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THE SINIFICATION AND LOCALIZATION OF DAOIST COSMOLOGY IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL STRUCTURE OF CAODAISM IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

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Caodaism (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ), founded in Tây Ninh province in 1926, is usually read by historians of religion as a case of Vietnamese syncretism: a local blend of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism assembled under French colonial rule. The article raises a narrower and more philosophical issue. Rather than treating the Three Teachings as three roughly equal ingredients, it isolates the Daoist component and traces two distinct operations through which Chinese Daoist cosmology entered and then settled into the Caodaist system: sinification, the transmission of a determinate metaphysical vocabulary (Wuji, Taiji, Yin-Yang, the Eight Trigrams, the Five Agents, the jing-qi-shen triad) from Chinese religious literature into Vietnamese scripture, and localization, the subsequent reworking of that vocabulary to answer needs the vocabulary was not originally built for. Drawing on a comparative reading of the two principal Caodaist scriptural collections, the *Đại Thừa Chân Giáo* and the *Thiên Đạo và Thế Đạo*, against the *Daode jing*, the Zhuangzi, and the Chinese-language scholarship of Kong Linghong, Sun Yiping, and Zhan Shichuang, the article argues that Daoist cosmology supplies the generative grammar of Caodaist metaphysics while Confucian ethics and Buddhist soteriology occupy positions that this grammar itself assigns them. The analysis is placed within the broader theoretical literature on religious syncretism and on the East Asian “redemptive societies” of the early twentieth century, a comparison that clarifies what is generic and what is specifically Vietnamese in the Caodaist synthesis. The article concludes that Caodaism is best understood neither as a disguised form of Daoism nor as an eclectic borrowing from it, but as a philosophically coherent transposition of Daoist cosmological categories into a theistic, colonial-era soteriology that no single Chinese tradition had previously produced.

Keywords: Caodaism; Daoist cosmology; localization; redemptive societies; sinification; Three Teachings; Vietnamese philosophy of religion

1. Introduction

On 18 November 1926, in the market town of Gò Kén in Tây Ninh province, several hundred people gathered for the founding ceremony of a religion that called itself Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ, the Great Way of the Third Universal Salvation. Within two decades Caodaism had a theocratic seat at Tây Ninh, an administration modelled in part on

the Catholic Church it competed with, and a following that soon made it, alongside the Hòa Hảo movement, the largest indigenous religion in southern Vietnam. It remains one of the few new religions of the colonial era anywhere in Asia to have built a functioning state within a state, complete with its own army, during the 1945–1955 period.

Caodaism describes itself as a synthesis of the Three Teachings of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, fused with elements of Christianity and modern spiritualism. Scholars writing in French and English have generally accepted this self-description and studied Caodaism as a case of syncretism in the ordinary sense: a mixture in which no single tradition predominates [Werner 1981; Oliver 1976; Blagov 2001]. Chinese-language scholarship has pushed further, asking which of the Three Teachings actually does the structural work. Sun Yiping, Kong Linghong, and Feng Chao have each, from different angles, suggested that Daoism supplies more than a third of the picture: it supplies the cosmological chassis onto which the other two teachings are bolted [Sun 2013; Kong 2013; Feng 2005].

The article takes that suggestion as a starting point rather than a conclusion. Two questions organize what follows. First, exactly which Daoist categories appear in Caodaist scripture, and in what form: are they quoted, paraphrased, or restructured? Second, once those categories have entered a new textual and social environment, what happens to them? The first question is a matter of textual sinification, tracing a determinate line of transmission from the Daode jing and the Yijing tradition into the *Đại Thừa Chân Giáo*. The second is a matter of localization, in the sense used in religious studies to describe the adaptation of an imported system to a new setting's problems, audiences, and rival institutions [Sun 2013; Takeuchi, Liu 2010]. Distinguishing the two operations matters philosophically, because it is possible for a religion to be saturated with Daoist vocabulary while being, structurally, something other than Daoist. Whether that is true of Caodaism is the question the article tries to answer.

The study develops, with a different theoretical apparatus and a narrower argumentative focus, material examined more descriptively in the authors' broader unpublished comparative study of Caodaism and the Chinese Three Teachings [Kong, Nguyen 2023]. It also extends the authors' earlier published analysis of the Tây Ninh Holy See [Nguyen et al. 2022] by placing the architectural evidence discussed there inside the sinification-localization framework proposed here, rather than treating it, as the earlier article did, primarily as an exercise in iconographic description. Readers familiar with either piece will recognize some of the primary-source citations; the argument built from them is new.

2. Theoretical Framework and Method

Two bodies of theory frame the analysis. The first concerns syncretism itself. Stewart and Shaw argued against treating syncretism as a neutral description of mixed religious content and proposed instead that scholars ask who has the authority, in a given religious community, to declare which elements belong together and which do not [Stewart, Shaw 1994]. Caodaism is unusually well suited to this approach because it answers the question explicitly, in its own scripture: the Tân Luật states outright that the Great Way “embraces all three orthodox teachings... and transforms and unifies them into one” [Tân Luật 2006, 5], assigning Confucianism the domain of social ethics, Buddhism the domain of liberation from rebirth, and Daoism the domain of cosmology and vital cultivation. The mixture is not an accident of history that a scholar reconstructs from outside; it is a claim the tradition makes about itself, and the claim can be checked against the texts.

The second body of the theory concerns the wider East Asian context in which Caodaism arose. Duara and, following him, Goossaert and Palmer have described a family of early twentieth-century movements, mostly Chinese in origin, that they call redemptive societies: Daoyuan, Yiguandao, Tongshanshe, and others, all built on a Wuji-Taiji cosmology, a universalist soteriology promising salvation for the current cosmic era, and a

reliance on spirit-writing as the mechanism of revelation [Duara 2003; Goossaert, Palmer 2011]. Caodaism shares every one of these features and arose within roughly the same historical window, though on the opposite side of the Sino-Vietnamese border and under a different colonial regime. Placing Caodaism next to this family of movements opens the possibility to separate what is generic to the redemptive-society type from what is specifically Vietnamese, a distinction the existing Caodaism literature in French and English has not systematically drawn.

Methodologically, the article proceeds by comparative textual analysis. The primary sources are the *Đại Thừa Chân Giáo* (Great Vehicle True Teaching, hereafter ĐTCG), the *Thiên Đạo và Thế Đạo* (Heavenly Way and Worldly Way, hereafter TĐTĐ), the *Tân Luật*, the *Pháp Chánh Truyền*, and the *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, all received through spirit-writing sessions (cơ bút) beginning in 1925. These are read against the *Daode jing* and the *Yijing* tradition, using the interpretive apparatus of Zhan Shichuang and Kong Linghong [Zhan 2017; Kong 2013], and checked against the secondary Chinese-language literature on Daoist transmission into Vietnam, principally Sun Yiping, Yu Rusong, and Takeuchi Fusaji [Sun 2013; 2014; Yu 2017; Takeuchi, Liu 2010]. Passages are cited in the English translations used in the authors' earlier comparative work [Kong, Nguyen 2023], cross-checked against the Vietnamese originals.

3. Historical Background: The Three Teachings in a Colonial South

Vietnam was administered as part of the Han Empire from 111 BCE, and Confucian scholarship, Buddhist monasticism, and Daoist ritual practice all entered during the following millennium of Chinese rule, each by a different route and at a different pace [Kong, Nguyen 2023]. Confucianism came with the administrators who ran the commanderies of Jiaozhi, Jiuzhen, and Rinan; Buddhism arrived by sea from India as well as overland from China; Daoism travelled south with migrants, minor officials, and itinerant ritual specialists, and it never built anything resembling the centralized Celestial Masters organization it had in China. Instead, as Yu Rusong has shown, it survived mainly through folk practitioners, morality texts, and its fusion with local spirit cults [Yu 2017].

By the Trần dynasty (1225–1400), all three traditions were interacting closely enough that Vietnamese historians speak of tam giáo nhất trí, “the Three Teachings as one mind”. The pattern that would eventually become Caodaism's founding claim was therefore already old by the time Caodaism appeared. What was new in the south, the region the French called Cochinchine, was the social pressure under which the pattern operated. Waves of settlement from the north from the seventeenth century onward produced communities with only loose access to formal Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist institutions, who practiced a compressed version of all three teachings alongside indigenous spirit cults [Kong, Nguyen 2023]. Three explicitly syncretic movements preceded Caodaism in this setting and prepared its cultural ground: the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương (1849), the Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa (1878), and, slightly later, the Hòa Hảo (1939).

A further, more specific channel of transmission deserves attention. Nguyen Ngoc Tho and Huang Huangbo trace one important line of Three-Teachings syncretism to the Minh Lý Đạo, an organization rooted in the Minh Hương communities, descendants of Ming loyalists who settled in southern Vietnam after the Qing conquest [Nguyen, Huynh 2020]. Some of Caodaism's founders had direct contact with Minh Lý Đạo circles before 1925. This is not a claim about diffuse cultural resemblance; it identifies a specific institutional route by which a Daoist-flavoured syncretism reached the individuals who would go on to found Caodaism.

Caodaism itself crystallized out of a series of spirit-writing séances beginning in 1925, conducted by a small group of Vietnamese colonial civil servants, among them Ngô Văn Chiêu, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang. They were literate enough in classical Chinese to operate the spirit-writing apparatus and to read the resulting oracles, and restless enough under colonial rule to be drawn to the spiritualist and Theosophist

currents then circulating internationally [Werner 1981]. The messages they received were attributed to a supreme deity who identified himself by the epithet Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát, a name that is itself a small anthology of the Three Teachings: Cao Đài, a Daoist term for a high celestial terrace; Tiên Ông, a Daoist title for an immortal elder; Bồ Tát, the Buddhist bodhisattva; and Ma Ha Tát, a transliteration of the Sanskrit mahāsattva. The founding revelation declared that this deity had previously spoken through Śākyamuni, through Confucius, and, under the name Yuanshi Tianzun, through Laozi, and was now speaking again for the third and final era of universal salvation [Feng 2005]. The theological programme of the entire religion is compressed into that one claim.

4. Sinification: The Transmission of Daoist Cosmological Categories

4.1. From Wuji to the myriad things

The ĐTCG opens its account of creation in language lifted almost intact from Daoist cosmogony: “Before the Supreme Ultimate was established, in that boundless space there was only the Hồng Kông vital breath, for it was the path of the primal chaos. That space is Wuji” [ĐTCG 2016, 213]. This is the standard sequence of the Yijing’s Appended Judgements, in which Taiji generates the Two Modes, the Two Modes generate the Four Images, and the Four Images generate the Eight Trigrams [Zhan 2017, 74], transposed with almost no modification into a Vietnamese scripture composed thirteen centuries after the Yijing commentarial tradition took this form.

What Caodaism adds is a name at the point where Daoist cosmology is silent about personhood. The Jade Emperor occupies the position of Taiji, the first differentiation out of Wuji, so that “the two vital breaths Yin and Yang together produce all things in Heaven and Earth” [ĐTCG 2016, 17], a line that restates almost verbatim chapter 42 of the Daode jing, where the Dao produces one, one produces two, two produces three, and three produces the ten thousand things [Zhan 2017, 75]. The mechanism is Daoist; the deity who runs it is Caodaist. This is sinification in its narrowest sense: a metaphysical grammar copied with unusual fidelity from a Chinese source.

The Eight Trigrams supply more than cosmogonic vocabulary; they name an institution. The highest of Caodaism’s three governing bodies is the Bát Quái Đài, the Eight Trigrams Terrace, described in the *Pháp Chánh Truyền* as the invisible realm of pure spirit and “the soul of the Way” [cited in: Kong, Nguyen 2023]. Naming a legislative body after a divinatory diagram is a strange administrative choice by any ordinary standard. It stops being strange once the Yijing’s own claim, that the trigrams are the structural pattern underneath all cosmic process, is taken as literally true, which the Caodaist founders appear to have done.

4.2. Being, non-being, and the doctrine of you-wu

The ĐTCG also takes up the Daoist dialectic of you (being) and wu (non-being) with more philosophical care than a merely decorative borrowing would require. Chapter 1 of the Daode jing calls non-being “the name of the origin of Heaven and Earth” and being “the name of the mother of the myriad things” [Zhan 2017, 6]. The ĐTCG maps Wuji onto wu and Taiji onto the entry point of you, and insists that the Way can only be grasped by understanding how the two mutually generate each other [ĐTCG 2016, 20]. Kong Linghong has pointed out that this is not simple repetition: the ĐTCG treats Wuji as pure potential out of which the Jade Emperor’s creative will emerges, which gives a classically impersonal category a theistic colouring that standard Daoist exegesis does not supply [Kong 2013]. The borrowing is philosophically serious, and the modification is deliberate.

Wu wei receives a comparable treatment. In the Daode jing it names the sage’s alignment with the Dao’s own spontaneity: the sage “acts without acting, and teaches without words” [Zhan 2017, 88–89]. The ĐTCG keeps the term but redirects it toward a devotional programme: the practitioner eliminates the seven emotions and six desires in order

to align with the will of a personal deity [ĐTCG 2016, 187–188]. Effortlessness, in the original, describes the absence of a striving self. In the Caodaist version it describes the successful surrender of a striving self to something outside it. The word survives the crossing; its philosophical content does not, quite.

5. Localization of the Pantheon

Sinification supplies Caodaism's vocabulary. Localization is visible in what happens once that vocabulary has to populate an actual religious hierarchy with figures ordinary worshippers can address in prayer. The Bát Quái Đài pantheon, as recorded in the standard Caodaist sources, runs from the Jade Emperor down through the Buddhas, Laozi, Confucius, Li Taibai, Guanyin, Guan Yu, Jesus, and Jiang Ziya [Kong, Nguyen 2023]. Six of these eleven principal figures come directly from the Daoist pantheon, and three of them repay closer attention.

Laozi holds the title Thái Thượng Đạo Tổ, Founding Patriarch of the Supreme Way, one of three historical manifestations of the supreme deity alongside Śākyamuni and Confucius [ĐTCG 2016, 25]. He is credited with dispensing the elixir of immortality, an unambiguous reference to Daoist external alchemy, and his teaching on cultivating the three treasures, jing, qi, and shen, anchors the Caodaist programme of inner cultivation [ĐTCG 2016, 82]. Sun Yiping notes that Caodaism inherits the fully deified Laozi of popular Daoism, Taishang Laojun, rather than the historical philosopher of the Zhuangzi's frame narrative: he is a living presence who still issues instructions through spirit-writing, not a founder consulted at one remove [Sun 2013].

The Queen Mother of the West, Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, occupies a still more prominent position, and here localization is easiest to observe directly. In Daoist tradition she governs the yin breath of the western quarter, presiding over the Jade Lake where immortals gather and keeping the register of the immortals. In Caodaism she becomes, without qualification, the divine mother of every adherent, addressed in verses of maternal tenderness: "How I love you all, my children! Mother now says farewell and returns to the Celestial Palace" [ĐTCG 2016, cited verse]. Her principal festival falls on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, and her image, a white-robed woman with the crescent moon, is a fixture of Caodaist temple iconography. Chen Yiyuan and Sun Yiping trace this figure's continuity from the Daoist Queen Mother, but the maternal register she speaks in owes at least as much to the indigenous Vietnamese Mẫu, mother-goddess worship that long predates Caodaism. What travelled from China was a cosmic office; what met it in Vietnam was an entire devotional idiom already centred on divine motherhood [Chen 2006; Sun 2013]. The result is neither the Chinese Queen Mother nor the Vietnamese Mother Goddess in any simple sense, and Sun's and Chen's own comparative work registers this without quite naming the mechanism as localization.

Guan Yu presents a third pattern. In China he already straddles Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion, receiving the imperial title Guān Shèng Dìjūn in 1614 and functioning in Daoist temples as a guardian of commercial and martial integrity. Tan Zhici has documented the dense network of Guan Yu temples built by overseas Chinese communities across Vietnam, and it is through this network, rather than through any direct doctrinal borrowing, that his cult reached Caodaism, where he appears as the Second Guardian of Awesome Majesty and is invoked for loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, and courage [Tan 2006]. Guan Yu's route into Caodaism is therefore social before it is textual: a diaspora cult, already established on Vietnamese soil, that Caodaism absorbed along with its existing worshippers rather than importing from scripture.

The Celestial Eye, the single open eye that crowns every Caodaist temple, has a comparable double ancestry. The ĐTCG states plainly that "the Eye is master of the mind; the two lights are sovereigns; light is spirit; spirit is Heaven; Heaven is I" [Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển, cited in: Kong, Nguyen 2023], a formulation Zhan Shichuang [Zhan 2017, 34] connects to the Daoist idea of shen, spiritual luminosity, as the faculty through which the

Dao perceives and sustains cosmic order. As a devotional icon rather than a philosophical claim, however, the single eye also functions as an emblem legible to worshippers with no exposure to Daoist metaphysics at all, which is presumably why it, rather than any more esoteric symbol, became the religion's public face.

6. Localization of Practice: Doctrine, Ritual, and Institutions

6.1. The doctrinal architecture of the Three Teachings

The Tân Luật states its structural claim about the Three Teachings almost in the form of an instruction manual: adherents must “firmly maintain the Three Cardinal Relationships and the Five Constant Virtues, preserve the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, and assiduously practise the Three Treasures and the Five Agents” [Tân Luật 2006, 5], a single sentence that hands social ethics to Confucianism, moral purification and liberation to Buddhism, and cosmological orientation together with vital cultivation to Daoism. The TĐTĐ renders the same division in verse, describing the three as “one root producing three branches that are identical to each other” [TĐTĐ 2009, 25], a formula the Caodaist commentarial tradition itself reads as Daoist, since it echoes the generative sequence of Daode jing chapter 42 running in reverse, the myriad things returning to the one [Kong, Nguyen 2023].

A further doctrine, the Five Branches Unite as One, extends this logic beyond the Three Teachings to encompass the Human, Spirit, Saint, Immortal, and Buddha Ways, with the Immortal Way corresponding to religious Daoism proper [Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển 2013, 15]. Confucian ethics and Buddhist soteriology are not incidental to this scheme, even though the present article's focus stays on the Daoist strand: the Tân Luật's Article 3 supplies the Confucian moral vocabulary of filiality and the Four Virtues [Tân Luật 2006, 17], and the ĐTCG supplies the Buddhist vocabulary of karma, rebirth, and the superiority of the Great Vehicle over the Lesser Vehicle for those “weary of worldly life” [ĐTCG 1956, 31]. What the Daoist cosmology contributes is the container into which these other two vocabularies are placed, not their content.

6.2. Ritual practice

Caodaist liturgy runs on four daily prayer sessions, at six in the morning, noon, six in the evening, and midnight, addressed in turn to the supreme deity, the Buddhas, the Immortals, and the Saints, in prayers composed in a register close to classical Daoist liturgical Chinese [TĐTĐ 2009, 23]. The single most distinctively Daoist practice, however, is not a prayer but a technology of revelation: spirit-writing, *fújī* in Chinese and *cơ bút* in Vietnamese, in which two mediums move a forked implement over a sand tray to produce characters attributed to a divine communicator. Spirit-writing has been central to Chinese popular Daoism since at least the Tang dynasty and flourished especially in Quanzhen and Ming-Qing popular religious circles [Takeuchi, Liu 2010]. Caodaism's entire scriptural corpus, without exception, was produced this way, which places the religion inside a specific transmission lineage rather than merely alongside it in some looser sense [Takeuchi, Liu 2010; Zengwei 2014].

Dietary discipline follows the same pattern of borrowing under new conditions: at least ten vegetarian days a month for lay adherents, full vegetarianism for clergy, and a prohibition on killing, meat, and sexual misconduct for the ordained, all recognisably drawn from the shared Buddhist-Daoist repertoire of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts [Tân Luật 2006, 13–14]. Liturgical robes in three colours, yellow, azure, and red, mark the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian branches of the clergy respectively, so that the Three Teachings synthesis is visible at every formal service rather than confined to doctrine [Kong, Nguyen 2023].

6.3. The Tây Ninh Holy See as built cosmology

Nowhere is localization more literally concrete than in the Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, completed in 1955 after several decades of construction. The building's tripartite institutional

structure, the Bát Quái Đài, the Cửu Trùng Đài (Nine-Tiered Terrace), and the Hiệp Thiên Đài (Heaven-Coordinating Terrace), is explained by the *Pháp Chánh Truyền* as an application of a specifically Daoist triad, spirit, vital breath, and bodily form, to the architecture of a modern religious bureaucracy: “the Bát Quái Đài is the invisible part... the soul of the Way; the Cửu Trùng Đài is the visible part... the body of the Way; the Hiệp Thiên Đài is the semi-visible part... the true spirit of the Way” [cited in: Kong, Nguyen 2023]. The authors have described the building’s iconographic programme at length elsewhere [Nguyen et al. 2022]; what matters for the present argument is narrower. A cosmological triad drawn from Daoist metaphysics has here been used to organise an institution, deciding which body issues doctrine, which body administers the laity, and which body mediates between the two. Sinification supplied the triad; localization put it to an administrative use no Chinese Daoist institution required of it, since no Chinese Daoist organisation needed to govern a mass lay religion competing for legitimacy with a French colonial church.

7. Discussion: What Kind of Daoist Transmission is This

The question of whether Caodaism should count as a form of Daoism, rather than as a new religion that merely quotes Daoism extensively, is not a question of labelling. It bears on how the transmission of a philosophical system should itself be theorized.

The case for treating Caodaism as continuous with Daoism is stronger than casual observation suggests. Its cosmological vocabulary, Wuji, Taiji, Yin-Yang, the Eight Trigrams, the Five Agents, is not ornamental; it does the actual explanatory work in Caodaist scripture, exactly as it does in the Yijing tradition. Laozi is venerated as a living cosmic deity, in the manner of popular rather than philosophical Daoism. Spirit-writing, the jing-qi-shen cultivation triad, and the “return to the origin” (phản bản hoàn nguyên) soteriology, itself a direct descendant of the Daode jing’s guigen, return to the root (chapter 16), are structural commitments, not decoration. Chen Yaoting situates Caodaism within the wider phenomenon of Daoism’s overseas transmission on exactly these grounds, and the redemptive-societies literature [Chen 2000; Duara 2003; Goossaert, Palmer 2011] supports the classification from outside the Vietnam field entirely, since the Chinese redemptive societies of the same period rest on an almost identical cosmological chassis.

The case against the classification is just as substantial. Caodaism’s supreme deity is unambiguously personal: he speaks, listens to prayer, and issues commands, which is not the impersonal Dao of the Daode jing under any reading. Its institutional model borrows as much from the Catholic Church, an organization Caodaism was in direct competition with for converts in colonial Cochinchine, as it does from any Daoist precedent, a debt the tradition itself acknowledges. Its pantheon includes Jesus and admits Theosophist and Spiritist influence with no Daoist analogue at all [Werner 1981]. And its founders were not Daoist ritual specialists but colonial civil servants working in a spiritual marketplace that was, by the 1920s, already global.

Neither description alone is adequate, and the inadequacy is philosophically instructive rather than a failure of classification. Caodaism took a metaphysical grammar built by and for a very different social order, imperial and early modern China’s religious landscape, and used that grammar to answer a set of problems the grammar was never designed for: how to build a mass lay religion under colonial occupation, how to compete institutionally with a foreign church, and how to found national religious legitimacy on a claim of universal, rather than merely Chinese, revelation. The grammar survived the transfer largely intact, which is what sinification names. What it was made to say did not survive intact, which is what localization names. Read this way, Caodaism is a single, well-documented case of a general problem in the philosophy of religious transmission: how much of a metaphysical system’s content is separable from the social conditions under which it was first formulated, and how much of that content changes, without ceasing to be recognizably the same system, when the conditions change completely.

8. Conclusion

Four domains of evidence, cosmology, pantheon, ritual, and institutional architecture, converge on the same conclusion. Caodaism's Wuji-Taiji-Yin-Yang cosmogony, its Daoist pantheon of Laozi, the Jade Emperor, the Queen Mother of the West, and Guan Yu, its reliance on spirit-writing and jing-qi-shen cultivation, and its tripartite Bát Quái Đài-Cửu Trùng Đài-Hiệp Thiên Đài structure are not four separate borrowings from Daoism but four expressions of a single cosmological grammar, transmitted with notable philosophical fidelity from Chinese sources into Vietnamese scripture.

That grammar did not, however, arrive and stay unchanged. The impersonal Dao becomes a deity who answers prayer. The classical sage's effortless spontaneity becomes a voluntarist discipline of will. The Daoist Queen Mother merges with an existing Vietnamese cult of divine motherhood strong enough to redirect her, rather than simply receiving her. Inner alchemy, once the practice of adepts in mountain retreats, becomes a discipline available to a Tây Ninh clerk or a Mekong Delta farmer without requiring either to leave ordinary life. None of these amounts to a failure of fidelity to Daoist originals. It is what a philosophical system's transfer into a new social order looks like when the transfer is taken seriously rather than treated as decline.

For the study of Daoism outside China, Caodaism is worth more attention than it currently receives, precisely because it is not the easy case. The Daoist temples of the Chinese diaspora in Singapore, Malaysia, or Taiwan mostly kept recognizable Daoist liturgical forms in new geographic settings; Caodaism did something more drastic, producing what might fairly be called a new branch on the Daoist tree rather than a transplanted graft of an old one. Two extensions of the present argument seem worth pursuing. One is comparative: setting Caodaism systematically alongside the Chinese redemptive societies it resembles, to establish exactly where the colonial Vietnamese case departs from its closest East Asian relatives. The other is contemporary: tracing how the same sinification-localization dynamic has continued, or stalled, in the Caodaist diaspora of France, the United States, and Australia, and under Vietnam's post-1975 religious administration, where a Daoist-derived cosmology now has to answer to conditions its early twentieth-century framers could not have anticipated.

Artificial Intelligence Disclosure

As English is not the authors' first language, an AI-based language tool was used to assist with editing and stylistic revision of the English text. The research design, source analysis, argumentation, and conclusions are the authors' own. All AI-assisted passages were reviewed, verified against the primary and secondary sources cited, and revised by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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Фіонг Тай Нгуєн, Тхань Хунг Нгуєн

Синізація та локалізація даоської космології

у філософській структурі каодаїзму на Півдні В'єтнаму

Каодаїзм (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ), заснований у провінції Тайнінь 1926 року, зазвичай розглядається релігієзнавцями як приклад в'єтнамського синкретизму – локального поєднання конфуціанства, буддизму та даосизму, що склалося в умовах французького колоніаль-

ного правління. У статті порушується вужче і більш філософське питання. Замість трактування трьох учень як трьох приблизно рівнозначних складників автори виокремлюють даоський компонент і простежують дві різні операції, завдяки яким китайська даоська космологія увійшла до каодаїстської системи, а згодом закріпилася в ній: синізацію – передавання визначеного метафізичного словника (Уцзі, Тайцзі, Ін-Ян, Вісім триграм, П'ять елементів, тріада цін-ці-шень) з китайської релігійної літератури до в'єтнамських текстів – та локалізацію – подальшу переробку цього словника для розв'язання завдань, під які він спочатку не був створений. На основі порівняльного аналізу двох головних каодаїстських канонічних збірок, “Đạo Thừa Chân Giáo” та “Thiên Đạo và Thế Đạo”, у зіставленні з Дао де цзін, Чжуан-цзи та китайськомовними дослідженнями Кун Лінхуна, Сунь Іпіна і Чжань Шичуана, автори доводять, що даоська космологія формує генеративну граматику каодаїстської метафізики, тоді як конфуціанська етика та буддійська сотеріологія посідають місця, визначені саме цією граматиною. Аналіз вписано в ширший теоретичний контекст дослідження релігійного синкретизму та явища східноазійських “товариств спасіння” першої третини XX століття, що дає змогу розмежувати загальні та власне в'єтнамські риси каодаїстського синтезу. Автори доходять висновку, що каодаїзм найточніше розуміти не як приховану форму даосизму і не як еклектичне запозичення з нього, а як філософськи цілісну транспозицію даоських космологічних категорій у теїстичну сотеріологію колоніальної доби, якої жодна окрема китайська традиція раніше не створювала.

Ключові слова: в'єтнамська філософія релігії; даоська космологія; каодаїзм; локалізація; синізація; три вчення; “товариства спасіння”

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