain function. From this scientific result, we can infer the opposite: if anxiety is reduced, the brain will function best, creating the most suitable conditions for the Thần (soul) to come to the body. With the above points, please understand that staying alert and unworried (rather than drinking a cup of tea) is offering the Thần to the Supreme Being.

Having completed the above preparation steps, you can perform the Tam Bửu offering ritual.

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<sup>26</sup> Anger, Jealousy, Greed, Excessive Sadness.

<sup>27</sup> Joy, Love, Satisfaction.



## Issue 2

Let us move on to the issue of why we have to offer Tam Bửu four times a day. I think it is a form of emphasis because the concept of Tam Bửu is extremely difficult to understand and needs to be learned, thought about, and followed correctly. Divine Beings know that people will ignore and gradually forget it because it is too difficult to understand. Usually, it is easy to understand the encouragement that “*the more you chant the prayers, the more merit you will have*” so Divine Beings encourage believers to chant prayers over and over again. Even if you do not understand, you will learn them by heart and maybe when the right opportunity comes, you will suddenly get enlightened.

The concept of Tam Bửu is partly related to the following two verses in the Buddhist sutra when Cao Đài followers make offerings everyday.

### Chinese

功參太極 破一竅之玄關

性合無為 統三才之秘旨

### Chinese-Vietnamese

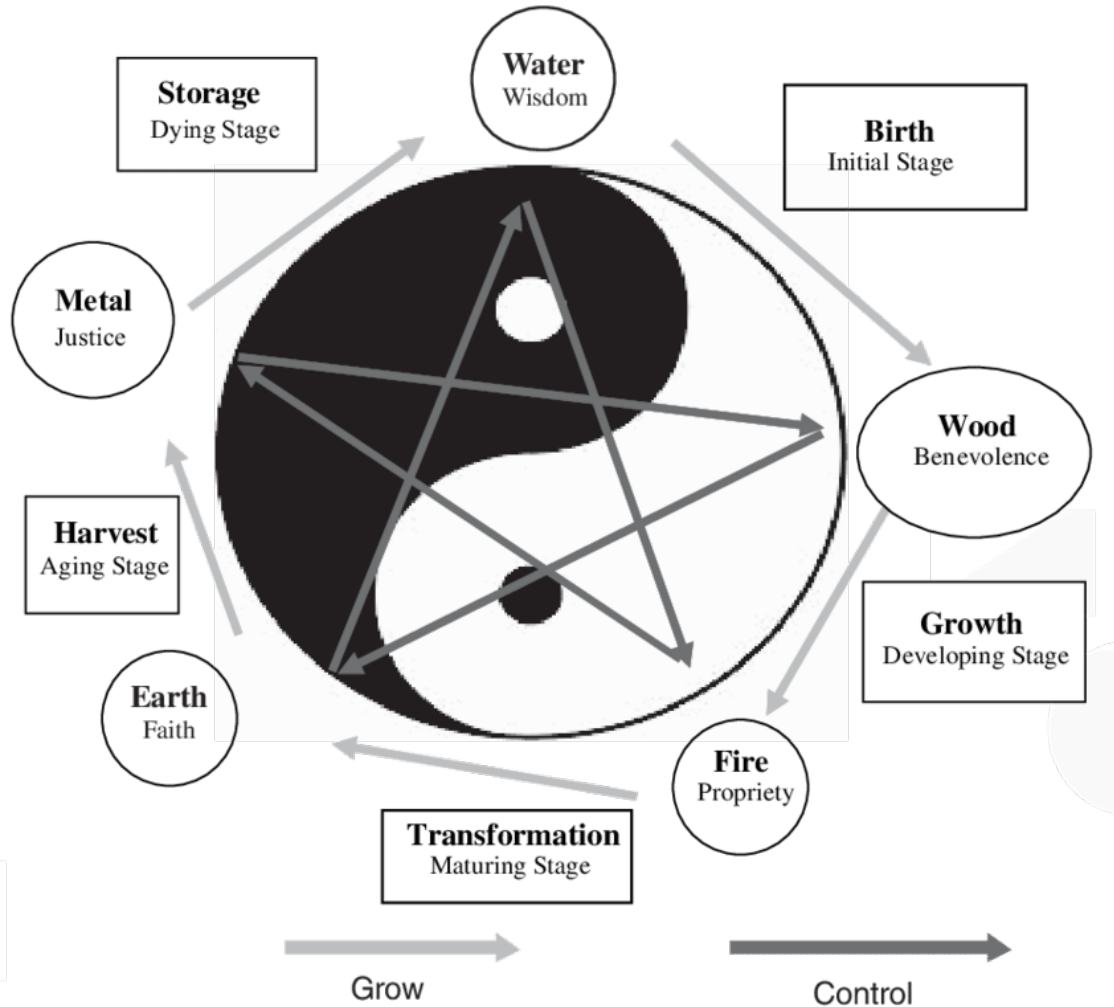
Công tham thái cực phá nhất khiếu chi huyền quan

Tánh hiệp vô vi thống tam tài chi bí chỉ

### Translation (by Từ Chơn)

Follow the principles of taiji, the magical door of unity opens.

Unite with non-action is an important instruction to combine the three precious things.



## The Symbols of Yin and Yang and Five Elements of Taoism

First, let me define some important concepts. These are ancient Chinese ideas that have been passed down for thousands of years.

- Thái Cực (Taiji) - Thái = very, very much. Cực = beginning, end. Thái Cực expresses the ultimate concept of the material

world. Thái Cực is the state that exists before the duality (Yin and Yang) appears.

- Nhất Khiếu Huyền Quan is also known as Huyền Quan Nhứt Khiếu. Huyền Quan = magical door. Nhứt Khiếu = an open door, a clear place. The magical door opens with unity or oneness.
- Vô Vi. Vô = non. Vi = do, act. This word has two meanings: First, expressing the state before Thái Cực. Second, recall the principle of “non-action”<sup>28</sup> in the Đạo Đức Kinh<sup>29</sup>.
- Tam Tài = 3 precious things in heaven and on earth. In humans, they are: Tinh, Khí, and Thần.

These are Taoist cultivation principles that are thousands of years old. If you just read it, you will probably find it extremely mysterious. The characteristic of Eastern religion is a bit of logic plus a bit of mysticism, but just calmly look up and use your own knowledge to find the clue.

The above two verses are written in a “biền ngẫu” style (biền = 2 horses galloping in parallel; ngẫu = a pair). This type of writing has the combined meaning of both sentences, not separate sentences. So the meaning of the above two sentences is: Follow the principle of "Thái Cực" or "Wu wei" if you want to "break the magical door of oneness" and "unite the three precious things". Following the principle of "Thái Cực" or "Wu wei" is a Taoist term that shows how to practice religion. Breaking the magical door of oneness and uniting three precious

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28 Wu wei.

29 Tao Te Ching.

things indicate the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment. In short, you should act according to the principles of Thái Cực and Vô Vi to attain enlightenment.

I think before continuing, I need to remind you of the Cao Đài Divine Message: *"I told you: When there was nothing in the universe, the Khí Hư Vô<sup>30</sup> gave birth to Me and My Throne called Thái Cực<sup>31</sup>. I divided Thái Cực into Lưỡng Nghi<sup>32</sup>. Lưỡng Nghi divided into Tứ Tượng<sup>33</sup>. Tứ Tượng transformed into Bát Quái<sup>34</sup>. Bát Quái transformed infinitely, creating the universe"*.  
(Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển I)

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30 nothingness.

31 Taiji.

32 Two forms.

33 Four symbols.

34 Eight trigrams.



### Taoist Bagua Diagram

Therefore, Nothingness (also known as Vô Vi) => Thái Cực => lưỡng Nghi => Tứ Tượng => Bát Quái => Everything. That is, Hư Vô and Thái Cực existed before Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang combine to create everything, including us. This is the first dimension: giving birth to all things. Cao Đài uses the term "uniting with the Teacher" to refer to the practice that goes

against the first dimension. That means from everything or Bát Quái => Tứ Tượng => Lương Nghi => Thái Cực => Nothingness. That's why the ancients often said "return to the origin", that is, go back to the root.

Fellow believers, it is still difficult to understand, isn't it? That is the theory for cultivating according to ancient Taoism. As for what to do specifically, in the past, we had to find a guru to learn. Unfortunately, there is currently no guidance available. As for the guru, countless people boast and call themselves by all sorts of strange and funny titles. The important thing is that we cannot determine who is the true master. I heard that a fellow believer with a university degree paid a tuition fee of 600,000 VND to a traditional Vietnamese physician to study Zen. After six months, he said he knew nothing new. What a pain! He was too busy making a living to equip himself with religious knowledge, so he encountered such an unfortunate situation. He is still lucky because, as far as I know, there is a Vietnamese teacher in America who even gave her master a car! No one knows whether she gets enlightened or not, but the car could not be taken back.

However, in this article, I only discuss the ritual of offering the Three Treasures, not the esoteric practice called Tĩnh Luyện<sup>35</sup>, which is also related to the Three Treasures. Therefore, you fellow believers, please read the article at this address if you want to have more details about the Third Method of Practicing Caodaism.

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35 Caodaist Meditation.

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/TuChon/thienvatinhluyen.html>

In short, the requirement to offer your Three Treasures up to 4 times a day is to remind Caodaists that those treasures are essential for their religious life.

## **PRACTICE**

With the theory mentioned above, it seems the view of entering the Meditation House after having enough meritorious deeds is a little improper! Don't we need to take care of our bodies, control our 7 emotions nor care about our soul, that is, listen to the voice of conscience before practicing Caodaist meditation?



**Trí Huệ Cung, one of the three Caodaist Meditation Houses.**

If we follow Cao Đài properly, we have to actually cultivate our body, mind and soul every day and offer them to the Supreme Being right from the moment of initiation. This idea will grow

over time until we are religiously mature. Then we will enter the third path: esoteric practice. Your Three Treasures are then strong enough for the practice.

On February 1, Year of the Pig (1947), His Holiness Hộ Pháp said: *"We attain enlightenment because we have three interconnected forms. Don't think we can't achieve it. As long as we want to, we can keep going. There is a way everywhere. But if you want to achieve enlightenment, you must do the esoteric practice. At the beginning of Caodaism, we must do the exoteric practice (popular rituals). If we cannot perform the true practice ( esoteric practice or meditation) later, it is like a person having pants but no shirt."*

Obviously, since the initial stage of practicing Caodaism, followers have prepared their Three Treasures every day. Esoteric practice at the Meditation Houses is just a stage of higher concentration to achieve the result. That result is called enlightenment or whatever name you want.

## CONCLUSION

With the above presentation, I see that all viewpoints such as *"this sect is concerned with exoteric practice; that sect is concerned with esoteric practice"* or *"in this third time only religious rites are needed, and one is exempt from esoteric practice"* are completely meaningless. Dividing into sects is a move that goes against the ideal of *"Tam Giáo qui nguyên, Ngũ*



*Chi phục nhứt*<sup>36</sup>. How can we preach unity to others if we ourselves promote division? Even gathering a few people and then giving the group an exotic name is already dividing factions.

Saying that esoteric practice is exempted (some people even say... it is forbidden), you deny not only the Caodaist Divine Messages and Canonical Codes but also the consistency of the Cao Đài's practice on the Tam Bửu. As discussed above, right from the moment of initiation, believers must begin cultivating their Tam Bửu, or more specifically, "performing esoteric practice" at the elementary level. Moreover, this viewpoint collapsed right during the Covid-19 attack. At that time, how would we practice Caodaism if we could not go to a Caodaist Temple for a rite? Imagine, in the future, will it be possible to go to a Caodaist temple and practice religion if a certain virus exceeds humanity's ability to make a vaccine? At that time, esoteric practice will be the most appropriate method.

In fact, Caodaism is consistent without any division. The Exoteric Practice and the Esoteric Practice are one. Believers have to practice both at the same time. Right from the moment of initiation, believers must take care of their three good deeds<sup>37</sup> and perfect their Tam Bửu for meditation in the future. That is why in Chapter II, Article 13 of the Caodaist Canonical Codes, it

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<sup>36</sup> Bringing the Three Religions back to the origin and uniting the Five Branches of Religion. (Literally translated) That is, all religions are one.

<sup>37</sup> Lập công, lập đức, lập ngôn - serving Caodaism by working, financing or preaching.

is clearly stated: "*In the lower class, anyone who practice vegetarianism for ten days a month or more will receive the teachings of the precious Dharma, that is, be taught how to do Caodaist Esoteric Practice in a Meditation House*".

Note that the law refers to the lower order, which are ordinary believers, not any dignitaries. In short, everyone is allowed as long as the Sacerdotal Council approves. As a believer, you have prepared the Tam Bửu up to 4 times a day, so they are good enough for you to practice in a Meditation House. However, I would like to remind that you must prepare as presented in the above section, not just chanting the three poems 4 times a day and you are done.

Hopefully from now on, when we chant the prayers on offering flowers, wine, and tea, we will also reflect on whether we have carefully prepared the offerings. If not, then next time try and keep trying until you have enough strength to enter the Meditation House. There is nothing more humorous than still harboring hatred towards another person (even if that person follows an evil religion) while saying "*I would like to offer this precious wine to the Supreme Being*"! That wine is Khí or our mind. Ask yourself whether it is appropriate to offer it to the Supreme Being, the source of love, if that mind is filled with hatred!

Từ Chơn

Saigon, June 27-2022

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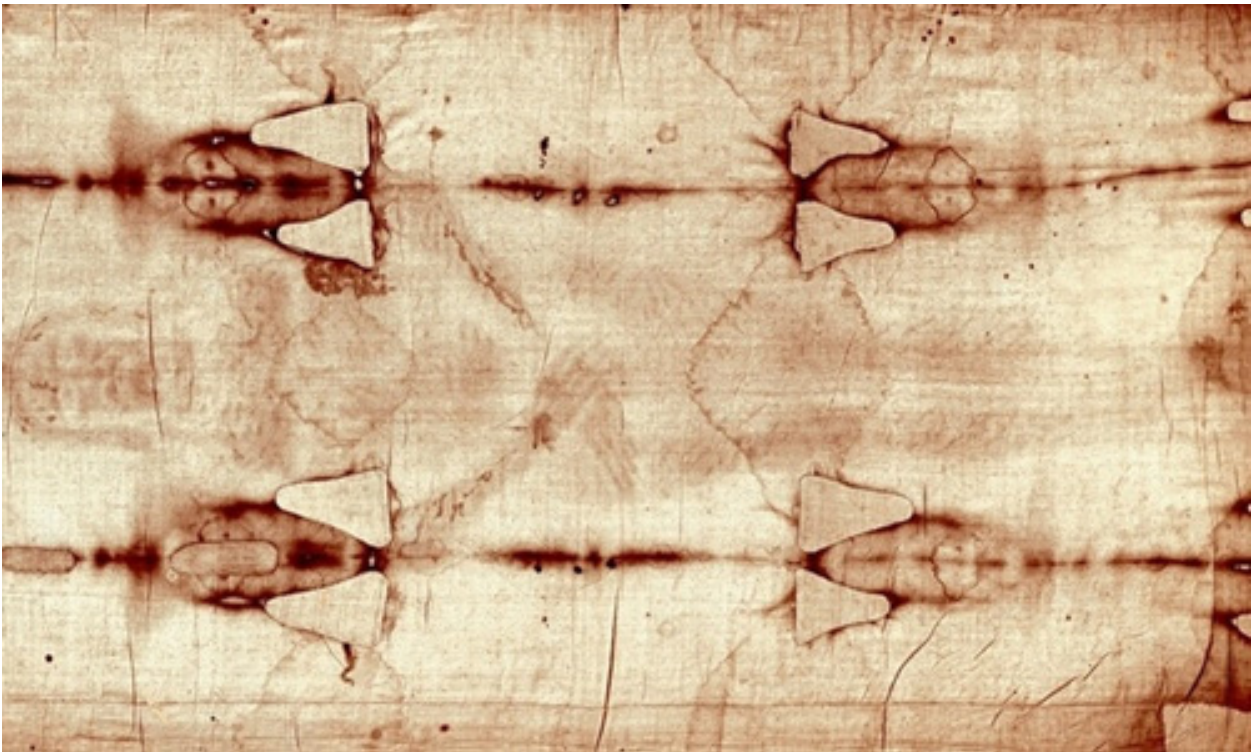
# MOUNT BÀ ĐEN'S GẠO CAVE THE LOST RELIC



TỪ CHƠN

## START

All religions have relics. These are the objects or places related to the religious leaders or the historical development of a religion. For example, Christianity has the shroud of Jesus, the cross that crucified Jesus, etc. Buddhism has the Jade Relics (Buddha's ashes after cremation), Lumbini garden, where Buddha born etc...Judaism has the Wailing Wall in the city of Jerusalem. Islam has the Kaaba temple in the city of Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad



**The Shroud of Jesus Christ in Turin Cathedral, Italy.**

These relics are loved and worshiped by believers because they recall the history of the religion. In addition, because of its spiritual significance, it is often a place where believers make annual pilgrimages, helping the travel and tourism industry

prosper, which they name "spiritual tourism". Of course, scammers also take this opportunity to make a living off of ignorant believers.

Cao Đài religion also has many relics and in this article, I would like to say about Gạo Cave at the foot of Bà Đen mountain, Tây Ninh province. This relic is related to the following two stories.

### **VẠN PHÁP CUNG<sup>38</sup>**

First, the very interesting story of Giáo Thiện Võ Văn Đợi (Võ Linh Đoán). Giáo Thiện is a religious title of Phước Thiện, the Caodaist Charity. He happened to have the opportunity to follow His Holiness Hộ Pháp to Mount Bà Đen to look for a place to build the Vạn Pháp Palace as a Meditation House for male followers. People spread word of mouth that His Holiness Hộ Pháp told him to wait outside while His Holiness entered the Gạo Cave. So curious was he that he secretly follow after a while. After a short walk, he met the Mountain God, who was a pair of white tigers, blocking his way. Too scared, he had to stop and wait until His Holiness Hộ Pháp came out.

It is unclear whether he saw anything else or not, but after that he very strongly requested permission to resign from the Phước Thiện. He wanted to stop doing meritorious deeds and switch to doing esoteric practice (that is, practicing Caodaist Meditation). Cao Đài followers call it the third path.

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<sup>38</sup> All Dharma Palace - one of the three Caodaist Meditation Houses.



**The Gate to Vạn Pháp Cung**

However, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council did not officially approve his request. Therefore, he abandoned his duty as Giáo Thiện and automatically gathered a group of Cao Đài followers, who went to the foot of Bà Đen mountain to build a small temple. He also named it Vạn Pháp Cung and held meditation sessions according to his own wishes. Let me remind you that His Holiness Hộ Pháp had had a plan to build the Vạn Pháp Cung before, but later it was not completed due to unfavorable conditions. Therefore, Mr Đợi's Vạn Pháp Cung was not officially recognized by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council. Several times, His Holiness Hộ Pháp called Mr Đợi and his

group “the mountainous monks” and implied that they were on the wrong path.

According to some senior followers in Phạm Môn<sup>39</sup>, Giáo Thiện Võ Văn Đợi still loved and respected His Holiness Hộ Pháp. He often had his friends offer the fruits grown on the mountain to His Holiness. Every time that happened, His Holiness Hộ Pháp sent back a message, "*Đợi, have you had enough three thousand merits yet?*" This number of 3,000 has caused a stir among believers and perhaps up to now there has been no official answers from the Sacerdotal Council that satisfy everyone.

A few anonymous dignitaries claim that it is 3,000 days of meritorious service. That is a little more than 8 years, so they themselves automatically round it up to 10 years. They are then confident that after 10 years of service at a temple, they will complete their secular responsibilities. As a result, they can wholeheartedly perform esoteric practice. In other words, they consider the number 3,000 as a counting number and they automatically add the word "day" to make it easier to count. Of course, everyone has the right to think like that, but my personal opinion is as follows.

First of all, His Holiness Hộ Pháp actually used the number 3,000 in a numerological sense, meaning the number related to religious philosophy, not a counting number. We can see this number appearing many times in the Cao Đài Divine Messages. For example, there are three thousand worlds in the universe or

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<sup>39</sup> a Caodaist organization established by Hộ Pháp, which later became the Phước Thiện.



in the third salvation, the Supreme Being will choose three thousand disciples. In reality, merit is a very complex activity that cannot be quantified by counting. Sometimes an hour of religious service is more valuable than working all day long. Just like chanting sutras, the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng only heard one verse of the sutra and immediately understood the entire sutra. Contrarily, we will probably not understand even a single sentence of the sutra though we chant it for the rest of our lives.

The question of His Holiness Hộ Pháp is similar to that in Chinese Zen Buddhism. The Zen master gives a student a koan (topic to think about) depending on each person's ability. Each student finds their own answer and presents it to the teacher individually. Through this answer, the teacher will certify whether the student has "achieved enlightenment" or not. Let me recall a famous example from Buddhism. During a sermon, Shakyamuni Buddha held up a flower without saying a word. All the disciples were stunned and did not understand anything. Only Mahākassapa smiled gently. Buddha Shakyamuni immediately certified (confirmed) that Mahākassapa "achieved enlightenment". From this story, people often say that Buddha imparted "a mind seal". Mind = thoughts, opinion. Seal = seal of proof. That is, teaching and confirming attainment of enlightenment with thoughts, not words. This is also the basic principle of Chinese Zen Buddhism.

Second, His Holiness Hộ Pháp sent a private message to Giáo Thiện Đợi, not to all followers. As mentioned, the certification only happens between a teacher and a student while the others

have nothing to do with it. In my humble opinion, the number 3,000 here is the koan that His Holiness Hộ Pháp assigned to Giáo Thiện Đợi. Based on the reaction or answer, His Holiness Hộ Pháp will "certify" if Giáo Thiện Đợi has attained enlightenment. However, only His Holiness Hộ Pháp and Giáo Thiện Đợi himself know that result while other disciples like us will not understand anything. That is just like the story between Shakyamuni Buddha and Mahākassapa. In short, do not associate this number 3,000 with lots of things because it is a koan for Giáo Thiện Đợi only.

According to Caodaist history, even without permission, Giáo Thiện Đợi and his friends still built a house at the foot of Bà Đen Mountain, named it Vạn Pháp Cung and established a management and religious hierarchy according to their own laws. An outstanding example is that, despite claiming to be Cao Đài followers, all of the monks there wore dark brown clothes, had shaved heads and called Giáo Thiện Đợi Venerable Master. Those things are not recorded in any laws of Cao Đài. Although before his death, he wrote a letter asking His Holiness Hộ Pháp to forgive him for disobeying orders and was immediately forgiven, in reality his system remains the same today.

### **LINH SƠN THÁNH MẪU<sup>40</sup>**

The second story is about the black diamond ring of His Holiness Hộ Pháp. Legend has it that His Holiness Hộ Pháp found the diamond in the Gạo Cave, but some people say that

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<sup>40</sup> the Holy Mount Divine Mother.

Giáo Thiện Đợi found it there and offered to Him. Then He had it made into a ring and worn at all times. I personally believe that the ring is related to Linh Sơn Thánh Mẫu due to the following story.



### The statue of Linh Sơn Thánh Mẫu

When His Holiness Hộ Pháp was exiled to Madagascar by the French, it was very difficult to communicate with the divine beings because of the lack of facilities in prison. He had to perform automatic writing by using a tree branch to draw on the

sand. At that time, a spirit often came down to talk to Him. This spirit claims to be a disciple of Thất Nương Diêu Trì Cung, but every time she left, the black diamond ring worn by Hộ Pháp suddenly lit up. Thanks to that, we know the spirit is Linh Sơn Thánh Mẫu, whose popular name is Bà Đen. Currently, there is no information about where this ring is.



Black diamond

## PRESENTLY

At this point, everyone probably wants to know what the Gạo Cave Relic is like now. As discussed above, religious relics are highly respected and are often pilgrimage destinations for believers every year. However, no one has taken care of Gạo Cave and very few people know about it. Many people even moved in the cave, calling themselves "this or that guru". They

held seances for divine messages, cast hexagrams, told fortunes and gave lottery numbers, creating opportunities for superstition to develop. Those scammers were so rampant that the government had to disperse them. There is still a painted mark saying "worship is prohibited" above the cave entrance.



His Holiness Hộ Pháp with the black diamond ring.

As for Vạn Pháp Cung, on August 9, 2022, Tay Ninh Television announced that the Tây Ninh Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council (Hội Đồng Chưởng Quản<sup>41</sup> after 1975) has appointed a new Executive Board of Vạn Pháp Cung and expelled the old one. Thus, since the above date, the Sacerdotal Council has officially managed 6 facilities of Vạn Pháp Cung. This has ended the period in which this Meditation House operated independently from the Sacerdotal Council. Readers are invited to view this news via the link:

<http://ttv11.vn/.../thoi-su-tay-ninh-0982022-tin-tuc-hom...>

In the current situation, I hope the new Executive Board will be more responsible for the Gạo Cave Relic. Specifically, a team should be appointed to maintain security and hygiene. In the future, the Gạo Cave Relic will be known to all believers and will become a beloved place of pilgrimage. Therefore, from now on, fraudsters who rely on forms of superstition must be prevented from taking over the sacred relic.

In the meantime, you are invited to watch the following video to learn more about Gạo Cave today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=livurwAbiM>

Sài Gòn September 10/2022  
Từ Chơn

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<sup>41</sup> the Management Council.

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LONG HOA JUDGEMENT DAY  
and  
Apocalyptic Theory



*Từ Chơn*



## Open

### Narrow ideas

When I was young, I had an Iranian (Persian) friend. He was a very pious Muslim. At 6:00 pm, he always laid a carpet on the floor, kneeled facing the holy land of Mecca and prayed for nearly 30 minutes. I admired him very much because I was not that pious.

We sometimes discussed religion and one day he asked me if I was religious. I replied I was a Cao Đài follower. He then seriously persuaded me to convert to Islam. I did not see any need to do so, I answered. Immediately, he claimed: *“Anyone who does not follow Islam now will have to join it on the Day of Judgment because Islam will unite all religions at that time”*.

I was speechless! I myself was about to tell him that Cao Đài religion is open to all humanity because the true doctrines of other religion “have faded” and Cao Đài will “unite all earthly religions”. Fortunately, I was also quite sharp and stopped the conversation right away. Otherwise, which religion will unify all religions in the world is still unknown, but one thing is known for sure: there would have been disagreements between the two of us right then and our friendship would have been ruined. This story has made me think up to now.

As for the religions developing in Vietnam, one day a friend of mine said: *“Followers of Cao Đài and Hoà Hảo Buddhism all*

*say that the Long Hoa Judgement will be held in their Holy Land. The former is in Tây Ninh and the latter is in Cẩm Mountain, Châu Đốc. I wonder who is right?"* That is another issue for me to ponder.

### **Why expand?**

The reason the above issue makes me think is I learn from Cao Đài two important points. First, the Supreme Being (or God, Jade Emperor, Jehovah, Allah, Ông Trời, Buddha, etc.) founded all religions to save humanity, so all religions have the same root. Second, the Supreme Being wants all religious believers and ethnicities to put aside their differences to live together peacefully on earth 68 through the slogan "Qui Tam Giáo Hiệp Ngũ Chi", that is "Unite all religions".

Nevertheless, in reality, the teachings have been distorted as you can see through the two stories mentioned above. Every religion claims to be the original and every believer wants their religion to surpass the others in the responsibility of saving the world. They even want their Patriarch to be the highest leader. This alone shows a deep disagreement that is difficult to reconcile. Therefore, to achieve Cao Đài's two main goals, it may take a lot of effort and time. It cannot be done in a few centuries with human effort alone. Perhaps that is why the Supreme Being prophesied that Caodaism would last for seven hundred thousand years (700,000 years).

Now, to better understand the difficulty of "uniting all religions", let us learn more about a very popular aspect, which is the apocalyptic theory. The end of the world is an event that most

contemporary religions consider a core part of their teachings. In my opinion, you must at least learn what other religions say first if you want to fulfill your duty as a Cao Đài follower, that is, practicing religious tolerance on a worldwide level.

## **Traceability**

### **East and west**

According to theological researchers, whether of Western or Eastern origin, most religions speak of an important time, which has many different names such as Doomsday, Judgment Day, Last Day, Dragon Flower Judgement Day, etc. At this time human civilization will almost be destroyed. Then the world will move to a new, better stage. And the descriptions of this day are named Apocalypticism or Eschatology.

## **Religions other than Cao Đài**

According to Professor Garry W. Trompf of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, there are currently 9,000 religions worldwide. Surely we, as ordinary believers, do not have enough time to study everything. So please allow me to briefly summarize the Apocalyptic Theories of some prominent religions on Earth 68 before going into the philosophical meaning, which is the research focus of this article. I will arrange in order of religions with more to fewer followers.

**Christianity** (2.2 billion followers, according to Pew Research Center 2010)

The Bible, both the Old Testament (telling the story before Jesus was born) and the New Testament (telling the story after Jesus was born) talk about the end of the world, also known as the Last Judgment. Since there are dozens of schools of interpretation of the Bible, there are also dozens of apocalyptic theories that differ in some details. I would like to mention the main points that are somewhat similar.



Painting of the Last Judgment by Stefan Lochner 1435.

Christians believe that the earth will eventually enter a bad period. At that time, natural disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes, floods and storms will occur with unusually terrible intensity. Humans also will have great changes. People will easily commit more sins. Wars will occur constantly around the world because of conflicts of interest. At that time, Jesus will return and make the final judgments for all humanity. Good people will go to Heaven, sinners will be sent to Hell and stay there forever.

**Islam** (1.6 billion followers, according to Pew Research Center 2010)

A false Messiah called Masih ad-Dajjal will appear, claiming to be Allah (God), who hold the keys to Heaven and Hell. Actually, his Heaven is Hell and vice versa. Then Isa (Jesus) returned and destroyed this false Messiah. Next, Islam will unify all religions and bring the world into a truly prosperous and happy era. At that time, only moral people remain in the world.



## Kaaba Mosque, holy city of Islam in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

**Hinduism** (1 billion followers, according to Pew Research Center 2010)

Hinduism believes that the world develops in successive cycles under the control of the three Supreme Gods of Hinduism: Brahma (creator), Vishnu or Krishna (protector) and Shiva (destructor). When the world ends phase 3 (destruction), it will return to the first phase (creation) and a new cycle begins. So according to Hinduism, there is no end of the world, but the moment of destruction turning to creation is equivalent to eschatology in other religions.



**Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva of Hinduism**

**Buddhism** (500 million followers, according to Pew Research Center 2010)

According to some researchers, the original Buddhist scriptures from India did not discuss the end of the world. It was during the process of transmission to China that Buddhist philosophy mixed with traditional Chinese philosophy and gradually formed the concept of eschatology.

According to Buddhist scriptures, Shakyamuni Buddha said that 5,000 years after his death, humanity would gradually forget his teachings. At that time, another Buddha, who is Maitreya Buddha, would come to educate humanity. Buddhism does not call this period the End of the World, but the End of Dharma (the final stage of Buddha's teachings).

Maitreya Buddha will meditate for 7 days and attain enlightenment under the Naga-Puwpa tree (Sanskrit) or Mesuna Ferrea (scientific name). Vietnamese people read Chinese words as Na Già Thụ, Long Hoa BỒ ĐỀ Thụ or briefly Long Hoa. Though unproven, this tree is called Long Hoa (dragon and flower) by Vietnamese Buddhists because its flowers and trunk resemble a dragon's head and body. Long Hoa tree can now be found in the Bengal region and on either banks of the Indian peninsula.



13th century Maitreya Buddha statue at Tokyo Museum, Japan



## The Naga-Puwpa tree or Dragon Flower Tree



In Asian countries with strongly developed Buddhism such as Tibet, China, Ceylon, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. Maitreya Buddha is carved in different shapes. Particularly in China, there were many people who claimed to be Maitreya Buddha. In particular, folks believe that Maitreya Buddha came to earth in the body of a Zen master called Bồ Đại Hòa Thượng (a monk carrying a burlap bag) around the 10th century. Therefore, in Vietnam, which was profoundly influenced by China, the statue

of Maitreya Buddha is sculpted as a chubby monk with a big belly and a smiling face, wearing a shirt that opens up the chest and abdomen and holding a rosary in his hand.



**Maitreya Buddha statue at Vĩnh Tràng Pagoda, Mỹ Tho, Vietnam.**

Shakyamuni Buddha said humanity gradually would forget his teachings during the Dharma Ending Period. Therefore, countless sins that cause societies to decline would be committed. The world would transform into a very evil place. In the situation of extreme moral corruption, together with natural disasters, wars, and unusual epidemics, those who commit crimes would be exterminated one by one. Then Maitreya

Buddha would descend to earth and bring the true Dharma (correct teachings) to educate mankind. Finally, the world, along with virtuous people, would return to the era of peace and happiness.



Maitreya Buddha statue in the form of the Bồ Đại Hoà Thượng in Singapore

**Judaism** (14 million followers, according to Pew Research Center 2010)



### Jewish elders embrace the Torah

According to Judaism, God will bring the Jewish people to the land of Israel, the current Jewish country, and restore the temple of David (ancient Jewish King) and the temple of Jerusalem. Then God will choose a Jew to be the Messiah, who will lead the Jewish people and the entire world into a new age in which humanity will have true justice and peace. All nations will recognize Jehovah (God) of the people of Israel. There will be a new Heaven and a new earth for good people.

### Similarities and differences

The above is just a summary of the apocalyptic theories of a few religions out of a total of 9,000 globally. Initially, we see the following similarities.

## **Similarities**

First, all doomsday theories agree that the earth's civilization will make life worse in the future. As a result, humanity has to experience extreme suffering. For example, the weather changes abnormally, natural disasters increase in intensity, famine occurs continuously, wars are everywhere and strange epidemics cause mass deaths. Obviously, contemporary newspapers show the results of this prophecy. Environmental protection organizations around the world are deeply aware of this phenomenon, but the measures they propose are still not taken seriously. Therefore, some scientists have even considered leaving earth and finding another planet like Mars to live.



The cremation ground for people who died of Covid-19 in India was overloaded at the time of the outbreak.

Second, all religions agree that a Savior will appear. This person will unify all political views and religious philosophies and lead the world to solve the above problems.

In the end, most religions have a common conclusion that our planet will enter a new, better era. Only good and honest people still live in this new world while sinners have been destroyed.

## **Differences**

Although similar in the above points, the apocalyptic theories of religions also have obvious differences. First, predictions about the time and place of the apocalypse are different. Often religions present numerology (i.e. numbers related to religion, not counting numbers), or present them in the form of extremely confusing oracle-style poetry. Many authors have tried to explain those numbers or oracles to find the exact dates. Unfortunately, these types of predictions often leave many people in deep trouble. An example that everyone probably remembers is the year 2,000. After quoting the Bible or the prophecies of the Saints as a basis, it was asserted that the year 2,000 would have a major event. Especially, there was the Y2K computer incident (Year 2,000), which further strengthened everyone's belief in Judgment Day. I still remember my family was finally moved to buy a dozen boxes of instant noodles and a few boxes of candles just in case. The results need not to be recounted here to make readers laugh.

Second, all religions believe that the Savior is a person either of their own nation or of their own religion! Christianity and Islam say it is Jesus Christ, Hinduism says Brahma, Buddhism and Cao Đài say Maitreya Buddha, Judaism says it is a Jew. In Vietnam, folks also contribute to calling him Minh Vương<sup>42</sup>, an unknown Vietnamese king. We easily recognize that "I" has been exaggerated into "my country", "my people" or "my religion". This idea only brings about more religious conflicts while, in reality, there is nothing to prove it. It hasn't happened yet, has it?

Third, everyone says that their country or religion will become the center of the world and be respected by other nations. Just like above, this idea only strengthens hostility. It even created jihad (religious war) in the past and will probably continue to do so in the future.

### **Responsibilities of Cao Đài followers**

What should we Cao Đài followers do to carry out the mission of "universal salvation" with such a huge amount of information full of both consistent and paradoxical details? Remember that Cao Đài also has an apocalyptic theory called the Long Hoa Judgement Day. This theory also raises a number of details both similar to and different from other religions'. The Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council did not officially announce the location and time of the phenomenon, but perhaps it is easy to guess most believers affirm the location is Tây Ninh Holy Land and the time is the opening day of Caodaism!

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<sup>42</sup> a smart king.

Some fellow believers think we just ignore what other religions say and keep "bảo thủ chơn truyền"<sup>43</sup>. Whether who is right or who is wrong will later be decided by the Supreme Being. This way of reasoning sounds very good at first and appears in most debates among Cao Đài followers. However, after all, this is just a type of fallacy called appeal to authority. Having to resort to fallacies only proves one thing: because of lack of reason, we cite the highest authority (teachings or Supreme Being) even though we still really do not know what decision the Supreme Being will make. In addition, if we continue to hold such opinions, we will fall into the same spiral of religious conflict, failing to achieve the ultimate goal of "returning to unity", that is, religious harmony of Cao Đài.

Fortunately, Cao Đài has a standard to temporarily evaluate a spiritual idea. Those are the standards of Tiên Cơ, Nhơn Cơ and Tà Cơ, applied while communicating with spirits through ouija board or automatic writing. Tiên Cơ is the message that preaches God's words, Nhơn Cơ is the message written by the mediums themselves, and Tà Cơ incites people to be hostile to each other. According to Cao Đài theology, the concepts sent from the spiritual realm to the earthly realm have neither forms nor languages at all. To be displayed, these concepts must coordinate with the peri-spirit of the mediums and appear in the form of ideas or languages. Only then will the mediums write it down for us to understand.

If the spiritual part is overwhelming, then we will have Tiên Cơ message. If the spirit of the mediums dominates, the message is

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43 to conserve the true teachings of Caodaism.



Nhơn Cơ. And if controlled by the Devil, it is Tà Cơ. As a result, the world will end, the Savior will appear, and the world will change for the better are the ideas that come from Tiên Cơ. On the contrary, the end of the world happens in "my" country and the Savior is from "my country" is Nhơn Cơ, even Tà Cơ. The very idea of the Savior and unifying humanity has left space for "my people" and "my country" to intervene and rekindle the seeds of friction. If we can see that, we will know which things to listen to and which things to give up.

As for practice, as long as we understand and properly implement the Cao Đài principle of "returning to the origin and unifying all religions", we can avoid the trap of Nhơn Cơ and Tà Cơ. According to this principle, all our thoughts and actions should lead to the fact that we help people live in harmony with each other. Any thoughts or actions that incite others to division, conflict, or hatred, whether indirectly or directly, are outside the "true doctrine" of Cao Đài. After all, eschatology is only a part of religious teachings, but it fully reveals an intractable personality of the entire human race: it is easy to conflict, but difficult to harmonize.

### **Conclusion**

The theory part is done, but the practice is extremely difficult. Just look at the internal affairs of the Cao Đài organization in the past as well as in the present and you can see immediately what I mean. Even though in the past all Caodaists knew the divine message: "*Dividing into factions is a great sin in God's eyes*", some still enthusiastically established many sects. Even now, the schismatic groups try their best to create their own cause for

existence while those who have not joined a sect look for every opportunity to form their own groups. If asked, those people will have enough very good and reasonable reasons to explain.

Just like today, we all understand that we should respect "harmony", "let go", etc. But once we get angry, our rights are damaged or we are criticized, we will probably not remember anything. Just look at yourself and you will see that "letting go" is almost impossible. Not to mention that there is an increasing trend for youngsters to speak with their tongues in their cheek. That is, they always use flowery expressions to praise the ideals they pursue, but they do not mind committing atrocities when taking action.

If examining ourselves carefully, we will see that our thoughts (mind) appear very quickly, much faster than reflective thoughts. In other words, when we do something wrong, we will realize it later. Therefore, when you realize that you have to "let go", it means you have already been entangled, when you realize you have to "stop being angry" you have already been angry, when you realize you have to "love" it means you have already hated. That is the reason why true practitioners do everything slowly and cautiously. Especially, they barely conclude whether something is "right" or "wrong". A hasty conclusion can ruin an entire lifetime of religious practice.

In short, in the current situation, fulfilling the function of a Cao Đài follower is an art. Remember that if we want to save humanity, other religions also want the same. If we have the Long Hoa Judgement, others also have doomsday. Therefore, it is difficult because we should preach to satisfy both Caodaists

and others. In this small issue, let's learn how to eliminate conflicts and then gradually move on to other bigger ones. Only then can we enter the period of Thượng Ngươn Thánh Đức<sup>44</sup>, the ultimate goal of Cao Đài.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn 18/5/2022

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<sup>44</sup> the First Moral Era.

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NOTHINGNESS  
IN  
CAO ĐÀI PHILOSOPHY



TỪ CHON

## Beginning

Every Cao Đài follower knows by heart the holy passage of the Supreme Being on how to create the universe : *"Like I said, when there was nothing in the universe, the Khí Hư Vô<sup>45</sup> gave birth to Me and My Throne called Thái Cực<sup>46</sup>. I divided Thái Cực into Lưỡng Nghi<sup>47</sup>. Lưỡng Nghi divided into Tứ Tượng<sup>48</sup>. Tứ Tượng transformed into Bát Quái<sup>49</sup>. Bát Quái transformed infinitely, creating the universe. I divided my nature and gave birth to all things: matter, herbs, insects and animals, all of which are called living beings"*.



**Thái Cực Đồ** describes the process of creating the universe.

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45 nothingness.

46 Taiji.

47 Two forms.

48 Four symbols.

49 Eight trigrams.

In addition, in his sermon at the Holy Temple<sup>50</sup> on March 13, Year of the Buffalo (April 10, 1949), His Holiness Hộ Pháp highlighted two unique ways of living according to Cao Đài philosophy: *"Souls can choose between two possible ways to advance on the spiritual path of eternal life. One is Cửu Thiên Khai Hoá, which means following the path of evolution up to Ngọc Hư Palace, Linh Tiêu Palace. The second is Hư Vô Tịch Diệt, which means going to Niết Bàn<sup>51</sup>, Cực Lạc Thế Giới<sup>52</sup>".*



### Returning to nothingness

From these two excerpts, it can be seen that "nothingness" plays an important role in Cao Đài philosophy. In the former quote, nothingness is the beginning of the universe, and in the latter, nothingness is the way to help spiritual beings complete their

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50 the Caodaist Temple in Tây Ninh, Vietnam.

51 *Nirvana.*

52 *the World of Ultimate Bliss.*

evolutionary path. When evolution reaches its peak, the cycle of reincarnation will end unless a soul wants to descend to earth for a purpose other than paying debts. Perhaps all of us believers want to end the karma of reincarnation, return to the eternal spiritual realm and stay there forever. Therefore, we should carefully learn what nothingness is because that is the key.

Usually, after reading the above two holy passages, we look up each word in the Chinese-Vietnamese dictionary, then it is considered that we have understood. But if we ask more rigorous questions, for example: What is Khí Hư Vô that gives birth to the Thầy? Can it be proven? How do we know Niết Bàn is a place without suffering? Faced with such questions, you will find that you have only superficially touched the shell of the words. Some people will say that if the Supreme Being teaches like that, then of course it is like that. Don't you believe it? Why do you still ask this and that question? Please remember that our question is for deeper reflection, not because we want to find a way to refute it.

## **Explanation**

First of all, in the literal sense, "hư vô" means nothingness. In the first excerpt, the word "Khí" is added to become "Khí hư vô" and in the second excerpt, the word "tịch diệt" is added to form "hư vô tịch diệt". However, the meanings remain the same.



Thus, what is the Khí hư vô? Ancient Chinese often used the term "Khí" to refer to invisible, intangible energy. They divide time into two periods: Tiên thiên, meaning before heaven, and hậu thiên, meaning after heaven. With the notion that before heaven there was nothing, they recognized "nothing" is a form of energy from which "something" arises, that is, every object in the universe.

“No matter” creates “matter” is a hypothesis that scientists have long sought to prove. Although it is still not very convincing, a prominent example is Miller and Urey's Primordial Soup experiment. Now, scientists really hope they will be able to do it when humanity is about to enter the era of quantum physics. If this can be proven, then "nothingness gives birth to the Thầy" is feasible.



Buddha entered Nirvana

And what is Hư Vô and Tịch Diệt<sup>53</sup>? Hư Vô is still "nothing". Tịch Diệt is the end of everything. Buddhism uses the term "Hư Vô and Tịch Diệt" to refer to the practice of putting an end to all worldly thoughts in one's mind. At that point one will achieve the state of Nirvana, which is also known as Cực Lạc Thế Giới (the world of the highest level of joy). To put it simply, a person will have the highest feeling of joy when he/she no longer has ordinary emotions and worldly desires. Furthermore, that person will also understand everything. Such a person is called Buddha by the ancient Indians, the Chinese translated it as 佛 and the Vietnamese pronounce Bụt or Bụt Đà (rarely heard) and Phật (most often heard).

## **Nothingness of the West and the East**

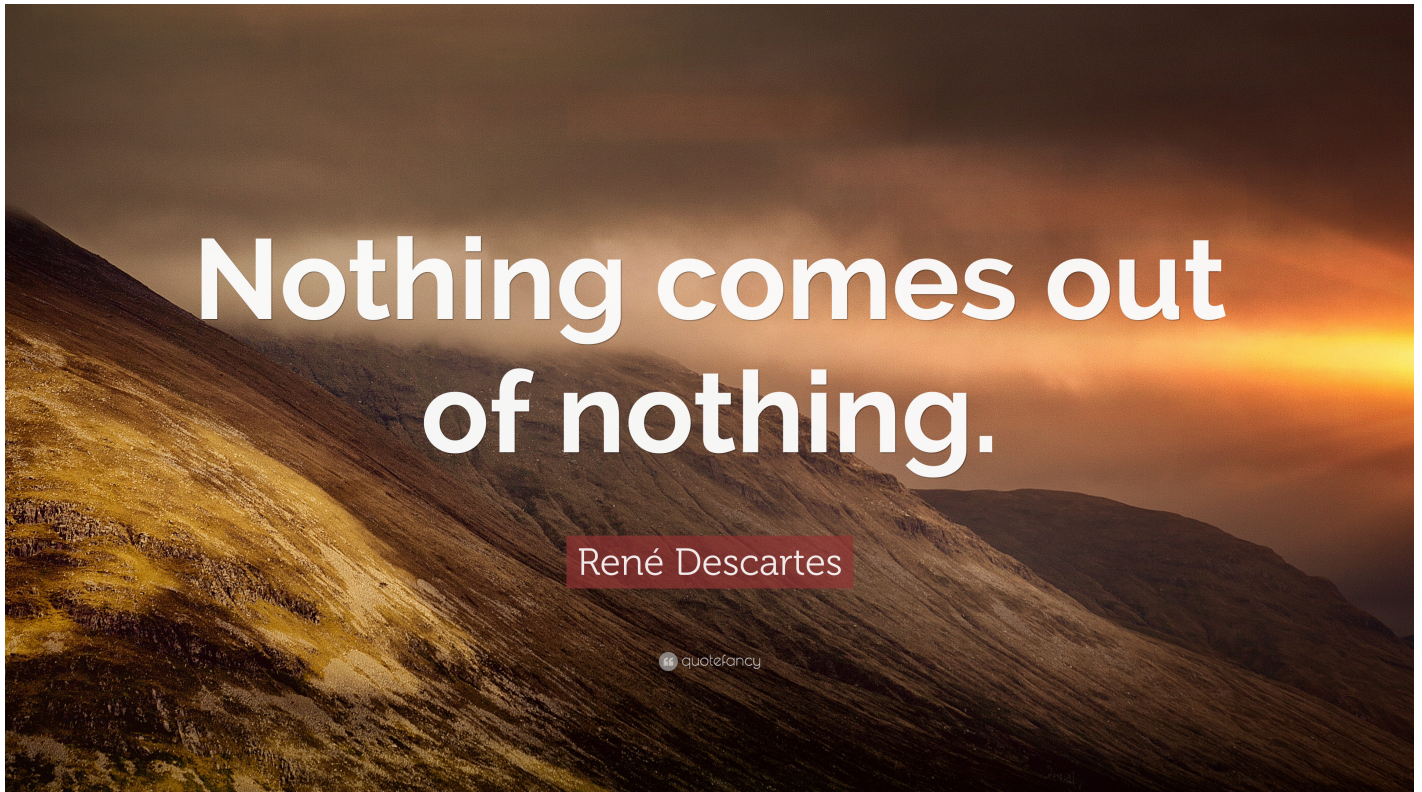
Now let's consider how humans, in general, have faced the concept of nothingness. For a long time, the world have been divided into two blocs: East (including India, China, Persia) and West (Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand) because their thinkers developed in two different directions.

In the West, many Greek philosophers of various schools began discussing nothingness from the fifth century before Jesus was born. For about 2,700 years, they have pursued two main trends. Firstly, they argued that there could not be nothingness because we have to see nothingness to say there is "nothingness". However, how can there be "nothing" while there is already

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53 Annihilation.

"me" and "nothingness"? "No" cannot be "yes", and "yes" cannot be "no".



**“Nothing does not give birth to anything.” Philosopher Descartes' view of nothingness.**

Secondly, they admitted that there was nothingness, but believed there should be a container. For example, there is a vacuum (nothingness) inside if you take a jar and suck all the air out. People can do this easily now.

In short, Western philosophers think "nothing" and "something" are two opposing concepts that cancel each other out. A prominent example is the allopathic perspective in medicine.

Germs cause disease, so without germs there is no disease. On that basis, treatment is to use antibiotics to kill germs. This spirit of confrontation manifests itself in all fields and eventually leads to what humanity today calls science and technology. It is important that their thoughts are applied to available materials. The material civilization of this planet has originated from those thoughts.



**A Japanese Zen monk**

In the East, Buddhism from India and Taoism from China have had a different view of nothingness for many thousands of years. According to Western researchers, the nothingness

(Sunyata) of Buddhism is a mental state. Practitioners must sit still, trying to eliminate all distracting thoughts (miscellaneous thoughts with no specific purpose). When we no longer have distracting thoughts, we will completely focus our mind on an idea or action. Actions at that time will be different from normal times. A classic illustration of Mahayana Buddhism, especially Japanese Zen, is that of an archer eliminating all miscellaneous thoughts to concentrate on hitting the target. However, that is still understanding Buddhism in the Western style, and thus still does not fully understand the mystery of the East.



Statue of Lao Tzu, Taoist leader in Quanzhou, China.

In fact, Buddhism and Taoism both believe that nothingness is beyond the ability of ordinary people. Therefore, it is impossible to name it because that is still to think. Therefore, Taoism "temporarily" calls it Đạo (Tao) while Buddhism expresses it with the famous saying "*Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form*" in the Heart Sutra (Prajnaparamitahridaya Sutra). In other words, nothingness is not "nothing" according to the Western way of thinking. Nothingness is the foundation that opens up another way of thinking, in which the limit between existence and non-existence disappears, paving the way to complete liberation.

In short, the West meditates on nothingness and applied it to the field of physics, so they have made great progress in science and technology. The East applies it to the human spiritual realm. Both sides have been evolving by discovering the cosmic laws of the Supreme Being, but up to now each side has only seen separate fragments. As long as this dialogue has an intersection, we humans on Earth 68 can hope to gain some power of the Creator.

## **Nothingness of Cao Đài**

At this point, I would like to put a question: what kind of nothingness is Cao Đài's? Of course, with the principle of "Unifying all Religions", Cao Đài's nothingness is deeply Oriental. The West focuses too much on physics, so at the end of the development path there will be spiritual shortcomings. This shortcoming has now been exposed through global

confrontation. As long as humanity cannot resolve conflicts, it will still need the nothingness of the East.

With the above principle, it is clear that Cao Đài's followers have a more important mission than uniting religions. It is the combination of Eastern and Western way of thinking to thoroughly understand the universe and the laws of the Supreme Being. However, that mission is for noble spiritual beings. As for us ordinary believers, we should try to study and practice to alleviate our past life sins.

So let's go back to the teachings of His Holiness Hộ Pháp in the above section, according to which every soul has to come to earth to learn in order to progress. While being humans, they have the right to choose between the two ways to evolve. The first is following the path of Cửu Thiên Khai Hoá, meaning progressing according to a hierarchy from low to high, just like in school. In each life, you will either go up one or more levels or go back depending on the number of good or bad things you have done until you reach Ngọc Hư Palace, the most noble place in the universe, where the Supreme Being God resides. An illustration of this evolution is the Cao Đài hierarchical system of Cửu Trùng Đài.



### Some Cửu Trùng Đài dignitaries of Cao Đài religion.

The other way is to go to Nirvana by the path of Hư Vô Tịch Diệt. To put it simply, we try to find a way to end all worldly desires to achieve a state of ultimate happiness. Achieving this state, souls also liberate themselves from the bonds of reincarnation. Illustrating this path is the Caodaist Esoteric Practice.

It is the easiest for ordinary believers to understand the path of Cửu Thiên Khai Hoá. Just live according to Cao Đài's moral regulations and fulfill your responsibilities as a human being. After death, the Toà Tam Giáo<sup>54</sup> will decide to promote you to a higher heavenly position. On that basis, when reincarnated, you will have a more comfortable life. On the contrary, you will be downgraded and have to make up for your past sins. Therefore, those who fall will have a more painful life. With such ups and downs, everyone understands that getting to the final destination of Bạch Ngọc Kinh will be extremely arduous and long-lasting. Therefore, to achieve the goal of evolution through this path, spiritual beings must be extremely patient in pursuing it through many lifetimes.

On the contrary, following the path of the Bí Pháp Tịnh Luyện<sup>55</sup>, you can be successful as soon as your worldly thoughts are eliminated, which means very likely in just one

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<sup>54</sup> the Three Religion Court.

<sup>55</sup> Caodaist Esoteric Practice.



lifetime. It's easy to say, but it's not like giving up all your possessions, staying away from your family, eating brown rice with sesame salt, and counting your breaths half asleep can erase worldly thoughts. This path requires a very high level of thinking, so only high-ranking spiritual beings, who have reincarnated countless lives and have a high position in heaven, can do it. As a result, this method is not recommended for everyone. To those who find it boring or confusing to read Bí Pháp Tĩnh Luyện<sup>56</sup> I sincerely advise them not to read it again. It is inappropriate for them to read it, much less to practice it. It is better to go to the Caodaist Temple to do odd jobs, which earns yourself more merits.



Trí Huệ Cung, expected to be where female Cao Đài followers practice meditation.

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<sup>56</sup> Caodaist Esoteric Practice.

## Application

In this section I will focus on Cao Đài's Esoteric Practice, which is related to the term "nothingness", the topic of the article. Readers are strongly advised to consider this section for reference only. If you like this topic, please read Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism more before deciding to practice. I never claim that my opinion is correct because it is still based on books and personal experiences. Our only hope is to clearly explain to help readers easily access the issue. Deciding right or wrong; implementing or rejecting is still the prerogative of each reader.

Every believer has heard the formula "*Refining and transforming Tinh into Khí, refining and transforming Khí into Thần, transforming Thần back to Hư*" of Cao Đài's Tĩnh Luyện<sup>57</sup>. Some authors add "*Transforming Hư back to Vô*" after it. In the scriptures of the Tây Ninh Holy See, there is no mention of that part.

Within the scope of this article, I would like to focus on the last part "*transforming Thần back to Hư*" because the Hư here is the nothingness. Those who want to know more about the first two parts please read here:

<https://www.daotam.info/books/v/pdf/pdf3/biphapluyendaobndtc.pdf>

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<sup>57</sup> Caodaist Meditation.

Having consulted many meditation documents from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Chinese Qigong or the type of meditation currently popular in the West called mindfulness, I think most of the movements are quite similar to the sections on refining Tinh and Khí in *The Caodaist Esoteric Practice* by Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung, for example mainly practicing breathing and using thoughts to control the Khí moving in the body or across important points that Taoism calls acupuncture points or Hinduism calls chakras. The preliminary conclusion is that this type of practice is completely doable by any believer in adequate health. Specifically, *The Caodaist Esoteric Practice* clearly states how to do it and what the results are.



A mindfulness meditation class in Western countries

As for the part of refining Thần back to Hu, many ancient documents are too difficult for people today to understand. The most common thing is they say you need a Chon Su<sup>58</sup> to teach you how to practice. However, there is no specific document guiding who the master is or what standards a master must follow. Finally, in particular, only Bát Nương Diêu Trì Cung says that when your peri-spirit can leave your body, you should pray and ask His Holiness Thượng Phẩm to take you to the Bạch Ngọc Kinh to meet a true master. Depending on the merits you have achieved, each person will meet a different master and will be given specific instructions on what is still lacking to achieve enlightenment. This is also a specific characteristic of the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice, which needs to be authenticated for future generations.

In our opinion, there are two things related to nothingness in this period. The first is the release of the peri-spirit and the second is the meditation in the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice.



The peri-spirit leaves the body (Hinduism)

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58 true master.

## **Astral projection**

Many religions have different ways of astral projection (or astral travel), that is, making the peri-spirit leave the body and travel around. Most of the methods include sitting still and meditating like the Cao Đài's Esoteric Practice. However, each religion says something different about where the peri-spirit can go after leaving the body. Currently there is no scientific evidence about this phenomenon. Science has only recently recognized the OBE (Out-of-body-experience) phenomenon, but that is only a small part of the astral travel phenomenon and is still very controversial. Please read more about OBE here.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out-of-body\\_experience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out-of-body_experience)

For Cao Đài, Thần back to Hư is roughly the peri-spirit (people often call it the soul) returning to the Bạch Ngọc Kinh (nothingness) to see the master for personal advice. And this phenomenon is not exclusive to the esoteric practitioners. Whether you work for the Hiệp Thiên Đài, Cửu Trùng Đài, Phước Thiện or any Cao Đài's organization, you will be divinely sent back to Bạch Ngọc Kinh (back to Hư) before you die if you have full merits. Surely everyone still remembers the divine message on December 9, 1926 about Chưởng Pháp Thượng Tương Thanh: "*Tương passed away due to predetermined destiny. It was blessed for him to return to Me (the Supreme Being) in the last few days of his earthly life.*" Another case is that of Hiền Tài Nguyễn Văn Mới, who was allowed to return to the Bạch Ngọc Kinh to meet a master by the grace of the Bát Nương Nữ Phật though he could not perform esoteric practice owing to old age. In short, "Hư Vô" is the Bạch Ngọc Kinh, the dwelling place of the Supreme Being. Whether the peri-spirit can return to that place is mainly

determined by divine grace based on the merits we have accomplished in this world.

### **Esoteric Practice**

According to *The Esoteric Practice* by Bát Nương Nữ Phật, the practice time in a Tĩnh Thất<sup>59</sup> is 100 days for each session. Every evening at a fixed time, the practitioner performs two parts: 15 minutes of Luyện<sup>60</sup> and 15 minutes of Tĩnh<sup>61</sup>. In the former part you practice abdominal breathing according to the instructions of the master. As for the latter part, which is equally important, you try to keep the mind free of thoughts. “Nothingness” here means having no thoughts, but this part itself is the most difficult for practitioners.

In the *The Esoteric Practice*, Bát Nương Nữ Phật taught as follows: *“To meditate is to close all five senses. You breathe without hearing the breath. The mind is concentrated and quiet until it reaches the point of emptiness. That will let your body fall asleep. When the body falls asleep in that empty silence, a light naturally emerges. That light is the released peri-spirit. When the released peri-spirit emerges, the body also wakes up. When the body wakes up, there are two similar piece of consciousness: the one of the body and the one of the peri-spirit”*.

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59 Caodaist Meditation House.

60 breathing.

61 meditating.

At first glance, it sounds very easy, but anyone who tries it will see that emptiness is an extremely difficult state to achieve. Every religion teaches concentration in many ways such as counting breaths, praying silently, counting rosaries, thinking about the meaning of scriptures, reciting mantras, etc. So it's okay to make your mind relatively quiet. Nevertheless, it is not easy to achieve nothingness. In fact, you cannot think because when you directly realize that you are not thinking, that is also a product of thinking! If you pay close attention, you will see that Bát Nương teaches two words "không không<sup>62</sup>", not just one word "không". This shows there are two negations, the first is to abandon all thoughts and the second is to abandon that "no thinking" state.

Thus, perhaps it is necessary to review some religious teachings of past and recent religious leaders:

- 色即是空, 空即是色 (*Form is emptiness, emptiness is form = existence is emptiness, emptiness is existence*). Quoted from what Buddha Shakyamuni said in the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra about 2,500 years ago.
- 無為而無不為 (*vô vi nhi vô bất vi = not doing anything but doing everything*). Quoted by Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching around the 6th century before Jesus was born.
- “*Grief is enlightenment. Those two states are not different. Ordinary people think sadness will leave you when you attain enlightenment. Enlightened people do not understand like that. Question: What do enlightened people think? Answer: Ordinary people see the difference between “bright” and “not*

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62 no no.

*bright*". Enlightened people see they are not different. That is enlightenment". The words of the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng (638 - 713) quoted in *Pháp Bửu Đàn Kinh*.

- "I am you, you are Me". The Supreme Being's words, quoted from Cao Đài's *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, nearly 100 years ago.



### Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra in Chinese

If you read and think twice about it, it is clear that the main idea of all these religious teachings is focused on one point: Your thinking should be based on the idea that two opposing poles such as "yes" and "no", "good" and "bad", "good" and "evil" etc. are not different. Of course, the ancient religious leaders did not say that just for fun. However, it is not easy to follow in reality. We cannot go to the supermarket, take a refrigerator without paying and then tell the seller: "without paying" and "paying" are not different!!!

To understand that "yes" and "no", "good" and "bad", "good" and "evil" etc. are not different, you must overcome one important thing. That is choosing a topic to think about. Why so? Because, first, the topic must be related to the religious



practitioner's real life, not a fantasy or other people's stories. Second, the topic must be appropriate to your level of knowledge. Otherwise, it is fruitless for you to think about it all your life.

Now let's look back at how a Zen monk practiced Buddhism in the past. First, the master gave a topic to think about called a 公案 (gōng-àn or koan). The koan would be the deciding topic because the master, who had attained enlightenment, clearly knew what the disciple needed to think about. Each student received a separate topic and only knew his own topic. After that, he continued to serve the pagoda while thinking about the answer. Having found anything, he would privately meet and present it to the master. This process was divided into two stages by the predecessors in ancient China: 觀 (careful consideration) and 覺悟 (awakening and understanding). The contemplation stage had no set deadline. Some people meditated for a while and become enlightened, others for a lifetime to succeed and the others meditated for a lifetime and got nowhere. Unfortunately, these people are the majority! Especially, only the master could decide whether the student was enlightened or not. Furthermore, only the master and the disciple involved knew this result.

What about us Cao Đài followers today? First of all, choose a method according to the teachings of His Holiness Hộ Pháp mentioned above, which is either doing meritorious work (Cửu Thiên Khai Hóa) or Esoteric Practice (Hư Vô Tịch Diệt). Don't waste your time looking for a master because you do not know

who he is. Fortunately, we Cao Đài followers already have a master, who is Đức Chí Tôn Thượng Đế<sup>63</sup>. Please read this divine message again: "*Your teacher is God. You only need to know that. That's it. Do you hear me?*". The second fortunate thing is the Supreme Being also gave the koan: it is the image of Bạch Ngọc Kinh on earth, the Tây Ninh Holy Temple. Therefore, each of us should go there and find our own koan and try to find the answer. The Supreme Being will privately speak to the person who attains enlightenment.



The painting of Shakyamuni Buddha attaining enlightenment.

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<sup>63</sup> the Supreme Being or God.

## Conclusion

At this point, perhaps I would like to temporarily close what I have gathered about nothingness in Cao Đài philosophy. We hope this article will be somewhat helpful to the fellow believers who really want to understand and practice religion. There are many authors in this world who discuss nothingness and I, let's just say, summarize the commonly heard points. The path to nothingness, according to Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, must be walked alone.

Từ Chơn

Sài Gòn, Jan 5th 2023

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# Morally Aggressive People



Từ Chơn

### A Cao Đài's divine message

On September 29, 1926, Đức Chí Tôn<sup>64</sup> said: *"The throne of the Bạch Ngọc Kinh<sup>65</sup> does not like to contain aggressive people, but it is strange that virtuously aggressive people often break through the door to enter. Most positions are taken by such persons. You are gentle yet aggressive, weak yet strong, small yet powerful and patient yet punishing. You should practice your behaviors so that they are contrary to those of ordinary people and you will be closer to the positions of Immortal and Buddha."* (Divine Message Collection - Sacerdotal Council).

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary of the Khai Trí Tiến Đức Association, "aggressive" is bold and eager. Most Vietnamese dictionaries today also include "willingness to take violent action". So what is the difference between the "aggressive" and the "morally aggressive" persons?

Dictionaries gives the meaning of an aggressive person as someone who is bold and eager to act violently when displeased, such as scolding or beating others. Nowadays, just look at any tabloid page and you will see a lot of stories about aggressive people. Hearing a few disparaging words, they can kill the speaker even though they were close friends just a few minutes ago. Like here:

<https://zingnews.vn/nhau-nhet-danh-bac-roi-gay-an-mang-post1355389.html>

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<sup>64</sup> the Supreme Being = God.

<sup>65</sup> Heaven.

Even just being looked at each, like here:

<https://vnexpress.net/danh-chet-nguoi-vi-nghi-bi-nhin-deu-4177270.html>

Of course, an aggressive person does not care about morality anymore:

<https://tienphong.vn/tu-hinh-nghich-tu-giet-me-chi-vi-bi-la-ray-post1455122.tpo>

Usually, in any country, aggressive people will be punished by the law. However, it is clear that more and more laws have been issued since history was recorded, but they still have not completely prevented crime. On the contrary, criminals are becoming more and more ferocious and more sophisticatedly to avoid the law. They even clearly know that they will be punished, sometimes by death, but they are willing to accept it! Perhaps this sheds light on the sentence 法令滋彰, 盜賊多有 (The clearer the ordinances are, the more robberies there are)



Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching

in Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching. Sadly, most of us often think many laws can prevent crime!

That is just between individuals. Aggression can also easily spread internationally. There are countries (saying that is a bit of an exaggeration because only the leaders, not the entire population of that country) send troops to attack the neighboring country just because they want to prove that they are "greater". Hitler is a prominent example. By the time Hitler lost, tens of millions of people had died and countless homes were destroyed.



Hitler, who started World War II



According to Caodaist scriptures, aggressive people like those mentioned above will not be able to enter the Bạch Ngọc Kinh after death, or as people often say, they will not be able to go to Heaven. However, scriptures also say people who are "*morally aggressive*" "*break through the door to get in*", meaning even though they encounter many difficulties, they still finally find the way to get to Heaven. Therefore, we should find out what "*morally aggression*" is because perhaps all of us believers want to return to Bạch Ngọc Kinh.

A “morally aggressive” person is someone who is not eager to harm others; on the contrary, they are eager to follow moral rules, such as the Confucian five virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith), the Caodaist Canonical Codes or the law of a certain religion. While following moral regulations, they encounter many obstacles. Sometimes the obstacle is so great that it causes damage to themselves. According to tradition, if they remain patient, willing to endure these losses to maintain their moral spirit, then they are "*morally aggressive*".

Some people, however, do not accept endurance. They understand that to be "*morally aggressive*" is to use force to oppose those who hinder their path of practice or change their traditional regulations. To avoid such distorted thought, the Supreme Being also said very clearly that our behaviors should be contrary to those of ordinary people. Specifically, instead of being cruel, we should be gentle; instead of being strong, we should be weak; instead of being powerful, we should be humble, instead of punishing, we should be patient. A very clear example is recorded in the Catholic New Testament. When the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus, one of his disciples, Saint

Peter, pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of them. Jesus told Saint Peter to stop and sheathe his sword because "*Whoever uses the sword will die by the sword.*" Obviously, it would have been difficult for the soldiers to capture Jesus if all disciples had drawn their swords then. Nevertheless, many people would have lost their lives. Jesus let the soldiers arrest himself to end the opposition. This action taught us how to be moral aggressors. Aggression is drawing the sword to slash at the enemy while moral aggression is sheathing the sword and let the enemy control the situation.



At first glance, you may think it is easy, but in reality it is extremely difficult to do so because today there are many situations that are not as clear as black and white anymore. Material civilization has turned life into a very complex environment. Therefore, to be a morally aggressive person, you must meet many conditions plus your own wisdom. For example, your superior asks for your opinion about a poem he just wrote. He was very satisfied with the poem, but to be honest, it was very bad. So what do you say? There are two suggestions as follows:

- A. You tell him the truth that his poem is very bad. Thus, you can keep the fifth precept of not lying.
- B. You praise the poem and ask him to make more for you. That way you can keep your job even though you have lied.

Obviously, method A would require two conditions. First, the boss must be knowledgeable and generous. Second, the society must respect the truth, meaning those who tell the truth will be respected. If those two conditions are not met, telling the truth will probably cause you to lose your job soon. So, perhaps you will not be able to help your family, let alone fulfill your ethical responsibilities!

Method B is applied in an environment where lies and flattery are wildly preferred and the boss is ignorant and very petty. At that time, even though you may have a reputation as a flatterer and morally violate the fifth precept, which is the prohibition of false speech (lying), the bigger benefit is you can save your family members. It is difficult to be a morally aggressive person these days. You must choose the right solution for the current situation.

### **The Bible**

Since there are countless different situations, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between an aggressive and a morally aggressive person. To know more about this, please read a story recorded in the New Testament (Gospel of Luke) about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

At first, let's say a little about the Pharisees and tax collectors in ancient Israel (Jewish) society. It is known that a little more than 2,000 years ago, the Roman Empire was so powerful that it

dominated the Mediterranean, North Africa and Western Asia. Countries under its rule had to work for them and pay taxes in order to retain their traditions. Israel also suffered the same and the Israelis, who collected taxes for the Romans, were often hated by the Israeli people. They were considered evil traitors for money. On the contrary, the Pharisees were respected because they advocated the worship of Saint Moses and kept the true traditions of Judaism.



### Roman army

Back to the story, there was a Pharisee and a tax collector who went to Jehovah's temple (Jews call the Supreme Being Jehovah). The Pharisee stood and prayed silently: *“Lord, I thank you. I'm not like a normal person. I am not greedy, unjust nor sexually immoral. I do not practice evil like this tax collector*

*either. I fast twice a week and give the church a tenth of my income". At the same time, the tax collector did not dare to approach the altar, nor did he dare to raise his eyes. He beat his chest and said: "God, have mercy on me, for I am a sinner!"*



### The Pharesee and the tax collector

Usually it is easy to think of the Pharisee as a good person, as "morally aggressive" person. Since he still followed the teachings of his religion despite living under the oppression of Roman tyranny. Conversely, the tax collector betrayed his homeland Israel for money, working for the Roman rulers. However, according to the Bible, Jesus taught his disciples that the tax collector is the one who deserves to go to Heaven because *"whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*

This is another lesson for us to better understand what ethically aggressive people are. A pious, but arrogant person is not as good as a sinner who sincerely recognizes his sins. It is humility and sincerity that make a morally aggressive person.



## Conclusion

Many people accuse the philosophy of staying away from the rat race as being too negative and cowardly. They say as a human, you should not be afraid of any force. You should stand up to protect the truth by all means. That is also a very beautiful ideal of life. However, all the ancient teachers taught that you should live a life different from others if you choose to practice religion. Do not use hatred for hatred, that is no one-to-one opposition. The above passage of Cao Đài's Divine Message also affirms that way is *"close to the throne of Immortal and Buddha"*. One thing is certain: the religious leaders do not speak for fun nor need to seduce anyone. In the end, being an aggressive person and being an ethically aggressive person is just waiting for a "choice" from us believers. And what we choose to do is completely our own right. Isn't that right, fellow believers?

To conclude, let's mention the ending in the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989) directed by Steven Spielberg. When having to choose the Holy Grail, the villain chose a golden cup studded with jewels because he reasoned that Jesus was the king of kings, so the utensils must be very valuable. On the contrary, the protagonist chose an ordinary wooden cup because he argues that Jesus is a carpenter's son. The villain chose wrongly, so he died tragically while the main character chose rightly, so he saved his father. Even though it's just for entertainment, the movie clearly states a truth: for your life, you must know how to choose correctly.

Từ Chơn

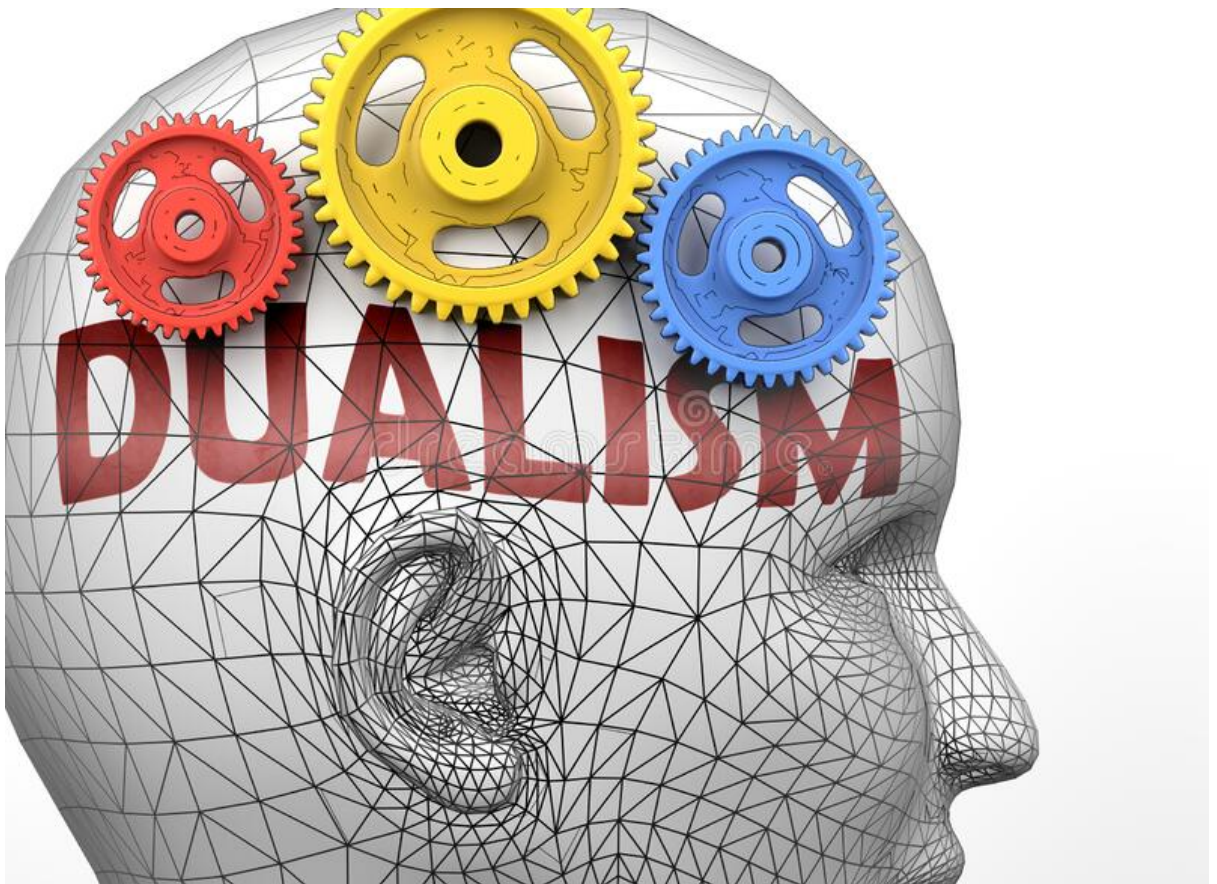
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***DUALISM***  
***IN***  
***CAO ĐÀI***



TỪ CHƠN

## Starting

Some fellow believers wonder: nowadays people often start religious stories with words that sound very fashionable like monism, dualism, pluralism, and even use them as pseudonyms or names for their descendants. What do those words mean, what do they have to do with Cao Đài, and most importantly, do they help in practicing Caodaism or not? If you use really cool words without understanding them clearly, and then practice wrongly, your efforts in religious life will be in vain. This article will try to clarify those things.

I think the mission of Cao Đài followers is universal salvation, which is, in the true sense, helping people escape suffering in life through religion. Some believers understand "saving" means convincing others to join the Cao Đài religion. It is too narrow-minded to think like that although it may be useful in some ways.

To "save" people, Caodaist believers can only use the religious teachings (doctrine) of their leaders, not any other means related to politics, military or economics. Therefore, Caodaists, especially dignitaries, should devotedly learn Caodaism. It is not necessary to have the extensive knowledge of a Doctor of Theology like Catholic Priests, but at least you must firmly grasp the basic teachings to hope to "save" others. Study a lot to understand correctly, and then practice correctly to be successful.

Moreover, now that the religion has spread to other countries, you have to study the doctrine even more diligently. Teach yourself then learn from others. That way, you will widen your vision and thereby open your heart to all humanity.

This article mentions something based on philosophy, so it will encounter two difficulties. First, the literature on philosophy is vast and the issues are often very complex, not to mention nearly half a century of forgetting and ignoring Western philosophy due to discouragement. Meanwhile, people in the West continue to progress rapidly, so after such a long period of time, we cannot avoid being more or less surprised when updating. Second, Vietnamese philosophical vocabulary is limited and often contains confusing Sino-Vietnamese terms.

To overcome these two difficulties, I especially consult the latest sources, always updated by the most scientific and reputable editorial boards, to avoid outdated or fake information. For example, articles from Encyclopedia Britannica (British Encyclopedia that has been around for more than 250 years), or Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Complete Dictionary of Philosophy from Stanford University, USA, the school is ranked third in the world). As for Wikipedia, which is an open dictionary, meaning anyone can write anything in it, I only use the English version, not the Vietnamese version. After that, the information will be condensed as much as possible and many Sino-Vietnamese words are removed for ease of reading. I hope to bring the world's knowledge base closer to my fellow believers so that in the future Cao Đài followers can boldly stand shoulder to shoulder with other religions in the world.

## Origin

Nhị nguyên is a philosophical term, translated from the word "Dualism". The original meaning of dualism is "two parts". Western scholars use this word to classify human ways of thinking. They say thinking like this is dualistic, thinking like that is monistic, etc. As a result, we can encounter this word in many other fields, such as politics, law, ethics, information technology, etc. Dualism is not the exclusive word of philosophy, theology or religion.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, specifically in the field of religion, dualism believes there are two supreme beings (two powers, two principles, two forces) who oppose each other and this struggle not only creates but also governs our world. In contrast, monism holds that the world originated from a single principle, such as spirit (or matter). This theory is often found in religions that only worship one god (monotheism). Pluralism believes many forces create and govern the world. Religions that worship many gods (polytheism) often have pluralistic doctrines.

In fact, it is not always easy to conclude whether a religion is monistic, dualistic or pluralistic because lots of religions mention all three theories in their teachings.

## East and West

In the West, in ancient times, religions in Egypt and Mesopotamia (today the Middle East) had dualistic features in their teachings although they still were not very clear. In Greece around the 5th century before Jesus was born, many philosophers had already taught dualism. Modern Christianity and Judaism also have many aspects indirectly or directly expressed by dualistic ideology.

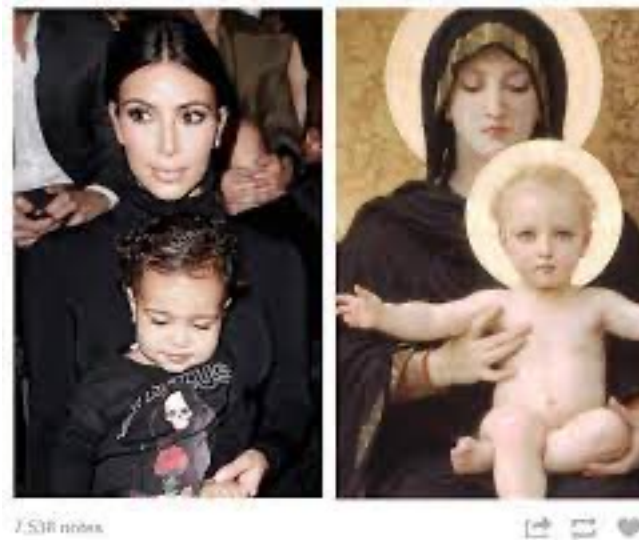
In the East, ancient Hindu teachings also revolved around dualism. Especially in ancient China, there was the Yin and Yang ideology (Yin - Yang), completed in the 3rd century before Jesus was born. Although it originates from dualism, Yin Yang theory has revealed important differences between Western and Eastern philosophy. At first glance, this system seems to fit the Western definition of dualism, but actually Yin and Yang are not opposed in the sense of destroying each other. They do not exist separately either. That is why, contemporary Western scholars do not classify the theory of Yin and Yang as dualism anymore. They call it non-dualism. This will be discussed further in the following section.

In short, dualism is present in most religions on this earth in many slightly modified forms. We can list a few popular topics as follows.

## Typical dualistic topic

### Sacredness and Profanity

Most religions that discuss this topic follow dualism. Sacredness is certainly the opposite of profanity. If you want to be sacred, you must not be profane and vice versa. People in the spiritual world live differently from those in the physical world. Especially in Asia, the divine beings have magic that mortals cannot have. Death is the boundary between these two realms.



### Good and Evil

This is also a very common opposition in both the West and the East. This opposition goes on forever and is the main driving force that causes conflict on earth. Most religions, except sects with sinful purposes, believe that the conflict will end, the Good will definitely win and the Evil will naturally be eliminated. The duality of this subject is very natural to humans, thus it governs most human activities.



### Good and Evil in Western dualism

#### **Creation and Destruction**

A famous example of this theme is the God of Creation (Vishnu) and the God of Destruction (Shiva) in the basic teachings of Hinduism.



### Shiva and Vishnu of Hinduism

In addition, other dualistic themes also appear in many forms in many religions, for example, men and women, love and hatred, heaven and hell, etc.

### **Dualism in Cao Đài**

Cao Đài is a young religion in Vietnam. Now (2022), very few people in the world know it. Only after the 1975 incident did Westerners begin to learn about Cao Đài teachings when millions of Vietnamese refugees came to live in Western countries and Caodaist believers among them established Holy Temples. So first, what do Westerners know about Cao Đài?

Encyclopedia Britannica recognizes Cao Đài as a syncretic religion, but the Wikipedia dictionary adds the word monotheistic. The word “syncretic”, I think, is acceptable because Cao Đài believers respect and study all other teachings. Contrarily, it is a bit reluctant for me to accept the word “monotheism” because the way to describe the image of God, which Caodaists call Đức Chí Tôn (the Supreme Being), is a bit different from monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

In religions that worship only one god (monotheism), God decides who is guilty or who is blessed. He controls the universe as an earthly king controls a country and will rule this universe forever.





### Cao Đài Temple in Houston, Texas, USA

On the contrary, Cao Đài describes how the Supreme Being governs the universe with a rather complex concept, typified by the following couplets:

*“Nhược thiệt nhược hư bất ngôn nhi mặc tuyên đại hoá  
Thị không thị sắc vô vi nhi dịch sử quân linh”.*  
(Kinh Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế)

It is too complicated to translate and explain these couplets, so here I would like to give the roughly combined meaning: *"The power of the Supreme Being cannot be expressed using mortal words or ways of thinking."* In addition, His Holiness Hộ Pháp

said we ourselves, not the Supreme Being, will decide our own sins and blessings and also determine the punishment or reward when returning to the eternal spiritual realm. The last point is also very important, the Supreme Being is not the eternal ruler. He allows his children (i.e. humanity) to rise to the level of His throne, even higher than Him (TNHT December 19, 1926). And in His Holiness Hộ Pháp's sermon on April 29, Year of the Pig (1947), He also said other noble spiritual beings can succeed the Supreme Being and even leave this universe and establish another. These ideas have never been raised by monotheistic religions before, but are now consistent with the multiverse theory, which holds that in addition to our universe, there are many other universes coexisting. Currently, this theory is increasingly popular among scientists in the fields of cosmology, quantum mechanics and philosophy.



**Illustration of the Multiverse Theory**

Anyway, please let me return to the main idea of the article. Obviously, Cao Đài's teachings cover many topics related to dualism as follows.

### **The statues of Good and Evil**

These are the first dualistic symbols everyone will encounter when coming to a Cao Đài Temple because they are placed on both sides of the main door. According to Nguyễn Văn Hồng's Cao Đài Dictionary, Ông Thiện (Prince Tỳ Văn) and Ông Ác (Prince Tỳ Vĩ) were the children of King Tỳ Kheo. The King saw that Tỳ Văn was gentle while Tỳ Vĩ had a violent personality, so he made a plan to assign Tỳ Vĩ to go far away. At home, he passed the throne to Tỳ Văn and then entered a temple to become a monk. When Tỳ Vĩ returned, he was dissatisfied and told his brother: *"You are too gentle to be king. A king needs to boldly use violence like me to punish criminals and protect good people. Please give me the seal."* Tỳ Văn did not want to disobey his father nor offend his younger brother, so he took the seal and ran to the temple to let King Tỳ Kheo know. Unfortunately, on the way, Tỳ Văn had an accident and died. Tỳ Vĩ chased after him and witnessed his brother's death. He felt extremely regretful and realized that power was meaningless to death. He finally entered the temple, following his father to practice religion and later attained enlightenment.

The story metaphorizes the duality of Good and Evil being closely related like siblings, not opposed like two enemies. Like people in the West say, they are two sides of the same coin. If we follow Western dualism, then in the end Tỳ Văn (Good) must

win and ascend to the throne to bring happiness to the people. However, in Eastern duality, no one wins. Tỳ Văn (Good) died in an accident. Tỳ Võ (Evil) regretted it so much that he gave up his power to become a monk and finally attained enlightenment.

### **Nhơn Đạo and Thiên Đạo<sup>66</sup>**

Theoretically, Cao Đài followers must experience two periods of practice. The first is Nhơn Đạo. That is fulfilling one's duty as a human being according to the regulations of Confucianism. The second is Thiên Đạo, in which they practice Taoism and Buddhism, finding a way to escape the endless spiral of reincarnation. Although these two methods are practiced differently in some points, they complement each other. They cannot be applied separately to attain enlightenment. It's best to practice both at the same time. In Cao Đài, there is a story that illustrates this point.

That is the story of Diêu Trì Cung Tứ Nương Nữ Phật<sup>67</sup>. She is in charge of the Huỳnh Thiên<sup>68</sup> realm and is one of the nine Lady Buddhas, who assist the Phật Mẫu<sup>69</sup>. She had a life in Vietnam as the famous poet Đoàn Thị Điểm. According to His Holiness Hộ Pháp's sermon on October 26, Year of the Cat

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<sup>66</sup> Nhơn Đạo - the personal responsibilities each individual has to fulfill before practicing religion. Thiên Đạo - practicing a religion to get enlightenment.

<sup>67</sup> the Fourth Lady Buddha of the Jade Pond Palace.

<sup>68</sup> the Yellow Heaven.

<sup>69</sup> the Buddha Mother.

(November 24, 1951), when she returned to the eternal spiritual realm, she could not return to the former position, but had to wait at Thanh Tịnh Đại Hải Chúng<sup>70</sup>. The reason for this is because in her life as a human she only fulfilled her Nhơn Đạo, not Thiên Đạo.

It was not until the opening of the Cao Đài religion, 185 years later, that Thất Nương Nữ Phật took her back to Lôi Âm Tự. At that time, she had the opportunity to practice Thiên Đạo by writing the work *Nữ Trung Tòng Phận*<sup>71</sup>. After completing both the Nhơn Đạo and the Thiên Đạo, she was able to return to her former position as Tứ Nương Nữ Phật. This story once again demonstrates the main principle of Eastern dualism: two ways of practice that seem to be opposite, but develop in parallel. If separated, they will be fruitless.

### **Exoteric Practice and Esoteric Practice**

The Caodaist Exoteric and the Esoteric Practice are another dualistic theme that is not only very common in Cao Đài teachings but also the most easily misunderstood. Although His Holiness Hộ Pháp provided a thoroughly detailed explanation through 15 sermons from May 2, 1949 to December 12, 1949, most followers still freely use these two words according to their own ideas. Some argue that esoteric means "secret" or "hidden", so that is a secret practice, reserved only for a few special believers. As a result, any practice that can be said or written

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<sup>70</sup> a heavenly place for the noble spirits who cannot return to their former positions.

<sup>71</sup> Women's Responsibilities.

down is no longer "secret". These people's argument is based on the literal meaning of the word "secret" to refute the Cao Đài Esoteric Practice or Caodaist Meditation. They even say that Caodaism only specializes in universal transmission, without meditation. Nevertheless, first of all, such reasoning goes against the principle: *"What must we do to complete the two words Phổ Độ (general salvation)? We must reveal the "bửu pháp" (precious dharma or esoteric practice), not hide it anymore"* (TNHT). Furthermore, such reasoning ignores the use of couplets in ancient Chinese literature. The "Exoteric Practice" must always go together with the "Esoteric Practice", like the flesh and the soul. Therefore, it is necessary to have both, not to choose one and leave the other. So "secret" does not just mean "hidden" but is the other side of "form".

If you read all the teachings of His Holiness Hộ Pháp, you will see that these two words are used in many different contexts. If Exoteric Practice refers to the form, then Esoteric Practice means the content. If Exoteric Practice refers to rituals that all believers can participate in, then Esoteric Practice refers to the practices performed in Tịnh Thất<sup>72</sup>. And like all other dualistic topics, these two opposite poles always go hand in hand, meaning both practices must be performed at the same time.

### **Biền ngẫu<sup>73</sup> style in literature**

Cao Đài's daily prayers are expressed through an ancient Chinese literary form called biền ngẫu. Biền = two horses

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<sup>72</sup> Caodaist Meditation House.

<sup>73</sup> two parallel horses.

traveling side by side. Ngẫu = pair. It is two sentences written in pairs, in which the words are opposite each other. For example:

Đại La Thiên Đế  
Thái Cực Thánh Hoàng  
(Translation)  
Mighty King in the Heaven  
Most Powerful Holy Emperor

Such literary texts also appear in couplets in the Divine Messages or in front of the gates of other Cao Đài's establishments. For example:

Cao như bắc nguyệt nhân chiêm ngưỡng  
Đài tại nam phương đạo thống truyền

(Translation)  
Cao in the north admired by people  
Đài in the south spreading God's words

Since ancient times, most of us have only admired the way the ancients found words to both express the main idea and have an interesting contrast in poetry. Actually, we have forgotten two important intentions of our predecessors.

Firstly, these two sentences have to combine to produce a shared meaning. If separately understood, the meaning will be incomplete. As in example one, đại la = a large net i.e. horizontal metaphor. Thái cực = the highest place i.e. vertical metaphor. Horizontal (horizontal axis) combined with height

(vertical axis) indicates unlimited space. The two words Thiên Đế and Thánh Hoàng are synonymous. If translated "The King of Heaven is like a large net. The Holy King is at the highest place", it sounds really crude, incoherent and confusing. Therefore, the shared meaning of both verses must be translated as "*The King of Heaven is everywhere.*"

Secondly, the relationship between words that the ancients called "opposite" does not simply have opposite meanings, but can also be equal or complementary depending on the meaning. In example two, Cao (high) and Đài (tower) are not antonyms but combine to create the noun Cao Đài, the name of the new religion. Như bắc khuyết (As the north) and tại nam phương (in the south) are considered opposites because they refer to two locations in the north and south. Nhân chiêm ngưỡng (people admire) and đạo thống truyền (religion is spreading) complement each other. The final combined meaning of these two sentences is "The honorable God of Heaven opened the Cao Đài religion in Vietnam and taught the unification of religions".

The two hidden meanings just mentioned are to fully express the principle of Yin and Yang. If you analyze all the Sino-Vietnamese sutras and couplets, you will see many other dualistic relationships. Thus, just like Prince Tỳ Văn (good) and Prince Tỳ Võ (evil), there is no such thing as opposing terms that are mutually exclusive. It is very lame to explain each sentence individually. I have written an article about this point: *An Element That Cannot Be Missed When Interpreting the Caodaim Sutra*. Please see it here:

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



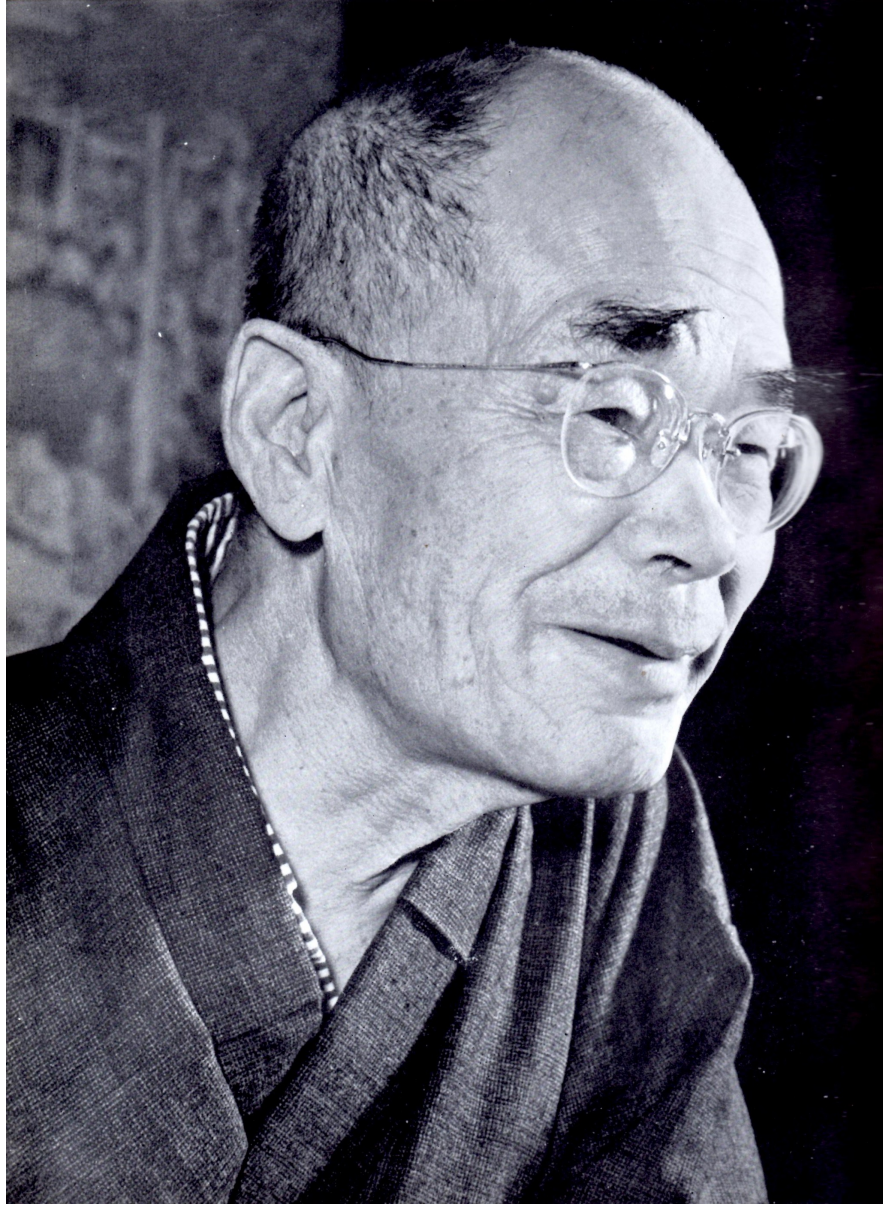
### **Temporarily shortening**

Consequently, from the above analysis, we can clearly see the difference between the dualism of the West and that of the East. Western dualism has only one relationship, which is opposite in the sense of eliminating each other. Between Good and Evil, the former must ultimately win; the latter must be destroyed even if Good suffers heavy losses during the struggle. It is like an American cowboy movie. On the contrary, Eastern duality does not exclude each other, but those two forces can be opposite to, complement, equal to each other, etc. This duality creates the ultimate meaning of reality.

The above idea was confirmed to the Western world by a famous Japanese scholar. That is Professor Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō (1870-1966), author of *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1963. It is he that brought Zen to the West. Professor Suzuki calls Eastern thought non-duality. In contrast, Western thought, which arose from modern science, is based on the confrontation of dualism. Although Western thinking is mandatory in everyday life, this type of thinking does not help us fully understand reality. According to Suzuki's philosophy, understanding reality requires direct contact with intuition, not inference.

Up to this point, we can see the difference between dualistic and non-dualistic ways of thinking. Some people do not call it non-duality, but non-dual dharma, even monism. However, I want to temporarily call them Western duality and Eastern duality to make it easier to be accepted. Of course, calling it that way, I

still make a distinction, that is I still suggest the choice between West and East, but it is difficult to eradicate the human nature of choice.



Professor Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō (1870-1966)

## Application

As a result, what is the way of thinking that Cao Đài wants its adherents to follow, dualism (Western) or non-dualism (Eastern)? I think the integration nature of Cao Đài allows its believers to accept both, but it is the most important how to apply them in your religious life so that you will also get a little closer to the truth if you do not attain enlightenment. Please do not rush to divide into two groups arguing whether the Western dualism is correct or the Eastern dualism is the "true doctrine". Lots of people who have done that since Cao Đài was first established and we all know the result, which is a deep division among followers!!!

According to my opinion, life can be roughly divided into three levels. Level one, in daily life, Western-style dualistic thinking is human nature. Between good and evil, right and wrong, good and bad, you must choose one. For example, between "putting your hand in the fire" and "not putting it there" you must definitely choose "no"; or between "good but cheap refrigerator" and "bad but expensive refrigerator", of course you know which one to buy. At that time, if you still sit and think about whether to follow the Western or the Eastern duality, you will be sent to a mental hospital! I guess thoughts like this take up 90% of our lives, so the rest will be the next two levels.

At level two, you still encounter binary choices, but it is a bit more complicated. Suppose I am a doctor on emergency duty, and a patient is admitted. I discover that this man has previously caused many misfortunes to my family. Now should I save him

or refuse? Duality has arisen! If I look deep into my soul, I will find it difficult to decide. However, it will be difficult to preserve the patient's life if I keep wondering whether "to save" or "not to save". At times like these, I have to rely on religion to guide me. I am a Cao Đài follower, so I know that the Supreme Being taught, *"If you can't love, don't hate."* That is, there is still the duality of "love and hate", but "hate" has been removed, so it is much easier to choose. Then I can just treat him like a strange patient. Additionally, you can follow His Holiness Hộ Pháp's teachings: *"Whoever does not hold grudges can defeat his enemies"* (*Phương Luyện Kỳ*<sup>74</sup>). Even though we still maintain the idea of "winning over our enemies", the sick person will be saved. To be honest, I tried to follow because I was taught like that, but in my heart there is still a little bit of uncomfortable dualistic ash.

So how can I still save that patient without being strictly controlled by duality? Fortunately, there is still level three: Eastern duality or non-duality. Please allow me to repeat two famous teachings: *"Do nothing, but do everything"* of Lao Tzu, or *"Form is emptiness, emptiness is form"* of Shakyamuni Buddha. Dear readers, people have discussed these two teachings for thousands of years. I have also written many articles on this issue. Today, by the way, I would like to invite readers to ponder over the statement of His Holiness Cao Đài<sup>75</sup>: *"I am you, you are myself."* This statement is the key to entering the world of Eastern duality (or non-duality, non-dual dharma,

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<sup>74</sup> *How to train yourself*, a book by His Holiness Hộ Pháp.

<sup>75</sup> the Supreme Being or God.

monism, whatever you like). This teaching is in Vietnamese, not Sino-Vietnamese, so hopefully it will be easier to understand.

First, let's do a little analysis. The first person pronoun is the Supreme Being and the second person pronoun all creatures in the universe. These two pronouns metaphorize the two opposite poles of duality. Note, it is not "I am like you", nor "I am equal to you", but "I am you". If it is the same or equality, there is a difference, which is the sign of Western duality. The verb "is" affirms the abolition of the distinction of Western dualism, meaning that fighting to destroy each other is not accepted. Everyone must coexist, which is the sign of Eastern duality. In other words, in Eastern dualism you cannot criticize, humiliate, sue, harm, or defame a rival because there are no rivals except your brothers.

However, there is one more confusing thing. The statement "I am you" is already complete, why add "You are me" again? For example, when learning math, we say  $A=B$  (A equals B) is enough. There is no need to say  $A=B, B=A$  (A equals B, B equals A)! Since these two sentences have the same meaning, isn't the second sentence redundant? There is no surplus, readers! We have seen this type of saying in the sentence "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form..." of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is a very necessary sentence because it reminds us to negate again, that is to completely negate the opposition of that Western duality.

Oh, I am sorry, talking too much for a while may make it more difficult to understand. Now let me tell you about a more

practical application, which is the example of the doctor above. When I hesitate between "saving" and "not saving", I am stuck in the trap of Western dualism. I have practiced Buddhism and know that discrimination must be eliminated according to proper "Dharma", so I stop wondering about choices and focus on "saving" the sick. At this point, I think I have practiced Eastern duality. That means the first negation.

Perhaps some people may ask why talk about it in circles to get in trouble because that is not so difficult. If you know it is duality, then let it go, so it becomes non-duality! Ladies and gentlemen, we have just been gently deceived by our own dualistic minds without even realizing it! Isn't "giving up Western dualistic thinking, following Eastern dualistic thinking" also the result of Western dualistic thinking!! So we are still under its control like we have always been. That is why the second sentence "You are myself" reminds us to also negate the idea of "abandoning the Western duality and following the Eastern duality". That means the second negation.

In short, as a doctor, I always happily and wholeheartedly save any patients. That's it. There are no enemies or relatives, no dualistic or non-dualistic practice, no West or East. Whenever I save my enemy the same way as I do to the person I love the most, that is truly an action according to Eastern duality because at that time I do not distinguish between hatred and love. "Hate is love, love is hate" then.

## Conclusion

In the end we can boldly say that Cao Đài philosophy includes both Western and Eastern dualism, not to mention monism and pluralism, which will be discussed in another article. Each ideology is recommended to be applied depending on various circumstances in life.

If taking a quick look at earth's history, we see that Westerners have applied dualistic thinking to many areas and created today's glorious civilization. For example, two opposing principles are applied to connecting (+) and disconnecting (-) electrical circuits. From there, it expanded into a binary mathematical system with two units (1) and (0) in computer science. Obviously, Western dualism has created countless useful applications in today's life, from smartphones to Covid-19 vaccines.

However, Western dualism has an inherent disadvantage: it promotes antagonism. As a result, antagonism is evident everywhere in society. At least people quarrel and to a greater degree of risk they kill each other, just like the barbarian times thousands of years ago. Now this antagonism has been raised to the international level, as in the events of Russia - Ukraine, Israel - Palestine, China - India, China - Taiwan and dozens of other hot spots around the world. Humans have all kinds of material means to take care of life, but still cannot create a peaceful earth because they only know how to confront each other in the Western dualistic style! If you want to eliminate

opposition, you need to upgrade your brain to think according to Eastern duality (ie non-duality).

Thinking twice about it, you surely know no one forbids us from developing without resistance, right? The simple idea is humans just need to sit together and discuss to invent machines to serve life and preserve a common global home. Just accept there will be many disagreements, but refrain from any animosity. That is what Nguơn Thánh Đức's time<sup>76</sup> is like, no need to look far and wide!

Từ Chơn  
Sài Gòn 7/8/2022

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<sup>76</sup> the moral era.



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Từ Chơn trân trọng đón nhận mọi ý kiến đóng góp để học hỏi  
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