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## Caodaism: A Unique Vietnamese Syncretic Religion

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### **Abstract**

*Vietnamese Caodaism is a syncretic faith that blends aspects of many faiths and traditions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Catholicism, spiritism, and traditional folk beliefs. It quickly rose to become the third biggest faith in Vietnam after its official establishment in 1926 in Tay Ninh province in the south. Today, there are about 5 million adherents. A brief history, philosophies, doctrines, worship rituals, and architectural aesthetics of Caodaism are presented in this article. It talks about how its worldview incorporates Buddhist ideas of karma and rebirth, how its socioreligious structure is shaped by Confucian ethics and propriety, and how its rituals and accessories reflect Taoist Yin-Yang beliefs. The doctrine of the Supreme Being, which echoes God the Heavenly Father, the liturgical structure of Caodaism, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy all show Catholic influences. Voodoo and the veneration of guardian deities are important tenets of traditional Vietnamese religion. Tay Ninh Holy See, a complex of temples that blends European and Asian architectural styles, is a synthesis of these many elements. Sacred yearly activities at this headquarters site include memorial services for revered individuals as well as group ceremonies of introspection and moral reaffirmation that revitalise believers on a spiritual level. Caodaism, with its distinctive character that combines Eastern philosophy with Western practises, is now widely practised thanks to official acceptance and international missions. The moral rebirth and cross-cultural appeal of this fusion religion are significant across growing international networks, even as Vietnam undergoes modernization.*

**Keywords:** *Caodaism, syncretism, taoism, buddhism, confucianism, catholicism, spiritism, worship, architecture.*

### **Overview of Caodaism**

Caodaism, sometimes referred to as the Great Faith or The Great Way of the Third Salvation (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ), is a contemporary religious movement that originated in Vietnam around the early 1900s. The organisation was established in Saigon by a collective of Vietnamese government officials who asserted that they were receiving messages from different spiritual entities through sessions. The official founding of Caodaism was declared on October 7, 1926, with 247 signatories (Hoskins 2015). Caodaism is frequently likened to Catholicism due to its hierarchical organisation, encompassing a pope, cardinals, archbishops, priests, deacons, and lay adherents (Jacobs 2011).

Caodaism is a syncretic religion that incorporates the principles of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, together with aspects of Catholicism, spiritism, and Vietnamese folk religion. The doctrine conveys the belief that the Jade Emperor, as the Supreme Being, has dispatched several prophets and sages across various historical periods to disclose the truth to diverse societies and civilizations. These individuals encompass Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Laozi, Confucius, Buddha, and various others. Caodaism holds the belief that the present era represents the "the Great way of the third universal salvation", serving as humanity's last chance to achieve enlightenment and harmony prior to the world's demise (Blagov 2001).

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The growth of Caodaism was swift during its initial years, with the number of followers reaching approximately two million in the 1950s. Nevertheless, it encountered persecution and repression from the French colonial authority, the Communist regime, and various political factions. Following the Vietnam War, numerous Caodaists emigrated from their home country and formed settlements in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Caodaism currently has approximately five million followers globally, with the majority residing in Vietnam, particularly in close proximity to the Tay Ninh Holy See, which serves as the religion's main administrative and spiritual hub (Fjelstad & Nguyen 2011).

Caodaism possesses a multifaceted and extensive theology that derives from the revelations received by its mediums, known as spiritual communicators. The canonical scriptures contain these revelations, providing a comprehensive account of the theology, morals, organisation, and rites of the faith. Caodaism promotes the idea of achieving salvation through a harmonious integration of the Way of Heaven and the Way of Earth, both of which represent distinct paths. The Way of Heaven encompasses the cultivation of inner alchemy, meditation, and asceticism, whereas the Way of Earth encompasses the engagement in social service, charity, and activism. Both pathways necessitate the strict observance of the Five Precepts, which serve as the fundamental ethical guidelines of Caodaism (Hoskins 2015).

Caodaism is renowned for its vibrant and intricate rituals, conducted four times daily at the Tay Ninh Holy See and adjacent temples. These ceremonies incorporate aspects of Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Catholic traditions, including the burning of incense, recitation of chants, performing bows, and bestowing blessings. The ceremonies are attended by the clergy, who don distinct gowns based on their hierarchical position and religious affiliation, and the laity, who don white attire. The rites serve the purpose of paying tribute to the Supreme Being, saints, ancestors, and spirits, while also reaffirming the commitments and prayers of the devoted. The ceremonies also include trance sessions, during which the mediums establish communication with the spiritual realm and receive advice and inspiration (Nguyen et al. 2022).

Caodaism is a distinctive manifestation of Vietnamese culture and identity, serving as a reaction to the complexities and transformations brought about by modernity. The text embodies the historical and social circumstances in which it originated and evolved, as well as the ambitions and ideals of its creators and adherents. The ideology acknowledges and accepts the variety and multiplicity of religious customs, while simultaneously emphasising its own uniqueness and innovation. The objective is to establish a universal religion that can unify all individuals in their pursuit of truth and virtue. Caodaism exemplifies the capacity of religion to adjust and create new ideas in response to challenges and favourable circumstances.

## **Philosophies and Doctrines of Caodaism**

### **2.1 Buddhist Influences**

Caodaism is a syncretic religion that assimilates various elements of Buddhism, including the principles of karma, reincarnation, nirvana, and non-attachment. Nevertheless, it also alters and adjusts these conceptions to align with its own perspective and objectives. Caodaism recognises the historical and spiritual significance of Gautama Buddha, along with the teachings and scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. However, it also respects the validity and complementary nature of other religious personalities and traditions. Caodaism possesses a unique perspective on the future, envisioning the arrival of a new Buddha named Maitreya, who will guide humanity towards salvation and harmony (Blagov 2001).

The Outline of Religious Self-Cultivation Techniques, authored by Ngô Văn Chiêu, the founder of Caodaism, serves as a primary source for Caodaist ideology. This literature extensively references the Mahayana sutras, particularly the Lotus Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, and the Surangama Sutra, which have

been translated into Classical Chinese. The sutras highlight the significance of wisdom, compassion, and skillful techniques in the journey towards enlightenment. In addition, they present the notion of the bodhisattva, an entity that pledges to assist all conscious beings in achieving freedom (Hoskins 2015).

Caodaism demonstrates its Buddhist influence in its ceremonies, architecture, and iconography. The primary sanctuary of Caodaism, known as the Tay Ninh Holy See, is an impressive edifice that harmoniously integrates features from both Eastern and Western architectural traditions. The structure features a ceiling with a dome form, reminiscent of a stupa, which is a Buddhist monument representing the Buddha's consciousness. Additionally, the structure features four towers symbolising the four noble truths, which are the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. The temple's interior is adorned with sculptures, artworks, and emblems representing diverse Buddhist entities, including the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, and the arhats, who are the enlightened followers of the Buddha. The temple features a prominent eye symbolising the Supreme Being, the ultimate origin of all religions (Nguyen et al., 2022). Caodaism adheres to a variant of the Noble Eightfold Path, which serves as the fundamental ethical and spiritual structure of Buddhism. Nevertheless, Caodaism designates it as the Path of Humanity and interprets it through a lens that emphasises societal and practical aspects. The Way of Humanity comprises eight fundamental elements: correct perspective, correct thinking, correct communication, correct behaviour, correct occupation, correct endeavour, correct awareness, and correct focus. The purpose of these characteristics is to provide guidance to Caodaists in their everyday lives and assist them in developing values such as compassion, righteousness, civility, wisdom, and faith. The objective of The Way of Humanity is to foster concord and tranquilly among individuals, irrespective of their religious or cultural affiliations (Hoskins 2015).

Caodaism diverges from certain branches of Buddhism by promoting active involvement in the world and the fulfilment of humanitarian duties, rather than advocating for detachment and renunciation of worldly pleasures. Caodaism does not consider nirvana to be the ultimate objective of spiritual discipline, but rather as a mental condition that can be attained during one's lifetime. Caodaism does not show preference for monasticism or lay life, but instead considers both ways to be equally acceptable and complementary. Caodaism posits that redemption can be achieved by two distinct paths: the celestial path, known as the Way of Heaven, and the terrestrial path, known as the Way of Earth. The Way of Heaven encompasses the utilisation of inner alchemy, a technique aimed at transmuting the physical and mental aspects of oneself into a state of pure energy. The Way of Earth encompasses the application of social service, which entails actively contributing to the well-being and contentment of others. Both methods necessitate adherence to the Five Precepts, which serve as the fundamental ethical guidelines of Caodaism (Hoskins 2015).

Caodaism is a distinctive and pioneering religion that amalgamates Buddhism with many religious and cultural customs. The ideology both reveres and upholds the heritage of Buddhism, while simultaneously modifying and reshaping it to align with its distinct vision and purpose. Its objective is to establish a comprehensive religion that may encompass and unify all individuals in the pursuit of truth and virtue. Caodaism exemplifies the capacity of religion to adapt and create new ideas in response to changing circumstances and difficulties.

Caodaism is a syncretic religion that amalgamates elements of Buddhism, as per the given facts. The belief system encompasses concepts such as karma, rebirth, nirvana, and non-attachment, while also offering its unique viewpoint. This individual highly esteems the teachings of Gautama Buddha and Mahayana Buddhists, while also demonstrating reverence for other religious traditions. "Outline of Religious Self-Cultivation Techniques" by Ngô Văn Chiêu is an important text that discusses Mahayana sutras, which prioritise wisdom, compassion, and the bodhisattva notion.

Caodaism incorporates Buddhist influences in its ceremonies and architectural design. The primary shrine of the Tay Ninh Holy See integrates architectural elements from both Eastern and Western traditions. The architectural design incorporates symbolic elements, such as a dome-shaped roof

reminiscent of a stupa and towers that represent the four noble truths. The building's interior features an assortment of sculptures depicting various Buddhist deities.

Caodaism diverges from conventional Buddhism by advocating for active involvement in worldly affairs and humanitarian obligations, while adhering to a modified rendition of the Noble Eightfold Path referred to as the "Path of Humanity" that places focus on sociological matters. Nirvana is not regarded as the ultimate goal, but rather as an achievable psychological state that can be experienced throughout one's life. Caodaism provides two distinct paths for achieving redemption: the celestial route, which entails the practise of inner alchemy, and the terrestrial pathway, which requires actively participating in social service. Both routes need unwavering commitment to the Five Precepts.

Caodaism distinguishes itself through its capacity to amalgamate diverse cultural traditions with Buddhism, aiming to form a comprehensive religion that unifies individuals in the pursuit of truth and moral virtue. It exemplifies the adaptability of religion in accommodating evolving circumstances and challenges.

## **2.2 Confucian Influences**

Caodaism embraces this impact by asserting that its adherents engage in the Way of Humanity, which entails nurturing the values of genuineness, fairness, appropriateness, sagacity, and honesty. The Caodaist writings, including prayers and hymns, were composed in a poetic form that consisted of alternating lines of six and eight syllables, and use the *Đường luật* poetic form that was favored by Confucian scholars in the past. This particular poetic structure was favoured by Confucian intellectuals in the past. The Caodaist cosmology and soteriology are influenced by the Vietnamese interpretations of the Spring-Autumn Annals, a historical document that scrutinised the legitimacy of the ancient Chinese dynasties. According to Blagov (2001), certain Caodaist deities, such as Guan Yu and Trạng Trình, represent the principles of a warrior and a scholar as advocated by Confucianism.

Caodaism incorporates its Confucian lineage through its ceremonies, symbols, and organisational structure. Within the central sanctuary of Tay Ninh's primary temple, there exists a sacred platform devoted to the veneration of Confucius. The pillars of the entrance gate are adorned with intricately carved depictions of his likeness as described in the Analects. The clergy don apparel that has resemblance to the conventional robes and headgear of the Vietnamese bureaucrats, as opposed to the Buddhist monastic garments. Located beneath the Bát Quái Đài, an octagonal edifice that contains the shrine dedicated to the Supreme Being, lies a designated area known as the Seance Spot. This is where the leaders of the Caodaist religion engage in communication with spirits and seek their guidance. This practise bears resemblance to the ancient Chinese courts that sought advice from oracles (Nguyen et al., 2022). The Caodaist religion exhibits a hierarchical and bureaucratic framework that closely resembles the organisational structure of the Vietnamese government, featuring distinct divisions and levels of authority. The Caodaists faced political and social obstacles brought about by French colonial rule, the Vietnamese monarchy, and competing religious movements. These challenges compelled them to employ both armed resistance and diplomacy, in contrast to the Confucian inclination towards peace and harmony (Hoskins 2015).

The Caodaist ethical system, known as The Way of Humanity, is founded around the fundamental principles of love and fairness. The objective of the Way of Humanity is to achieve a state of harmony by combining the principles of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, while also incorporating the insights from other religious and philosophical traditions. The Way of Humanity has five fundamental principles: abstaining from murdering, refraining from theft, avoiding alcohol consumption, abstaining from obscene behaviour, and refraining from lying. These principles have resemblance to the Buddhist five commandments, while also embodying the Confucian ideals of benevolence and moral uprightness. The Way of Humanity encompasses four fundamental commandments: adherence to the instructions

of those in authority, displaying humility and assisting others, conducting oneself with honesty and respect in financial affairs, and demonstrating sincerity and consistency in the presence or absence of others. The origins of these commandments can be traced back to the Confucian classics, including the Analects and the Mencius. The Way of Humanity promotes vegetarianism, meditation, charity, and social work. It also emphasises the development of values such as moderation, respect, modesty, and concession.

The *Đường luật* poems are a type of Caodaist religious texts that are written in the manner of the classical Chinese poetry from the Tang era. The name "*Đường luật*" denotes the "Tang rules", which encompass the stringent regulations of rhyme, tone, and parallelism that govern this particular literary structure. The name *sinh động*, which translates to "lively" or "vivid", signifies that these poetry are not simple replicas of the historical models, but rather original manifestations of the Caodaist spirit and vision. The *Đường luật* poems are typically composed by the spirit mediums of the Caodaist hierarchy, who assert that they get inspiration and guidance from holy entities like as Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Jesus, and Cao Dai (the Supreme Being). The *Đường luật* poems fulfil multiple roles within the Caodaist scriptures, including the revelation of divine intentions, elucidation of teachings, exaltation of saints, guidance for followers, and prophetic insights into the future. Examples of the *Đường luật* poetry include: A poem authored by Buddha, which unveils the genesis and purpose of Caodaism: The Third Universal Redemption's Grand Path The Supreme Being reveals his presence through the embodiments of Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, and Jesus. These enlightened beings impart to us the genuine principles of existence (Jeremy, 2016).

A poem authored by Laozi, elucidating the notion of Cao Dai (High Tower): Cao Dai is synonymous with the Supreme Ultimate. The Supreme Ultimate and the Infinite are synonymous. The concept of the Infinite is synonymous with the notion of the Void. The Void and Cao Dai are synonymous. A poem authored by Confucius, extolling the virtues of the esteemed Caodaist leader Pham Cong Tac: His moral nature is profound and boundless. His mind is exceptional and akin to celestial brilliance. His Daoist heart has the qualities of a mountain, characterised by unwavering strength and stability. His compassion and moral integrity are akin to the boundless expanse of the sea.

The Caodaist cosmology and soteriology diverge from the Confucian worldview and ideals in various areas. Caodaism embraces a dualistic perspective of the cosmos, wherein it recognises the existence of both the observable realm (yang) and the imperceptible realm (yin). The visible world encompasses the physical domain of substance, space, and time, in which both humans and other living entities are bound by the continuous cycle of birth and death, as well as the principle of karma and its consequences. The unseen realm encompasses the spiritual domain, serving as the abode of God and other celestial entities, and offering humanity the opportunity to achieve emancipation and eternal life. Contrary to this, Confucianism does not prioritise the differentiation between the observable and imperceptible realms. Instead, it centres its attention on the balance and organisation of the human realm, which is established upon the principles of Heaven (Tian) and the Way (Dao). Confucianism lacks a distinct notion of redemption or transcendence, instead emphasising the development of moral values and the fulfilment of social obligations.

Furthermore, Caodaism espouses a theistic perspective, acknowledging God as the Ultimate Being, the Originator, and the progenitor of all entities. God is the ultimate origin of all existence, knowledge, and affection, and he communicates his presence to humanity through many prophets and messengers, including Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Jesus, and Cao Dai. Additionally, God establishes communication with humans through the practise of spirit-mediumship and seances, which serve as the primary means of receiving the sacred scriptures and teachings of Caodaism. Contrary to that, Confucianism does not hold a personal or anthropomorphic perception of God. Instead, it considers Heaven (Tian) as a transcendent and immanent power that regulates both the universe and human matters. Heaven is not



an entity responsible for creation or judgement, but rather a system of moral principles and natural laws. Humans can harmonise with Heaven by engaging in rituals and nurturing their sense of compassion and kindness. Confucianism lacks a legacy of divine revelation or prophetic messages, instead placing its trust in the sagacity of the wise individuals and the authoritative texts known as the classics.

Furthermore, Caodaism embraces a syncretic perspective on religion, positing that all religious beliefs are distinct manifestations of a shared truth, and can be harmoniously combined and assimilated into a superior oneness. Caodaism asserts itself as the Third Universal Redemption, representing the ultimate and conclusive divine revelation. Its objective is to harmonise all religions and deliver salvation to all beings. Caodaism assimilates tenets from Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, and other faiths, and acknowledges their respective founders and saints as integral components of the Caodaist pantheon and hierarchy. Contrarily, Confucianism does not possess a universal or exclusive perspective on religion. Instead, it identifies itself as a humanistic and ethical tradition that may peacefully coexist and enhance various religious and intellectual systems. Confucianism does not assert its exclusivity or ultimate truth, but instead aims to safeguard and convey the cultural and ethical legacy of Chinese culture. Confucianism lacks a rigid or dogmatic theory, instead embracing variation and flexibility to accommodate the evolving circumstances and demands of different eras (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ngo-Van-Chieu>).

Confucius and other prominent Confucian figures hold a crucial position and has profound significance within the Caodaist pantheon and ceremonies. Confucius is considered one of the three primary figures representing the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism), which serve as the foundational principles of the Caodaist doctrine. Confucius is recognised as one of the five founders of the Caodaist faith, with Buddha, Laozi, Jesus, and Cao Dai. Confucius is highly respected as the epitome of Humaneness, imparting teachings on ethics, allegiance, reverence for family, and societal concord. Confucius is regarded as the leader of the Confucian division (Ngoc Hoi), which is one of the three primary branches of the Caodaist hierarchy, alongside the Buddhist division (Thai Hoi) and the Taoist division (Thuong Hoi). The Confucian division assumes the role of governing and instructing the Caodaist community, with its members donning blue garments to signify their association (Serguei A. Blagov, 2001).

Caodaism also pays homage to other prominent Confucian figures such as Mencius, the second sage of Confucianism, who emphasised the inherent goodness and capacity of human nature; Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius, who compiled the Classic of Filial Piety; and Zhuge Liang, a renowned strategist and statesman from the Three Kingdoms era, who epitomised the virtues of loyalty, wisdom, and benevolence. These characters are revered as the holy beings and protectors of the Confucian division. They frequently manifest during spirit-mediumship sessions and seance poetry, offering counsel and instruction to the followers of Caodaism (R. B. Smith, 2009).

The Caodaist vestments and Vietnamese governmental costume exhibit both similarities and distinctions, while also carrying symbolic significance that mirrors the Caodaist identity and mission. The Caodaist garments and the Vietnamese governmental costume share certain commonalities, which can be summarised as follows: Both costumes are derived from the traditional attire of Vietnam, including of a lengthy robe known as "áo dài" and a headpiece called "khăn đóng". The long robe and turban are emblematic of Vietnamese culture and civilization, representing the virtues of modesty, dignity, and elegance.

To summarise, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are combined in Caodaism, which promotes the Way of Humanity, which values sincerity, justice, wisdom, and honesty. Confucian scholars favour its beautiful prayers and hymns, which reflect ancient virtues. And Confucianism influences the religion's rites, symbolism, and hierarchy. Caodaism honours Confucius with sacred sites and clothing. The hierarchical structure reflects the Vietnamese government, responding to colonialism and religious

conflicts.

Caodaism's Way of Humanity promotes love, fairness, and morality based on Confucian and Buddhist beliefs. It promotes vegetarianism, compassion, and moderation for social harmony. Caodaist scriptures use traditional Chinese *Đường luật* poems to explain divine purposes and prophetic insights. These poetry by spiritual mediums communicate Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Jesus, and Cao Dai's wisdom. A dualistic cosmos and theistic view of God as the Ultimate Being communicating through spirit mediums distinguish Caodaism from Confucianism. It claims to be the Third Universal Redemption, uniting all religions and saving them.

Caodaism's pantheon and rites honour Confucians. The five Caodaism founders venerate Confucius, Buddha, and Laozi, representing the Three Teachings. Spiritual gatherings also honour and consult Confucian figures like Mencius and Zhuge Liang.

Caodaist and Vietnamese government clothes feature long robes and headpieces, symbolising Vietnamese culture. Traditional and symbolic, these clothes reflect Caodaist identity.

### 2.3 Taoist Influences

The native Vietnamese term *Đạo* signifies an Ultimate Reality cosmology where Yin-Yang energies continually flux between growth and decay. As China's indigenous "Way," Taoist renderings of this worldview entered Vietnam early. Caodaism explicitly claims completion of Lao Tzu and Gautama's salvific missions as the next stage in a cyclic soteriology where new faiths build upon previous ones. Deities venerated include the Jade Emperor, Eight Immortals and Three Realms governance figures. Scripturally, core texts quote *Tao Te Ching* passages and describe Vietnam as successor for safeguarding its wisdom. Theologically, clergy study methods for comprehending and directing *Đạo* energies towards humanity's moral betterment (Jacobs 2011).

Ritually, the *Đại Đàn* worship hall configures offerings to deities upon a cosmic diagram called the *Bát Quái Đài* envisioned as transmitting devotees' petitions Heavenward. Liturgically, ceremonies occur at fixed astrological hours corresponding to Yin-Yang principles for efficacious alignment. Architecturally, Tay Ninh's dragon-horse sanctuary shape symbolizes mythical beasts ridden by immortals in China's classic novels. Vestments, regalia and ritual paraphernalia borrow extensively from Taoism's visuospatial repertoire. Adherents believe inner energetic cultivation harmonizing with outer natural flows manifests destiny and longevity, as Taoist alchemy techniques promise (Palmer 2008).

Caodaism is a syncretic religious movement that emerged in Vietnam around the 1920s. It purports to be the Third Universal Redemption, a novel divine revelation that encompasses and harmonises the teachings of preceding faiths, such as Taoism and Buddhism. Caodaists hold the belief that the Supreme Being is identical to the Tao, which is the ultimate truth and origin of all things. Additionally, they perceive this Supreme Being as a benevolent and empathetic deity who interacts with humanity through seances and mediums. The Divine Eye serves as the emblem of the Supreme Being and holds significant importance for Caodaists, who revere and contemplate upon it. The symbol embodies the divine attributes of God's all-knowing and all-powerful nature, as well as the spiritual insight and illumination of the human spirit.

The Third Universal Redemption is founded upon the notion of the Three Periods of Salvation, which align with the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. As per Caodaist doctrine, every period is assigned a distinct task and approach to salvation, which is foretold by the preceding period. The initial phase of salvation encompassed the epoch of Confucianism, a doctrine that emphasised ethical conduct and societal harmony. The Second Period of Salvation encompassed the teachings of Taoism and Buddhism, which emphasised the principles of natural order and the cycle of cause and effect through karma and rebirth. The Third Period of Salvation refers to the epoch of Caodaism, a religious movement that espouses the principles of global love and harmonious coexistence

among all faiths. Caodaists hold the belief that the Third Period of Salvation, which is considered the ultimate and all-encompassing revelation from the Supreme Being, was prophesied by Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching and by Gautama Buddha in the Lotus Sutra.

The Caodaist pantheon and hierarchy encompass a multitude of Taoist deities, with entities from several religions and notable historical persons. Several Taoist deities include:

The Jade Emperor, known as Ngọc Hoàng, holds dominion over the celestial realm and serves as the embodiment of the Supreme Being in the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. Additionally, he holds the position of the leader of the Caodaist Executive Body, responsible for overseeing the administration of the religion.

The Eight Immortals, known as Bát Tiên, serve as the guardians of the Caodaist Legislative Body, responsible for establishing the laws and regulations of the faith. The Caodaists view them as exemplars of spiritual development and transcendence.

The Three Pure Ones, known as Tam Thánh. The wall mural dominates Tinh Tam Dien. The three figures are Caodaism-connected Saints. First Chinese Republic founder Sun Yat Sen (Trung Son Chon Nhon) wears modern Chinese attire. A Chinese inkstone is in his hand. In Western clothes and a white beard, Victor Hugo, a humane French poet and writer, appears next to him. His spiritual role is Caodaism's overseas missionary. He writes with a Western Civilization feather pen. The 16th-century Vietnamese poet and prophet Trang Trinh Nguyen Binh Khiem (Thanh Son Dao Si) is on the right. He writes the God-Human accord in Chinese. The Agreement is also in French. Two languages unite Eastern and Western Civilization with the same message. The English translations are "God and Humanity" and "Love and Justice".

These are the Three Pure Ones goals we must all meet. Honouring this agreement will redeem you. The Saints you see aid Caodaists spread the Third Alliance between God and Humanity and guide the faith. The Three Officials, known as Tam Quan, serve as the administrators of the Three Realms. The Heavenly Official, known as Thiên Quan, exercises dominion over the destiny and fate of all living beings. The Earthly Official, referred to as Địa Quan, is responsible for the management of natural resources and the occurrence of calamities in the globe. Lastly, the Human Official, known as Nhân Quan, supervises the moral and spiritual education of humanity.

The Caodaist interpretation of the Tao Te Ching diverges from the conventional Taoist interpretation in multiple aspects. The Caodaists consider the Tao Te Ching to be a holy text that encompasses the divine words of the Supreme Being, rather than solely a philosophical work that conveys the wisdom of Lao Tzu. Furthermore, the Caodaists place significant emphasis on the ethical and social ramifications of the Tao Te Ching, rather than solely focusing on its metaphysical and mystical elements. According to their beliefs, the Tao Te Ching imparts the values of global love, peace, justice, and harmony, which serve as the fundamental tenets of Caodaist ideology and ethics. Furthermore, the Caodaists establish a connection between the Tao Te Ching and the additional scriptures and teachings of the Third Universal Redemption, extending beyond the confines of the Taoist canon and tradition. They hold the belief that the Tao Te Ching elucidates the fundamental nature and interconnectedness of all religions, and that it harmoniously coexists and enhances the other divine disclosures from the Supreme Being.

The function and importance of the Supreme Being and the Divine Eye in Caodaist cosmology and theology diverge from the Taoist perspective on the Ultimate Reality and the symbol of the Taiji. The Supreme Being encompasses both the transcendental and indescribable Tao, as well as a personal and benevolent deity known as Cao Dai, who possesses a distinct identity, represented by the Divine Eye, and communicates through seances and mediums. The Supreme Being is the one responsible for bringing the universe into existence and ensuring its continuation. It is the origin and ultimate purpose of all forms of existence, and the progenitor of all living beings. The Divine Eye serves as both a symbol and a manifestation of the Supreme Being, acting as a conduit for divine presence. The Divine Eye



encompasses the omniscient vision of God, the quest for enlightenment inside the human soul, and the conduit via which communications from the Supreme Being are received during a seance. The Divine Eye serves as the intermediary connecting the mortal and the divine, the perceptible and the imperceptible, and the singular and the collective.

The Caodaist rituals and Taoist rituals can be distinguished by their similarities and distinctions, which are outlined below: - Both Caodaist and Taoist rituals encompass practises of purification, meditation, and the presentation of offerings to divine entities. In addition, they employ analogous symbols, such as the Eight Trigrams, the Five Elements, and the Yin-Yang. Nevertheless, the Caodaist rituals exhibit a higher degree of organisation and uniformity, whilst the Taoist rituals display a wider range of variations and adaptability. Caodaist rituals adhere to a predetermined calendar and a standardised liturgy, but Taoist rituals exhibit variability based on the specific occasion and the practitioners' own preferences.

- Both Caodaist and Taoist rituals strive to attain a state of concord and equilibrium between the human and the natural realms, the individual and the collective, and the temporal and the eternal dimensions. Additionally, they strive to acquire blessings and safeguarding from the divine beings, while also demonstrating appreciation and dedication. Nevertheless, the Caodaist rituals exhibit a broader and inclusive focus, whilst the Taoist rituals demonstrate a narrower and exclusive focus. The Caodaist rituals prioritise the harmonious coexistence and equal status of all religions and individuals, whereas the Taoist rituals highlight the varied nature and hierarchical structure of different sects and orders.

- Both Caodaist and Taoist ceremonies employ seances and mediums as a means of establishing communication with the supernatural realm. Additionally, they employ comparable techniques, such as the planchette, the basket, and the table.

Nevertheless, the Caodaist seances and mediums have a position of greater authority and exclusivity, whilst the Taoist seances and mediums enjoy a more widespread and inclusive reputation. The Caodaist philosophy and organisation primarily rely on the Caodaist seances and mediums, which are exclusively conducted by the ordained clergy. Taoist seances and mediums serve as significant conduits for the transmission of Taoist learning and practise, and are conducted by both the clergy and the laity.

The seances' techniques and outcomes serve as reflections of the Caodaist authority and legitimacy.

- The seances employ various instruments such as the planchette, the basket, or the table, which enable the mediums to communicate the messages from the Supreme Being or the Divine Beings through writing or speech. The seances are led by the Caodaist clergy, who possess exclusive authorization to receive and interpret the messages. The seances take place in the seance hall, a consecrated area that is isolated from the external environment by drapes and security personnel. The seances are conducted at predetermined times and dates, in accordance with the astrological and lunar cycles. The seances are observed by the Caodaist adherents, who must maintain silence and show reverence.

The results of the seances consist of the communications received from the Supreme Being or the Divine Beings, which are then documented and released as the Caodaist scriptures. The messages encompass the doctrines, statutes, ordinances, predictions, and disclosures of the Caodaist faith. The messages contain comprehensive information regarding the identities, ranks, titles, and responsibilities of the Caodaist clergy and followers. Additionally, they provide instructions, warnings, accolades, and penalties in response to their activities. The messages are regarded as the unequivocal and flawless utterances of the divine, serving as the foundation of Caodaist power and credibility.

The seances demonstrate the Caodaist religion's authority and validity by affirming its status as the Third Universal Redemption, the ultimate and all-encompassing revelation from the Supreme Being. The seances further demonstrate that the Caodaist clergy and adherents are the selected and devoted agents of the Supreme Being, entrusted with a distinct purpose and duty to disseminate the Caodaist doctrine and to unite all religions and individuals. The seances further demonstrate that the Caodaist religion represents the culmination and amalgamation of preceding religions, particularly Taoism and Buddhism, and that it harmoniously coexists and supplements other divine revelations.

The subsequent account outlines the historical development and organisational framework of the Caodaist institution, as well as its interactions with the Vietnamese government and society.

The history of the Caodaist organisation may be categorised into four distinct phases: the inception phase (1926-1934), the growth phase (1934-1955), the oppression phase (1955-1975), and the resurgence phase (1975-present). The initial stage was characterised by the construction of the Caodaist Holy See in Tay Ninh, the creation of the Caodaist hierarchy and administration, and the elaboration of the Caodaist theology and ethics. The expansion phase was characterised by the proliferation of Caodaist adherents and their increasing influence, the establishment of Caodaist temples and educational institutions, and the active participation of Caodaist factions in political and military engagements. The suppression phase was characterised by the systematic persecution and repression of the Caodaist religion by various regimes, including the demilitarisation and imprisonment of Caodaist leaders, resulting in a drop in Caodaist activities and visibility. The revival period was characterised by the reestablishment and refurbishment of the Caodaist temples and schools, the acknowledgment and control of the Caodaist religion by the Vietnamese government, and the renewed vigour and prominence of Caodaist activities and presence. During the revival phase, the Caodaist diaspora emerged, particularly in the United States, France, and Australia. Caodaist exiles and immigrants in these countries formed their own communities and temples, while simultaneously maintaining their connections with the Caodaist Holy See in Tay Ninh. During the revival era, there was a significant growth in Caodaist research and dialogue, both within and outside the Caodaist community. Additionally, Caodaists actively engaged in ecumenical and social movements.

The Caodaist organisation is structured according to the Three Powers model (*Tam Quyền*), which comprises the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. The Executive Power is led by the *Giáo Tông*, who serves as the leader and ambassador of the Supreme Being on the earthly realm. The *Giáo Tông* is supported by the *Cửu Trùng Đài*, which is the council consisting of nine levels of the Caodaist clergy. Additionally, the *Hiệp Thiên Đài* serves as the seance hall where communications from the Supreme Being and the Divine Beings are received and documented. The Legislative Power is led by the *Hộ Pháp*, who serves as the guardian and lawmaker of the Caodaist religion. The *Hộ Pháp* is supported by the *Bát Quái Đài*, an octagonal edifice that contains the sanctuary of the Supreme Being, and the *Thập Nhị Thời Quân*, a military force comprised of twelve zodiac hours, who serve as the protectors and enforcers of the Caodaist regulations. The Judicial Power is led by the *Thượng Phẩm*, who serves as the judge and arbitrator within the Caodaist faith. The *Thượng Phẩm* is supported by the *Thượng Sanh*, who serve as the elders and counsellors of the Caodaist society, as well as the *Cửu phẩm Thần Tiên*, which consists of the nine divisions of the heavenly army responsible for investigating and punishing Caodaist transgressions.

The dynamics of the relationship between the Caodaist organisation and the Vietnamese government and society have been intricate and subject to fluctuations throughout history. During the initial stages of the Caodaist movement, the adherents encountered repression and animosity from the French colonial authorities, who sought to quash and regulate the Caodaist faith due to its perceived challenge to their governance. The Caodaists encountered rivalry and conflict with various political and religious factions, including the Vietnamese monarchy, nationalist parties, communist forces, and other sects and cults. In response to these obstacles, the Caodaists established their own militia and army, and engaged in alliances and negotiations with other factions and powers. The Caodaists endeavoured to demonstrate their independence and self-governance by establishing their own territorial domain and administrative system in Tay Ninh and other provinces. The Caodaists endeavoured to propagate their vision and mission of the Third Universal Redemption, seeking to unite and emancipate Vietnam and the world from colonial and feudal subjugation. Their ultimate goal was to establish a new period of tranquilly and

concord among all religions and sentient beings.

Following the conclusion of the Vietnam War and the subsequent reunification of Vietnam under communist rule, the Caodaists experienced a fresh wave of oppression and suppression. The communist government regarded the Caodaist religion as a counterrevolutionary and destabilising influence, and made efforts to eradicate and absorb the Caodaist organisation and culture. The Caodaists endured the seizure and annihilation of their temples and assets, the incarceration and execution of their leaders and adherents, and the proscription and limitation of their activities and ceremonies. The Caodaists also underwent the scattering and movement of their followers, as numerous Caodaists sought shelter in foreign nations and established themselves there, particularly in the United States, France, and Australia. The Caodaists had the difficulties of adjusting and assimilating into their new surroundings, while simultaneously striving to save and pass on their culture and religious beliefs.

Over the past few decades, the Caodaists have had a slow and partial amelioration of their circumstances and standing both within Vietnam and internationally. The Caodaist religion in Vietnam has received formal recognition and regulation from the government, resulting in the reopening and restoration of Caodaist temples and schools. The Caodaist clergy and followers have been granted permission to restart and broaden their activities and presence, as well as to engage in social and cultural events. The Caodaist community has forged connections and engaged in discussions with other religious and non-religious groups, and has actively participated in interfaith and social movements. The Caodaist research and dialogue have undergone significant development and expansion, occurring both inside and beyond the Caodaist community. These efforts have played a crucial role in enhancing comprehension and admiration for the Caodaist religion and culture.

The Caodaist diaspora has expanded and thrived in places where Caodaist refugees and immigrants have established themselves, on a worldwide scale. The Caodaist diaspora has constructed its own temples and villages, while also preserving their ties and correspondence with the Caodaist Holy See in Tay Ninh. The Caodaist diaspora has successfully assimilated and acclimated to their new surroundings, establishing harmonious relationships and collaborating with various religious and ethnic communities. The Caodaist diaspora has encountered the difficulties associated with industrialization and globalisation, including the secularisation and diversification of society, the absorption and hybridization of culture, and the individualization and pluralization of faith. The Caodaist diaspora has effectively addressed these obstacles by innovative adaptations and transformations of their organisation and identity. They have also actively explored and articulated their position and relevance in the modern world.

The Caodaist movement and identity are significantly influenced and faced with difficulties due to the processes of modernization and globalisation.

The Caodaist movement and identity have been both benefited and endangered by the processes of modernization and globalisation. Modernization and globalisation have facilitated the expansion and diversification of the Caodaist movement, allowing it to reach and appeal to a wider range of individuals and locations. The Caodaist movement has benefited from modernization and globalisation, which have given them the means and methods to communicate, collaborate, learn, and invent. However, the Caodaist movement and identity have also encountered obstacles and risks as a result of modernization and globalisation. The Caodaist movement has been exposed to competition, conflict, criticism, and examination as a result of modernization and globalisation. The process of modernization and globalisation has introduced various challenges and conflicts to the Caodaist identity, including the erosion and transformation of traditional customs and culture, as well as the emergence and cohabitation of other beliefs and practises.

The Caodaist movement and identity have been confronted with concerns and issues as a result of modernization and globalisation. Key questions and concerns include: How can the Caodaist movement effectively reconcile and incorporate local and global influences, traditional and modern elements, and exclusive and inclusive principles? How can the Caodaist movement sustain and enhance its power and

credibility, its cohesion and variety, and its significance and uniqueness? How can the Caodaist movement effectively tackle and resolve the various issues, conflicts, disparities, and injustices that exist in the world? How can the Caodaist movement effectively express and exemplify its vision and mission, its values and ethics, and its contributions and duties in the world?

## 2.4 Catholic Influences

The presence of Catholic influences is a prominent and contentious characteristic of Caodaism, a syncretic religion that originated in Vietnam during the 1920s. The influence of Catholicism is evident in multiple aspects of Caodaism, including its structure, doctrine, worship, and building design. The influences of Catholicism can be comprehended via various lenses, including historical, cultural, political, and spiritual perspectives.

Christianity entered Vietnam via 17th century Jesuit and Dominican missionaries, catalyzing the founding of a native Caodaist church centuries later. Ecclesiastically, the religion possesses hierarchical clergy including a Giáo Tông (Pope), Phối Sư (Cardinals), Giáo Sư (Archbishops), Giáo Hữu (Priests), Lễ Sinh (Student Priests) and adherents termed tín đồ resemble lay parishioners. This formalized structure administered through a Holy See directs spiritual matters impacting adherents. Liturgically, ritual procedures incorporate Catholic Mass elements like petition prayers, votive candlelighting and communion rites using wine, tea or water instead (Fjelstad & Nguyen 2011).

Theologically, a Supreme Being concept fuses the Biblical Heavenly Father with Asian divine patriarchs as the Jade Emperor. Christ appears in Caodaist cosmology as the Way of Saints, one among the Five Branches redeeming humanity. The Cao Dai religion venerates secular individuals such as the French warrior Joan of Arc, the Roman ruler Julius Caesar, and the first president of China, Sun Yat-sen, in addition to their religious veneration. Figures like Joan of Arc represent enlightened spirits guiding believers, although Jesus himself rarely manifests in sessions. Architecturally, St. Peter's Basilica shapes Tay Ninh's facade while Virgin Mary iconography inspires the Divine Mother statue. Catholic notions of charity, salvation, sin and the soul permeate scriptures revealed through 19th century French spiritist methods like talking boards. This fusion of Asian and European influences under papal hierarchy gives Caodaism a truly syncretic identity within Vietnam (Palmer 2008).

An issue pertaining to Catholic Influences is the emergence and progression of Caodaism as a distinct and autonomous religion, distinct from the colonial and foreign religions like Catholicism and Buddhism. Caodaism was established in 1926 by a cohort of Vietnamese intellectuals and public servants who harboured discontent towards the political and socioeconomic conditions in Vietnam under the French colonial era. In addition, they were influenced by Catholic nationalist and anti-colonial activities, such as the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc school. They professed to receive divine communications from God, also known as Cao Dai, through seances and mediums, with the intention of founding a novel religion that would unite and emancipate Vietnam and the entire world. In addition, they embraced the Catholic system of hierarchy and administration, together with its symbols and characters, including the Pope, Cardinals, Virgin Mary, and Joan of Arc. Additionally, they assimilated aspects from several religious practises, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and Spiritism, resulting in the formation of a syncretic and diverse identity for Caodaism.

Caodaism, a religious belief system, incorporates Catholic influences in its theory and cosmology. It centres around the concept of the Third Universal Redemption, also known as the Great Way or Dai Dao. Caodaism is the belief that God, known as Cao Dai, has made a divine appearance to humanity for the third and ultimate occasion, following the earlier revelations by Moses and Buddha. The Third Universal Redemption is regarded as the culmination and integration of prior religious traditions, particularly Catholicism and Buddhism, and as a reaction to the challenges of modernity and the global demand for spiritual rejuvenation. Caodaism espouses the belief in a gender-inclusive deity,

acknowledging both male and female aspects. Furthermore, it recognises that this divine entity manifests itself in various forms and is referred to by different names in diverse religious and cultural contexts. The Divine Eye serves as the emblem of the divine entity and serves as the central point of veneration and contemplation for the Caodaists. The Divine Mother holds significant prominence in Caodaism, being associated with revered figures such as the Virgin Mary, the Goddess of Mercy, and the Mother Goddess of Vietnam. Jesus Christ is considered one of the three eminent philosophers of the Way of Saints, alongside Laozi and Confucius. Joan of Arc holds the position of one of the four female cardinals within the Caodaist church and serves as the leader of the Way of Heroes. Victor Hugo is a prominent figure in Caodaism, being one of the three original spirit mediums who founded the religion and serving as the leader of the Way of Spirits. In addition to Catholic figures, the Caodaist pantheon and hierarchy encompass various other deities, including the Jade Emperor, the Eight Immortals, the Three Pure Ones, the Three Officials, and the Buddha.

Another aspect pertaining to Catholic Influences is the observance and implementation of Caodaism, which draws inspiration from the Catholic liturgy and sacraments while also incorporating its own distinct features and advancements. Caodaism conducts four daily ceremonies, as reported by sources, scheduled at 6 am, 12 pm, 6 pm, and 12 am. These ceremonies encompass prayers, hymns, and readings from the scriptures. Caodaism also includes a sacrament of initiation, known as baptism for Catholics and initiation for Caodaists. Both ceremonies entail the utilisation of water and the summoning of the Holy Spirit. Caodaism also include a sacrament of reconciliation, akin to the practise of confession in Catholicism and repentance in Caodaism. Both ceremonies entail the acknowledgment of wrongdoings and the plea for pardon and absolution. Caodaism has a distinctive practise known as seance, wherein communication with the spirit realm is facilitated via the use of mediums and tools such as planchettes and beaked baskets. The ritual serves as the primary means of obtaining divine revelation and prophecy in Caodaism, as well as a method of seeking direction and counsel from the celestial entities. Caodaism practises a unique rite of vegetarianism, wherein adherents refrain from consuming meat and animal-derived items on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month, as well as at special occasions and festivals. This ritual serves as a means of demonstrating empathy and reverence towards all sentient creatures, while also cleansing the physical and mental faculties. Caodaism features an intricate worship rite that involves the reverence of the Divine Eye and the divine entities on the central altar, together with the ancestors and saints on the adjacent altars. This ceremony entails the utilisation of incense, candles, flowers, fruits, and other tributes, accompanied by actions such as bowing, kneeling, and prostrating.

Another aspect pertaining to Catholic Influences in Caodaism is the architectural and artistic expressions, which draw inspiration from Catholic style and iconography while also embodying the syncretic and eclectic essence of Caodaism. The primary temple of Caodaism, known as the Holy See in Tay Ninh, is designed in the likeness of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. However, it incorporates several religious and cultural symbols, including the dragon-horse, the lotus, the swastika, and the star of David. The primary place of worship, known as the *Đại Đền*, is organised in accordance with a cosmic diagram called the *Bát Quái Đài*. This diagram symbolises the eight trigrams found in the I Ching, an ancient Chinese book used for divination. The term "*Bát Quái Đài*" refers to the octagonal edifice which serves as the abode for the shrine dedicated to the Supreme Being, the paramount god of Caodaism. The *Bát Quái Đài* serves as a conduit for communication between the mortal and celestial realms, where Caodaist leaders receive messages and directions from spirits during seances. The temple also houses statues and depictions of the Divine Mother, Jesus Christ, Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, and other revered personalities, both Catholic and non-Catholic, who are venerated and respected by the Caodaists. The temple is adorned with paintings and murals that portray the historical events and teachings of Caodaism, along with the visions and prophecies of the Caodaist mediums.



## 2.5 Native Vietnamese Religious Influences

The incorporation of native Vietnamese religious influences in Caodaism exemplifies its syncretic and eclectic character, as well as its deep-rooted ties to the indigenous culture and spirituality of Vietnam. The influence of indigenous Vietnamese religious traditions is evident in multiple aspects of Caodaism, including its text, theology, ritual, and pantheon. The impact of indigenous Vietnamese religious beliefs can be interpreted from various perspectives, including historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions.

Preceding Sinicization and Christianization, indigenous non-Han peoples inhabited Vietnam practicing worship of spirits tied to nature, clans, communities and the afterlife. Caodaism strongly invokes this religious substratum through its honoring household guardian deities called *thần tích*. Scripturally, humanity ranks first among the Ngũ Chi or Five Branches of adherents comprising the faith. Additionally, founding figures received messages from domestic spirits spurring the 1926 declaration. Ritually, altars bestow offerings upon tutelary protectors of places where adherents dwell as much as high gods. Theologically, such localized entities operate under authority of Taoist-style bureaucrats managing individual villages' fortune. Eclectically, mother goddesses, legendary patriots and healers qualify for worship equally alongside bodhisattvas, immortals and Biblical figures (Hoskins 2015).

This religious inclusiveness synergizes native Vietnamese animism with philosophically sophisticated traditions from abroad, striking a resonant balance between vernacular and literati faith expression. It sacralizes customs like ancestor memorialization, fortune-telling and trance channeling of spirits which colonial movements sought to erase as superstitions. Rather than replacing indigenous practices, Caodaism coopts and dignifies them within a universalist soteriology centered on returning all creation in harmony back unto the Supreme Being through good deeds (Fjelstad & Nguyen 2011).

An topic pertaining to Native Vietnamese Religious Influences is the genesis and progression of Caodaism as a distinct and autonomous religion, in juxtaposition to the colonial and alien religions like Catholicism and Buddhism. Caodaism was established in 1926 by a cohort of Vietnamese intellectuals and public servants who harboured discontent with the political and socioeconomic conditions in Vietnam under the French colonial era. In addition, they were impacted by the indigenous religious practises of Vietnam, including animism, veneration of ancestors, communication with spirits through mediums, and devotion to mother goddesses. They professed to receive divine communications from God, known as Cao Dai, through seances and mediums, with the purpose of founding a novel religion that would unite and emancipate Vietnam and the entire world. In addition, they incorporated indigenous Vietnamese religious symbols and people into their practises, including the dragon, phoenix, turtle, unicorn, Divine Mother, and national heroes. Additionally, Caodaism assimilated components from several religious practises, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam, resulting in a syncretic and diverse identity.

Another aspect pertaining to the impact of Native Vietnamese Religious Influences is the theory and cosmology of Caodaism, which revolves around the notion of the Third Universal Redemption, also known as the Great Way or Dai Dao. Caodaism is the belief that God, known as Cao Dai, has made his presence known to humanity for the third and ultimate occasion, following the earlier revelations by Moses and Buddha. The Third Universal Redemption is regarded as the culmination and integration of preceding faiths, particularly Catholicism and Buddhism, and as a reaction to the challenges of modernity and the global demand for spiritual rejuvenation. Caodaism espouses the belief in a gender-inclusive deity, acknowledging both male and female aspects. Furthermore, it recognises that this divine entity manifests itself in various forms and is referred to by different names across diverse religious and cultural contexts. The Divine Eye serves as the emblem of the divine being and serves as the central point of veneration and contemplation for the followers of Caodaism. The Divine Mother holds significant prominence in Caodaism, being closely associated with revered figures such as the Virgin Mary, the

Goddess of Mercy, and the Mother Goddess of Vietnam. She epitomises love, compassion, and charity, and safeguards the underprivileged and marginalised.

Another aspect pertaining to Native Vietnamese Religious Influences is the observance and implementation of Caodaism, which draws inspiration from the indigenous Vietnamese religious traditions and rituals, while also including its distinct features and advancements. Caodaism conducts four daily ceremonies, as per the sources, scheduled at 6 am, 12 pm, 6 pm, and 12 am. These ceremonies encompass prayers, songs, and readings from the scriptures. Caodaism also encompasses a sacrament of initiation, known as baptism for Catholics and initiation for Caodaists. Both ceremonies entail the utilisation of water and the summoning of the Holy Spirit. Caodaism also include a sacrament of reconciliation, akin to the practise of confession in Catholicism and repentance in Caodaism. Both ceremonies entail the acknowledgment of transgressions and the plea for pardon and absolution. Caodaism incorporates a distinctive practise known as seance, which involves communicating with the spirit realm via mediums and tools like as planchettes and beaked baskets. The ritual serves as the primary conduit for divine revelation and prophecy within Caodaism, while also providing a means to seek counsel and assistance from celestial entities. Caodaism practises a unique rite of vegetarianism, wherein adherents refrain from consuming meat and animal products on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, as well as at special occasions and festivals. This practise serves as a means of demonstrating empathy and reverence for all sentient creatures, while also cleansing both the physical and mental aspects of oneself. Caodaism features an intricate worship ritual that involves the reverence of the Divine Eye, divine creatures on the altar, as well as ancestors and saints on the side altars. This ceremony entails the utilisation of incense, candles, flowers, fruits, and other tributes, along with gestures such as bowing, kneeling, and prostrating.

Another aspect concerning Native Vietnamese Religious Influences is the pantheon and hierarchy of Caodaism, which encompasses numerous indigenous Vietnamese religious figures, along with other religious and historical figures. The Caodaist pantheon and hierarchy consist of the following indigenous Vietnamese religious figures, as reported by the sources:

The Divine Mother, also known as Duc Phat Mau, represents the feminine manifestation of the divine and is considered the progenitor of all existence. She is frequently associated with the Virgin Mary, as well as other goddesses like Kuan Yin and Tara. She holds the highest authority in the Caodaist church and is considered the ultimate bestower of divine favour. Ba Chua Xu, also known as the Mother Goddess of Vietnam, is revered as the guardian deity of the southern area of Vietnam and the defender of the nation. In addition, she is linked to fertility, prosperity, and health. She is among the quartet of female cardinals within the Caodaist church and holds the position of the head of the Way of Humanity, a sect that focuses on promoting social welfare and engaging in charitable endeavours.

The user did not provide any text. The National Heroes, known as Anh Hung, are esteemed historical people who valiantly battled foreign invaders to secure Vietnam's independence and freedom. The individuals mentioned are Tran Hung Dao, Le Loi, Nguyen Hue, Nguyen Trai, and Ho Chi Minh. They are highly esteemed as the paragons and sources of inspiration for the adherents of Caodaism, and they also hold leadership positions among the many sects of the Caodaist church.

The Healers, known as Thay Thuoc, are the individuals who practise traditional medicine and magic in Vietnam. The individuals mentioned are Tue Tinh, Hai Thuong Lan Ong, and Nguyen Binh Khiem. They are revered as the authorities and patrons of the Caodaist society, and they also hold the positions of leaders in the Way of Immortals, a sect dedicated to the pursuit of longevity and immortality.

### **3. Worship Practices of Caodaism**

Caodaism's syncretic and eclectic nature is seen in its assimilation of native Vietnamese religious influences, which also highlights its strong connection to the indigenous culture and spirituality of

Vietnam. The impact of native Vietnamese religious customs is seen in various facets of Caodaism, encompassing its scriptures, theology, ceremonies, and divine assembly. The influence of native Vietnamese religious beliefs can be analysed from multiple angles, encompassing historical, cultural, social, and political aspects.

Ceremonial life lies at the core of Caodaism's identity with Tay Ninh's Holy See campus hosting daily rituals attended by clergy and laity. Devotees entering the main sanctuary pass statues symbolizing morality's triumph over evil through education's power. Worshippers don simple white tunics representing purification from previous wrongs when petitioning the Supreme Being. Cathedral interiors feature ornate dragon iconography and holy calligraphy amidst incensed air and candle glows (Nguyen et al. 2022). Officiants don ecclesial regalia variably colored denoting rank, performing litanies and offerings beseeching grace. Prayers amplify across chambers as participants visualize attaining transcendent bliss (Hoskins 2015).

Home adherents maintain personal ancestral shrines enacting analogous rites rezoned for domestic settings. Instead of communal worship, families partake priestly functions themselves by invoking and presenting food, flowers and opulent fruits to inhabiting spirits. Reciprocally, such venerated ghosts protect offspring granting blessings when appropriately honored. Officially there exist two designations of formal ceremonies — The Nine Heavens comprising gatherings held at Tay Ninh yearly and The Four Heavens representing weekly meetings locally oriented. Beyond obligatory observances, volunteers freely organize supplemental rituals colored by eclecticism like Western-style weddings or improvisational trance healings (Fjelstad & Nguyen 2011).

Ceremonial life is a crucial component of Caodaism, as it serves to manifest the religion's identity, beliefs, and ideals. Caodaism encompasses a diverse range of ceremonies, conducted by both the clergy and the public, at the Holy See, local temples, and home shrines. Ceremonies are additionally shaped by other religious and cultural customs, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Spiritism. Ceremonies are modified and developed based on the requirements and inclinations of the Caodaist adherents.

An aspect concerning ceremonial life pertains to the daily ceremonies conducted in the Holy See in Tay Ninh, which serves as the primary religious hub and administrative base of Caodaism. Based on the sources, the daily rituals occur four times each day, specifically at 6 am, 12 pm, 6 pm, and 12 am. These rituals encompass prayers, songs, and readings from the scriptures. The daily rituals are observed by both the clergy and the laity, who don plain white tunics as a sign of purging themselves from past transgressions. The clergy choose different coloured robes to signify their hierarchical position and religious affiliation. The daily ceremonies take place in the main sanctuary, a splendid and vibrant structure adorned with intricate dragon iconography and sacred calligraphy. The primary sanctuary features a colossal Divine Eye adorning the ceiling, serving as the emblem of God and the central point of veneration and contemplation for Caodaists. The daily rituals serve the purpose of beseeching the Supreme Being for mercy and salvation, while also demonstrating devotion and appreciation towards the holy entities.

Another aspect pertaining to ceremonial life is the domestic rites conducted by Caodaist adherents at their personal shrines. As per the sources, house shrines are typically found in the living room or bedroom and have a compact altar adorned with an image or sculpture of the Divine Eye, along with representations of ancestors and saints. Home rituals bear resemblance to daily rituals, albeit with greater flexibility and informality. The domestic rituals encompass the act of presenting nourishment, blossoms, produce, and aromatic substances to the ethereal beings, alongside the recitation of devotional invocations and songs. The purpose of house rituals is to venerate and revere the ancestors and saints, while also seeking their divine protection and blessings. The home rites in Caodaism incorporate and honour the traditional Vietnamese religious practises of animism and ancestor worship, reflecting its

integration and reverence.

Another aspect pertaining to ceremonial life involves the organised rituals conducted at the Holy See and local temples. These formal ceremonies serve as significant events and celebrations that commemorate the religious calendar and historical milestones of Caodaism. Based on the sources, there exist two distinct categories of formal ceremonies: the Nine Heavens and the Four Heavens. The Nine Heavens refer to the yearly rituals conducted at the Holy See, encompassing the following:

### **Cao Dai Religious Calendar**

As stated in the Book of Prayers/ *Kinh Thiên-Đạo và Thế-Đạo* (Tòa-Thánh Tây-Ninh, 1975), all temples observe the following rituals and sacred occasions. These events adhere to the lunar calendar, with the exception of Christmas, which commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ in December, and the commemoration of *Đức Nguyệt-Tâm Chơn-Nhơn* (Victor Hugo) on May 22nd.

Month 1: Commemoration of *Tết Ngươn Đán* / Lunar New Year (The homecoming of Divine Beings).

9th Month, 1st Day: The Day of the Supreme Being, God (*Đức Chí Tôn, Đức Cao Đài*).

On the first month of the year, the *Thượng Ngươn* Ceremony marks the beginning of the first-third of the year.

On the 15th of the first month, we observe *Ngài Trương Tiếp-Pháp's* Day, which is a commemoration of the deceased Juridical Legislator.

On the 22nd of the first month, we observe *Ngài Trần Khai-Pháp's* (in memory of the deceased Juridical Reformer).

29th of the 1st month: *Phối Thánh Bùi Ái Thoại's* Day (in honour of Saint Bùi Ái Thoại).

On the 15th day of the 2nd month, we celebrate *Đức Thái Thượng Lão-Quân's* Day, which honours the founder of Daoism, His Holiness Taishang Laojun.

On the 19th of the second month, we celebrate *Đức Phật Quan-Âm's* Day, which is dedicated to honouring Her Holiness Quan Yin.

On the 3rd day of the 1st month, we observe His Holiness Cao *Thượng-Phẩm's* Day, which is a tribute to the deceased leader of Spiritual Affairs.

On the 26th day of the 3rd month, we observe His Holiness Cao *Thượng-Sanh's* Day, which is dedicated to honouring the former leader of Temporal Affairs who has passed away.

On the 8th month, 4th day, we celebrate the Day of His Holiness Gautama Buddha, also known as *Thích Ca's* Day.

On the 8th of the 4th month, *Bà Nữ Đầu-Sư Lâm-Hương-Thanh's* Day is observed to honour the inaugural female Cardinal of the Cao Đài Religion.

On the 10th of the 4th month, we observe His Holiness *Phạm Công Tắc's* Day, which commemorates the passing of the *Hộ-Pháp*, who was the Head of Legislative Affairs.

On the 5th month, on the 5th day, we celebrate the birthday anniversary of His Holiness *Phạm Công Tắc, Hộ-Pháp*.

November 5th: *Bà Đầu-Sư Nguyễn-Hương-Hiếu's* Day

22 May (Western Calendar): *Đức Nguyệt-Tâm Chơn-Nhơn's* Day (in honour of His Eminence Victor Hugo).

On the 22nd of the 5th month, we observe *Ngài Cao Tiếp-Đạo's* Day, which is a day of remembrance for the deceased Religious Legislator.

On the 6th day of the 24th month, we observe *Đức Quan-Thánh Đế-Quân's* Day to honour His Holiness Kuan Sheng Ti Chun/Guan Sheng Di Jun, also known as Kuan Kung/Guan Gong.

On the 15th month of the 7th lunar calendar, the *Trung Ngươn* Ceremony takes place, marking the midpoint of the year.

On the 21st of July, we observe Ngài Đầu-Sur Thái-Thơ-Thanh's Day, which is a commemoration of the late Cardinal Thái Thơ Thanh.

On the 15th of the 8th month, the Hội Yến Diêu Trì festival, also known as The Diêu Trì Festival or The Mother Buddha's Festival, takes place in the Yáo Chí Palace.

On the 18th of the 8th month, we observe Đức Lý Giáo-Tông's Day, which is a commemoration of the Spiritual Pope Li T'ai Pai.

On the 27th of the 8th month, we celebrate Đức Khổng-Thánh's Day, which is a commemoration of His Holiness Confucius.

April 9th: Ngài Bảo Văn Pháp Quân's Day (in memory of the deceased leader of Cultural Affairs).

On the 9th of the 7th month, we observe Ngài Nguyễn Bảo Pháp's Day in remembrance of the deceased Juridical Conservator.

On the 10th day of the first month, we celebrate Phối-Thánh Phạm Văn Màng's Day, which is dedicated to honouring Saint Phạm Văn Màng.

On the 13th of the 10th month, we observe His Holiness Thượng Trung Nhựt's Day, which is a commemoration of the First Codaist Pope (interim).

On the 15th day of the 10th month, the Lễ Hạ Ngươn Ceremony, which marks the end of the year, is held. This day also commemorates the inauguration of the Cao Đài Religion, known as Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ in Vietnamese.

On the 19th of the 10th month, we observe Ngài Ca Bảo-Đạo's Day. It is important to note that on the 18th of the 12th month, we celebrate the late Religious Conservator, Ngài Hồ Bảo Đạo.

25 December (according to the Western Calendar) is observed as the day of His Holiness Jesus Christ, often known as Christmas Eve.

24 Month 12: Commemoration of the Departure of Divine Beings to Heaven.

The four services must be practised both at Temples (Thánh Thất / 聖室) and in homes. Believers must do at least one act of obeisance before the altar of God on a daily basis.

The time periods are as follows: - 12:00 midnight (Thời Tý / 23:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.) - 6:00 a.m. (Thời Mẹo / 5:00 a.m. - 7:00 a.m.) - 12:00 noon (Thời Ngọ / 11:00 a.m. - 13:00 p.m.) - 6:00 p.m. (Thời Dậu / 17:00 p.m. - 19:00 p.m.).

The custodian of a Thánh Thất (temple) is required to perform four daily rituals. The service is scheduled to take place punctually at 6 a.m. (Thời Mẹo), 12 p.m. (Thời Ngọ), 6 p.m. (Thời Dậu), and 12 a.m. (Thời Tý). Prior to the commencement of the ceremony, it is necessary to ring the bell. Disciples have the option to participate in the rites according to their own discretion. Please refer to Article 20 of the New Canonical Codes, Tân Luật. Monthly Traditions.

Routine ceremonies take place in the Cao Đài Temples on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month.

In Vietnam, monthly and annual rituals are typically conducted at either 12:00 midnight (Thời Tý) or 12:00 noon (Thời Ngọ).

Believers are required to gather at their local Thánh-Thất / Temple twice a month, specifically on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar calendar. During these gatherings, they must participate in the ceremony and attentively listen to the teachings. Allowances can be granted for individuals with valid justifications. Please refer to Article 19 in the New Canonical Codes, Tân Luật.

Within the temples, there exist two distinct types of rituals: major and minor. Firstly, at the Holy See, the distinctions between major and minor rituals are as follows:

Minor ceremonies (tiểu lễ) employ a musical ensemble consisting of three pieces, as opposed to the seven or five pieces used in large ceremonies (đại lễ).

The ritual attendants do not depict the heart symbol by tracing it with their foot throughout their



procession.

There is no rear altar (ngoại nghi) present.

The practise of Hoán Đản, which involves circumambulating the interior of the shrine, is not observed. Furthermore, at local temples, the distinction between major and minor ceremonies lies in the musical arrangements. In small ceremonies, the music is performed with a trio of instruments, as opposed to the larger ensembles of 7 or 5 instruments used in major ceremonies.

The ritual servers do not trace the heart symbol with their feet during their march.

There is no rear altar (ngoại nghi) present.

Major annual events occur connected with Vía and holiday celebrations. Vía memorializes the death date of a god or saint central to Caodaists which clergy mark through sermons, music and scriptural recitations at Tay Ninh. Figures so venerated span Asian wisdom bringers like Sun Yat Sen to French authors as Victor Hugo. Occasions fuse theological reflections, embodied worship and communal aesthetics towards spiritually renewing adherents (Hoskins 2015). New Year festivities observe Tet traditions like house cleaning, ancestral tributes and reconciliatory family visits. These embed Caodaism within Vietnamese culture yet open its symbolism interpreting additional meaning for followers. Similar style adaptations accompany mid-Autumn, lunar calendar or Gregorian holiday commemorations (Fjelstad & Nguyen 2011).

The ceremonial ceremonies serve the purpose of honouring and acknowledging the diversity and oneness of Caodaism, while also providing education and inspiration to its followers. The official rites also entail the involvement of the clergy and the laity, who don distinct coloured robes and headgear to signify their position and affiliation. The ceremonial rituals also incorporate the utilisation of music and instruments, such as the organ, gong, bell, and drum, to establish a dignified and melodious ambiance. In Taoism, the formal rituals incorporate the utilisation of wine, tea, and water as symbolic representations of the body, breath, and mind. These three elements are considered the fundamental components of existence and are referred to as the three treasures in Taoism.

#### 4. Tay Ninh Holy See Architecture

Tay Ninh city lies Northwest of Saigon, home to Caodaism's principal sanctuary constructed 1926-1955. Stylistically this structure combines Asian religious architecture with European cathedral motifs and esoteric symbolism. Its elongated frontal façade separates into three sections intimating cosmological realms while integrative passageways imply spiritual transformation possibilities. Flanking towers emblazon "Cao Đài/High Tower" vertically proclaiming the Jade Emperor's manifestation through Vietnamese voice (Nguyen et al. 2022). Behind these edifices consecutive portals transition sanctuary chambers externally fronting the Supreme Being's abstractly rendered presence. Granite steps lead into his gilded palace intimating the metaphysical ascent enlightening humanity (Hoskins 2015).

Interiors elaborate magnificent visual pedagogy via paintings, statues and scriptural couplets educating followers. Murals commemorate heroic deeds of virtuous figures for emulation. Dragon iconography inspires adherents scaling nobler ethical heights. Gleaming accoutrements carry mystique precipitating numinous breakthroughs. Gilded archways, paneled chambers and glowing lamp globes map celestial planes breached by rousing devotees' passion (Nguyen et al. 2022). Surmounting the Supreme Being's cubic shrine apexes rests an oversized sphere symbolizing space-time's parameters. This rotating cosmos sustains but also caps human accomplishment possibilities. Beyond material worlds untethered pure spirits infinite freedom enjoy, although immobilized earth-lodged souls cyclic rebirthing endure (Hoskins 2015).

Exuding this dialectic teaching through crafted beauty nuances visitors about life's fleeting preciousness yet volition's significance. Outwardly expressing such ineffable truth, Caodaist architecture focuses attention reverencing the Supreme Being's subtle omnipresence. Inwardly touching devotees thus

awakens urgent morality guarding existence's ultimate meaning. Thereby an erased soul bears no further chances its mission fulfilling. By fusing esoteric metaphysics through transcultural aesthetics, Tay Ninh's sanctuary delivers a complex message rewarding patient contemplation (Nguyen et al. 2022). Mastering associated paradoxes grants adepts liberative equilibrium onward endless refinement.

Tay Ninh city, located in the northwest of Saigon, is well-known for housing the main temple of Caodaism. This sanctuary serves as a remarkable example of the religion's impressive architecture and spiritual significance. The Tay Ninh Holy See, built from 1926 to 1955, is a remarkable edifice that harmoniously combines Asian religious architectural forms with European cathedral motifs, adorned with intricate esoteric symbolism. This great structure is not merely a construction, but rather a tangible representation of the theological and cosmological principles of Caodaism.

The enormous frontal façade of the Holy See, which is separated into three unique portions, represents the cosmic worlds of Caodaism. These sections depict the spiritual progression of a believer, starting from the physical world and culminating in the ultimate connection with the Supreme Being. The interconnected corridors within the sanctuary serve as more than just links between different areas. They symbolise the possible routes of spiritual metamorphosis that a worshipper can embark upon.

The flanking towers of the temple are adorned with inscriptions of "Cao Đài" (High Tower), which vertically proclaim the presence of the Jade Emperor, channelled through a Vietnamese medium. These inscriptions serve a purpose beyond mere decoration; they represent the fundamental conviction of the faith in the ability of humans to communicate with the almighty.

Transcending the outward magnificence, the interiors of the Holy See serve as a visual educational tool for the teachings of the religion. The presence of splendid paintings and statues, accompanied by scripture couplets, offers a deeply engaging and instructive experience for devotees. The paintings, which portray the courageous accomplishments of morally upright individuals, serve not only as artistic creations but also as catalysts for believers, motivating them to embody these characteristics in their own existence.

The dragon iconography, which appears often in the sanctuary, acts as a spiritual mentor for followers, motivating them to strive for elevated moral principles. The ornate decorations found throughout the Holy See, such as golden archways and illuminated lamp globes, serve a purpose beyond mere adornment. They symbolise the heavenly realms that followers strive to attain, encapsulating the Caodaist understanding of the universe.

The cubic shrine of the Supreme Being, crowned with a disproportionately large sphere, represents the fundamental boundaries of space-time in the cosmology of Caodaism. The rotating sphere, representing the universe, emphasises the idea in a continuous but limited capacity for human accomplishments. According to Caodaist philosophy, pure spirits experience boundless freedom beyond the physical domain, in contrast to the repetitive cycle of reincarnation that souls in the terrestrial realm undergo.

The Tay Ninh Holy See conveys lessons about the impermanence of life and the importance of free will through its magnificent architecture. The architectural designs serve as more than merely aesthetic preferences; they represent the indescribable reality of Caodaism, emphasising the omnipresence of the Supreme Being. Internally, these architectural components evoke a profound response in followers, arousing a perception of ethics and safeguarding the fundamental purpose of being.

Within the Caodaism belief system, a soul that has been wiped and is unable to fulfil its designated purpose is deprived of any subsequent opportunities for salvation. The firm conviction is quietly expressed through the architectural features of the Holy See, which blend obscure metaphysics with transcultural aesthetics. The sanctuary conveys a multifaceted message that encourages deep thought, providing valuable understanding of life's contradictions.

The Tay Ninh Holy See serves as both a religious sanctuary and a hub for education and spiritual enlightenment. The architecture of this structure, deeply imbued with symbolism and theological views,

provides a distinct viewpoint on the integration of religious and cultural aspects. The Holy See serves as a prominent symbol of Caodaism, welcoming both followers and researchers to explore its profound intricacies and uncover the enigmas enshrined within its premises.

To summarise, the Tay Ninh Holy See is an impressive architectural accomplishment that embodies the fundamental principles of Caodaism. The design of the religious emblem is imbued with significant symbolism and spiritual importance, providing a deep understanding of the beliefs and rituals of the faith. The Holy See is not merely a tangible edifice, but rather a vibrant embodiment of the lasting heritage of Caodaism, serving as a refuge that perpetually motivates and illuminates individuals who aspire to fathom the profound intricacies of this distinctive belief system.

## 5. Relations of Caodaism with other Vietnamese Religions

Caodaism, the third-largest religion in Vietnam, coexists within a multifaceted religious environment, predominantly alongside Buddhism and Catholicism, which are the two prominent religions in the country. The coexistence has resulted in a multitude of interactions, spanning from historical conflicts to neutral or even favourable relationships. The intricacies of these interactions provide an intriguing insight into the religious diversity and tolerance within Vietnam.

### *A Comparative Perspective on Caodaism and Catholicism*

The relationship between Caodaism and Catholicism in Vietnam has been complex and diverse. The French colonial administrators originally were suspicious because to the organisational resemblances between the two, such as congregational membership and a hierarchical structure. They regarded Caodaism as potentially divisive because of its resemblances to Catholic organisational frameworks. From the perspective of the Vatican, however, the disparities were clearly evident. The lack of a one messianic figure in Caodaism, its reverence for various spirits, and the creation of supplementary texts through spiritual gatherings were perceived as inherently conflicting with Christian teachings. Although there are theological differences, the relationship between Caodaism and Catholicism in Vietnam has been characterised by peaceful coexistence rather than open conflict (Jacobs 2011).

### *Interactions and conflicts with Buddhism*

The link between Caodaism and Buddhism is marked by more pronounced doctrinal similarities. Principles such as karma, retribution, the eightfold path, and non-attachment are fundamental to both religions. Caodaists, similar to Buddhists, strive for emancipation from suffering through a lifestyle characterised by self-discipline. Although there are shared characteristics, Buddhist leaders have occasionally derogatorily labelled Caodaists as "vegetarian religionists," emphasising their rigorous dietary customs. Nevertheless, these criticisms are rather moderate and are tempered by Caodaism's support for religious liberty, particularly in the face of French colonial marginalisation. Activists from both religions forged a strong alliance in their battle against colonial practises that undermined their credibility, employing orientalist language (McHale 2004).

### *Engagement with animism and indigenous beliefs*

The connection between Caodaism and Vietnam's native religious customs, specifically animism, is informal yet profoundly meaningful. The syncretic aspect of Caodaism facilitates the incorporation of spirit worship, mediumship practises, and vernacular faith norms that align with the specific local environment. This merger exemplifies Caodaism's flexibility and reverence for Vietnam's multifaceted religious legacy. The incorporation of inclusion has been a pivotal factor in the attractiveness and expansion of Caodaism inside the theological framework of Vietnam (Nguyen 2006).

### *The wider framework of religious interaction in Vietnam*

The interaction between Caodaism and other Vietnamese religions exemplifies the wider religious acceptance and variety in the nation. The presence of different spiritual beliefs and practises has led to a diverse and intricate fabric of coexistence, notwithstanding the difficulties encountered. Caodaism,

characterised by its distinctive fusion of Eastern and Western religious components, serves as a representation of Vietnam's diverse religious landscape.

The fundamental tenet of religious unity and harmony in Caodaism is exemplified by its recognition and integration of aspects from Buddhism, Catholicism, and indigenous beliefs. This idea is not merely theoretical; it is evident in the everyday religious rituals and engagements of Caodaists with adherents of different belief systems. The religion's capacity to encompass and assimilate other religious ideas and practises is evidence of its inclusive and universalistic ethos.

Moreover, the past and present exchanges between Caodaism and other religions in Vietnam offer significant understanding of the nation's sociopolitical and cultural environment. The nature of these encounters has been moulded by historical occurrences, such as colonialism and its subsequent consequences, and has been impacted by the changing socio-cultural dynamics of Vietnam. The religious composition in Vietnam, characterised by the prominent presence of Caodaism, presents an exceptional opportunity to examine the interaction between many religions within a unified country.

Overall, the connections between Caodaism and other Vietnamese religions can be described as a blend of shared beliefs, similar structures, past conflicts, and reciprocal admiration. The interplay among these various religious beliefs underscores the intricate and varied nature of Vietnam's religious landscape. Caodaism's comprehensive stance towards other religions, its flexibility, and its dedication to religious concord render it a distinctive and essential component of Vietnam's spiritual legacy.

## **Conclusion**

Caodaism, originating in Vietnam, exemplifies the impressive ability of spiritual ideas to transform and adjust by incorporating many cultural, philosophical, and religious components. Caodaism emerged in early 20th century Vietnam, a time marked by social, political, and religious upheaval due to colonialism and the blending of different religious beliefs. It serves as a testament to the resourcefulness and determination of people in their search for purpose and self-definition.

This religion is not merely a haphazard combination of several ideas, but rather a refined and intentional fusion that has resulted in the emergence of a distinctive religious identity. The work skillfully tackles the intricacies and spiritual demands of its day, reflecting the ongoing search for religious representation and unification. The proliferation of Caodaism, despite countless obstacles and oppressions, underscores its ongoing significance and tenacity. The uniqueness of Caodaism is seen in its teachings, rituals, hierarchical organisation, and particularly in its Holy See at Tay Ninh, which is famous for its diverse and symbolic architecture.

Caodaism, being a dynamic and progressive religion, remains faithful to its fundamental principles and practises while actively engaging with modern concerns. The development of this phenomenon outside the confines of Vietnam, particularly through expatriate populations, highlights its universal allure and its capacity to surpass geographical and cultural limitations. Caodaism exemplifies the ability of faiths to adapt and incorporate multiple influences while remaining relevant and dynamic, particularly in the setting of a globalising world.

An analysis of Caodaism's historical background, theological doctrines, cultural practises, and organisational structure sheds light on this distinctive religious phenomena, both within Vietnam and on a global scale. Caodaism, an inherently Vietnamese religion, offers as an exemplary paradigm for fostering intercultural communication in our interconnected world, as it draws from a wide range of global influences. Although there are many areas that warrant additional inquiry, such as the theological intricacies, organisational dynamics, and demographic changes of Caodaism, the present analysis offers a concise summary of its distinctive characteristics, which justify a more thorough examination. The acknowledgment and admiration of this work lies in its ability to combine post-colonial identities and

promote social cohesion.

Caodaism epitomises the distinctively Vietnamese method of participating in worldwide spiritual discussions in the colonial era of the early 20th century. As a reaction to the significant societal disruptions produced by foreign control and the commercialization of culture, it ingeniously incorporated external ideas about science, religion, and patriotism, striking a chord with the rich indigenous cultural knowledge. While the early followers of this religion were typically educated elites influenced by Western ideas, the core beliefs of the faith, which include the belief in miraculous healing, psychic occurrences, and communion with spiritual beings, demonstrate a continuance of traditional religious concepts that encompass the Three Teachings and folk traditions.

Caodaism exhibits a deliberate endeavour to reconcile these inherited traditions inside a well-organized religious establishment, resembling Western ecclesiastical frameworks. It accomplishes this by recording its teachings in the local language and using modern concepts. The Caodai Holy See, characterised by its elaborate construction, represents the amalgamation of various ideologies, deities, and practises from different civilizations. It provides moral advice and a contemporary way to redemption.

Potential areas for future research involve investigating the process of Caodaism's adaptation as it spreads beyond Vietnam, and examining how it is defining its identity within a global framework. Further investigation is warranted to explore the influence of new media on the development of religion and its interactions with the post-1986 Vietnamese government and other societal factions.

Caodaism's unique method of religious synthesis, which combines foreign and indigenous components, provides valuable perspectives on intercultural interactions between the East and the West, as well as the construction of post-colonial identities during times of substantial transformation. This shows the capacity for spiritual ingenuity that connects many civilizations in our progressively globalised, postmodern society, providing vital insights for promoting religious acceptance, adjustment, and interaction in a diverse and growing global environment.

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