



HISTORY OF CAO DAI FAITH

*Vol. 1: THE FOUNDING PERIOD
From Initiation to Inauguration*

Translated By:
Diệu Đức (Trần Ánh-Tuyết)

THE GREAT WAY FOR
THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION

History of Cao Dai Faith

Volume I: THE FOUNDING PERIOD

From Initiation to Inauguration

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Diệu Đức (Trần Ánh-Tuyết)

CAO DAI TEMPLE OVERSEAS

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PREFACE

Cao Dai Faith has reached its centennial landmark and deserves a deep reflection on its contribution to society and humanity. As people often say that history repeats itself, now it is time to look back at the history of Cao Dai Faith with a new and more complete perspective to draw lessons to prepare for the future.

The process of formation and development of Cao Dai religion has many very special events, both miraculous and full of twists and turns. Today, Cao Dai followers and researchers of the later generations should look back at history on an objective, pure and selfless stance to ponder each phenomenon, each situation, each character to fully appreciate the historical significance of each event and the pioneering effort of the predecessors. By doing so, one can review the past lessons and recognize the present issues to affirm one's own mission and the mission of the Great Way. That is what the predecessors and the senior fellows have been and are continuously doing.

That is also what author Huệ Nhân did in this book, which he considered his life's work. He spent decades on field trips to patiently collect documents and information, seek and approach each witness, check and verify every location, and look up in many scripts and documents. His diligent work is condensed in the book *Lịch Sử Đạo Cao Đài Quyển I – KHAI ĐẠO: Từ Khởi Nguyên đến Khai Minh* (*History of Cao Dai Faith Volume I – The FOUNDING PERIOD: From Initiation to Inauguration*). In addition to the main part of the book, the supplemental section is so elaborate and detailed that it could be separated into another book.

In the English translation of Mr. Huệ Nhân's book, readers find quite a few parentheses containing words or sentences in

smaller font sizes, such as Kinh Dịch (the Logic of Change), huyện (district), or the book title shown above. These are not in the ‘source text’; instead, they are annotations inserted by the translator to help readers understand better the corresponding Vietnamese terms. By the same token, the Cao Dai dignitary ranks are also annotated in the same way. For example, Giáo Tông (the Pope), Đầu Sư (Cardinal), Phối Sư (Archbishop), etc... In this case, readers may recognize that the ecclesiastic hierarchy of the Catholic Church is used to annotate the Cao Dai dignitary ranks. Please understand that these rank annotations are merely intended to help readers visualize the hierarchy of Cao Dai dignitary ranks, and the Cao Dai Clergy is not at all like the one of Catholic Church.

We hope that everyone would be blessed to know Cao Dai, and we appreciate all constructive comments or additional information to improve this book, both the English and Vietnamese versions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The translator is very honored to receive and complete this work, assigned by the late Sister Giáo Sĩ Lập Hạnh (Lê Tuy Phụng), then Head of the Culture Department at the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way (Vụ Trường Văn Hóa Vụ Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo). Sister Lập Hạnh stated that the translation would be better if it was done by Cao Dai followers living and integrating into the United States of America like natives. Together with the author and contributors, we are blessed to accomplish one of the major projects that were ordered and approved by Đức Giáo Tông Vô Vi Đại Đạo (the Spiritual Pope).

This translation book was in fact a teamwork project. Besides the translator, at least three other people actively contributed to this work. The translator maintained a frequent email correspondence to the author, Mr. Huệ Nhân (Võ Thành Nhân), through his daughter, Sister Giáo Sĩ Võ Phương Trúc. Mr. Huệ Nhân was very supportive and willing to clarify all the abstract points, clearly explaining the passages and the verses written in Sino-Vietnamese or in old-styled Vietnamese. The translated draft was reviewed by Mr. Minh Tiến (Lê Quang Minh) before being returned to the translator for correction. Then the corrected draft was sent to Mr. Minh Tiến again for another round of revision. This cycle was repeated until everything was clear and correct. So, Mr. Minh Tiến not only worked on a single revision but on multiple rounds. Throughout the reviewing and editing process, Sister Võ Phương Trúc served as the liaison keeping author Huệ Nhân, reviewer Minh Tiến, and translator Diệu Đức in the loop. Moreover, she printed the draft document for Mr. Minh Tiến to review and patiently typed the corrections or comments that Mr. Minh Tiến wrote in the draft, before sending it back to the translator. Obviously,

the book would not be as good if these three religious fellows had not volunteered their time and effort to participate in this project.

Countless thanks also go to all fellow practitioners at Cao Dai Temple Overseas for their continuous guidance and encouragement. They make every effort, with all their means and abilities, to provide support for the translator to complete her work. Among them is the young Brother Nathan Phan Minh Trí, an engineer who did a great job in designing the book cover. In addition, the translator is grateful to the young Brother Damon Phan Minh Thái for taking time to cover her other writing tasks, so she could focus on finishing this book. She also admires him in his journey to quest for the meaning of life that leads to his vision of God-Eye and his deep faith in Cao Dai. She hopes that, while reading this book, Damon enjoys the miraculous events in the process of founding the God-Way.

Finally, we want to send love to everyone on earth. We hope you remember that we are all siblings having the same parents: God Father and Divine Mother. Hence, we can live in peace and in fraternity under the same roof.

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History of Cao Dai Faith

Volume I: THE FOUNDING PERIOD

CHAPTER 1. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FOUNDING OF CAO DAI FAITH

CHAPTER 2. PHASES OF FORMATION OF THE RELIGION

EPILOGUE

*THE GREAT WAY IS OPEN TO HELP YOU – HUMANITY –
RETURN TO THE MORALITY IN EACH INDIVIDUAL
BEING. IF YOU UNDERSTAND MY WORDS:*

I AM YOU; YOU ARE ME

*THEN THE WORLD WILL BE PEACEFUL AND THE
UNIVERSE WILL BE STABLE.*

JADE EMPEROR SUPREME GOD¹

¹ Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo (i.e., the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way), the full-moon day of the 10th month of Quý Sửu year (November 9, 1973).

CHAPTER 1.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FOUNDING OF CAO DAI FAITH

SECTION I. CAO DAI HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVES

SECTION II. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF
HUMANITY PRIOR TO THE FOUNDING
OF THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION

SECTION III. PROPHECIES OF THE
EMERGENCE OF CAO DAI FAITH

SECTION I

CAO DAI HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Cao Dai historical perspectives clearly comment on human evolution, and especially on the Third Universal Salvation.

A. THE EVOLUTION OF MANKIND

The presence of mankind on earth is the inevitable result of a long evolutionary process. Unlike the gradual and sequential evolution of all other species, the evolution of mankind is more intricate. Humans have the freedom to decide to progress or otherwise to regress, in both temporal and spiritual aspects, especially spiritual ones.

Actively contributing to the evolutionary process – which is also called the Way – religions serve an essential means to help promote moral consciousness to lift humans up to their position in the Universal Triad (Heaven - Earth - Man).

At the end of the Last Era – the period of the Third Universal Salvation – God Himself came to earth to open a new religion. He uses the New Method of Cao Dai to guide mankind to overcome obstacles, completing the final stage of the spiritual evolution mentioned above.

Talking about history is talking about the time dimension. And talking about religion is talking about spiritual aspects, which are miraculous and abstract. Therefore, when writing the

history of Cao Dai Faith in its founding period, it is impossible to avoid mentioning the chronological evolution of humans in both temporal and spiritual aspects. In other words, here are the Cao Dai historical perspectives.

1) Like any other religions, Cao Dai Faith has its own historical viewpoint to explain the historical process of humanity, which can be divided into three periods: the First Era, the Middle Era, and the Last Era. At the end of each era is a period when God disseminates the Way into the world to save humans. Thus, there are three periods of universal salvation: the First, the Second, and the Third Salvation (details in Chapter 1, Section I, Part B).

The three eras mentioned above, according to some ancient books, have been assigned an equal amount of time. But in this approach, it is very difficult to explain the coincidence of the three eras with the three periods of salvation due to the fact that mankind has progressed exponentially over time. To circumvent this problem, it is recommended to apply the Classic of Change (the I-Ching) as follows. The cycle of sixty-four hexagrams of the Pre-Genesis I-Ching consists of two parts: one belongs to yang and the other, yin. The series of thirty-two yin hexagrams from the Kou (Coming to Meet) ䷋ to the K'un (The Receptive) ䷁ represents the path of continuous progress of human intelligence since appearing on earth. This path follows the 'Way of Earth'. The Commentary on Appended Judgment I in the Classic of Change wrote: *"Heaven is the ultimate origin, and Earth creates all beings"*. The Classic of the Way and Virtue (Dao De Jing) called it: *"Man emulates Earth ..."*.

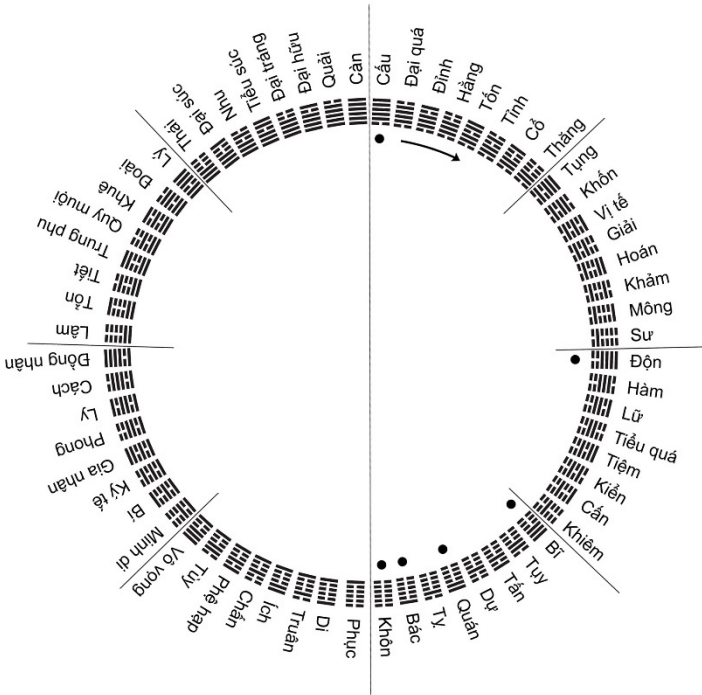


Figure 1: The cycle of sixty-four hexagrams of the Earlier-Heaven I-Ching. (The key hexagrams are dotted).

The process starts from the Kou (Coming to meet ☵), with one yin line), going through sixteen other hexagrams to reach the Tun (Retreat ☴, having two yin lines), then through eight hexagrams to the P'i (Standstill ☶), then through four hexagrams to the Kuan (Contemplation ☶), and through two hexagrams to the Po (Splitting apart ☶). In this process, the yin lines gradually encroach on the yang lines while the spacing between these key hexagrams rapidly reduces (16-8-4-2-1), to finally reaching the K'un (the Receptive ☷) with all

six yin lines (Figure 1). As time went on, the invention and manufacture of human-serving objects became faster and faster, and today they are extremely abundant, causing also the need for enjoyment to increase, which is concrete proof of this process. And, once material life reaches its culmination at the K'un hexagram (䷁), the Last Era full of calamities and distresses abounded.

Going into more detail, we can choose the number one hundred twenty-nine thousand six hundred (129,600) years as a basis. This number is taken from Cao Dai scriptures (also corresponding to the number in the book *Hoàng Cực Kinh Thế* (*The August Ultimate Through the Ages*) by Thiệu Khang Tiết (Shao Kang Jie), to the one indicated by ancient Indian philosophers, as well as to the solar cycle on the Zodiac according to astronomy...). In time dimension, the mark at one hundred twenty-nine thousand six hundred years is the time point when humans (in the true sense) appeared and evolved on Earth. If this number is divided into thirty-two (32) intervals according to the above “Địa Đạo” (“the Way of Earth”), the last period [the interval from the K'un (the Receptive ䷁) to the Fu (Return ䷗)] is the four thousand and fiftieth (4050th) year, corresponding to the time when God began his work of the First Universal Salvation, teaching morality to mankind. (More details in Chapter 1, Section I, Part B).

Mankind has been present on earth for a very long time. The traces of the Ape-like species (*Australopithecus*) are more than four million years old (approximately the product of 129,600 timed by 32). Over a long period of time in primitive life, the brain gradually developed, *Homo habilis* evolved into *Homo erectus*, then became *Homo sapiens* with the basic characteristics of modern humans. Archaeologists have confirmed that, in the past, about one hundred fifty thousand (150,000) years ago (this number is close to the number 129,600 mentioned above), mankind had a very important physical mutation: The skull of prehistoric humans grew, increasing the brain volume by one and a half times, from eight

hundred cubic centimeters to more than twelve hundred cubic centimeters. This brain capacity was enough for *Homo sapiens* to be able to **speak**. According to psychologists, spoken language is the basis of thinking.

The next important evolutionary stage of mankind was the ability to **write**. Formed and completed about four thousand years ago (this number is close to the 4050 years of the last period in the Pre-Genesis I-Ching cycle mentioned above), written language helped people preserve and widely spread their thoughts.

Thus, **spoken and written language** are two important landmarks that determine the progress of human knowledge. Human civilization cannot be without these two means of expression, which, at the time of their appearance, perfectly correspond to the estimated times using the I-Ching approach above.

Human development was insignificant during the first tens of thousands of years. Food was mainly obtained by plucking or picking. Gradually, people discovered fire, accumulated experience in growing crops, raising cattle, and made rudimentary tools... Life in the tribal community at that time was still simple and innocent... Cao Dai doctrine calls this the First Era (The Era of Creation).

Then, tens of thousands of years later, most tribes found their own suitable land and began to organize a sedentary society. Living in a community, knowledge was exchanged and combined, so the products created by the ancient people became more and more diverse and abundant. Some people had surplus wealth and needed to hire more workers to help. From there, the form of master and servant, rich and poor, emerged.

Society was polarized, showing signs of class distinction. Sadly, the upper class often enjoyed the labor of the lower

classes. People have lost their inherent innocence and frankness. Lao-Tzu described this era as follows:

When the Great Way fades away, there is benevolence and justice.

When human intelligence comes forth, there is great pretense.

The Classic of the Way and Virtue (Dao De Jing),
chapter 18

The above two verses mean: The innocent way of life, in accordance with the principles in the First Era (The Era of Creation), no longer existed. People were smarter than their predecessors, which is good, but they often used their intelligence to compete for benefits, trying to use their intelligence and tricks to win. Bad acts collided with wrong moves; human society became dark and needed the intervention of the Supreme Being to teach them about humanity and righteousness in life. The First Universal Salvation was bestowed by the Supreme Being in such a context.

2) In terms of spirituality, in ancient times, people grouped together in tribes, they lived in small, independent societies, scattered all over the world. Tribes barely had the opportunity to contact each other. However, the special coincidence is that in all those separate societies, there was a form of worship of gods. Each place worshipped differently, but there was no place without it.

Because each individual human being is endowed with a divine nature (Cao Dai religion calls it the Spark of Divine Light), from the depths of their consciousness, ancient people accepted that there were invisible, superior beings who always watched over and controlled their lives. The form of worshipping gods, even in its most primitive and low form, was one of the important differences between the ancient people who “still lived in caves” and the herds of animals. The belief in these

gods gradually evolved and later became the monotheistic religious belief – worshipping the Supreme Being.

B. THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION

The phrase “the Third Universal Salvation” has two meanings:

The first meaning: It describes the last of the three times God imparted the Way to the world. Those are: the First Era (the First Universal Salvation), the Middle Era (the Second Universal Salvation), and the Last Era (the Third Universal Salvation).

The second meaning: It refers specifically to the last universal salvation. In this sense, The Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation also means Cao Dai Faith.

The following discussion aims to analyze the first meaning: The Third Universal Salvation is the last of the three periods when God teach the Way to mankind, and thus it also includes the second meaning.

1) THE FIRST UNIVERSAL SALVATION

In ancient times, people lived in peace and prosperity, “houses were never locked, and people did not pick up lost things on the street”. In China, this period lasted from ancient times to the time of the Emperors Nghiêu and Thuần (Yao and Yu the Great) (about four thousand three hundred years ago). No definite evidence of written language was found in this period.

By the end of the First Era, on one hand, mankind needed to be educated to keep up with progress; on the other hand, morality had begun to decline, so God bestowed the grace of the First Universal Salvation.

Legend has it:

* During the reign of Emperor Hiên Viên Huỳnh Đế (Xian Yuan) of China, the Ancient Buddha Dipankara came from the Void Heaven to help sentient beings attain enlightenment. After that, the Buddha entered Nirvana. Dipankara is the Founder of Buddhism.

* Đức Thái Thượng Đạo Tổ (The Supreme Master of Taoism) descended from the Pre-Genesis Realm to the world many times during the reigns of Tam Hoàng Ngũ Đế (the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors) in China to teach sentient beings. The Supreme Master of the Pre-Genesis Realm is the Founder of Taoism.

* Also in China, during the reign of King Fu Xi (2852 - 2737 BC), the Dragon Horse appeared, carrying Hà Đồ (the Yellow River Chart). King Fu Xi, based on the logic of the Yellow River Chart, invented the Pre-Genesis Eight-Trigram Plan. Later, King Yu the Great (2205 - 2197 BC) wrote Hồng Phạm Cửu Trù (the Great Unity of the Nine Palaces, i.e., Hongfan of the Shangshu) based on Lạc Thư (the Lo River Writing) on the back of the Divine Turtle. Also, from the foundation of the Yellow-River Chart and Lo River Writing, the ancient sages (Fu Xi, Yu the Great, King Wen Wangan, Duke Zhou Gong...) initially established Nhân đạo (the Way of Man) and Thiên đạo (the Way of Heaven), expressed in the Classic of Change.

* In the West Asian region, around 1300 BC, Saint Moses emerged in Palestine. The Old Testament recorded the story of Saint Moses guiding the Jewish people to take refuge. On the top of Mount Sinai, after a forty-day period of meditation, Saint Moses had communion with God, then he preached the "Ten Commandments" and glorified God (Yahweh) to the Jewish.

2) THE SECOND UNIVERSAL SALVATION

The Middle Ages, also known as the Middle Era, lasted for about thirty centuries (from 2000 BC to about 1000 AD). At that time, countries began to form, with borders adjacent to

each other, and the division was mainly based on military strength rather than customs and ethnicity. Even within each country, usurpation of the throne also frequently occurred. Society was in chaos, and people were suffering from hunger and poverty.

During this period, many religions emerged and developed simultaneously:

* In India, Shakyamuni Buddha was born in 560 BC. As a prince, he left the throne at the age of twenty-nine to seek a way to escape from the four sufferings. After many hardships, he attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi tree. Shakyamuni Buddha set a shining example of equality, self-realization, self-enlightenment and enlightenment of others...

* In China, Confucius was born in 551 BC, during a time of national turmoil. From the age of thirty-four to fifty-five, he traveled to many places, teaching students and preaching the doctrine of righteousness and worldly morality. Confucius wrote and edited many scriptures, whose value remains till present-day. People honored him as “the Preceptor of All Times”. Yet, besides his teaching on the “Way of Man” which was set as a model for society, his “Way of Heaven” was little known.

* Also in China, Lao Tzu was born and lived about the same time as Confucius. It can be said that no one knows exactly his origin. According to legend, he was from the Zhou state, and his name was Lao Dan. When he was born, his hair was already white, so he was called Lao Tzu (The Old Child). Lao Tzu left behind the sublime Classic of the Way and Virtue (Dao De Ching) before he left the Han Gu Pass, riding a buffalo into the vast desert of the Western Regions.

* During the time when the Roman Empire dominated the Mediterranean and most of Europe, the kings were

tyrannical, and the local people suffered greatly. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, West Asia, into a working-class family. At the age of thirty, thanks to God's revelation, Jesus went into seclusion for forty days to pray, receive God's grace and endure trials. After that, he was back to the world to preach the doctrine, evoke humanity, love, and charity in people so they would turn to God. One day at the age of thirty-three, he left his body on the Cross. From that day on, the Holy Cross became a symbol of Christianity and widely admired by humanity.

* In the sixth century, the Arabian land was divided by many wars between tribes, and human society was unstable. Muhammad – also known as the Prophet – was born in 571, in the city of Mecca, the capital of Arabia. At the age of forty, he was enlightened by God. Within twenty-three years, Muhammad composed and preached the Qur'an, established Islam, focused on the love of fellow humans, evoked human charity and considered God as the Supreme Being.

All of the above Saints are "the Second Person of the Trinity" (God the Son) sent by God to the world during the period of the Second Universal Salvation to preach the Way.

3) THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION

a) Near the end of the Last Era, material progress reached its peak, while spiritual values were undermined. The Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation was founded in 1926, right in between the two terrible wars: World War I (1914 – 1918) and World War II (1939 – 1945).

As if to prepare for the Third Universal Salvation, numerous religions as well as many philosophical thoughts on universality to promote the idea "All religions are of one principle" appeared in the world in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example:

* In 1875, Madame Helena Blavatsky established the Theosophical Society headquarters in the United States of America and later moved it to Madras - India. The Theosophical Society advocates: “No religion surpasses the truth”.

* In 1893, the First Parliament of World Religions was convened in Chicago, USA.

* In 1900, the First International Conference on the History of Religions was convened in Paris, France.

* Many prestigious universities opened departments of Comparative Religion such as: Oxford in the United Kingdom, Sorbonne in France, Yales in the United States of America ... along with many books and newspapers published with similar purposes.

* In the early twentieth century, the world accepted the idea of integrating the basic teachings of religions, adapting to the progressive trend in all aspects.

b) Opening the Third Universal Salvation, through the religious form of Cao Dai, God assigned the mission to the Vietnamese people.² In 1926, Cao Dai Faith was officially established in South Vietnam. Since Cao Dai teaching has been presented in many other books, only a few main features are listed here:

The Supreme Leader of the religion is the Jade Emperor, the almighty Supreme Being. Cao Dai followers are blessed to address Him as Teacher.

From the First to the Second Universal Salvation, no Supreme Leader has ever claimed to be the Supreme Being. Only in the Last Era, the decrepitude of this world is so fast-pacing and

² Differences in meaning of Cao Dai and the Third Universal Salvation are discussed in Chapter 2, Section III, Part B.4.

devastating that God Himself, with His omnipotence, can save humans from calamities.

* Cao Dai disciples follow the cultivation program that is completely mapped out with all the steps from low to high, from the harmony in secular path to the liberation in spiritual way, based on the essential teaching of the Three Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. At every level of cultivation, the practice includes self-liberation and liberation of others.

* Cao Dai Faith truly liberates women. Women are equal to men in studying and practicing in both spiritual and temporal aspects. This is almost the first time in the history of religion that women have been honored as high-ranking dignitaries as *Đầu Sư* (Cardinal).

* In terms of origin, Cao Dai Faith originated from two different streams. The Supreme Being sowed the seed of Esotericism and that of Exotericism separately, like the Yin and the Yang. Then He managed to unite them in *Bính Dần* year (1926), in accord with the cycle of the celestial mechanism. This movement has a very special and unprecedented meaning.

A statement in the Classic of Change somehow describes that union as follows:

The Way comprises one Yin and one Yang.

Commentary on Appended Judgment I – Chapter 5

As stated above, these are just some major features of Cao Dai Faith. There are many other mystic principles in Cao Dai doctrine, from which transcendent thoughts are forged, forming the foundation for this last universal salvation.

SECTION II.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF HUMANITY PRIOR TO THE INITIATION OF THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION

Section I discusses Cao Dai historical viewpoint with respect to the timeline. Section II will briefly present this viewpoint, but in the spatial dimension, on the social context of the world in general, and of Vietnam in particular, prior to the initiation of the Third Universal Salvation.

A. THE WORLD SITUATION

In Cao Dai religion, the period from the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century is considered as the steps toward the end of the Last Era, the time when material development reached its peak.

In the early nineteenth century, there were many basic inventions in technology serving humans, such as electricity, chemistry, physics, steam engines, oil engines... making the nineteenth century called "the century of iron." One invention followed another. Underwater, iron ships with engines replaced wooden boats; on land, trains quickly multiplied. (In 1870, the world had two hundred thousand kilometers of railway).

On the other hand, books on modern world history, when referring to the nineteenth century, all present images of turmoil within and between countries.

1) IN INDIVIDUAL NATIONS

Numerous struggles arose between the people and the rulers and between the workers and the masters.

In the nineteenth century, the “revolutions” were no longer smoldering but had burst violently, especially in developed capitalist countries in Europe such as France, Germany, Italy, Austria... and in Asia such as Japan. These uprisings affected the government structure in those countries. Parliamentary democracy gradually replaced the monarchy in many developed countries and became a common trend for the whole world in the mid-twentieth century.

2) AMONGST NATIONS

... “Indeed, what are the essential characteristics of capitalistic society, as it exists today? The expansion of international commerce on a large scale is not its sole distinguishing mark; on the contrary, it includes also the flowering of a large-scale industry, the triumph of machinery, and the growing power of the great financial houses. In a word, it is the present-day union of all these phenomena which really constitutes modern capitalism.”³

... “The greater accumulation of wealth in the hands of individuals also gave rise to new economic ideas, as developed in the mercantilist

³ Henri Sée in *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*, page 2, originally written in French, translated into English by Homer B. Vanderblue and Georges F. Doriot, New York Adelphi Company, New York, September 1928.

and protective system. This fact explains the efforts to establish colonies which should be at once the outlet for the products of the mother country and the source of metals and precious commodities. It also explains the colonial system, the aim of which was to assure a monopoly of trade to the mother country.”⁴

Countries with strong industrial development competed to acquire colonies first, such as England, France, and Germany, pulling many other countries into this "movement". The list of empires grew longer: Italy, Austria, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States of America, Japan... And when the world no longer had land to invade, numerous colonial wars broke out.

In Europe, two opposing factions gradually formed. On one side were Germany, Austria, and Hungary; on the other side were England, France, and Russia. Both sides increased their armaments. In such a situation, World War I (1914 – 1918) broke out in Europe and progressed fiercely, affecting the whole world. The amount of pain and loss that all of humanity had to endure through that horrible war is immeasurable.

Without exception, Vietnam, including Cochinchina (South Vietnam), also endured the collective karma of sentient beings in the world war.

3) HUMAN SOCIETY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY ACCORDING TO WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS

The idea of human enjoyment – which has existed since ancient times – has developed tremendously along with material progress. In the twentieth century, pragmatism

⁴ Henri Sée in *Modern Capitalism: Its Origin and Evolution*, pages 50-51, originally written in French, translated into English by Homer B. Vanderblue and Georges F. Doriot, New York Adelphi Company, New York, September 1928.

reached its peak. Material desires, without effective resistance, have spread uncontrollably, affecting the fate of human society and culture. Philosophers call it the materialistic civilization devoted to sensual pleasure.

On the other hand, industrial society with its developed machinery limits the consciousness of the individual. Philosopher Gustav V. Gheorghiu describes: *It is like a thread that has been threaded into the loom to weave a cloth. Once threaded in, it cannot be pulled out again.* Gabriel Marcel⁵ in “The Broken World” (“Le Monde Cassé” - 1929) wrote: *The world, what we call the world, the human world... once upon a time it must have had a heart, but now that heart no longer beats.*

What is the reason? It is because of the invasion and oppression of matter and of mechanical technology on human life.

Many materialist philosophers (of which Jean Paul Sartre was a prominent representative) believed that the Ego was just a messy mass of slime that existed by chance, was absurd and superfluous. They believed that the universe and mankind appeared as something disgusting and nauseating; *therefore, humans are not obliged to follow any moral standards* (sic).

However, there were also some opposite echoes, Fellini conceived of man *like a dynamic pebble. It has a meaning and a usefulness that we cannot know. Only the Creator knows. And if this pebble is not useless, then nothing in life is useless.*

In general, there were many conflicting philosophies, each of which is agreed upon by many people, showing the hopeless confusion of human thought in the early twentieth century, in which the tendency to enjoy material things is somewhat dominant.

⁵ Gabriel Marcel graduated with a master's degree in philosophy at the age of twenty (1908), influenced by Schelling's Spiritual Realism.

B. IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1) A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOUTH VIETNAM UP TO THE FRENCH COLONIAL PERIOD

Most of the southern part of Vietnam around the seventeenth century was called Gia-Định. This land originally belonged to the kingdom of Funan, which was eradicated in the seventh century. After that, this place was inhabited by many ethnic groups such as Vietnamese, Chinese (the exiles), Cambodian...

In the year of Mậu Dần (1698), Commander Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh received orders from Lord Minh Vương Nguyễn Phúc Chu to conquer and pacify the Gia-Định – Biên Hòa region. Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh⁶ became the first Governor of Gia Định prefecture. Gradually, the border of South Vietnam was expanded according to the policy of Mr. Nguyễn Cư Trinh (during the reign of Võ Vương Nguyễn Phúc Khoát).

After many conflicts with the army of Tây Sơn (from 1776 to 1788), Mr. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh recaptured the South, marched to attack and capture Phú Xuân, then unified the country.

In 1802, Mr. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh ascended the throne, established the capital in Huế, chose his royal name Gia Long, and changed the country name to Vietnam. In 1808, King Gia Long redefined the territory, dividing it into twenty-three trấn (towns) and four dinh: the North region (Bắc Thành) included eleven trấn; the Central region included seven trấn and four dinh in the capital region; the Gia Định region (Gia Định Thành) included five trấn: Phiên An, Biên Hòa, Vĩnh Thanh (Vĩnh Long and An Giang), Định Tường, and Hà Tiên.

⁶ His birth name was Nguyễn Hữu Thành, posthumous name Kính, (1650 - 1700). Currently, he is worshipped at Minh Hương Gia Thạnh Communal House (District 5, Saigon city), at Phố island (Biên Hòa), and at Châu Phú Communal House (Châu Đốc town, where there is still a Royal Decree of “Lễ Thành Hầu” with the rank of Thượng Đẳng Thần (Superior Deity). He is also worshipped in many other places.

In the thirteenth year of King Minh Mạng (1832), the whole country was divided into thirty provinces (tỉnh) (at this time the total population was about six million people). The five trấn of Gia Định were changed into six provinces: Gia Định, Biên Hòa, Định Tường, Vĩnh Long, An Giang, and Hà Tiên. Therefore, South Vietnam in the past was called Lục Tỉnh (the Six Provinces) (Figure 2). This name was still used until the mid- twentieth century.

From year 1858, the French expeditionary force began to annex Vietnam.

In the fifteenth year of King Tự Đức, on June 5, 1862, the Huế Court signed the Peace Treaty of Nhâm Tuất, ceding to France the three provinces on the East side of South Vietnam. Then on March 15, 1874, the Peace Treaty of Giáp Tuất ceded the remaining three provinces of the West side. Losing all six provinces, the entire land of South Vietnam became a French colony.

The whole country of Vietnam was then divided into three regions: Nam Kỳ (Cochinchina, South Vietnam), Trung Kỳ (Annam, Central Vietnam), and Bắc Kỳ (Tonkin, North Vietnam).

The three regions had relatively different political systems. Cochinchina (South Vietnam) was a colony, while Annam and Tonkin (Central and North Vietnam, respectively) were protectorates of France.

The French-controlled Cochinchina underwent administrative reform, and from 1895 was divided into twenty-one counties (hạt), later changed to provinces as follows:⁷

⁷ The French words in parentheses are the words used at that time.

The counties (hạt), from January 16, 1899 were changed to provinces (tỉnh); then divided into districts (quận); districts were divided into cantons (tổng); cantons were divided into communes (xã), villages (làng)...

The entire Cochinchina comprised seventy-eight districts, one hundred ninety-seven cantons of major ethnic (Kinh) and ten cantons of minor ethnic (Thượng), fourteen hundred seventy communes (xã).

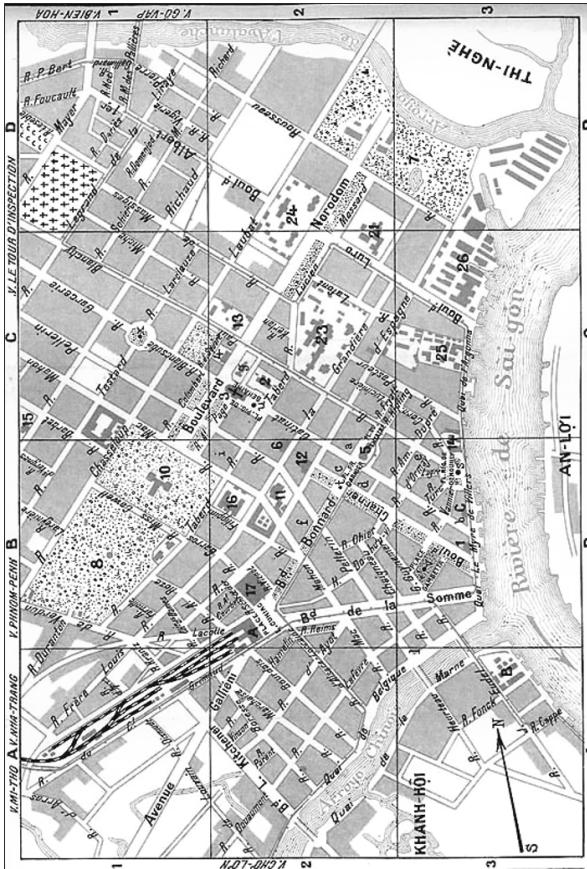


Figure 2: **Map of Saigon in 1928.** (This print has been reduced to fit the page).

- Gia Định was divided into five provinces: Gia Định, Chợ Lớn, Tân An, Tây Ninh, and Gò Công. (In 1944, Tân Bình province was added).

- Biên Hòa was divided into four provinces: Biên Hòa, Bà Rịa, Cape Saint Jacques (Vũng Tàu), and Thủ Dầu Một.

- Định Tường was renamed as Mỹ Tho.
- Vĩnh Long was divided into three provinces: Vĩnh Long, Bến Tre, and Trà Vinh.
- An Giang was divided into five provinces: Châu Đốc, Long Xuyên, Sa Đéc, Sóc Trăng, and Cần Thơ.
- Hà Tiên was divided into three provinces: Hà Tiên, Rạch Giá, and Bạc Liêu.

South Vietnam entered the twentieth century in such a state of division and was ruled by France.

2) THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM IN COCHINCHINA IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Above all was the Governor-General of Indochina (Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine) who oversaw all three regions of Central, South and North Vietnam, as well as the two regions of Cambodia and Laos. The head of the Cochinchina government at this time was the Governor of Cochinchina (Gouverneur de la Cochinchine), whose palace was also called Dinh Phó Soái (the Deputy Marshal's Palace); presently, it is Bảo Tàng Cách Mạng (the Museum of Revolution), at 65 Lý Tự Trọng street. Under the Governor were the twenty-one provincial chiefs (Chef de province).

Before the year 1879, Cochinchina was ruled by French Navy generals. The first civilian Governor was Le Myre de Vilers. In 1926 – the year of the Inauguration of the Great Way – the Acting Governor of Cochinchina was Mr. Le Fol. The Governor-General of Indochina at that time was Mr. Pierre Pasquier (temporarily replacing Mr. Varenne from October 4, 1926).

The Colonial Council (Conseil colonial) was established in 1880 with the task of discussing the budget and some local affairs. At first, the membership consisted of ten French and six Vietnamese. Later it increased to fourteen French and ten

Vietnamese. Above that, there was the Indochina Senate (Conseil supérieur de l'Indochine) and the Advisory Council (Conseil Privé).

To grasp the general political situation, the Governor-General of Indochina sent an additional official to inspect the provinces, called the Inspector of Political and Administrative Affairs (Inspecteur des affaires politiques et administratives). Unlike in Tonkin (the North Vietnam), where the provinces were divided into many prefectures (phủ), the provinces in Cochinchina (the South Vietnam) were divided into many districts (quận); districts were divided into many cantons (tổng); cantons were divided into many communes (xã). The commune's Council consisted of twelve officials: Chủ, Sur, Trưởng, Chánh, Giáo, Bộ, Quản, Thân, Hào, Xã Trưởng (Village Chief), and Chánh Lục Bộ (Secretary).

The provincial governor was French. According to the Decree dated December 14, 1905, the district governor was recruited among Vietnamese administrative officials who passed the exams for the following positions: Huyện (District Chief), Phủ (Prefect), and Đốc Phủ Sứ (Governor). Therefore, the Prefects and District Chiefs in South Vietnam were merely administrative positions.

In the 1920s, in South Vietnam, there were two secondary schools: Lycée Chasseloup Laubat and Lycée Petrus - Trương Vĩnh Ký.⁸ After graduating from these schools, students could

⁸ Lycée Chasseloup Laubat was opened in 1875. It was originally called Indigenous College (Collège Indigène), now Lê Quý Đôn High School.

In 1927, College of Cochinchina (Collège de Cochinchine) opened its first four classes; the following year Governor Blanchard de la Brosse changed it to the secondary school (Lycée) Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký, now Lê Hồng Phong High School.

Further notes: The French education system had three levels:

-Primary Elementary level (six years): The first three years are Elementary (Nursery class, Preparatory class, and Elementary class), students take exams to obtain the Primary Elementary (Primaire Élémentaire) certificate; continue to Second grade (two years) then First grade; after First grade,

easily become government officials, usually secretaries or interpreters for an office.

Long-time, capable interpreters and secretaries might take an exam consisting of two parts: an oral interview and a skill test for professional ability (which was quite difficult). If they passed the exam, they would be ranked in the level of District Chief (Huyện) and gradually promoted to the levels of Prefect (Phủ), Governor (Độc Phủ Sứ) ... into the leadership ranks.

As native and educated, although they had to work for a living, many people still maintained their self-respect and high national consciousness. Nam Phong Magazine No. 102 (issued in February 1926) in section Thời Đàm (Current Situation) had a paragraph:

“Many Vietnamese from our country studied in the West and passed the engineering and doctoral exams like Western people. Yet, when they come back home and do not integrate with the French community, they can only do menial jobs under the French authority and never be equal to their French colleagues. But integration with the French community means abandoning their country, no one with a conscience can bear to do that.”

At that time, many of the first disciples of Cao Dai worked as civil servants at all levels, from the village level to the Indochina Senate. Thanks to their inherent moral foundation, most of them were devoted to helping the people, trying their

students take exams to obtain the Primary School certificate (Certificat d'Etude Primaire).

-Primary College level: After four years of study, students take an exam to get a Primary College degree, also known as Thành Chung diploma (Diplôme d'Etude Primaire Supérieurs). Schools that teach Primary College are called Collège.

-Secondary level (three years): Also known as the French Vietnamese Baccalaureate. Students take an exam to get a First Baccalaureate degree after two years (Baccalauréat 1^{ère} partie), followed by a Full Baccalaureate.

best to ease the yoke of the colonial government within their jurisdiction.

3) POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT BY THE TIME OF THE FOUNDING OF CAO DAI FAITH

a) Political context

In South Vietnam at the end of the nineteenth century, following the military uprisings of Mr. Trương Định (Long An), Mr. Nguyễn Trung Trực, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Huân, Mr. Thiên Hộ Dương (Đồng Tháp Mười), Mười tám thôn vườn trầu (Bà Điểm)... which were brutally suppressed by the French, Vietnamese patriotic intellectuals turned to using many other forms of resistance against the French.

- In 1904, Mr. Phan Bội Châu (1867 - 1940) took the initiatives to establish Duy Tân Hội (Reformation Society) in Quảng Nam province with the aim of "Restoring Vietnam, establishing an independent government". This society had branches in South Vietnam such as Nam Đồng Hương, and Minh Tân Công Nghệ (led by Mr. Trần Chánh Chiếu, Mr. Lương Khắc Ninh, Mr. Trương Duy Toàn...). Then in 1905, Mr. Phan Bội Châu initiated the Đông Du (Going East) movement,⁹ which was brutally suppressed by the French in 1908.

- In 1911, schoolteacher Nguyễn Tất Thành (later became revolutionist Nguyễn Ái Quốc – Hồ Chí Minh) boarded the ship Latouche Tréville at Nhà Rồng port to go to Europe to find a way to liberate the country.

⁹ Translator's note: Đông Du was a Vietnamese political movement founded by Mr. Phan Bội Châu at the start of the twentieth century that encouraged young Vietnamese to go east to Japan to study, in the hope of training a new generation of revolutionists to rise against French colonial rule. Other notable proponents of Đông Du include Mr. Phan Chu Trinh and the exiled prince Cường Để. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

- In 1914, a major change occurred: World War I broke out in Europe, with France directly participating in the war. That disastrous war spread throughout Europe, then affected the whole world, including Vietnam.

Along with the whole country, in South Vietnam, patriotic revolutionary movements took advantage of the situation to gain independence while France was immersed in war. In return, France increased terrorism toward Vietnam.

After World War I, Cochinchina society continued to have many crises, especially in Saigon.

- In 1921, the first Worker Union was established in Saigon and organized many rallies and strikes in the name of fighting for workers' rights, but with the main hidden goal of fighting against the French.

b) Some social characteristics

- South Vietnam was a newly developed land, where people from all other locales flocked in to settle down. In 1920, the population in South Vietnam was estimated at three million and six hundred thousand (people over 15 years old). Many of them came from the North and Central Vietnam, also from Guangdong and Fujian of China. The land was vast, but the population was sparse; so, they lived together with the natives. Therefore, their own customs and practices gradually merged.

The people were kind, hospitable, sociable, generous... these qualities have become the common lifestyle of the Southerners. Different religions brought by many ethnic groups were equally respected, without envy or discrimination. In any newly formed residential area, along with other public works, there are communal houses, pagodas, temples... with given priority to be built first.

The inclination of worshipping the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) permeated and was deeply ingrained in every Southerner's subconscious. Even Catholicism, introduced by Europeans, was also easily

accepted. The first church had been set there long before the nineteenth century.¹⁰

- Besides the carefully preserved national identity, Southern Vietnamese under the French colonial regime had the opportunity to broaden their horizons and see another civilization from the West. They witnessed with their own eyes the very advanced technologies of transportation, mechanics, construction, etc... And surrounding them was a new culture with legal systems, education, ethics, philosophy, etc..., completely different from the East.

With their open-minded and sensitive nature, the Southerners quickly absorbed the above advanced technologies.

- One of the influences that changed Vietnamese culture at that time was the advent of Quốc Ngữ (national language). Created by Catholic missionaries – especially Alexandre de Rhodes – based on the Latin alphabet, and thanks to its convenience and ease of learning, this type of writing quickly permeated the public.

By the early twentieth century, the national language was widely used in the Southern speech field. This was also an essential means in the early dissemination of Cao Dai Faith.

- South Vietnam (Cochinchina) at this time was a French colony, of course it had to directly bear the humiliation of a ruled country. As a colony, it naturally followed the regimes of the mother country. In the case of the opening of Cao Dai Faith, in that misfortune there was a loophole; the religious policy in Cochinchina was almost the same as in France,

¹⁰ According to author Vương Hồng Sển in the book *Sài Gòn Năm Xưa* (Saigon in the Past) page 226, the number of Catholics in Saigon city and the surrounding areas, including the hamlets of Thị Nghè, Chợ Quán, and Xóm Chiếu, as of February 11, 1859, was twenty-seven thousand.

Some other documents indicated that in Saigon there was a Hội Ngoại Quốc Truyền Giáo (Convent Administrator of the Foreign Missionary Society). The Archbishop's Palace was completed in 1912, and by 1928 the Saigon Diocese had eighty-nine thousand two hundred eighty Catholics.

although with some additional constraints. Thanks to that, Cao Dai predecessors were somewhat relieved of the burden of rules; even when preaching the new religion, they only made a notice (Declaration of Cao Dai Faith – *tờ Khai Đạo*) for the Cochinchina state. In Central or Northern Vietnam at that time, this might have been different.

- In such a socio-political context, the recitation of prophecies was very popular. Among the people, many tended to be spiritual, always hoping that "Heaven's Will" would somehow turn around to save the Vietnamese people from disaster.

Moreover, many spiritic mediums, who were used for getting prophecies, for asking about national affairs, or asking for medicine to cure illnesses... by means of many different "techniques", were no longer strange to everyone. Particularly among the civil servants of Cochinchina at that time, a movement arose to learn and practice communication with the invisible world through reading French books. These books were mostly disseminated by the Theosophical Society (whose authors were Allan Kardec, Camille Flammarion, Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Olcott, Léon Denis...)

The above characteristics of Southern society in the early twentieth century formed an ideal "ground", a necessary geographical advantage for Cao Dai Faith to form and develop smoothly and sustainably in the long term.

SECTION III.

PROPHECIES OF THE EMERGENCE OF CAO DAI FAITH

The emergence of Cao Dai Faith in the world is a predestined event. Therefore, since ancient times, many scriptures in China have mentioned the word **Cao Đài** and the phrase **Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ** (the Third Universal Salvation). In Vietnam, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the prediction of **Cao Đài** manifestation in the world appeared many times in spiritic séances of Immortals. Some typical prophecies are listed below:

A. PROPHECIES IN SCRIPTURES

*1) IN SCRIPTURES OF MINH SU**

Minh Sur (Mingshi) is a religious branch in China, spreading to Vietnam in the nineteenth century.¹¹

* A book of the Minh Sur Masters was brought from China to Vietnam. On the cover of the book there are two prophetic verses:

*As **high** as the North Gate that people admire,*

¹¹ Please refer to the section on Minh Sur in Appendix IV.

*Is the South **Tower** where the Way is disseminated.*¹²

“These two parallel sentences indicate that Cao Dai Faith will appear in the South, with Cao Dai as its leader.”¹³

* In the book *Xiển Đạo Yếu Ngôn*,¹⁴ it tells the story of a man named Hồn Hồn Tử (during the reign of Qianlong Emperor, 1736 – 1796) giving seminars at Trung Hòa mountain. In Chapter 12 “Chứng Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ chi ứng nghiệm” (“Proving the fulfillment of the Third Universal Salvation”) it mentions the prophecy in the book *Tiên Giám* as follows:

“Now as the time has come for the Last Era and the First Era to meet, the three calamities and the eight adversities¹⁵ will arise. Buddhas from the Three Heavens have known how to respond to the times and come down to the world to preach the Great Way, saving all pre-destined humans.¹⁶ You should know that **Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ** has come, and you, (the monks who are listening to the sermon) must

¹² Translator’s note: ‘Cao Đài’ literally means ‘High Tower’ in English language.

¹³ Huệ Lương in the book *Cao Đài Giáo Sơ Giải*, page 23.

¹⁴ Vietnamese translation by Master Lão Sư Đinh Đạo Ninh (Quang Nam Phật Đường) in 1933, Thạnh Mậu printing house, 147 Quận Hạng street, district 1, Gia Định province.

¹⁵ Translator’s notes: the three calamities (‘tam tai’ in Vietnamese) are: storm, flood, and fire.

And the eight adversities (‘bát nạn’ in Vietnamese) are: birth, aging, illnesses, death, parting with loved ones, enduring the uncongenial, unfulfilled wishes, and suffering associated with the five skandhas (ngũ ấm).

¹⁶ Translator’s notes: predestined or original men (‘nguyên nhân’ in Vietnamese) are superior spirits returning to this world to amass more credits and virtues by serving and supporting all beings.

build up merit and virtue to enter the place of thousands of lotus thrones that have been planned.”

2) IN NGỌC LỊCH MINH KINH

Ngọc Lịch Minh Kinh is an ancient Chinese scripture. In Vietnam, this scripture is usually printed together with Hối Dương Nhơn Quả scripture. The last part of Ngọc Lịch Minh Kinh, in a section titled “*Giác Mê Diễn Ca*” (“*Awakening Poem*”), there is a prophecy:

*... Predestined to meet the **Third Universal Salvation**,
Your name would be listed forever in the palace of
Immortals.
Accomplishing three thousand works of merit,
You will receive the holy order bestowing you a
celestial title...*

3) IN THANH TỊNH KINH

In the scripture Thanh Tịnh Kinh (Qingjing Jing), which has been circulated for a long time in the Taoist religious community, in chapter *Chi Đạo*, the explanation section has the following passage:

*Thanh Tịnh Kinh hữu di tích. Công viên quả mãn chỉ
thọ đơn thơ. Thiên mạng phương khả truyền đạo **Tam
Kỳ Phổ Độ**.*

Interpretation: *Thanh Tịnh Kinh* leaves a mark stating that: Those who have accomplished enough work of merit will receive the spiritual method (that is, receive the method of self-liberation). People of divine destiny should spread the Way of **the Third Universal Salvation**.

B. PROPHECIES VIA AUTOMATIC WRITING

1) SPIRITIC SÉANCE IN CAO LÃNH DISTRICT (1913)

On January 3, 1913 (the 26th day of the 11th month of Quý Sửu year), in Cao Lãnh district, Sa Đéc province, a group of intellectuals organized a séance at the residence of Mr. Lê Quang Hiển. That day, the spirit of the patriotic Confucian, who was the Honor Graduate Nguyễn Hữu Huân (1841 – 1875), descended and gave the following poem in Sino-Vietnamese language:

*Dung tất Cao Đài nhiệm khuất thân,
Từ triêm đào lý nhứt môn xuân.
Canh tân bồi ức giang sơn cựu,
Trừ cựu thời thêm tuế nguyệt tân,
Cửu thập thiêu quang sơ bán lục,
Nhất luân minh nguyệt vị tam phân.
Thừa nhàn hạc giá không trung vụ,
Mục đồ Cao Đài tráng chí thân.¹⁷*

¹⁷ This prophecy was quoted from the book *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (Cao Đài Giáo sơ giải)* page 27 by author Huệ Lương.

Reading in the book *Tư Liệu Sự Kiện Lịch Sử Cao Đài Tiên Thiên* (internally issued in 1997 by Đoàn Tin Sử of Cao Đài Tiên Thiên) provided more detail as follows.

That ceremony was attended by some Cao Đài Tiên Thiên predecessors such as gentlemen Trương Đình Đẩu, Nguyễn Văn Lắm ...

When Ms. Lê Thị Dung (the eldest daughter of Mr. Lê Quang Hiển) asked about the current situation, the spirit of the Honor Graduate Huân gave the above poem (with the word Dung at the beginning of the poem). However, this document does not agree on the date of the event (whether it was the first day of the first month of Ất Sửu year (1913) or the 21st day of the 12th month of Nhâm Tý year (1912)).

The spirit of Honor Graduate Huân went on to give that poem in national language:

*“Practice **Cao Đài** to be peaceful, (the first verse)*

.....

*Meet with **Cao Đài** to be serene.” (the last verse)*

The term **Cao Đài** were repeated four times, two in each poem. The séance attendants believed that this poem carried a very profound meaning; yet they could not grasp its hidden implication. Mr. Lê Quang Hiến's (Figure 3) family kept these two poems on the altar as memorabilia.



Figure 3: Portrait of Mr.
Lê Quang Hiến

Only at the end of year 1926, when the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Cao Hoài Sang, Vương Quan Kỳ, Lê Bá Trang, ...in their religious trips, came to Cao Lãnh district to preach the name of Cao Dai, then everyone remembered the holy poem they had received thirteen years earlier.

2) SPIRITIC SÉANCE AT MIẾU NỒI (1923)

Miếu Nổi, also known as Phù Châu Shrine, was built on a small, secluded island on the An Phú Đông river (i.e., Bến Cát

After World War I (around 1945), there was no trace left of Mr. Lê Quang Hiến's house. The land is now a residential area on Đặng Văn Bình street, next to the Traffic Police Office of Cao Lãnh town.

river), between Gò Vấp district and An Phú Đông commune (Hóc Môn district). This shrine is considered an ancient relic of Gia Định province. Some books recorded that the shrine was built by some Chinese merchants during the King Gia Long period.

According to Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu (in the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên*, page 9), in a séance at Miếu Nổi on the night of July 30, 1923 (the 17th day of the 6th month of Quý Hợi year), a member of Bát Tiên (the Eight-Immortal group), Tào Quốc Cự (Cao Guo-jiu), descended to encourage cultivation, saying:

*You all have good fortune and destiny to be in the revelation of the Way, which opens the third time. Indeed, you all are spiritually destined, so you have encountered it ahead of the world. “Predestined people will meet and be saved in the **Third Salvation**”, the Immortals and Saints all descend to the world to save predestined people.*

3) SPIRITIC SÉANCE AT NGỌC HOÀNG TEMPLE (1923)

In the same year 1923, on September 2 (the 22nd day of the 7th month of Quý Hợi year), at Ngọc Hoàng Temple in Đa Kao,¹⁸ a séance was held, and another prophecy was received. Huê Quang Đại Đế (the Great Emperor Huaguang) descended and gave the following poem:

*The Way for the **Third Era** has been opened,*

¹⁸ Ngọc Hoàng Temple belongs to Đức Tể sect (of Minh Sư religious branch), built in 1895 by (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Ngô Đạo Chương (birth name Ngô Cẩm Tuyền). It was initially named Ngọc Hoàng Điện (on Nguyễn Huy Tự street, near Đa Kao marketplace). The first Patriarch was (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh (Note: He was not (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple) who came from Cục Lạc Động at La Phù Sơn (Hong Kong) to spread the religion. A few years after its establishment, for economic reasons, the temple was sold. Then the followers of Đức Tể sect built Quang Nam Phật Đường as the Ancestral Temple (at 17 Trần Quang Khải street, Saigon District 1), which still exists today.

And the tricolor flag is flying radiantly in all four directions.

You are so blessed to receive the spiritual method to attain enlightenment,

As the Great Emperor descends to free you from tribulations.

The first line of this poem “Tam Kỳ đạo dĩ khai” (“the Way for the Third Era has been opened”) refers to the fact that Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (the Third Universal Salvation) was opened by God a few years earlier (1921), accepting the first disciple, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, on Phú Quốc island.

* In addition to the above-mentioned prophecies that explicitly mentioned the term “Cao Đài” and/or “Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ” – as well as those that are not listed here – the founders of major religions in the past all had important “hidden words” about the revolving of the celestial mechanism in this Last Era.

The sermon of (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc at the Holy See on the 2nd night of the 6th month of Mậu Dần year (1938) stated as follows:

“The ancient religious leaders prophesied that: In the future, the Three Religions must return to the world, so they left mysterious vestiges in their oracles:

- As for Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha said: Sixty thousand years later, God will open Huỳnh Đạo (the Regal Way).
- As for Confucianism, Confucius said: At the end of the Third Period, God will initiate Huỳnh Đạo (the Regal Way).
- When Jesus was crucified on the cross, he

prophesied to his disciples: In two thousand years, at the end of the world, I will come to judge humanity once again. And he said: There are many sheepfolds that God the Father will gather and return to one.

Now, the Supreme Being opens the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation, which is in accordance with the prophecies of the ancient religious leaders.”

The Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) – the last book in the New Testament – has a hidden meaning about “the sealing on the foreheads of God’s servants” and clearly states that “*those who come out of the great tribulation*” are “*clothed in white robes*”. The white robes (áo dài trắng) are the religious attire of the children of God in the Third Universal Salvation. And the seal on the forehead is perhaps the “divine point” in each disciple, received from “God Eye”.

* There is a seemingly predestined “geographical” event, which is the movement of the Vietnamese people in the “Southwards” direction matching the three periods of universal salvation.

In the First Universal Salvation, about four thousand years ago, the Vietnamese people mainly lived in the Northern Delta.

In the Second Universal Salvation, over two thousand years ago, the Vietnamese people settled and established a nation in the Red River Delta.

And, in the Third Universal Salvation, the Vietnamese people had just managed to fully exploit and expand the Mekong Delta. Immediately after that, this new land received Cao Dai Faith, the religion of the Third Salvation. This land is perhaps the “geographical advantage” that was predestined for the Vietnamese people.

CHAPTER 2.

PHASES OF FORMATION OF THE RELIGION

SECTION I. GOD INITIATED THE FIRST SOURCE
OF CAO DAI FAITH (THE ESOTERICISM or
INNER SELF-CULTIVATION)

SECTION II. GOD INITIATED THE SECOND
SOURCE OF CAO DAI FAITH (THE
EXOTERICISM or PUBLIC PROPAGATION)

SECTION III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
RELIGIOUS FORM

SECTION IV. SEPARATION AND EMANATION

SECTION V. TOWARD THE INAUGURATION OF
CAO DAI FAITH

The Third Universal Salvation is the ultimate salvation at the end of this Last Era, when the influence of material desires engulfs mankind into the sea of suffering, when the power of evil overwhelms and obscures the true Way. This is an extremely great and extremely difficult task. Therefore, Jade Emperor the Supreme Being Himself came to earth to preach the Way.

Vietnamese people of the Southern region were fortunate to be the first to receive this holy grace, and the predecessors in the founding period became the representatives of mankind to receive and propagate the God-Way.

In accord with the principle of the Way comprising “*One Yin, One Yang*”, Cao Dai Faith gradually took shape, originating from two separate sources.

SECTION I.

GOD INITIATED THE FIRST SOURCE OF CAO DAI FAITH (THE ESOTERICISM)

This source of the Faith essentially started with only one disciple: Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu.

A. Mr. NGÔ VĂN CHIÊU AND HIS PATH TO CAO ĐÀI

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878 – 1932) was born on the 27th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year (February 28, 1878),¹⁹ son of Mr. Ngô Văn Xuân and Ms. Lâm Thị Quý (1858 – 1919) (her other name was Lâm Thị Tiền).

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was the first disciple chosen by Cao Dai Supreme God.

Mr. Ngô 's respect for Buddha and God was revealed from his childhood. As a student at a very young age, he lived in the house of his aunt Ngô Thị Đây in Mỹ Tho province, where there was an altar for worshipping Quan Thánh Đế Quân.²⁰ Every night, after studying, he recited prayers and made

¹⁹ Regarding Mr. Ngô's birth date on the 27th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year, please refer to his biography in Appendix I.

²⁰ He was Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor and the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China.

offerings before going to bed. At that time, he was only about ten years old.

1) THE WAY OF MAN, THE INITIAL FOUNDATION

The path of cultivating moral conduct begins with the Way of Man. In other words, the Way of Man is always the foundation; if the foundation is strong, the later work built on it will be sustainable.

Before entering the Spiritual Way, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had fulfilled the Way of Man, even when he graduated and became a government official. Some of his outstanding examples are recorded as follows:

a) Filial devotion to parents

When he was young (at six years old), his parents had to move to Hà Nội city for business. He stayed in Mỹ Tho province with his aunt.

“As a man of great filial piety, when he received his salary, he wrote a letter inviting his parents from Hà Nội to return so he could take care of them.

Working at Tân Đáo Court, he leased a residential unit on Chaigneau alley (now Tôn Thất Đạm street) behind Triều Châu office, to live with his parents. Later, his father moved out; but whenever his father needed money, he provided it fully and never complained. To avoid cash shortage, he taught French language to the Chinese people in the evening.

To his mother, he was a very dutiful son. Every day after work, he never forgot to ask his mother if she had eaten and if she had a good appetite. When she was very sick, he went to the spiritist séances to ask for remedies and did his mother's laundry

himself, for fear that his wife and children would neglect this task.”²¹

After obtaining Thành Chung Diploma on March 23, 1899, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu worked in Tân Đảo Court (now called the Immigration Department), in Saigon city. On May 1, 1909, he was ordered to work as a secretary at the Bồ Court (the Administrative Court) in Tân An province. He brought his mother along to make it easier for him to take care of her.

As for his father, Mr. Ngô Văn Xuân, after a period of living separately, he probably returned to live in Tân An area in his old age, to be near his children and grandchildren.²²

b) Fulfillment of family duties

Since marrying Mrs. Bùi Thị Thân (1879 – 1955), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu often went to work afar off, in Hà Tiên town and Phú Quốc island. With his high position and in the social conditions at that time, it was easy to have concubines; but Mr. Ngô always kept his marital duties.

After subtracting his own sparing expenses, he sent all his salary back to his family. He delegated to his wife full authority in managing and resolving family issues, as he wrote in a letter to his children: "*Whatever your mother decides, your father will do the same.*"

²¹ Excerpt from the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, Chiêu Minh branch, Sài Gòn 1962, page 15.

²² On September 4, 1946, the village officials of Lợi Bình Nhơn village, Hưng Long commune, Tân An province, made a Death Certificate Replacement, stating that "*Our village confirms that Mr. Ngô Văn Xuân died in Lợi Bình Nhơn village, but no death certificate is documented in the village. Now our village confirms that Mr. Ngô Văn Xuân's death certificate has been lost*". Unfortunately, his tomb has not been found to date. According to Mr. Ngô Văn Tinh (Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's second son), the tomb was in Phú Lâm – Phú Thọ area and must have been moved elsewhere and lost.

“He was very tolerant towards outsiders but was strict and fair towards his own children.

When he was working in Tân An province, one of his sons, who was still young at the time, secretly followed his friends to the market on Tết’s²³ holidays to roll other people’s melons and was arrested by the policemen and taken to the police station. He found out and released all the other kids, but his son was detained until the afternoon.

He often taught his children to be humble, patient, and content with their lot. When he was close to them, he used stories that happened before their eyes to teach them. When he was far away, he often wrote home to remind them of their duties as human beings.”²⁴

To illustrate, here is a few passages quoted from the letter from Phú Quốc island that he sent to his two eldest daughters (Cô Tư and Cô Năm) on August 31, 1923:

... I love all my children, boys and girls alike... I advise you to always be good and honest. Do not swindle in business. It is so serious a sin. (...)

Remember what I taught you, be kind, do business honestly, do not cause trouble with anyone, just work hard to make a living. (...) The practice of yielding to others is a magic trick that has been taught by the gods for thousands of years, not something new...

²³ Translator’s note: Tết is Vietnamese New Lunar Year.

²⁴ Excerpt from the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, Chiếu Minh branch, Sài Gòn 1962, page 15.

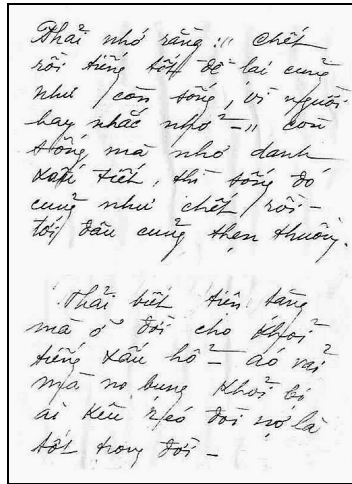


Figure 4: A handwriting of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu in the letter sent from Saigon to Tân An province to his two daughters, Cô Tư (Miss Ngô Thị Yến Ngọc) and Cô Năm (Miss Ngô Thị Nguyệt) on October 12, 1924.

In another letter (Figure 4), he advised his children:

Remember that: "After death, a good reputation left behind is like living, because people often remember you". If you live but have a bad reputation, then that life is like dead, because wherever you go you will be ashamed.

c) Compassion for all

"He was very charitable, always helping people in need. But he often gave alms secretly, not wanting people to know and thank him.

Knowing there were very poor people in the

neighborhood and wanting to help them, he used the excuse of asking them to do trivial jobs around his house and then paid them five or ten times more. On Tết New Year's Eve, when he met merchants in the countryside who still had unsold goods, he bought them all so these people would have money to buy offerings for their ancestors during the three days of New Year Festival.

At night, he wore ordinary clothes and went into the poor neighborhood. Hearing people lamenting about poverty, sick children and/or ill wives, he would secretly put money in their door jambs and leave without letting them know.”²⁵

With friends and colleagues, he treated them with all his heart. On his transfer from Tân An to Hà Tiên (1920), many people wrote farewell poems to show their admiration. For example, a passage from the farewell poem of Mr. Trần Phong Sắc and Mr. Cao Văn Lỗi (Chief Justice of the Court in Tân An province) wrote:

*Today the Chief Justice held a banquet,
Sending the District Magistrate on his way.
Friends and colleagues are present here,
Wishing to send the virtuous man off.
Passing examinations, you become an official,
Yet you lead an ordinary life always in moderation.
Canton folks and villagers are so touched!
It is said that anyone who is liked by mandarins is
disliked by commoners.
But everyone loves you so much!
They stick with you when you are nearby and miss you
when you are away.*

²⁵ Chiếu Minh branch, *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, Sài Gòn 1962, page 15.

*Your integrity maintains the level of justice,
Your loyalty and honesty are the key to trust ...*

The other poems are the same, all expressing affection when saying goodbye to a kind and gentle friend.

His filial piety, compassion, and respect for Buddha and God gradually created a solid foundation in the Way of Man, contributing to the fate that brought Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to the Faith of the Third Era, becoming the first disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God.

2) FIRST CONTACT WITH THE DIVINE

In 1902 (Nhâm Dần year), his mother was often ill. To pray for her longevity, and to verify the rumors of the miraculous manifestation of the Immortals in spiritic séances, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu went to Thủ Dầu Một (now in Bình Dương province) to attend the Minh Thiện invocation.

That day, an Immortal gave him the following quatrain:

*“Thủ bôi vị lễ diệt khả thông,
Trung dung hữu Đạo thị tâm không,
Đắc vọng kỳ sự giả thân du,
Minh phong khả đối dữ thành công.”*

This poem contains profoundly hidden meanings. Even the combination of the first word of each sentence “*Thủ Trung Đắc Minh*” alone implies Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s later self-disciplinary achievement in meditation.²⁶

²⁶ In mid-1926 when departing from the missionary activities of the Faith, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu guided the establishment of Chiếu Minh branch, an inner cultivation school. Disciples of Chiếu Minh change their middle name into Minh, for example, Ngô Văn Chiêu becomes Ngô Minh Chiêu. The term ‘branch’ in “Chiếu Minh branch” does not mean a church or a branch like the missionary churches or branches.

This could be considered the first time Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had contact with the Divine Beings. He was then twenty-four years old (Figure 5).

At the end of 1917 (Đinh Tỵ year) his mother became seriously ill. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu attended Hiệp Minh invocation in Cái Khế district, Cần Thơ province, to ask for remedies.²⁷



Figure 5: Portrait of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu taken at the age of twenty-three. (Mr. Ngô wrote his age on the back of the photo)

Around this age, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu attended Minh Thiện séance (Thủ Dầu Một district) for the first time to pray for his mother's longevity.

When he arrived, the invocation had already been started.²⁸ He dared not enter abruptly, afraid of causing a commotion, so he stood outside. Suddenly, the Immortal called Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu in and gave his mother a prescription for a cure and two poems for himself.

The first poem has ten lines, as follows.

It is regrettable that the original version of this poem (and of many other poems) is not written in Sino-Vietnamese characters and thus, very hard to be accurately rewritten and interpreted.

²⁷ Please find more details about Hiệp Minh séance in Appendix II.

²⁸ Please refer to the research on automatic writing in Appendix III.

*As long as Heaven exists, so do rivers and oceans.
 Everywhere on earth, mountains and hills are moist.
 Thanh Minh festival is in the springtime,
 Phoenixes bow, cranes dance, and wild cocks crow.
 Over winding passes and on gorge tracks,
 You must quietly overcome thorny obstacles.²⁹
 A filial child never minds
 Seeking to follow Buddhas and Immortals into the
 Paradise.
 Looking back and forth, past and present,
 You are so righteous a man under the firmament.*

The second poem also has ten lines, of which the last four lines are quoted here:

*...Sixty years of age is the end of your mother's life,
 Should you still wish for her recovery,
 Stay in front of the altar to pray the whole three days,
 To plead for her mercy.*

Thanks to his sincerity, the Divine Beings approved the prescription to cure his mother's illness, and she remained healthy for a few more years.

In 1919 (Kỷ Mùi year), his mother became very ill again. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu returned to Hiệp Minh invocation site in Cái Khế district to ask for remedies. This time, the Immortal did not give him any prescription and only gave him two long poems. One was “*Khai Xuất Thiên Hoàng*” consisting of seventeen verses. The second was “*Hồ Xự Xang*” consisting of thirty verses. Both poems had many strange hidden meanings.

²⁹ The term “**ải**” in the original Vietnamese version means hindered or separated by obstacles. In some books, this term was printed as “**phải**”, which is not the original word.

Because of his compassion for his sick mother, he went to Minh Thiện invocation site (in Thủ Dầu Một district) once again to ask for remedies. That day, (the Saintly Emperor) Quan Thánh Đế Quân³⁰ descended and gave him a seven-word quatrain poem.

His daughter, Cô Năm Ngô Thị Nguyệt, still remembered two lines from that poem:

*“Tỵ thủy huê lưu thiên bán lạc,
Hạnh lâm phong đảo hội tiền phi”.*

Understanding the meaning of the poem, he knew that his mother would not live much longer.

She passed away on November 15, 1919 (the 24th day of the 9th month of Kỷ Mùi year).³¹

3) ORGANIZING SPIRITIC INVOCATION

After many times going to the invocation sites to seek remedies for his mother, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu gained – indirectly – another important thing, which was **faith**. He believed that beyond this visible world, there existed an invisible, supernatural, and supremely powerful world, and he placed all his trust in Divine Beings. This belief made him well

³⁰ Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor and the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China.

³¹ According to Mr. Ngô Mạnh Thường (Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s grandson), his family was then so poor. Thus, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu buried his mother using the “wooden burial” method, with only a wooden base and no plasterwork in the grave. Originally, the tomb was in the temple grounds near Nguyễn Huỳnh Đức’s mausoleum. On the 24th day of the 9th month of Bính Thân year (1956), thanks to Miss Cô Năm Ngô Thị Nguyệt’s embroidery skills, she earned money to rebuild the tomb. Over time, the surrounding landscape changed, and now the tomb is located in the yard of Khánh Hậu Elementary School (Tân An province). At present, the tomb is still there, thanks to Mr. Ngô Văn Nhựt who works in the provincial education sector. But the future is unknown.

determined to actively seek ways to contact the Heavenly Realm.

During his time working at Tòa Bó court, Tân An province, around the end of 1919, when he was about to move to Hà Tiên town, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu and some friends including gentlemen: Trần Phong Sắc, Nguyễn Thiên Kim (Figure 6), Lê Kiển Thọ and Nguyễn Văn Vân (Figure 7),³² practiced invoking spirits.

The method of invoking spirits was based on the instructions of (Great Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tánh at Châu Tế Phật Đường, a temple of Minh Sư religious branch close to Đá Hàn gulf (Tân An province).³³

The group chose Mr. Lê Kiển Thọ as the medium, holding the red spiritic pen, Mr. Trần Phong Sắc as the séance master, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu as the reader, and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Vân as the scribe.

³² Mr. **Nguyễn Thiên Kim** (1870 – 1946) was a son of Mr. Đoàn Văn Vào and Ms. Huỳnh Thị Thê. His childhood name was Đoàn Thiên Kim, and his family resided at 82A Phan Đình Phùng street, Tân An province. Later, he devoted himself to Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church, promoted to (Cardinal of Buddha faction) Thái Đầu Sư (Hòa Phong La Hán).

Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Vân** (1893 – 1981) at that time was a schoolteacher at the Elementary School for boys in Tân An province (where Mr. Trần Phong Sắc taught Morality). His residence was in Lợi Bình Nhơn village (now 233/26 Bình Yên Đông 2, Tân An province). Later, he devoted himself to Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church, promoted to the rank of (Cardinal of Taoist faction) Thượng Đầu Sư (Thượng Kim Tiên).

Mr. **Lê Kiển Thọ** (1879 – 1946) was Hương Bộ, a village official, and thus also called Mr. Bộ Thọ. His house is now at 76 Phan Đình Phùng street, Tân An province (across the street from Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house). Later, he devoted himself to Tân An Holy House (the Holy See in Tây Ninh province) until the end of his life.

³³ This temple was a branch of Quan Âm Phật Đường (Thâm Nhiên). After (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tánh passed away (1946) without successors, the temple fell into ruin. At present, only his tomb remains at this site.



Figure 6: Portrait of **Mr. Nguyễn Thiên Kim (Đoàn Thiên Kim) (1870 – 1946)**



Figure 7: Portrait of **Mr. Nguyễn Văn Vân (1893 – 1981) in the religious costume of Thượng Đẩu Sư (Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church)**

Their invocation sessions were regularly held in Mr. Lê Kiến Thọ's house for charitable purpose of curing patients. But on the full moon day of every month, the invocation was set in Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house at 31 Lagrange street, Bình Lập Commune (now changed to 41 Phan Đình Phùng street, Tân An province) (Figure 8).

At this time, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu worshipped Quan Thánh Đế Quân, Văn Xương Đế Quân, and Quan Âm Bồ Tát.³⁴ The prayer to invoke Immortals “Thỉnh Tiên Chú” taken from the book “*Vạn Pháp Qui Tông*” was recited by the neatly dressed

³⁴ Those tablets are still worshipped below the Divine Eye in Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house (Tân An province). Looking at it, on the right is the tablet for Quan Âm Buddha (Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva, the Goddess of Mercy), on the left are those for Quan Thánh Đế Quân (Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor, i.e., the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China) and Văn Xương Đế Quân.

The location of his house (the place where the grand name of Cao Đài Immortal was first announced and received in the world) has the coordinates according to the global positioning satellite system (GPS) are 10°32'24" N; 106°24'39" E.

children kneeling in front of the altar. The first part of the prayer is as follows:



Figure 8: Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s home in Tân An province (where he heard the grand name of Cao Đài for the first time)

Photo taken in 1996 by author Huệ Nhân.

*“Kiềng thiềng cung khẩu thỉnh,
 Phù Sứ vị thông truyền.
 Bất phân thời dữ khắc,
 Trục chỉ đảo Đào nguyên.
 Tiên cung trần tịch tịch,
 Động phủ nguyệt quyên quyên.
 Ngã kim bảm khai nguơn quân lịnh,
 Hiệu triệu Bồng Lai thỉnh chúng Tiên.
 Ngũ chơn bửu khí lâm trần thế,
 Giá hạc đăng vâ xiển từ nguyên.*

*Cao Đài Tiên bút thư văn tự,
Tốc giáng oai linh phó cảm tiên.
Khẩu khải chư Tiên chư Địa phủ,
Thông linh vị thượng tử cô tiên.
Kim thời hữu thỉnh tốc báo ứng,
Tế độ Càn Khôn vạn cổ truyền ...”³⁵*

Despite the lack of experience in organizing spiritic invocation, his group was blessed to miraculously cure many people of their illnesses, thereby increasing his and many others' faith.

Here is one typical case of a patient being cured: Ms. Phạm Thị Thống, wife of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Bạch (they were the parents of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Vân in Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's invocation group). Ms. Phạm Thị Thống had been suffering from diabetes for many years, and when it became serious, the doctors in Tân An province at that time were helpless. During an invocation session, the patient came to attend and sincerely prayed. After the session, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu gave her the white water (previously offered on the Divine Altar in a small bowl). After three times like that, she was completely cured of her illness miraculously.

³⁵ The book of *Bí Truyền Vạn Pháp Qui Tông* is over a hundred years old, brought from China to Việt Nam. It is specializing in spells and communication with the invisible world.

This “*Thỉnh Tiên Chủ*” prayer comprises fifty-two lines, in which the eleventh line: “*Cao Đài Tiên bút thư văn tự*” is considered a prophecy about Cao Dai automatic writing (thần cơ diệu bút Cao Đài). Saying this prayer, one must read to oneself the last six lines silently. In addition, many books write lines 9 and 10 as “*Lâm triều thế ... xiển tự nguyên*”, which is different from the original Chinese text as follows:

五 眞 寶 氣 臨 塵 世
駕 鶴 騰 雲 闡 詞 源

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thông, whose nickname was Đò (1902 – 1998) (he was probably the last leader of the “Tam Kỳ Nguyên Nguyên Bản Bản” sect, and the sixth younger brother of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Vân), told the above story. He also remembered many other cases of being cured by cups of white water or fresh coconut water placed on the Divine Altar. At that time, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thông and the children of Mr. Nguyễn Thiêng Kim, Mr. Lê Kiển Thọ ... were allowed to follow along to chant prayers and assist in the rituals. Because they witnessed it with their own eyes, they never forget it.

These healing sessions did not last long, in fact only a few months, but they were a means for Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to strengthen his faith and accomplish work of merit in the first steps of his religious life. It was through these sessions that the whole invocation group in Tân An province received holy order to correct the invocation ritual and to train the mediums to use the beaked basket instead of the spiritic pen.

B. RECEIVING THE GRAND NAME OF CAO ĐÀI

1) HEARING THE GRAND NAME OF CAO DAI FOR THE FIRST TIME (TÂN AN PROVINCE, 1920) – THE BEAKED BASKET

As mentioned in the previous section, about two months before Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu moved to Hà Tiên, his invocation group in Tân An province received a holy order to reorganize the invocation ritual and practice using the beaked basket.

Following these instructions, the invocation body was rearranged as follows: Mr. Trần Phong Sắc was the séance master, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Vân the active medium, Mr. Lê Kiển Thọ the receptive medium, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kiêm the scribe, and Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu the reader. Thus, their invocation ritual was like the ones at the Minh Thiện and Hiệp Minh

invocation sites, where Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had attended before.

During a séance at Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house, most likely on the full-moon day of the 12th month of Kỷ Mùi year (February 4, 1920), they were chanting the following verses of the invocation prayer:

*“Ngũ chơn bửu khí lâm trần thế
Giá hạc đẳng vân xiển từ nguyên ...”*

Suddenly, the beaked basket tapped loudly, and an Immortal descended, calling himself: **Cao Đài Immortal!**

The Immortal asked the séance master to correct the two sentences above. Mr. Trần Phong Sắc³⁶ hesitated and then responded:

This invocation prayer has been around for a hundred years, and it was passed down from China. No one has yet dared to say it was wrong. Why are you asking to correct it now? Is it really wrong?

Immediately, the beaked basket brushed aside as a warning. Mr. Trần Phong Sắc was scolded for his casual words. Then the Immortal called Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, and the latter changed the sentence to:

“Bửu chơn ngũ khí, lâm trần thế ...”

³⁶ Mr. **Trần Phong Sắc** (1873 – 1928), given name Diễm, penname Đăng Huy, was born in Vĩnh Long province, and was a famous Confucian literate at that time. He taught Chinese and Ethics at the provincial school in Tân An province. He also translated many Chinese fictions into Vietnamese such as: Phong Thần Diễn Nghĩa, Anh Hùng Náo Tam Môn Giai, ... In addition, he was the author of many stories, poems, plays... with a total of fifty-nine books (the first book was printed in 1906). He passed away on August 24, 1928.

The Immortal praised that the new verse was correct.

Because they did not know who Cao Đài Immortal was, they asked him, and the Immortal answered with the two verses:

*Cao Đài respond to the heart of sentient beings,
But who knows the name of Cao Đài?*

The grand name Cao Đài was mentioned three times that day. But how could anyone understand it? As for Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, he believed that Cao Dai Immortal was the Supreme Being. Only God would dare to correct the ancient scriptures like that. From that day on, Mr. Trần Phong Sắc resigned from the role of séance master.

Later, the above-mentioned invocation prayer “Thỉnh Tiên Chú” was changed by the Divine Beings. The group switched to using the first poem that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had received at Hiệp Minh invocation site in late Đinh Tỵ year (1917). Also, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu received the holy order to write and append the last four lines to this poem as follows:

*The more polished the gold and jade, the brighter they
are.
The more steadfastly you follow Buddha, the deeper
you contemplate.
Immortals are never far away,
They manifest immediately if you have faith.*

This new invocation prayer is often called “Trời còn” prayer, due to its first line: “Trời còn sông biển đều còn ...” (“As long as Heaven exists, so do rivers and oceans”).

Back to the two verses:

Cao Đài respond to the heart of sentient beings,

But who knows the name of Cao Đài?

This was **the first time God descended to earth and proclaimed the name Cao Dai**. The two verses above were not only reminded by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu throughout his life of religious practice but also created a “koan” for his descendants to ponder. That was the origin of the two words Cao Dai when the Faith was founded.³⁷

³⁷ Perhaps it is also necessary to briefly present the meaning of the two words Cao Dai, based on the explanations that the Supreme Being taught in later séances.

“Meaning of the two words **Cao Đài**.

To explain his proclaimed name, Jade Emperor taught in a séance in 1927, Cần Thơ province:

Linh Tiêu nhất tháp thị Cao Đài,

Đại Hội quần Tiên thử ngọc giai.

Vạn trượng hào quang từng thử xuất,

Cổ danh bửu cảnh: Lạc Thiên Thai.

Interpretation: At Linh Tiêu Palace in Heaven, there is a high tower called Cao Dai; the Immortals often gather in great meetings in front of that jade platform; that is where the thousand-foot halo shines. The ancient name of this precious place is Lạc Thiên Thai (Delightful Paradise). So, this time, the Jade Emperor took the name of the place of his residence as his eponym.”

(Taken from the book *Cao Đài Giáo Sơ Giải*, page 31, written by Huệ Lương, 1963).

That is Cao Dai in Heaven (the Macrocosm), but what about in the human world (the microcosm)? The scripture *Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo* (the 2nd edition, published in 1956, i.e., *Cao Dai Great Way: The Grand Cycle of Esoteric Teaching*, chapter “The Cross of the Three Purities”, pp.190 - 191, trans. Anh-Tuyet Tran, Cao Dai Temple Overseas 2015), has a passage:

What does CAO ĐÀI mean? It means the highest peak of Kunlun Mountain or Nirvana Chamber, belonging to the Superior World ... The universe has three worlds: the formless, the formed, and the desire worlds; human body also comprises these three worlds. When the soul breaks through the Celestial Gate, it enters the Realm of Supreme Purity. What is the Celestial Gate? It is the Nirvana Chamber.” (the center of mystic energy in human head crown).

2) HEARING THE GRAND NAME OF CAO DAI FOR THE SECOND TIME (HÀ TIÊN TOWN, 1920)

Just after the period of one-hundred-day mourning for his mother (who passed away on November 15, 1919), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu transferred to Hà Tiên on March 1, 1920 (the 11th day of the 1st month of Canh Thân year) for official duties.

In Hà Tiên, before Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu came, there had been a group of people who used planchette to summon the Immortals under the guidance of a Lão Sư (a Taoist Master) in Quảng Tế Đường (Minh Sư religious branch); this group comprised gentlemen Lâm Tấn Đức, Nguyễn Thành Diêu, Đốc Phủ Cao Văn Sự, Phán Ngàn, ... Usually, this group had to go through five or seven rounds of invoking before the Immortal would descend once. After settling in his new position, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was introduced to this group by Mr. Cao Văn Sự (a colleague at Tòa Bó court in Hà Tiên). Since Mr. Ngô's joining, the invocation to summon the Immortals became much easier.

They often set up the invocations on Thạch Động mountain (Tiên Sơn Động) and at Mặc Cửu's tomb. Once at Thạch Động, Lady Immortal Ngô Kim Liên gave Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu two quatrains, encouraging him to start his self-cultivation:

*The swallows call their friends in mid-autumn,
Stating that Heaven and Earth are still far apart.
From the Western Realm they look back to the thorny
path behind,
Through which everyone must strive to become a man
of great mind.*

The moon is shining brightly in the autumn sky,

The Supreme God opened the Way in the Third Era, using the name Cao Dai. Surely that name has many other profound meanings.

*Yet, Western Paradise is still far away.
Who, with carnal eyes, can ever see it?
Only those who persevere in self-perfection might.*

On the night of Mid-Autumn Festival of that year (Sunday, September 26, 1920), an invocation was held at Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức's house (Figures 9 & 10), in which Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức and Mr. Cao Văn Sự were the medium pair. The Immortal descended and gave the following poem:³⁸

*“Cao Đài minh nguyệt **Ngô Văn Chiêu**,
Linh lung vạn học thể **Quan Diêu**.
Vô thậm **Sự Đức** nhiệm ngao du,
Bích thủy thanh sơn tương đối tiểu.”*

The poem named the séance attendants (Chiêu, Diêu, Sự, Đức). Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was called first and by his full name. Notably, this was the second time Mr. Ngô heard the grand name Cao Dai.

³⁸ This poem was taken from the book “*Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*”. The second verse of the poem has the word Quang Diêu, which is very likely Mr. Lê Quang Diêu (1903 – 1987) who around year 1950 worked as Hương Bộ at Dương Đông, Phú Quốc island. He and his father, Mr. Lê Văn Bảy (1888 – 1947), practiced the cultivation method of Cao Đài (of the Tây Ninh Holy See) until the end of their lives. Some elders at Dương Đông Holy House (of the Tây Ninh Holy See) said that Mr. Lê Quang Diêu was a medium during the time of the period of invocation using ancient planchette.

As for Mr. **Lâm Tấn Đức** (1866 – 1934), he was adaptive father of poet Đông Hồ Lâm Tấn Phác and a notable scholar of the ancient Hà Tiên land. His residence at Đông Hồ wharf, currently is the poet Đông Hồ memorial house, and has the coordinates according to the GPS global positioning system: 10°22'56" N; 104°29'26" E.



Figure 9: A portrait of **Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức (1866 – 1934)**



Figure 10: **Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức's house, where Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu received the grand name of Cao Đài for the second time (1920).**

Serving eight months in Hà Tiên and just one month after hearing the grand name Cao Dai for the second time, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was ordered to transfer to Phú Quốc island to become the District Chief.

Phú Quốc is a good land. Poet Đông Hồ, on a visit to this island, wrote a compliment published in *Nam Phong Magazine* No. 124 (December 1927); the article has the following

passage:

“In Phú Quốc, most people still preserve the customs and virtues of the past; clearly, it is a community in which ‘houses have no doors.’ Houses never have doors. Rich people may want doors to their houses merely for decoration, and they never lock those doors at night. Doors left open, yet there are no thieves.”

This will be a suitable environment for Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to learn and practice the New Method of Cao Dai.

C. ACQUIRING CAO DAI SPIRITUAL METHOD

1) CHOSEN AS THE FIRST DISCIPLE OF CAO DAI GOD (PHÚ QUỐC ISLAND, 1921).

On Tuesday, October 26, 1920 (the full-moon day of the 9th month of Canh Thân year), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu became Phú Quốc District Chief. Phú Quốc is a large island at the end of South Vietnam, with undulating mountains and immense water body. Here, as if God had destined for Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's arrival to complete the three constituents of the Universal Triad: Heaven - Earth - Man, it signals the right time to instill the God-Way into this first disciple.

Phú Quốc District Palace, where Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu served and resided, was in Dương Đông town. On top of Dương Đông mountain was Quan Âm Tự, a temple belonging to Minh Sư religious branch, about five hundred meters from the district palace.³⁹

³⁹ Amazingly, the name Dương Đông is coincidentally the same as the birthplace of Đạo Vô Vi (wuwei way, the Way of effortless action). Đông (the East direction), according to the Eight Trigram plan in both the Pre- and Post-Genesis, is Dương (Yang). Moreover, the Đông (East) direction, according to the Five Primordial Elements, belongs to Wood (the initiation); it is the Spring, it is the Origin virtue in the Way of QIAN (☰) triagram. The Sun also rises in this direction.

Before Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's arrival, there had been a group of gentlemen in Phú Quốc island who often used spiritistic mediums to invoke. Although the mediums and reader were young and unwary, Immortals only descended once in every few invocation times (like the invocation group in Hà Tiên). But since Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu joined the group, every time he set up the invocation, the Immortals would descend as soon as he finished chanting the invocation prayer.

He often set up invocation sessions with the following people: Mr. Trương Văn Khâu (Hương Hào), Ms. Bà Năm Trương Thị Vàng (sister of Mr. Trương Văn Khâu), Mr. Nguyễn Văn Mẫn (schoolteacher), Mr. Đinh Văn Phan (Hội Đồng - Councilor) with his two daughters Ms. Đinh thị Thao và Ms. Đinh Thị Lược, Ms. Bà Phủ Nguyễn Văn Phẩm, Ms. Ba Lang Đinh Thị Lang⁴⁰ (Figure 11), and many others. The medium named Lê

Mr. Huỳnh Đăng Khoa (his religious name in Minh Sư religious branch was Huỳnh Kim Chung) (brother-in-law of Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức) was the one who built Quan Âm Temple on the land provided by his brother Huỳnh Cập Đệ. Please refer to Appendix II for additional information on Quan Âm Temple.

⁴⁰ Ms. **Đinh Thị Lang** (1884 – 1972) was the daughter of Mr. Đinh Văn Nhiều and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Thìn, and her husband was Mr. Nguyễn Văn Còn (1880 – 1940). She had two sons, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huỳnh (Hai Huỳnh) (1906 – 1945) and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Xuân (Ba Xuân) (1912 – 1988), both served as mediums. Ms. Đinh Thị Lang was a maternal cousin of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. He frequently visited her family (at number 286, hamlet 6, zone 2), and had her make some garments for him.

She passed away on May 28, 1972. The house was then taken care of by her granddaughters, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Ba and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Tư (daughters of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huỳnh) and was preserved almost as before with a sophisticatedly carved altar system. Particularly, this place still preserves a very old image of God Eye, probably from the time Mr. Ngô was on Phú Quốc island. (Although this family does not follow Chiêu Minh practice, they still worship it). The photograph of God Eye is shown in Chapter 2 Section I Part D.1.

In addition, since Mr. Huỳnh Đăng Khoa, the owner of Quan Âm Temple, was the brother-in-law of Mr. Lâm Tấn Đức in Hà Tiên, certainly the two invocation groups of Hà Tiên and Phú Quốc knew each other.

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of Quan Âm Temple are: 10°12'48" N; 103°57'39" E.

Văn Ngung (nickname Tư Ngung)⁴¹ (Figure 12) was very young; he served as medium throughout the time Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu acquired the spiritual teaching on Phú Quốc island (and throughout Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's religious life).

⁴¹ According to Ms. Phan Thị Trung (born in 1919), currently residing in Phú Hữu Holy House near Cát Lái ferry (belonging to the Tây Ninh Holy See, although she is a disciple of Chiêu Minh), Ms. Phan Thị Trung lived closely to Mr. Lê Văn Ngung for many years, until the last days before he passed away.

Mr. **Lê Văn Ngung** was born in Bính Ngọ year (1906). He was allowed by his mother, who was a disciple of Đức Tể sect, Minh Sư religious branch at Quang Nam Phật Đường (17 Trần Quang Khải street, District 1, Saigon city), to serve as a medium and an attendant for Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. Regretfully, due to his intemperance Mr. Tư Ngung did not practice Chiêu Minh cultivation method. When Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was about to leave the world (1932), Mr. Tư Ngung knelt down to urge Mr. Ngô to teach him the cultivation method. But Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu did not honor that wish; instead, he gave Mr. Tư Ngung a piece of cake he was holding in his hand and said something like: "*Eat this piece of cake with all your sincerity and in the future, you will be spiritually saved*". Mr. Tư Ngung obeyed.

After Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's passing, Mr. Tư Ngung stayed in Cần Thơ province for a while to assist Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huỳnh (nickname Tư Huỳnh). Then he moved back to Trúorác Tiét Tàng Thơ (Thủ Thiêm district). GPS: 10°46'46" N; 106°43'18"E.

In 1945, when Trúorác Tiét Tàng Thơ was burned down, Mr. Tư Ngung and Ms. Phan Thị Trung moved to Mr. Phan Quang's residence (next to Ngọc Hoàng Temple, Đa Kao district). During that time, Mr. Tư Ngung asked for permission to ride in the forest ranger vehicles of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lê (1904 – 1975) (commonly known as Mr. Đốc Lê, a disciple of Chiêu Minh) to go back and forth between Saigon city and Ban Mê Thuột province to buy and sell clothes.

In 1948, after a business trip, he felt sick and died the next day. He was buried in the cemetery of Bình Hòa Holy House. About 1985, this cemetery was dissolved to make Cây Điệp market, Mr. Tư Ngung's remains was reburied in Nha Trang province.

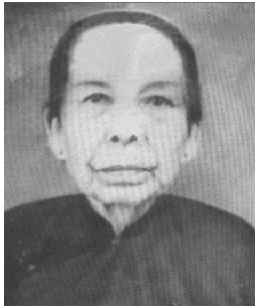


Figure 11: Portrait of Ms. **Ba Lang Đình Thị Lang** (1884 – 1972)



Figure 12: Portrait of the **Medium Lê Văn Ngung** (1906 – 1948)

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu organized many invocation sessions at Quan Âm Temple. At the end of Canh Thân year (1920), an unnamed Immortal manifested in the séance, expressing that, if Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu agreed to be his disciple, he would teach Mr. Ngô. The Immortal also instructed him to stop reciting Minh Thánh prayer⁴² as he had done every night.

Thanks to his pre-existing awareness, Mr. Ngô was so happy to know that he had met the Holy Teacher. Therefore, he accepted to be the Immortal's disciple and stopped chanting Minh Thánh prayer.

One day, the Immortal descended and instructed Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to be **vegetarian ten days a month**. (At that time, he was vegetarian only two days a month, on the new-moon and full-moon days).

Everyone knows that Phú Quốc island is well-known for its fishing and fish sauce production, but it has few vegetables and farm produces.

⁴² Minh Thánh prayer praises (the Saintly Emperor) Quan Thánh Đế Quân (Kuan-Ti, the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China). This command implies that the celestial rank of the Immortal is higher than that of Quan Thánh Đế Quân.

At that time, Mr. Ngô was worried about being bound to secular activities and duties. He was the District Chief and people frequently invited him here and there. Every day, he had to interact with people above and below him. If he accidentally ate meat, he would not be able to fulfill his promise. Moreover, according to him, the ten-day vegetarianism was merely a little more diligent than the two-day fasting...

Still hesitating about this issue, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu planned to clearly explain his situation to the Immortal when he had the chance for the next invocation session. It was near the end of Canh Thân year (1920).

2) BECOMING A FULL-TIME VEGETARIAN – RECEIVING THE SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION METHOD

On the Lunar New Year's Day of Tân Dậu (February 8, 1921), a silversmith in the town wanted to organize an invocation session at Quan Âm Temple and asked Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to be the séance presider. That day, even before Mr. Ngô had a chance to explain his personal situation, the Immortal called his name and commanded:

Chiêu, three years of full vegetarianism.

He could only obey, but said:

His Holiness! If you taught me so, I shall obey. But I beg you to protect me, because three years of full vegetarianism is too long. I am not sure if I can endure it or not. And I beg you to guarantee me, if I obey you, I will gain some fruitful attainment.

The Immortal replied:

Just follow the instruction and you will understand later.

Three years later would be right at the beginning of Giáp Tý year (1924).

Thus, since the Lunar New Year's Day of Tân Dậu (1921), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu **became the first person in the epoch of Third Universal Salvation to receive the teaching from Cao Dai God.**

From then on, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was allowed to set up private séances, with only him attending, to receive the teaching and the spiritual method. Invisible Holy Teacher taught the Spiritual Way. The young medium Lê Văn Ngung was specifically assigned by the Almighty to serve in those private séances.

Later, disciples of Chiêu Minh school chose the Lunar New Year's Day as the Commemoration of "Full Vegetarianism to receive the spiritual method".

Three other commemorative days of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu are:

- The 7th day of the 1st month: His birthday
- The 5th day of the 3rd month: His live proof of sanctification (Figure 13).
- The 13th day of the 3rd month: His ascension anniversary

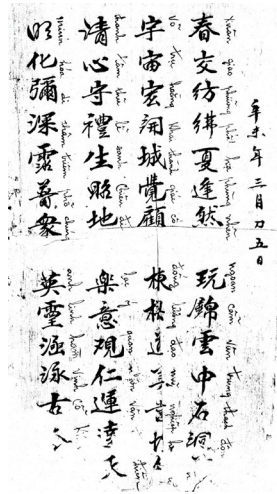


Figure 13: Mr. Ngô's handwriting (both in Chinese and Vietnamese characters) (reduced to 35%).

On the 5th day of the 3rd month of Tân Mùi year (April 22, 1931), while meditating at noon time in a room in his residence on the second floor of 110 Bonard street, Saigon city, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu manifested his true spirit that descended in Hiệp Minh séance (Cần Thơ province) to give a Tang poem which included these two lines:

*Thanh tâm thủ lễ sanh Chiêu địa,
Lạc ý quan nhơn vận đạt Thiên.*

Later, when asked, Mr. Ngô confirmed this event.

D) THE NEXT STEPS OF CULTIVATION

1) THE APPEARANCE OF GOD EYE (PHÚ QUỐC ISLAND, 1921)

Since the beginning of Tân Dậu year (1921), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had been a disciple of the Immortal. But he did not know the ritual of worshipping Cao Dai. Every day, he just fasted, cleaned himself, prepared...

One day, the Immortal instructed him to find a symbol to worship; that symbol must be unique and fully express the transcendent principles of the new Faith. As if he had chosen it beforehand, Mr. Ngô told the Immortal that he wanted to worship “**the Cross**”. The Immortal replied:

*The Cross is also fine, but it is a unique symbol of an existing religion. You must think it over to find a novel symbol. I'll help you.*⁴³

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu asked for a one-week extension to contemplate on it. Yet, the issue was so difficult, and by the end of the week, he still could not figure out an appropriate symbol to worship.

At about 8 a.m. of the 13th day of the 3rd month of Tân Dậu year (April 20, 1921)⁴⁴, while sitting on a hammock behind the district palace and looking out to the sea, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu saw a huge EYE shining with a very lively halo just a few meters away from him. Frightened, he covered his eyes with both hands. Later, when he opened his hands to look, the scene was still there. He clasped his hands and prayed:

Your Divinity! I know your marvel. I beg You not to do so. I am very scared. If You tell me to worship the Divine Eye, please make it disappear immediately.

⁴³ **The Cross**, in theology, represents the combination of yin and yang; the horizontal line symbolizes the yin, and the vertical line, the yang. The Cross also represents the dimensions of space and time, that is, the universe.

Christianity chose the Holy Cross as a symbol of worship.

⁴⁴ Previously, books written about this period did not specify the time, only estimating it to be in the middle of the 3rd month of that lunar year. On the 14th day of the 3rd month of Đinh Mùi year (April 23, 1967), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu descended in the séance at Cao Đài Hội Thánh, in Dương Đông town, Phú Quốc island to confirm that the Divine Eye had appeared on the 13th day of the 3rd month. (Data taken from Hiệp Thiên Đài Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam, i.e., the House of Heavenly Alliance at the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam).

Once Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu finished his imploration, the EYE gradually faded and disappeared. However, because it was the first time he saw the God Eye, he was still hesitant and did not draw a picture of the God Eye to worship.

A few days later, he witnessed the same scene again, and only after he had vowed to worship God Eye, did the EYE disappear.

After the second appearance of God Eye, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu attended a séance at Quan Âm Temple, in which the Immortal instructed him to draw the God Eye, exactly as he had seen (the left eye, because the left is the Yang side), to worship.⁴⁵ (Figure 14)

⁴⁵ In the early days of the founding of Cao Dai Faith, because it was still so new that the teaching could not be in depth. That was why the Holy Master did not clearly explain the meaning of God Eye. Even after the gentlemen of the Second Branch was converted and taught (please refer to Chapter 2 Section II), the Holy Master only explained part of it on February 25, 1926, as follows.

*... It is not yet the right time to know why you should draw the **God Eye** to worship Me. But I briefly discuss it so that you can grasp a little bit of its meaning.*

*Eye is master of the Mind,
And the two sources of Light.
Light is Spirit.
Spirit is God.
God is Me.*

Spirit is the missing part of the mystic mechanism since the day the Way has been closed. Founding this Third Universal Salvation, only I can let Spirit unite with Quintessence and Energy to fulfill the Three Treasures, the mystic mechanism to transform sentient into saint.

Ten years later, the Holy Master explained further the mystic meaning of God Eye in *Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo* scripture (i.e. *Cao Dai Great Way: The Grand Cycle of Esoteric Teaching*, chapter “Method of Worship”, pp. 258 – 259, trans. Anh-Tuyet Tran, Cao Dai Temple Overseas 2015):

From there, the ritual of worshipping the symbol of God Eye in Cao Dai Faith or in the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation has been established.

Why does God Eye symbolize Me? I have previously taught Eye is master of the Mind, and the two sources of Light; Light is Spirit, Spirit is God, God is Me. Eye is the Spiritual Heart in humans. That Heart is the Creator, i.e., Spirit; and Spirit is the Principle of Infinity. Indeed, that immutable, eternal, and absolute Principle is God.

When one transmutes Quintessence into Energy, Energy into Spirit, Spirit into Nothingness, and Nothingness into Infinity, one activates the Mystic Sight. What is Mystic Sight? It is God Eye.

The significance of God Eye used as a symbol of worship in Cao Dai Faith has been explained in many works. Most importantly, Caodaists today understand that God Eye is also a mystic method of the Third Era. Thanks to that, each practitioner of the New Method of Cao Dai will directly receive the salvation of God, depending on the extent to which his/her true heart is revealed.



Figure 14: A photograph of God Eye, in the house of Ms. Đinh Thị Lang (cô Ba Lang) in Phú Quốc island. This worship presentation is the same model as the old one (still existing) in Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house in Tân An province. The unique detail on this statue is: The upper branch of the Cross has only five words "Ngọc Hoàng Đại Thiên Tôn", instead of the ten words "Huyền Khung Cao Thượng Đế Ngọc Hoàng Đại Thiên Tôn".

2) FULLY RECEIVING THE GRAND NAME OF CAO DAI (PHÚ QUỐC ISLAND, 1921)

It was during the spiritistic séance at Quan Âm Temple when Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was instructed to worship God Eye that the Immortal allowed Mr. Ngô to call Him **Teacher**. Also in this same séance, for the first time in the world, God declared his full title: **Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát** (Cao Dai Immortal Bodhisattva Mahasattva).

Thanks to the previous two times, in Tân An province (at the end of Kỷ Mùi year, 1920) and in Hà Tiên town (on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Canh Thân year), that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had heard the grand name of Cao Dai, this time he was no longer surprised and knew for sure that the Holy Master was the Supreme God.

The exact date of this spiritistic séance has not been determined or stated in any existing historical documents. But one could simply infer as follows. The two times that God Eye appeared were only a few days apart. And Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had to set up the invocation right after the second appearance of God Eye, that is from the full-moon day to the 20th day of the 3rd month of Tân Dậu year (late April, 1921). That séance had a very important meaning:

- First, it determined the progress of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's cultivation. Cao Dai Supreme God confirmed the acceptance of Mr. Ngô as his first disciple after three months of Mr. Ngô's sincere practice of the cultivation method.

- Second, it established all the basic elements of a new religion: the Founder, the disciple, the doctrine, the worship symbol, ...

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu attended spiritistic séances and received the teaching at Quan Âm Temple for seven or eight months. By the mid-year of Tân Dậu (1921), he no longer set up invocation at Quan Âm Temple, due to the erratic and sometimes excessive intemperance of the Abbot, Mr. Đỗ Văn Đồ (nickname Tám Gia). Mr. Ngô and other fellow practitioners moved to Sùng Hưng Temple at the foot of Dương Đông mountain (about two hundred meters away, the grounds of the two temples were adjacent to each other). They asked the Abbot there to lend them a place to use for invocation sessions.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ That year (1921), **Sùng Hưng Tự** was presided over by (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thích Ngô Tiên (Tĩnh Nghĩa), the seventh Abbot. The Most Venerable Monk was originally from Quan Âm Cổ Tự (Long Thuận village, Tân Châu district) and was sent here to maintain Cổ Sơn Môn sect

During the time at Sùng Hưng Temple, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu continued to set up private invocation sessions for his spiritual cultivation. He was determined to progress without retreating. However, the cultivation method he learned was kept secret, because by then he was not allowed to pass them on to others and had to wait for the order from the Supreme Being.

In this phase of cultivation, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was instructed to recite Nhựt Châu prayer (Nhựt châu chơn vũ du du ...), which later became one of the daily recitations (read during the two sessions at midnight and noon time) for Chiếu Minh disciples.

3) WINE OFFERING CEREMONY TO THANK THE DIVINE

By mid-year of Quý Hợi (1923), after nearly three years of receiving the blessing of being directly taught by the Supreme Being, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu felt so much beholden to his Holy Teacher. Thus, during a séance session he said:

Dear Holy Master! In this mortal world, I do not know how to repay the kindness of the Immortals and Buddhas. So, I would like to offer a champagne banquet to the Immortals and Buddhas. I wonder if it is possible or not? Holy Master, please instruct me on this issue.

The Holy Master replied:

Follow your heart.

at Sùng Hưng Temple. (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Ngô Tiên passed away on the full-moon day of the 2nd month of Bính Tuất year (1946), at the age of sixty-one. His stupa still remains behind Sùng Hưng Temple (Phú Quốc island).

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu also understood that this favor was not only for himself but had a much greater influence. For this reason, on August 31, 1923, he wrote a letter from Phú Quốc island to his family in Tân An province, telling them to unite their hearts and pray together with him. In the letter, he advised:

You should set up a table and chairs, flowers and fruits, incense and candles to venerate the Immortal. Also, you should chant Nhựt Châu prayer, and kowtow facing North; the North is from the front yard looking into the house.⁴⁷ Organize the ceremony at 11 p.m. on the 30th night of the 7th month till the dawn of the 1st day of the 8th month, that is, the night of September 9, because it is the day I thank the Immortal for teaching me the cultivation method.

Thus, at midnight of the 1st day of the 8th month of Quý Hợi year (1923), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu presented a champagne party on Phú Quốc island to thank the Holy Master. This is also the story about the special rite of wine offering in Chiếu Minh school. Whenever performing the “Wine offering”, Chiếu Minh disciples follow the ritual of chanting three times the following prayer:

*“Bồ đào cam giá tửu Tây phương,
Bả trần cung trần mỹ vị hương,
Đệ tử thành tâm kiến phụng hiến,
Cao Đài hoan lạc kết trình tường”.*

4) QUICK VIEW OF THE FAIRYLAND (1924)

Recognizing Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s diligence in his spiritual practice, once the Holy Master encouraged him as follows.

⁴⁷ The direction of this house at 31 (currently, at 27) Phan Đình Phùng street, Tân An province was checked with a compass; it is exactly correct as Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had mentioned in his letter.

*Working very hard in three years to save a man,
I am certain about this disciple's determination.
I love the child still tottering
But willfully seeking the miraculous Way.*

On another occasion, around the 1st month of Giáp Tý year (February 1924), the Holy Master wanted to give Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu a favor on whatever he wished to. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu said:

Dear Holy Master, I heard that Fairyland is extremely beautiful. Is it possible for me to view it?"

The Immortal did not reply.

In an afternoon several days later, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu leisurely sat on a rock outside Dinh Cậu (about three hundred meters away from the district palace, and along Dương Đông beach), looking out to the sea.

“Suddenly, he saw from the place where the sky and water met, a scene appeared, not knowing what it was, but it was very beautiful. As soon as that scene disappeared, another scene appeared. Finally, he saw the scene with the God Eye looking down on a vertical row of Sun, Moon, and Star, also extremely beautiful. He sat there, absorbed in watching, forgetting that his body was still in the mortal world. After about fifteen minutes, that scene gradually faded away and disappeared.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Taken from the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, 1962, page 34. In this excerpt, there is a footnote for the last sentence: “*The last scene with the God Eye looking down on a vertical row of Sun, Moon, and Star, also extremely beautiful*” written as follows: “Coming back to Saigon, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu asked one of his first-class disciples, Mr. Phạm Văn Thới, to draw a representation of that scene, exactly as he had seen it, to worship. Mr. Đốc Học Thới (the School Principal) read the story again to the followers”. It is known that Mr. Đốc Thới was the one who wrote this

A moment later, he regained his composure and returned to reality. He found himself still sitting on that rock, with the same sky, clouds, water, and mountains in front of him...

When it was time for the invocation session, the Immortal told Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu those scenes were *the Fairyland* that he wished to see.

Let's recall that exactly three years ago, on the first day of the Lunar New Year's of Tân Dậu, Cao Dai Supreme God gave the order: "*Chiêu, three years of full vegetarianism*", and insisted, "*Just follow the instruction, and you will understand later*". Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu strictly followed the order, and after three years of diligent cultivation, on this day he saw the scenes of Fairyland.

The Fairyland scenes, though appeared briefly, were proof of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's great progress in the path of his self-cultivation. This was the third time he saw the God Eye with his naked eyes, and it was also the perfect one (as he was not terrified like in the two previous ones). It can be said that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had accomplished his self-cultivation practice and thus, his spiritual power had adapted to the celestial realm.

Moreover, the Fairyland scenes appearing in the mortal world at the beginning of the Spring of Giáp Tý year was indeed a

history book, along with other Chiêu Minh disciples such as gentlemen Lê Minh Huân, Nguyễn Minh Lý, Nguyễn Minh Dương, ...

On the other hand, according to poetess Mộng Tuyết (wife of poet Đông Hồ), she remembered it quite clearly that in Phú Quốc island, Hà Tiên town, the first Saintly Representation of God Eye lining with the Sun-Moon-Star was drawn by (the School Principal) Đốc học Lý Văn Nhơn (1900 – 1967). Mr. Đốc Nhơn (brother-in-law of poet Đông Hồ) had previously practiced the Minh Sư cultivation until the rank of Chứng Ân (religious name Minh Đạo) and then converted to Cao Dai. He and his wife Lâm Ngọc Anh became Chiêu Minh disciples until the end of their lives.

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) at Dinh Cậu, the location where Mr. Ngô saw the scenes of Fairyland and God Eye (the third time) are: 10°13'01" N; 103°57'38" E.

very special mark to start a new era of the Great Way, the Era of Recreation: The Third Universal Salvation.

5) TRANSFER BACK TO SAIGON (1924)

In mid-1924 (Giáp Tý year), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was transferred to Saigon city. Before he left Phú Quốc island, Cao Dai God gave him a long poem as follows.

*Keep closed outside and then closed inside,
Take care and enjoy the long journey.
The first merit is to endure hardship and not retreat,
To promote to the Heavenly Court and enjoy the
foretaste of the Way.
Three years of an unswerving heart as bright as
vermillion,
Climbing mountains, diving in oceans, all work fully
accomplished.
Do not grieve when you feel weary of your self-
cultivation,
All obstacles would be cleared as Đường Ngu met the
sage.
Do not seek the obvious presence of your God Teacher,
The originality of his teaching is proved through your
success.
Now your Teacher points out your profound merits,
In the future you will ride the dragon back to the
origin.⁴⁹*

⁴⁹ The verse “In the future you will ride the dragon back to the origin” is considered a prophecy, fulfilled when Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu ascended to Heaven on Mekong river, while on Mỹ Thuận ferryboat crossing the Nine-Dragon river (Cửu Long river, i.e., Mekong river).

By the same token, in the prayer of “Ngọc Hoàng Bửu Cáo” there is a sentence: “Thời thừa lục long du hành bất tức”. Meaning: At the right time, one will ride six dragons to travel without respite. This verse paraphrases

*Outside and inside, you are pure like a white lotus,
 Keep preserving this state without negligence.
 Chiêu's spirit is lucid like the moon,
 It is also witnessed by the Heavenly Court.
 You will taste the divine flavor,
 And drink the sacred potion that your Teacher gives
 you.
 Practice spiritual cultivation for self-perfection,
 Chiêu, keep your Teacher's words in your mind.*

Mr. Ngô's fellows sadly bid him farewell, including the medium Lê Văn Ngung, who was always by his side day and night, helping him receive the spiritual teaching (and who, a short time later, rejoined him in Saigon city). Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu left Phú Quốc island on July 29, 1924 (the 28th day of the 6th month of Giáp Tý year), arriving in Saigon the following day (July 30, 1924).⁵⁰

His family, wife and children, were still in Tân An province. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu rented a residential unit at Bá Huê Lầu on Pellerin street (now Pasteur street). He then moved several times.

He lived a secluded life amid the bustling city, going to work every day at the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina, coming home after work to close the door and perform the four daily meditation sessions ... Perhaps the Almighty transferred Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to Saigon to serve as a catalyst, while the

the meaning of the Qian hexagram (in the Logics of Change) as follows: "Thời thừa lục long dĩ ngự Thiên." It signifies a spiritual practitioner's success and full fruition: Attaining enlightenment and ascending to Heaven.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that the term Giáp Tý encompasses various meanings. Giáp is the first of the Ten Heavenly Stems; Tý is the first of the Twelve Earthly Branches. It is written: "*Thiên khai ư Tý, Địa tịch ư Sửu, nhân sanh ư Dần*" ("Heaven is opened at Tý time; Earth is created at Sửu time; mankind is engendered at Dần time"). Therefore, in 1925 (Ất Sửu year) God initiated the second branch in Saigon so that the God-Way would be inaugurated to mankind in Bính Dần year.

Divine prepared auspicious atmosphere so that exactly one year later – also at the end of July – the Supreme Being opens the second source of the Faith (the Exotericism or the Public Propagation) right in that same city.

During the period of 1924 – 1926, in Saigon city Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu guided a few people such as gentlemen Vương Quan Kỳ, Đoàn Văn Bản, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Võ Văn Sang, ... to worship God Eye and recite some prayers such as Cứu Thiên prayer, Nhụy Châu prayer, ... But he did not transmit the spiritual method to them and therefore, it was considered he did not officially propagate the true teaching he had received.

Looking back at the entire development of the first source of the Faith (the Esotericism or the Inner Cultivation) from 1920 to 1924, Cao Dai Faith was opened by the Supreme Being through this religion and was formed with all the elements of a religion:

The founder: The Jade Emperor Himself with title: Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát (Cao Dai Immortal Maha-Bodhisattva Mahasattva). He allows disciples to call Him Teacher.

The symbol: God Eye.

The disciple: Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu.

The methods: Vegetarianism and the New Method of Cao Dai. Use the beaked basket to receive holy messages. Holy messages contain various forms of poems, hidden in them are moral teachings.

SECTION II.

GOD INITIATED THE SECOND SOURCE OF CAO DAI FAITH (THE EXOTERICISM)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, around the 1920s, many books on Spiritualism from Europe found their way into South Vietnam.⁵¹ These books discussed about communications with the invisible world, arousing curiosity among intellectuals.

Also in Saigon, under the colonial regime, many scholars had to work for the French government to earn their livings. But they always felt uneasy about the fact that their country was being occupied. Some people, who had the same aspirations and were of the same mind, sought to relieve their psychological stress by meeting together to compose poetry and to put their own thoughts into the lyrics and music.

Those factors, combined in the right place, at the right time, with the right persons, create an environment for God to

⁵¹ Examples were the books written by the medical physician Allen Kardec (1804 – 1869):

- The book on Spirits
- The book on Mediums

He also wrote the Evangel, the Heaven and the Hades, the Genesis, and others...

initiate the second source of Cao Dai Faith: the Exotericism of Public Propagation.

A. DESTINY AWAITS THE MISSIONARIES

1) POETIC CONNECTION THROUGH TABLE-TURNING PRACTICE

Around mid-1925, in Saigon there were three civil servants from the same hometown (all were born in Tây Ninh province), who frequently visited each other. They were the gentlemen (Figure 15):⁵²

- **Cao Quỳnh Cư** (1888 – 1929), official of Railroad Department

- **Phạm Công Tắc** (1890 – 1959), official of Commerce Department

- and **Cao Hoài Sang** (1901 – 1971), official of Commerce Department

Having elegant souls, being connoisseurs of poetry and music, the three of them often met at night to play music, recite poems and prose over a cup of tea. Then, on a Saturday afternoon, when the three of them were meeting at Mr. Cao Hoài Sang's house on Phố Hàng Dừa street,⁵³ it was said that:

⁵² Please refer to their biographies in Appendix I.

⁵³ Phố Hàng Dừa is the popular name for d'Arras street (now Cống Quỳnh street, Saigon District 1), because both sides of the street were planted with coconut trees. This row of coconut trees was cut down at the end of year 1926.

According to Ms. Cao Ngọc Thanh (the eldest daughter of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang), the house of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang and that of Mr. Phạm Công Tắc (which was only one house away from that of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang) belonged to the rental housing complex owned by the Indian people and was next to the orphanage Hội Dục Anh. Coincidentally, their residences were located on the premises of 171B Cống Quỳnh street, the current office of the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way (CQPTGLĐĐ).

“After the discussion with a cup of tea and poems, as the night grew late, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư seemed to be urged by the gods, or because his spirit was agitated, to think of using table-turning to contact the lost souls. Mr. Cao Hoài Sang and Mr. Phạm Công Tắc also agreed and responded eagerly to this suggestion ...”⁵⁴

“... Filled with the resentment for their country being colonized, these three gentlemen took the pleasure of using table-turning to invite the souls of the deceased to ask about the future fate of the fatherland or to compose poems for entertainment.”⁵⁵

The initiative was implemented that very night, July 25, 1925 (the 5th day of the 6th month of Ất Sửu year). Around 9 p.m., after preparing all the rituals, incense, tea, fruit, burning incense and praying, the three gentlemen placed a tripod table (with one leg not touching the ground) on the veranda. They then sat around the table, quietly concentrated their mind and placed their hands on the table in the same way as they had learned from the French books, with the tip of their thumbs and little fingers touching each other ... (Please find more information on table-turning in Appendix III).

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang's old house is: 10°45'59" N; 106°41'20" E.

⁵⁴ Hương Hiếu, *Đạo Sử I (History of Caodaism vol. I)*, Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh (the Tây Ninh Holy See), page 1.

⁵⁵ Excerpt from the confirmation of His Excellency Đức Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang in the first part of the above book of *Đạo Sử I*.

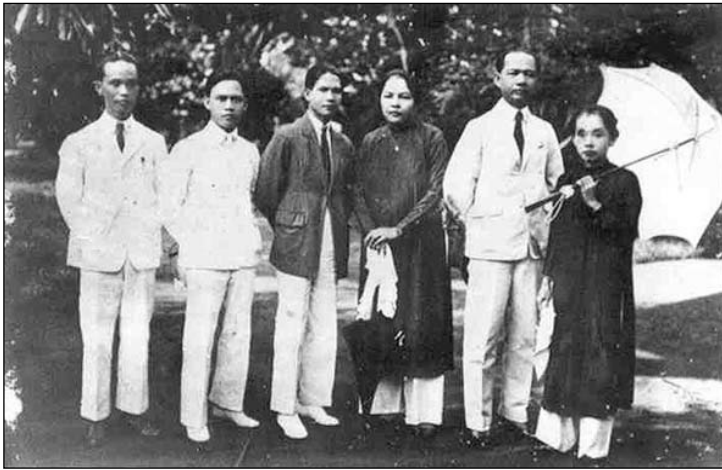


Figure 15: A photograph taken in Saigon Zoo and Botanical Garden, on a Sunday in 1924. From left to right: Mr. Phạm Công Tắc, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang, the two nephews, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương (wife of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư).

The original photograph belonged to (Student-Priest) Lê Sanh Thượng Vinh Thanh (the Tây Ninh Holy See) with dedication from (Lady Cardinal) Đâu Sư Hương Hiếu.

According to Khai Đạo Phạm Tấn Đãi (in the Preface to the book of *Đạo Sĩ*, mimeographed in 1975), at that time (1924), Captain Paul Monet was a member of the French Spiritualist Association and a close friend of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư; he once sat in a mediumship to help the three gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Hoài Sang communicate with the invisible world.

Not long after, the table shook, sometimes gently, sometimes quickly and eagerly. At first, the three gentlemen thought it was an internal teasing by one of them playing tricks on the others. But only later did they realize that the spirit of a deceased person was entering their set. Nevertheless, when taking notes of the signals they received and reviewed, they realized that the sentences and words were very messy:

Vietnamese words mixed with French and English ... without any logic. It seemed that many spirits were competing to talk, causing confusion.

The table-turning session from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. did not achieve the desired results. However, because the existence of an invisible world was confirmed right in their first attempt, it created excitement and made the three of them not give up.

The following night, July 26, 1925 (the 6th day of the 6th month of Ất Sửu year), the three of them continued the table-turning at the same place (Figure 16). This time they unexpectedly achieved an interesting reunion.

After completing the rituals exactly as they did the night before, they started the table-turning at Tý time.⁵⁶ The tripod table shook, then tapped very steadily and clearly, not chaotically like last night. They received a spirit named himself Cao Quỳnh Tuân and the following poem:

*When I left the world at the age of fifty,
You have just reached the age of ten.
With affection I advise you to patiently record these words,
With love I recommend you to persistently cultivate your mind.
Human life is filled with panicking events,
The superior world is frequented by peaceful enjoyments.
So sad to see my wife still doddering in life,
I wish to give her some recommendations.*

⁵⁶ Tý time are 11:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.



Figure 16: “The picture showed the three gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang when they started the table-turning on the 6th day of the 6th month of Ất Sửu year at Phố Hàng Dừa street”.

Above is a note from (Lady Pioneer) Tiên Khai Hương Hiếu, and the image was drawn by Phú Sĩ studio (Tây Ninh province) based on her memory, printed in the photo book “*Sơ Giải Sự Tích Xây Bàn*” (“Introduction to the History of Table-Turning”). It should be noted that, according to the book *Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên*, the first table at Mr. Cao Hoài Sang’s house in Phố Hàng Dừa street was a round table with three legs. Later, at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house, a square table with four legs was used as shown in this picture.

Reading the poem, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was deeply moved and the whole group also felt very sad. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân (1848 – 1896) (Figure 17) was Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s father, who passed away in the year of Bính Thân, nearly three decades prior to the year 1925. The good results of that second session of table-turning encouraged the three gentlemen to focus their mind on the invisible world.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ According to the book *Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên* by Huệ Chương (published in Saigon, 1929), before that event, the three gentlemen had received the



Figure 17: Portrait of Mr.
**Cao Quỳnh Tuân (1848 –
1896)**

The next table-turning session was held four days later, on the night of July 30, 1925 (the 10th day of the 6th month of Ất Sửu year), also at Mr. Cao Hoài Sang's house on Phố Hàng Dừa street. The spirit of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân did not come back, perhaps because he had completed his initiating task. This time the tripod table swayed gently and slowly. The spirit of a lady named Đoàn Ngọc Quế⁵⁸ descended to give a Tang poem that deeply touched the hearts of all three participants:

*To whom I may confide,
Ill-fated, I died young.
I prepared to be in a noble marriage,
But then suddenly deceased.
Neither did I fulfill the filial and patriotic duties,
Nor did I accomplish marital love.
Sorrow encumbers my heart,
To whom I may confide.*

That same night, the spirit of Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế also gave two other seven-word quatrains. Being talented poets, the three

spirit of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Lượng (who was a son of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu, and who died young), whom they asked to invite the spirit of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân.

⁵⁸ Later, the three gentlemen learned that it was the pseudonym of Thất Nương, one of the nine Lady Immortals escorting the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu.

gentlemen responded to the above Tang poem with emotion, and hereby recorded:

Poem by Mr. Phạm Công Tắc:

*To whom the astounding fate has struck,
Destiny hastened to bury such a talented lady,
Who left behind the burden of affection in life,
Being deceased unjustly.
Neither could she worship her unattended ancestors,
Nor could she respond to her long-awaiting husband.
Unfortunately, her story is not published,
To whom the astounding fate has struck.*

Poem by Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư:

*To whom this mourning is expressed,
At the grave of such a talented and pretty lady.
Her poetic style reveals her noblesse,
I'm heartbroken for the deceased soulmate ...
For thousands of miles the flower drips from its root,
In this tomb the grass buried her body.
Spirit of Quế in the invisible world, please attest
To whom this mourning is expressed.*

Poem by Mr. Cao Hoài Sang:

*To whom the young death is lamented,
Losing such talent is regretted.
Her competence is no less than the male
correspondents.
Her poems even touch the most distant people.
She would have had a happy marriage,
Yet, she left the world at a young age.*

Though differing in generations, we still share the same emotion.

To whom the young death is lamented.

Delighted by such an elegant and mysterious meeting, the next day (July 31, 1925) Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư invited Mr. Phạm Công Tắc and Mr. Cao Hoài Sang to his house (at 134 Bourdais street, currently Calmette street, Saigon District 1)⁵⁹ to set up another table-turning session. The spirit of Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế continued to descend, using poetry to make friends with these gentlemen.

“Seeing the miracle and mystery in contact with the invisible world, the three gentlemen became actively and passionately involved in table-turning. Every night they gathered until 3 or 4 a.m. before breaking up.

Whenever they received a poem, they stayed at the end of the table-turning session. Two of them played the lute, while the third one recited the

⁵⁹ According to Ms. Huỳnh Thị Trí, also called Bà Năm, (daughter of Mr. Huỳnh Văn Giới – Please find more information in Appendix I), she was born in 1911 and in her childhood, she lived next to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house. This row of houses was owned by Mr. Hui Bon Hoa and consisted of twelve units (from number 134 through 156) built in the same style, single floor with tile roof, and a front veranda of about two meters wide. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house was on the edge next to an alley. The sidewalk in front of the house is spacious with big and tall tamarind trees. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu’s house was on the other side of the street. Later, this row of houses was sold to the Indian people, completely renovated and rebuilt into two-floor houses, like the house style currently on Đặng Thị Nhu street, Saigon District 1.

By about 1958, all were completely eradicated to build villas (currently, the Eximbank building). The houses nextdoor from number 132, 130, ... still retained their old house numbers.

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of the old house of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư are: 10°46'08" N; 106°41'54" E.

given poem. Then together they drank wine to inspire nostalgia...”⁶⁰

By means of poetry and literature through the table-turning, the spirit of Miss Đoàn Thị Quế and the three gentlemen gradually became very close. Hence, on Saturday night of August 8, 1925, they became sworn siblings. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was the eldest in the group and was called Trưởng Ca (Eldest Brother); Mr. Phạm Công Tắc, Nhị Ca (Second Brother); Mr. Cao Hoài Sang, Tam Ca (Third Brother); and Miss Đoàn Thị Quế, Tứ Muội (Fourth Younger Sister). She called Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương, wife of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, Đại Tỷ (Eldest Sister) (Figure 18).⁶¹

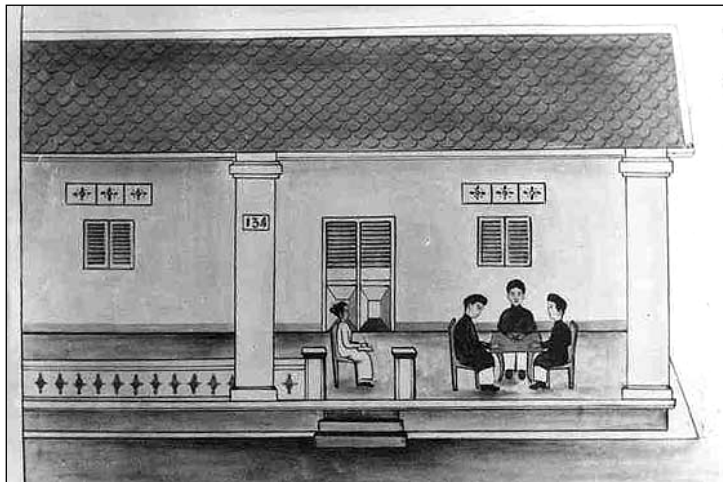


Figure 18: “The three gentlemen were in a table-turning session at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house (134 Bourdais street). Sitting beside them and next to the door, Ms. Nguyễn Hương Hiếu wrote down the holy messages taught by the Divine.”

The above picture was redrawn by Phú Sĩ studio (Tây Ninh province) based on the memory of (Lady Pioneer) Tiên Khai Hương Hiếu.

⁶⁰ Excerpt from the confirmation of His Excellency Đức Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang published in the first part of the book *Đạo Sử I* (from the Tây Ninh Holy See).

⁶¹ Later, she received the holy name Hương Hiếu. Please refer to her biography in Appendix I.

That close relationship inspired the gentlemen to further inquire about the background of Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế. After being asked for several times, she finally revealed that her real name was Vương Thị Lễ (Figure 19).⁶² Through Miss Vương Thị Lễ, the three gentlemen made acquaintance with her uncle, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ (Figure 20), at the end of year 1925.



Figure 19: A photograph of **Miss Vương Thị Lễ** taken in 1916



Figure 20: Portrait of Mr. **Vương Quan Kỳ** (1880 – 1939)

Besides poetry and literature in the table-turning sessions, the gentlemen often asked Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế about the upper world. Based on their spiritual foundation to guide them in the

⁶² Miss **Vương Thị Lễ** was born in 1900, passed away in 1918, buried in the Vườn Bà Lớn cemetery. (According to some documents, the three gentlemen came there to visit her grave on August 1, 1925). In 1968, the cemetery was eradicated, leaving only the Ancestral Temple Đổ Hữu Từ Đường (at the end of Trương Minh Quyền street, Saigon District 3). Currently, Miss Vương's ashes and those of her family members are kept at Huệ Nghiêm Pagoda (An Dương Địa), Phú Lâm. Please find more information about Miss Vương and her family in the biography of Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ in Appendix I.

first steps, “*she willingly explained to them a little bit about the secret of Heaven.*”⁶³

Thanks to that, they gradually gained a more correct perception of the invisible world, which includes the lower and the higher levels of the Divine. Thus, they were more solemn and faithful in organizing the table-turning sessions, rather than doing it for entertainment as before.

2) FURTHER DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE DIVINE

The date when the Superior Divine Beings (though not yet disclosed their titles) first contacted the gentlemen in Branch Two was the 10th day of the 6th month of Ất Sửu year (July 30, 1925), which was the day Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal), under the pseudonym Đoàn Ngọc Quế, descended at Phố Hàng Dừa. According to the solar calendar, that day was exactly one year after the day Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu returned from Phú Quốc island to Saigon (July 30, 1924).

Through that impressive initial poetic connection, the relationship between the visible and invisible worlds was promoted and gradually developed. From then on, the table-turning sessions were regularly held at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house.

a) Bát Nương (the Eighth Lady Immortal)

Around the beginning of the 7th month of Ất Sửu year, motivated by that relationship, the gentlemen suggested that the spirit of Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế invite other poetic friends in the invisible world to join their circle.

In the table-turning session on the night of August 22, 1925 (the 4th day of the 7th month of Ất Sửu year), the spirit of Miss

⁶³ This is the exact text written by (Lady Pioneer) Tiền Khai Hương Hiếu in *Đạo Sử I* (*History of Cao Daiism vol. I*), page 5.

Đoàn Ngọc Quế introduced the spirit of Miss Hón Liên Bạch.⁶⁴ Mr. Cao Hoài Sang, being a young man at that time, ask for permission to bring up the topic “Tiễn Biệt Tình Lang” (“Farewell to Sweetheart”). The spirit of Miss Hón Liên Bạch immediately gave an outstanding Tang poem:

*Halving the mirror, I asserted to you at the communal house,
My everlasting love is like gold and stone.
Parting away, your silhouette looked melancholic at the dark horizon,
Sorrowfully, my loving words were sent through the quiet moon.
Days are so long when I am awaiting,
Nights are so quiet when I am alone.
Gradually my youth is fading in solitude,
Distantly your feelings should penetrate such reality.*

At the request of the gentlemen, Miss Hón Liên Bạch also gave another poem titled “Hoài Lang” (“Missing You, Sweetheart”) (starting with the verse *Recall your departure from Động Đình*).

Several days later (on the 8th day of the 7th month of Ất Sửu year), during a table-turning session at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house, the gentlemen received the spirit of a poet whom many people at that time had heard of. That was Mr. Quý Cao.⁶⁵ On

⁶⁴ **Hón Liên Bạch** is the pseudonym of Bát Nương (the Eighth Lady Immortal), one of the nine Lady Immortals escorting the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu. In the past, Bát Nương incarnated in China (under the sovereignty of Tiên Hán) with the name Hón Liên Bạch. A telltale says that, after that past life, Bát Nương re-incarnated in Vietnam as a lady commander with the surname Hồ and name Đề under the leadership of the sisters Hai Bà Trưng.

⁶⁵ **Quý Cao**, real name Huỳnh Thiên Kiêu, during his lifetime he worked for Sở Tuần Thành Department, then transferred to (the Governor’s Palace) Dinh Đốc Lý and worked at Saigon (Patent Office) Sở Môn Bài. He was a poet in

this occasion Mr. Quý Cao responded to Miss Hồn Liên Bạch's poem "Farewell to Sweetheart", using the same rhyme:

*Hastening its sounds, the drum beat at the communal house,
My broken heart sank at the thought of our separation.
Your loving words are repeatedly echoed in my mind,
My thoughts are readily waiting for your responses.
Tears are in my eyes when I watch the waning moon,
Grief is in my heart when I see the half mirror.
Distantly my farewell is sent through this departure,
Sincerely your feelings should perceive such loyalty.*

It had been just about one month since the spirit of Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế (i.e., the Seventh Lady Immortal) communicated with the gentlemen. This connection was mainly through literature and poetry, so it was not strange that the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao joined the group. Of course, not all spirits with poetic talent could participate in the great cause. Later, during a reunion on January 16, 1926, the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao told the gentlemen that he was still in the cultivating process in the upper realm. Thus, his manifestation was to fulfill his responsibilities, and not by chance.

Nowadays, it is understood that in the early days of the Faith, the Divine leaned on the poetic interest of the gentlemen, so the poems tended to be descriptive literature. Gradually, the Divine elevated poetic themes to be more transcendent.

b) Lord AÃÂ

Exactly after one month of poetic connection between the visible and invisible worlds, on Friday night, August 28, 1925

(the 10th day of the 7th month of Ất Sửu year)⁶⁶, at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house, the three gentlemen started the table-turning as usual. As soon as they placed their hands on the table, it moved immediately. An anonymous Divine Being named Himself AÃÂ gave the following poem:

*“Ớt cay cay ớt gãi mà cay,
Muối mặn ba năm muối mặn dai.
Túng lủi đi chơi nên tấp lại,
Ăn bòn chẳng chịu tấp theo ai.”*⁶⁷

The gentlemen were all puzzled about the name of the Divine Being as well as the theme of the poem. Furthermore, most of the words in the poem had the timbre of a, ă, and â (the first three letters of the Vietnamese alphabet).

At that time, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư calmly asked for the age of the guest who had just joined. To respond, Lord AÃÂ tapped on the table continuously. At first, the gentlemen were counting these strikes; but then they could not count any more. Then Lord AÃÂ taught:

If you want Me to come often, please accept my requests as follows:

- *First, do not seek to know who I am.*
- *Second, do not ask about national affairs.*

⁶⁶ It was generally written in all books on history of Cao Dai Faith that the first time Lord AÃÂ descended in the séance was “about the 7th month of Ất Sửu year”. But in the sermon at the Holy See in the 30th night of the 2nd month to the 1st day of the 3rd month of Nhâm Dần year (1963), Mr. Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Trảng explicitly stated the date was the 10th night of the 7th month of Ất Sửu year (1925).

⁶⁷ The poem can be roughly translated as:

*Red pepper is piquant, considerably piquant,
Salt is salty for three years, everlastingly salty.
Running out of cash for entertainment I drop in,
To sponge off but not to depend on.*

- *Third, do not ask about Heaven's secrets.*"

The above message was humble, but decisive. Hidden in these words was a persuasive power. Knowing the affairs of the country, understanding the secrets of Heaven, and calling Himself "Bần Đạo" ("Humble Monk"), the position of Lord AÃÂ must be very high.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Nowadays, all Cao Dai followers know that Lord AÃÂ is indeed the Holy Master, the Jade Emperor Supreme God. But at the beginning, why did the Supreme Being use the pseudonym AÃÂ? The three letters "AÃÂ" can be temporarily interpreted in the following three explanations:

- First, from the linguistic aspect, letter A is a main vowel whereas the two letters Ă and Â are secondary vowels. The latter, Ă and Â, are secondary because they are vowels themselves but cannot go beyond the original vowel A. The two signs, concave and convex in opposite directions on top of letter A, create two completely new sounds. This is a special point that only exists in the Vietnamese language.

- Second, letter A is the first letter of the Vietnamese alphabet (and other languages in the Latin system), giving birth to two (and only two) other letters Ă and Â, like one Yang and one Yin.

It is stated in the Classic of Change: "*The Supreme Ultimate gives birth to the Duo Principle*". Duo is also two. But with duo, those two principles are not fully separate; instead, they are closely related. The Duo Principle are the Yin and Yang from which all beings emanate. Nevertheless, no matter how much it emanates, the Supreme Ultimate is still eternal and is always the root. The principle of the Supreme Ultimate and the Yin-Yang duo is the core of Theology: they are three in one and one in three, like the letters AÃÂ.

- Third, in table turning, the single letters are read in order: A, Ă, Â, B, C, D ... until the letter is used, then the table stops tapping. (According to Huệ Chương in the book *Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên*, Saigon 1930, page 7). Thus, to indicate letter A, the table taps only once; letter Ă, the table taps twice; and letter Â, the table taps three times. This set of One – Two – Three corresponds to the following principle:

"The Way gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, three gives birth to all beings".

(from the Classic of Wisdom and Virtue, Chapter 42)

Indeed, the name of the Supreme Being, borrowing the three Vietnamese letters "AÃÂ" as the first signal for this third period of Universal Salvation, implies many other meanings.

Sharing the same thought, the gentlemen promised to accept these requests.

From then on, the gentlemen often received teachings from Lord AÃÃ in the following table-turning sessions, but the topics were limited to literature and poetry. Deep inside they felt annoyed and still had resentment in their hearts. To compensate and appease their frustration, when discussing literature and poetry, Lord AÃÃ helped to clarify the difficulties and obscure allusions in literature. These are classical anecdotes in the Ancient Chinese history, or essential points in Confucian and Buddhist teachings, ... all of which were explained by Lord AÃÃ clearly, easily understood, and very thoroughly. Below is one of the many anecdotes as an example.

On November 11, 1925 (the 25th day of the 9th month of Ất Sửu year), after receiving the poem from Thổ Địa Tài Thần (the God of Earth and Wealth), the last part of which had the following verses:

*“Người trước nghĩ thương con tuyết nhuộm,
Lũ sau buồn chạnh nỗi sưng pha.
Ngồi chờ thế sự rồi vay trả,
Cửa tịch vui vầy kệ Thích Ca.”*⁶⁹

Mrs. Cao Quỳnh Cư asked Lord AÃÃ to explain the hidden meanings of the above lines.

Lord AÃÃ explained:

⁶⁹ Translated:

*“Predecessors feel pity for those who fight bravely for their
country,
Successors express sorrow for those who withstand ravenously the
hardship.
Instead of awaiting the karma of this world,
Get in the solitude to appreciate Buddha stanza.”*

There is a saying: ‘Mã bì tuyết thể’ literally means horse skin and snow-covering body. It alludes to a talented commander who fights alone, courageously dashing through snow on battlefields and using horse skin to cover his body. This indicates the warring time.

There is a proverb: ‘Gối đất nằm sương’, literally means lying in the dew and using the ground as a pillow. It alludes to anybody who endures hardships and suffering.

The first two verses, if revised like this, would be more allusive:

*“Chạnh trẻ phải cơn sương gối ướt,
Thương già gặp buổi tuyết thân pha.”⁷⁰*

The word ‘pha’(mingle) means mix together, enduring the cold to the point that the body and the snow are equally cold.

The three gentlemen were increasingly filled with great respect and admiration. Lord AÃÃ’s explanations were considered typical standards for all the issues.

B. AT THE DOORSTEP OF CAO DAI

1) THE DIVINE BEINGS OFFICIALLY PROCLAIM THEIR NAMES

At the beginning of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year, another step brought the gentlemen of Branch Two closer to the doorstep of Cao Dai. On the 8th night of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year (September 25, 1925), Lord AÃÃ descended and instructed them to prepare a vegetarian banquet to invite (the Divine Mother) Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu and (the Nine Lady Immortals) Cửu Vĩ

⁷⁰ Translated: “Sorry for the young exposing in the dew,
Pity for the old mingling with the snow.”

Tiên Nương to descend. (Dharma Protector) Phạm Hộ Pháp⁷¹ revealed:

“The Supreme God gave orders to make a feast. He instructed us to prepare that feast to entertain the Invisible Beings, to entertain the Divine Mother and the Nine Lady Immortals.”

Overjoyed by the chance to receive the Supreme Beings, the gentlemen also worried, not knowing how to use offerings and how to serve the Divine properly.

Therefore, the next night, the 9th night of the 8th month, the three gentlemen called on Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế (Vương Thị Lễ) to ask more questions to get the details. That spiritist session was very important, since it was the first time Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế revealed that she was Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) and Miss Hón Liên Bạch was Bát Nương (the Eighth Lady Immortal) among the Nine Lady Immortals escorting (the Divine Mother) Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu. However, Thất Nương still did not reveal about Lord AẤẤ.

Next, Thất Nương fully instructed the rituals of receiving the Divine Mother Đức Từ Tôn Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu on the night of Mid-Autumn Festival. She also requested the gentlemen to fast for three days prior to the ceremony and use the beaked basket to pray and invoke the Divine Mother Đức Mẹ Diêu Trì.

The 8th day of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year (September 25, 1925) was an important date, marking the day the Divine Beings officially announced their titles to the gentlemen of this second group.

⁷¹ Excerpt from the sermon of (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc at the Tây Ninh Holy See on the 5th day of the 8th month of Kỷ Sửu year (1949). He used the term ‘Đức Chí Tôn’ (‘Supreme God’) in the sermon as he recalled that event, which at that time was truly only the name ‘Lord AẤẤ’.

a) The Beaked Basket

Regarding the beaked basket, the three gentlemen had never heard about it before, as they only practiced the table turning method according to the French books. Fortunately, Mr. Phan Văn Tỷ⁷² (Figure 21), a friend who lived near Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house (across Boudais street), frequently used it (he received it from Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site), Thủ Dầu Một district) to invoke Immortals for medicinal prescriptions to cure illnesses.



Figure 21: A portrait of **Mr. Phan Văn Tỷ (1888 - 1962)**

Having a new beaked basket, Mr. Phan Văn Tỷ lent it to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc and trained them to use it properly. In this early period, the invocation prayer was also borrowed from Minh Thiện religious branch. (The prayer starts with “Chón Bồng Lai ...”. Please find more information in Appendix II).

⁷² Mr. **Phan Văn Tỷ** (1888 – 1962), often called Mr. Phán Tỷ, was originally from Thủ Dầu Một province. After graduating from Lycée Chasseloup Laubat, he worked as a civil servant at Sở Trường Tiền (the Public Work Department) and was an adherent of Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation site).

Later, he became in-laws with Mr. Trần Hiến Vinh, the séance master at Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site). Some books record that Mr. Phán Tỷ had previously lent this beaked basket to the gentlemen of Minh Lý Thánh Hội to invoke the Immortals [when switching from Huyền Cơ (mystic psychography) to Ngọc Cơ (beaked basket)].

b) Lễ Hội Yến Diêu Trì (The Diêu Trì Banquet)

After three days of fasting, on the 14th night to 15th day of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year (October 2, 1925), the three gentlemen held the festival at the private residence of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (134 Bourdais street). They meticulously took care of the preparations such as:

“... Set up the altar, displayed fragrant flowers, burned incense and sandal wood all day (no guests were received in the house).”⁷³

“Everything was prepared by (Lady Principal Archbishop) Chánh Phối Sư Hương Hiếu⁷⁴ who followed the orders to create a banquet. Above was the altar of the Divine Mother. Below was a large table with nine chairs arranged as if people were sitting. Bowls, chopsticks, spoons, plates, etc... everything was arranged on the table the same way as if serving visible people.”⁷⁵

At Tý time on the full-moon day, after lighting candles and incense sticks, the three gentlemen knelt and prayed sincerely. Then they started the invocation. Divine Beings descended to greet them.

Following the instructions previously given by Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal), the three gentlemen temporarily halted the invocation and together they performed the rituals. Next, they recited the three poems that they had prepared to (the Divine Mother) Đức Diêu Trì and (the Nine Lady Immortals) Cửu Vị Tiên Nương.

⁷³ Hương Hiếu in *Đạo Sư I* (mimeographed), page 7.

⁷⁴ Translator's note: (Lady Principal Archbishop) Chánh Phối Sư Hương Hiếu was then Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương, wife of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư.

⁷⁵ Excerpt from the sermon of (Dharma Protector) Đức Phạm Hộ Pháp at the Holy See on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Kỷ Sửu year (1949).

Entering the banquet, the three gentlemen were allowed to arrange three more chairs at the back to sit on, while Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương served the Divine Beings. She solemnly paid tribute to the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, then presented offerings to each of the Nine Lady Immortals...

After the offering rituals, they restarted the invocation. According to their earlier promise, the First, the Sixth, the Seventh, and the Eighth Lady Immortals gave four poems.

Below is the poem from Lục Nương (the Sixth Lady Immortal): ⁷⁶

*Quietly, the trees and grass are still green,
Dimly, the plum soul marks the autumnal tone.
The wind in the sky stirs the cloud roll in jade,
The dew on the ground wets the willow with pearl.
The morning sun briefly flashes up,
The evening moon steadily lights on.
The motherland is gloomy without its king,
It is so sad to see such a desolate scene.*

(Unfortunately, the other three poems were lost)

At the end of the séance, the Lady Immortals bid farewell and said:

*From now on, with the beaked basket, it is convenient
for Diêu Trì Palace to come and teach.*

⁷⁶ **Lục Nương** (the Sixth Lady Immortal) was born in France as Saint Jeanne d'Arc (1412 – 1431). There is a story saying that, in her most recent incarnation, Lục Nương was born in Vietnam as Ms. Hồ Thị Hoa (1791 – 1807); she became the Queen of King Minh Mạng and died thirteen days after giving birth to her son who later became King Thiệu Trị. The royal tomb of Lăng Hiếu Đông, dedicated to “Tá Thiên Lê Thánh, Đoan Chính Cung Hòa, Đốc Khánh Từ Huy, Minh Hiền Thuận Đức Chơn Hoàng Hậu” (i.e., Queen Hồ Thị Hoa) was near the tomb of King Thiệu Trị (in Cư Chánh village, Hương Thủy district, Huế province). Her family's tomb, in Linh Đông commune, about five hundred meters from Thủ Đức district, is called Hồ Tộc Tự.

Since then, every year on the full-moon day of the 8th month, the Mid-Autumn Day, the Diêu Trì Festival, also called Hội Yến Bần Đào (the Peach Banquet), is solemnly held. It is an occasion for Caodaists to express their respect to (the Divine Mother) Đức Mẹ Vô Cực Từ Tôn Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu and (the Nine Lady Immortals) Cửu Vị Tiên Nương.

That event was such a great honor for mankind, because such a heavenly banquet was held in a private home on earth for the first time. Through the form of this ceremony, the Divine indirectly brought the gentlemen into a moral framework and at the same time raised the consciousness of the predecessors of the Great Way to a noble level: Attending the banquet with the Immortals, one must be worthy of that blessing.

Additional notes on the four poems given by the Nine Lady Immortals:

In the book *Đạo Sử I*, Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu stated that the three poems given by the First, the Seventh, and the Eighth Lady Immortals were lost. She only had the poem of Lục Nương (the Sixth Lady Immortal).

In Đại Đồng Magazine (issue No. 14, published on July 1, 1940) Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu quoted a set of four poems named “Tứ Thời Bi Cảnh” (“Sorrow of the Four Seasons”) given by the Nine Lady Immortals. But he noted as follows: *Unfortunately, because it has been too long, we do not remember clearly who gave which poem.*

Recognizing that the poem “Bi Thu” (“Sorrowful Autumn”) coincides with the poem given by the Sixth Lady Immortal, it is very likely that the other three poems were also given on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival in Ất Sửu year (1925). So, we would like to record them here for further historical references. As Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu was a prestigious poet, this set of the four poems “Tứ Thời Bi Cảnh”, including the “Bi Thu” quoted above, were kept

exactly as the original text written in the article.

As a further note, the Lady Immortals also descended to give a set of four poems named “*Tứ Thời Lạc Cảnh*” (“*Delight of The Four Seasons*”).

Bi Xuân (Sorrowful Spring)

*Spring blessings are poured everywhere,
Yet, someone is still sad in a corner of the world.
Peach blossom blends like and dislike,
Chrysanthemum teases at tears and laughter.
Bees and butterflies flirt, stinging the eyes,
Branches and birds sway, making dirty words.
Is this spring comparable to those in the past?
It is secretly blamed for not meeting its time.*

Bi Hạ (Sorrowful Summer)

*Tranquilly the cold mist covers the scene,
Abundantly the summer rain teases the moonlight.
The cloud veil obscures the willow trees,
The wind fan shakes the begonia flowers.
The wet-winged orioles coo for their nest,
The country birds recall their motherland.
The lord of spring has not been gone for long,
For whom does this scene sadden with tears of heartbreak?*

Bi Đông (Sorrowful Winter)

*The winter cold air halts flowers from blooming,
The withered trees and grass remind of autumnal sky.
Flirting with the moon, trees lean their body flexibly,
Sulking at the wind, peach blossoms droop their faces.
Missing the nap, the mountain lies hidden,
Losing the flock, the swallow hides in the reed forest.
The fox couple tightly hold their thin fingers,
The crickets softly croon their sad thread.*

2) THE OUTDOOR CEREMONY TO BESEECH FOR THE WAY AND THE REVELATION OF THE GRAND NAME OF CAO DAI FOR THE FIRST TIME (1925)

After the Diêu Trì Festival, the three gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang still frequently invoked Immortals to discuss poetry and literature and were totally unaware that their path to the Faith was near.

At the beginning of the 9th month of Ất Sửu year, the Supreme Being tested the gentlemen once again. On the 2nd night of the 9th month of Ất Sửu year (October 10, 1925) Lord AÃÃ descended in their séance and using some pretext, He announced something like:

I revealed the secret of Heaven, and Ngọc Hư Cung (the Jade Palace) above penalizes me. If you don't pray for me, I will be punished ...

The gentlemen were extremely worried for Lord AÃÃ. Therefore, recalling the Divine Mother and the Nine Lady Immortals whom they had served on the Mid-Autumn Festival night, the very next night they set up the altar with all rituals and offerings. After the incense offering, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, as representative, knelt in front of the altar and read the supplication he had prepared:

*We urge the Nine Lady Immortals,
To tell Ngọc Hư (the Jade Palace) our original story.
For the sake of righteousness, ... committed a serious sin,
Please think of fellow believers to show compassion.*

Then they immediately set up the invocation. Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ (the Goddess of the Nineth Heavens)⁷⁷ descended and taught:

You must cultivate your heart and train your nature so that later you can return to your position.

Indeed, the act of asking for forgiveness for Lord AÃÃ was clearly just an excuse for the Divine to further instill in the gentlemen's mind the spiritual sense through the terms such as 'secret of Heaven', 'Ngọc Hư Cung', 'cultivation of mind and nature', 'return to the position' ... Then on the 27th night of the 10th month of Ất Sửu year (December 12, 1925), Đức Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ (the Goddess of the Nineth Heavens) descended again and gave the order:

*On the 1st day of this month, the three of you must perform the **Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way**.*

Therefore, the Divine from Diêu Trì Palace did "come to teach" as foretold on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival. The short but decisive command made the three gentlemen quite confused. (Lady Pioneer) Tiền Khai Hương Hiếu recorded their mood in the book *Đạo Sĩ I* as follows:

"She ascended; the three gentlemen gathered to discuss, not understanding what is 'beseech for the Way' that She taught."

⁷⁷ In the mimeographed book "*Ba Chặng Đường Đạo Sĩ*" ("*The Three Stages of Religious Activities*") page 7, author Thanh Minh recorded the date the three gentlemen begged for forgiveness for Lord AÃÃ as October 16, 1925. That night, Bát Nương (the Eighth Lady Immortal) descended, announcing that Lord AÃÃ was very pleased about their sincerity. She also added that "*No one dares to accuse Lord AÃÃ*". The three gentlemen were curious and kept asking more questions, Bát Nương replied "*This issue will be clear later*".

The next night, the three of them succeeded in invoking Thát Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) and immediately asked:

Thát Nương, would you please teach us what 'beseech for the Way' means?

Thát Nương said:

It is not my duty. Please ask Mr. AÃÃ.

The next night, when the gentlemen asked the same question, the Divine Beings who descended all spoke briefly, in general:

It is not my duty. Please ask Mr. AÃÃ.

The gentlemen felt that this issue was very serious.

a) Receiving the Grand Name of Cao Đài for the first time.

On the 30th night of the 10th month of Ất Sửu year (December 15, 1925), Lord AÃÃ descended and clearly taught everything:

On the 1st day of this 11th month, the three of you must perform the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way. Bathe yourselves to be pure, kneel in the open air, hold nine incense sticks in your hands and pray as follows:

*Three of us, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang, sincerely pay homage to **Cao Đài Supreme God** to grant us enough blessings so we can turn from evil to righteousness.*

This was the first time the three gentlemen had heard the name CAO ĐÀI. They knew the Supreme God was the Almighty; but they did not understand the meaning of the name Cao Dai, and wondered whether it was the appellation of a new religion ... Despite many puzzling questions in their mind, they

wholeheartedly admired and venerated Lord AÃÃ. They had **faith**, so they did not discuss anything further and decided to organize the Outdoor Ceremony.

b) The Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way

From the morning of the new-moon day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (December 12, 1925), all arrangements for the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way were actively prepared at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house, 134 Bourdais street (now Calmette street).

At night, the gentlemen set up an altar on the grassy yard next to the sidewalk in front of the house, with all the offerings, candles, and incense sticks on the table. Wearing áo dài (national costumes), each of them lit nine incense sticks, knelt and prayed exactly as Lord AÃÃ had taught them the day before (Figure 22).

“In silence the three gentlemen kept praying as Lord AÃÃ had taught them, not remembering the incident of kneeling on the street with people passing by. Coming back from a play or a show, people stopped to see whom the three men praying to while kneeling on the grass like that. Letting anyone watch, the three gentlemen just knelt there and prayed until all nine incense sticks burned out.”

The gentlemen's feelings during this event were later recounted by (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp himself as follows:

“We no longer knew any shame and ego. In the middle of the bustling Saigon city, the Supreme God forced us to kneel on the side of the road,

kneeling to beseech for the Way for all living beings.”⁷⁸



Figure 22: “This picture above shows the three gentlemen obeying the command of Lord AÃÃ on the the new-moon night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (December 16, 1925) to perform the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way... That is why the picture shows the three of them knelt on the sidewalk and held nine incense sticks to pray, as instructed by Lord AÃÃ.”

The above is the note written by (Lady Pioneer) Tiên Khai Hương Hiếu and the image was drawn by (Student-Priest) Lễ Sanh Thái Rầy Thanh according to her memory. If we pay attention, we can recognize that the table they used in the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way was the table they usually used for table-turning activities.

⁷⁸ Excerpt from the sermon of (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp at the Holy See on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Kỷ Sửu year (1949). In addition, all the holy messages in this section The Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way are excerpts from the book *Đạo Sĩ I (History of Caodaism Vol. 1)* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu.

The meaning of this Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way was clearly analyzed by Đức Hộ Pháp:

“This is a general gesture, not just from Thượng Phẩm⁷⁹ or Hộ Pháp. Cao Đài God’s teaching is essentially for all humanity on this planet, most of all for our Vietnamese race.”

As if to adequately test the gentlemen, at that time a poet named Bồng Dinh, who was an acquaintance, passed by and saw them. He stopped to recite a few verses, attracting even more people on the street.

When the nine incense sticks were burned out, the gentlemen entered the house to start the invocation. Cao Dai Supreme God descended and gave them a quatrain in Sino-Vietnamese:

*“Vọng niệm phân thù sự sự phi,
Cá lý thiên tâm thường thể nhĩ.
Thiên tâm tu hướng cá trung cầu,
Quân vấn thiên tâm mạc tri tường.”*

Since the gentlemen did not fully understand what Cao Dai Supreme God meant and still had many questions, they switched back to table-turning to urge Lord AÃÃ to explain the poem.

Lord AÃÃ descended and taught:

Cao Dai God want to say that the three of you do not have enough faith in Him; so, He asked again. You three must think it through.

And Lord AÃÃ continued to give the poem:

Just cling to the Supreme God’s banner,

⁷⁹ Translator’s note: Thượng Phẩm (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs) was then Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, and Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) was then Mr. Phạm Công Tắc.

*Cultivate your nature to attain peace effortlessly.
Stay away from all sources of sensuality,
Hold on to the willow branch to enjoy the leisurely way.*

The explanation was still difficult, not fully understood. The next day they kept asking Lord AÃÂ to explain it more clearly. This time, Lord AÃÂ translated every single word in the Sino-Vietnamese poem and summarized the meaning in prose as follows:

*Praying for a wish is not right; All things are from
God's Will; Wait for his orders.*

*God's Will look at every matter that is prayed for; Ask
your conscience, don't you know clearly?*

(God's Will: Conscience)

(Note: These holy messages above are all excerpted from the book *Đạo Sử I* recorded by Lady Cardinal Nữ Đầu Sư Hương Hiếu.)

At this point the gentlemen understood that the God-Way cannot be sought easily overnight. In the Last Era, calamities occurred everywhere. The Divine have bestowed grace, and humans must wholeheartedly revere them.

c) Receiving the Grand Name of Cao Dai for the second time.

On the 4th night of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year (December 19, 1925) Lord AÃÂ approved the sincerity of the three gentlemen and descended to give the following poem:

*What a joy to be in the Way of **Cao Đài**,
Thanks to your virtues in past lives.*

*Open your mind for advice and redemption,
Preserve your heart, cultivate your nature, avoid
transgression.*

This was the second time the three gentlemen had heard the name Cao Dai. Thus, it could be concluded that the Outdoor Ceremony to Beseech for the Way on the new-moon night of the 11th month was accepted by the Divine.

The words ‘the Way of Cao Dai’ in the above poem, as well as the term ‘Cao Dai God’ that Lord AÃÃ mentioned on the 30th night of the 10th lunar month, helped them clearly know that this was a new religion founded by God Himself. Since then, Cao Dai Faith was preparing to open its door for universal salvation.⁸⁰

The next seven days (from the 1st to the 7th day of the 11th lunar month) the gentlemen were ordered to pray, as (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp later explained: “*To pray for all beings*”. And the 7th day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (December 22, 1925), i.e., seven days after the Outdoor Ceremony, was the Winter Solstice.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Why did the Supreme God order the gentlemen to perform the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way on the new-moon night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year? – Was it because that special day with three numbers 1, combined with the word Ất Sửu, being two numbers 2 in the system of sexagenary cycle, yielded “tham thiên lưỡng địa”? “Tham thiên lưỡng địa” is a term used in *Thuyết Quái Truyện Kinh Dịch*. Bào Ba (in Yuan dynasty) explained it in the book titled *Châu Dịch Nguyên Chi* as follows: “Can be separated from each other is ‘tam’ (‘three’); cannot be separated from each other is ‘tham’ (‘trio’). Separable is ‘nhị’ (‘two’); inseparable is ‘lưỡng’ (‘duo’).” It refers to the fundamental transformation of the universe.

That 1st night of the 11th lunar month of the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way was the beginning of the pure K’un (the Receptive ䷁) hexagram in the Earlier Heaven cycle of change (for a year). The pure K’un is all yin; the all yin is not only for the past calendar year, but also for the entire Last Era.

⁸¹ In Taoist theology, Winter Solstice corresponds to the Fu (the Return or Turning Point ䷗) hexagram. At this time, according to the cycle of a year,

3) *BUILDING THE INITIAL FOUNDATION*

a) *Encouraging Self-Cultivation*

In the period following the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way, Divine Beings frequently descended to teach the three gentlemen. From then on, the themes conveyed in holy messages always aimed to encourage self-cultivation, helping the gentlemen to gradually absorb the fragrance of morality. The stronger the love for morality results in the less tasteful the wine of life. Here are some of the encouraging poems:

In the the 5th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (December 20, 1925), Lord AẤẤ taught:

*With the opportunity, with the power, with the spirit,
From there it is easy to approach the Divine.
Strive to nurture your nature and cultivate your mind,
In the future you will enjoy the full grace of Heaven.*

On the night of Winter Solstice, December 22, 1925 (the 7th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year), Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) rejoined the séance and gave two poems:

The first poem:

*Together we have promised,
Being out of sight, but never out of mind.
The further you get in the Way, the more steadfast you
are inclined.*

“the first yang is born” after the previous prosperous yin period. In the discussion on the Return hexagram, it is stated that “Phản phục kỳ đạo, thất nhật lai phục, thiên hành dã” (roughly translated as: Return, restore the Way. It will restore in seven days. Heaven operates like that), which fully corresponds to the meaning of this opening period of Cao Dai Faith. ‘The first yang is born’ not only corresponds to the upcoming Bính Dần year, but also to the new era: the Era of Recreation, with the special mark of the emergence of the grand name Cao Đài Immortal for the universal salvation at that very moment (the 9th day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year).

Then we will surely meet in Heaven.

The second poem:

*What a delight to be under the same roof,
From now on, the Holy Way will be fulfilled.
A step forward, a step closer to the windup,
Maintain sincerity to impress Cao Đài.*

The next night, Lục Nương (the Sixth Lady Immortal) descended to give a poem in a friendly tone:

*Well! Well! Not visiting for quite a while,
I'm afraid that you, elder brothers, secretly blame me.
Though being out of sight, we are not out of mind,
Feeling empty, I read and recite our poems.*

That night, Bát Nương (the Eighth Lady Immortal) also descended and taught:

*Sprinkling the willow branch to put out passion,
I come frequently due to our initial connection.
Strive to fulfill your duty to the nation,
End your karmic debts without hesitation.*

Next, (Great Immortal) Bạch Nhãn Đại Tiên descended to give a quatrain:

*The Jade Palace protects the Động Đình Lake,
Where God Emperor bestows grace and holds complete
power.
The Three-Religion Tribunal praise the good and
punish the evil,
To teach the world the value of Heaven's grace.*

Then there was an Immortal named Huệ Mạng Trường Phan, who practiced Buddhism in mount Điện Bà (Tây Ninh

province) in his lifetime and had known the three gentlemen. On the 8th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (December 23, 1925) this Immortal descended and gave two poems, the first of which was as follows.

*Previously we promised to be together,
Unexpectedly we have come to this circumstance.
Practice self-cultivation with perseverance,
In the future we will reunite in Fairyland.*

b) Receiving the full name of Cao Đài Tiên Ông (Cao Dai Immortal) (Christmas 1925)

The 9th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year was Christmas Eve (December 24, 1925), Christians and Catholics were bustling to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. As for the gentlemen Phạm Công Tắc and Cao Hoài Sang, they gathered at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house to prepare for the invocation ritual.

That night, Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) descended to announce the news, instructing the gentlemen to prepare the ritual solemnly to sincerely attend upon the Supreme Being. Hearing this, those present felt this moment had become extremely solemn.

Temporarily discontinuing the invocation, the gentlemen meticulously prepared the offerings, and carefully checked their costumes to be more formal, before holding the beaked basket. Cao Dai Supreme God descended in the séance and gave the following holy message:

*Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế Viêt Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại
Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát Giáo Đạo Nam Phương. (Jade Emperor
Supreme God, namely Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhisattva
Mahasattva, teaching the Way in the South).*

Poem:

*I am the Eternal Authority.
Self-cultivate willfully to enjoy my favor.
Preach the miraculous Way globally,
For your legacy to last eternally.*

*Cao Dai acknowledges the sincerity of the three
disciples and has bestowed full grace on each of them.
Tonight, you must rejoice, because it was the day that
the Supreme God descended to earth to teach the Way
in the West.*

*I am very pleased to see the three disciples respecting
Me like this. This home will be filled with my grace. The
day is near, wait for the command. I will let you see the
miracles so that you respect Me even more.*

At this point the three gentlemen supplicated to inquire about the identity of Lord AĂĂ.

Cao Dai Supreme God asked jokingly:

*Before, you promised not to ask about the identity of
this Immortal. Why are you asking now?*

But perhaps it was the right time for the gentlemen to know about the God-Way, Cao Dai Supreme God continued:

*(Previously) You three had not been able to understand
the Way very well. **I -- your Teacher** -- had to restrain
myself and said that it would be clear later because you
three still need someone to guide you through ...*

For a long time, I have been using the name AĂĂ in

*order to guide you into the Way, so that soon you will have to come out to help Me propagate the Way.”*⁸²

After the séance, everyone looked at each other in amazement, both happy and scared. Happy because they had frequently received the Supreme Being without knowing it. And scared because they had treated Him very “casual” for so long; they wondered if they committed any sin. They were even more worried because the Holy Master had given the order: “*Soon you will have to come out to help Me propagate the Way.*”

Thus, on Christmas Eve 1925, Lord AÃÃ officially confirmed that Lord AÃÃ is the Supreme Being, who uses the name Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva to teach the Way in the South. The Supreme Being humbled Himself to only call Himself **Teacher** to the three new disciples.

That day was also a landmark in the initiation of Cao Dai Faith, a truly joyful occasion. Hence, Lục Nương (the Sixth Lady Immortal) descended and gave the following poem:

*Glad for mankind, glad for the Way, and glad for
meditation.
Glad for each step on the path, a peaceful step.
Glad for the shadow of Cao Dai covering everywhere.
Glad for the mirror of Jade Emperor reflecting
serenity,
Glad for the Thousand Worlds admonishing human
affairs.
Glad for the color of Heaven shutting the purgatory.
Glad for rescuing all beings from the suffering sea.
Glad for God showering all the grace of Heaven.*

On this special occasion the great poet of the Tang dynasty, Lý Thái Bạch (Li Tai-Pei, 701 – 762), descended to celebrate (as if

⁸² Excerpt from the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên*, by Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Saigon, 1957, page 16.

to prepare for his upcoming important responsibility) and gave the following poem:

*Though incarnated in the Tang dynasty as a high-ranking mandarin,
I did not care about fame, but the leisurely delight.
I was renowned for composing hundreds of verses over a cup of wine,
Such an angelic nature of a thousand lifetimes has not yet faded.
Getting to a drunken stupor in the wind and moonlight,
I spill out a bag of literature and poetry.
In Fairyland I am still dreaming while my pen is dancing,
To depict the world affairs and the beauty of the country.*

A few days later (on January 13, 1926), the gentlemen met with Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) again, and they lightly blamed her:

*We blame you for not telling us that Lord AẢẢ is God.
You know your three brothers are like the blind, but you keep lying to us!*

Thất Nương replied:

*God is God, I am me. I know clearly but dare not disclose it. Now as you three brothers get it, I am happy.*⁸³

At this stage, the Supreme Authorities of Cao Dai Faith directly and officially proclaimed their names. (The Divine Mother) Đức Vô Cực Từ Tôn Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu descended to earth on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year

⁸³ Excerpt from *Đạo Sĩ I* page 37 recorded by (Lady Pioneer) Tiền Khai Hương Hiếu.

(September 24, 1925), and exactly three months later, on the night of December 24, the great name of Đức Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế (the Jade Emperor Supreme God) was officially given. In the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages), the Holy Master taught:

*Khí Hư Vô (the Innate Energy of Emptiness) gives birth to just Me - your Teacher - ... if I do not exist, then there is nothing in this universe and this world; but if the Innate Energy of Emptiness does not exist, then neither do I.*⁸⁴

When worshipping, Cao Dai followers recite the twelve-word mantra of the Supreme Being:

**NAM MÔ CAO ĐÀI TIÊN ÔNG
ĐẠI BỒ TÁT MA HA TÁT**

This is the title of the Supreme Being in the Third Universal Salvation, implying the Three Religions have the same origin: Confucianism (Cao Đài)⁸⁵, Taoism (Tiên Ông), and Buddhism (Đại Bồ Tát).

This mantra was bestowed by the Holy Master to protect his disciples in the Last Era and has been proven by many Cao Dai believers to be extremely miraculous.

⁸⁴ According to Cao Dai view of Thượng Đế Vô Ngã (Impersonal God), Khí Hư Vô là Ngôi Vô Cực trong Tam Cực (Vô Cực - Thái Cực - Hoàng Cực) [the Innate Energy of Emptiness is the Non-Being in the Trinity (Non-Being – Supreme Being – August Being)]. That Innate Energy gradually condenses the primordial electric forces into the Globe of Divine Light (the Supreme Being) which engenders the Yin and Yang (the August Being).

In the view of Thượng Đế Hữu Ngã (Personal God), the Non-Being manifests as the Divine Mother Đức Mẹ Điều Trì Kim Mẫu, but the ‘main position’ is still the Innate Energy of Emptiness.

⁸⁵ In the book *Ấu Học Quỳnh Lâm* (a kind of school textbook) published by Quảng Ích Thư Cục in Shanghai 1912, there is a sentence: “Cao Đài viết đầu ... Đầu vì Cao Đài”, roughly translated as “Cao Dai is the head ... The head is Cao Dai”, implying that Cao Dai resided in human head crown.

c) Starting to learn about the Way (January 1926)

From then on, hidden in holy messages were mostly doctrinal allusions. On the last night of the year 1925 (the 16th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year), Cao Dai Supreme God descended and taught:

Have you seen how AÃÂ humbles himself? Can anyone of such utmost authority be as humble as AÃÂ? AÃÂ is Me, your Teacher!

Participated in the invocation session at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house on that day was a Catholic woman. With the purpose of testing the invocation, she brought a picture of Jesus Christ and a cross and told the gentlemen:

Please let me place these items on the invocation table. If Lord Cao Dai is truly God, then he can manifest in the séance. Otherwise, if He is the Devil King, seeing these sacred objects, He will avoid them.⁸⁶

Everyone in that session agreed to let her try. Consequently, Saint Pierre descended in that séance and gave the following poem:

*Guarding the Paradise of West Heaven,
I preach the Way to make people know the Master.
He has saved them for over two thousand years,
Cao Đài, his name, entrusts me to guide you through.*

⁸⁶ This story is quoted from the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* by Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu. Some books record that the person who came to test the invocation was Mr. Phủ Chi, a friend of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, while other books record that it was Mrs. Phủ Chi, a friend of Mrs. Cao Quỳnh Cư.

Cao Dai Supreme God then taught further:

Do you understand who Jesus is? In the past I shed my blood for mankind out of love, now I have come to save mankind also out of love. Do you love Me as much? I need you to repent so I can save you.

The Supreme Being essentially taught the gentlemen about love, humility, and spiritual aspiration. Then the next day, January 2, 1926, Cao Dai Supreme God descended in the séance and advised Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and Mr. Phạm Công Tắc to be aware of the important responsibility they were about to be entrusted with:

I enjoin both of you one thing: On every issue, you must wait for my order, do not judge based on your own opinions. I have already determined your duties and responsibilities, but the time has not come yet. Listen, you must obey Me. From now on, I will start teaching you the Way.”⁸⁷

‘Start teaching the Way’ was another milestone in the process that the Holy Master sowed the Way in South Vietnam. After the period of building faith in the new religion, the gentlemen must be disciplined as Cao Dai Supreme God had taught in the previous night:

Consider the gentleness of Thất Nương (The Seventh Lady Immortal). Do you have even a shred of it? Learn from that gentleness.

How about the sublimeness of Lục Nương (The Sixth Lady Immortal)? Do you have even a shred of it? Learn from that sublimeness.

And the virtue of Nhất Nương (The First Lady Immortal), do

⁸⁷ At the end of this message, Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu wanted to emphasize by writing in the book *Đạo Sĩ I* page 36: “Please remember that on January 2, 1926, the Holy Master started teaching the Way.”

you have a shred of it? You must learn...

*Are your love and affection equal to that of Bát Nương
(the Eighth Lady Immortal)? You must learn ...*

The first lesson is still a review on human decency. And, achieving gentleness, virtue, love, etc... is merely the indispensable conditions to represent the Holy Master to save humanity, to ‘help the Holy Master open the Way’. There will be many higher steps to follow. Yet, despite such an important and difficult task in the early stage, right on the next day, January 4, 1926, the Holy Master further advised the gentlemen as follows:

*Do not frequently call on the Divine Beings whom I
have appointed to teach you, because each has his/her
own duties... unless there is something you need to
learn.*

On the long journey of practicing the Way, the predecessors (and other devoted followers) were always watched over by the Almighty, who taught in many ways and tested them to gradually lift them up. Moreover, to encourage them to concentrate in religious practice wholeheartedly, as well as to instill in them some religious concepts, when Ms. Hương Hiếu⁸⁸ worried about her mother who lived far away and could not have a chance to join the new religion, Cao Dai Supreme God said:

***Hiếu**, you should know that your sincere determination
in self-cultivation is sufficient to save your nine
generations of offsprings and seven generations of
ancestors, let alone your mother...*

The above-mentioned date, January 2, 1926, marked the first day the Holy Master “taught the Way” to the disciples in Branch Two. After that, the worship rituals and prayers, the

⁸⁸ Translator’s note: Ms. Hương Hiếu is Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s wife.

kneeling and bowing posture, etc... for the new religion were gradually established and completed. For example:

On January 3, 1926, the Holy Master reinforced the awareness of the mediums in the act of holding the beaked basket and spiritic pen:

Either holding the beaked basket or the spiritic pen, the medium must maintain serenity in body and mind so that his true spirit can leave the perispirit and come to Me to receive my teachings. When holding the spiritic pen, his hand follows what the true spirit dictates to write down...

When holding the beaked basket and becoming unconscious, his true spirit will completely leave the body. I will then teach it to write a certain word, and it will follow. I will say the name of a word, and his body will hold the beaked basket to write it...

Before holding the spiritic pen or beaked basket, the medium must change into clean clothes, dress formally, and bathe to be pure, upon coming to the divine altar to perform his duties.⁸⁹

After knowing clearly that the God-Way was founded by the Supreme Being Himself and they were the first disciples, the predecessors felt in their hearts that they needed to have a form of worship and praise to fully express their admiration.

Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ, who was already an acquaintance of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu and Minh Lý religious branch,⁹⁰ suggested the

⁸⁹ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages, trans. Hùm Bù and Hồng Bù, CreateSpace, 2015).

⁹⁰ In the holy message dated January 31, 1926, (Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, i.e., Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages, trans. Hùm Bù and Hồng Bù, CreateSpace, 2015), the Holy Master taught: “**Cư, Sang, Tắc** want to follow your brother to attend meetings in Minh Lý. **Kỳ**, only with you do I allow the three of them to go.”

gentlemen to borrow some prayers from these two sources for their temporary use (more details are in Chapter 2 Section II Part C).

On April 4, 1926, the Holy Master encouraged the gentlemen to chant prayers as follows:

*I commend you two on chanting prayers ...*⁹¹

d) Worshipping God Eye

Unfortunately, there is currently no document that clearly identifies the first day when the Holy Master instructed the gentlemen of Branch Two to worship God Eye. Written in some historical documents are as follows:

- In the book *Đạo Sử I*, page 64, (Lady Pioneer) Tiên Khai Hương Hiếu recorded:

“When the Supreme Being descended to earth to establish the religion, He used automatic writing to receive disciples. The first time He taught the worship of God Eye was also at his (Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s) house.”

- Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương (Figure 23)⁹² – a religious leader

Later, the Holy Master also ordered Mr. Phạm Công Tắc to recite Nhon Quả Kinh (the Repentance Prayer, Kinh Sám Hối) of Minh Lý religious branch. (From the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 21, i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hùm Bù and Hồng Bù, CreateSpace, 2015).

⁹¹ Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu in *Đạo Sử I* page 36.

⁹² Later, (Senior Brother) Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương Trần Văn Quế (1902 – 1980) was conferred as: (1) Chủ Trưởng Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo Cao Đài (Head of the Sacerdotal Council of Cao Dai Mission), (2) Vĩnh Tịnh Sư Minh Lý Thánh Hội (Tam Tông Miếu), and (3) Tổng Lý Minh Đạo Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam (Conservator of Religious Enlightenment at the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam). All these titles were heavenly ordained.

The pronoun “Đạo Trưởng” is exclusively used in Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý (the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching) to refer to a senior leader who is highly virtuous and exemplary for the next generations. As the use of this

who had contact with and was close to most of the Cao Dai predecessors – on page 30 of the book *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ* (*Cao Đài Sơ Giải*) published in 1963, wrote more clearly:

“The gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Quỳnh Cư, though had not yet contacted the group of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, were ordered to draw God Eye to worship.”



Figure 23: Portrait of
(Senior Brother) **Đạo
trưởng Huệ Lương
Trần Văn Quế**
(1902-1980)

- In the book *40 năm Lịch Sử (1926 – 1966) Đạo Cao Đài* (censored by the Tây Ninh Holy See on December 12, 1966), page 28, author Hoài Nhân wrote about the beginning of the propagation branch as follows:

“In early 1926 (late Ất Sửu year), the Immortal taught his disciples to prepare to open the new religion of the Holy Master, who descended to earth in the Third Era, assuming the name Cao Đài, using the symbol of God Eye (Heavenly Eye) to symbolize God... About God Eye, they drew and presented many times, but were not accepted...”

Around the beginning of February 1926, the Holy

term has not been unanimously confirmed by Cao Dai Churches, it has been internally used within the Institute only.

Master sent his disciples Trung, Cù, Tắc, Sang, Hậu, Đức to Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's house at 110 Bonard street (now Lê Lợi street), to ask for a model of God Eye..."

It can be tentatively concluded that the Holy Master taught the gentlemen of Branch Two to worship God Eye in a séance at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house some time in the first ten days of year 1926, the period between Christmas Eve 1925 and the day the beaked basket was transferred to Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house (January 18, 1926).

Once the Holy Master taught about the worship symbol, it was considered that Branch Two had met the conditions to form a new religion. The image of God Eye was introduced by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to the gentlemen of Branch Two. Thus, for the second branch of the new religion, this was the first model of the Holy Image, which only showed the image of God Eye with rays of light around it, without the set of Sun-Moon-Star, nor the holy images of Tam Trấn (the Three Spiritual Governors) and Tam Giáo (the Three Religious Founders) (More details are in Chapter 2 Section II Part C: About the Altar).

Back to the time when the gentlemen of Branch Two received the holy order to worship God Eye, they followed the instructions but did not fully understand the meaning of that symbol. More than a month later, on February 25, 1926 (the 13th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year), in an invocation session, they inquired about the meaning of worshipping God Eye. Cao Dai Supreme God answered:

...I briefly discuss it, so you grasp a little bit of its meaning:

*Eye is master of the mind
And the two sources of light.
Light is Spirit.
Spirit is God.
God is Me.*

*I have come to reinstate your True Spirit to its original state so you can attain enlightenment. You should understand that Spirit resides in the eyes. Arrange for your fellow believers to clearly understand it. The source of Immortals and Buddhas is essentially there.*⁹³

C. DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS IN SELF-CULTIVATION

1) RECEIVING MORE CORE MEMBERS

The Third Universal Salvation was miraculously transformed. Just for the personnel in the founding period of the religion, the ‘predestined individuals’ were arranged by the Divine to have stable positions in society. At the right time and right circumstances, they stepped forward to take on the role of representing God to preach the Way.

There are numerous cases that can be used as examples. Sometimes it was a group of friends or colleagues, sometimes a whole family, and sometimes a few individuals. Below are just a few typical cases of some people who later became heavenly-ordained dignitaries in Cao Dai Faith.

a) Mr. Trương Hữu Đức (Figure 24)⁹⁴

Mr. Trương Hữu Đức (1890 – 1976) was a friend of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư at Sở Hỏa Xa (the Railway Department).

In the early days of using table-turning, sometimes he joined in but still had doubt in his heart. One day, coming home from a table-turning session, he alone tried the technique by placing his hands on the table and asking for poetry. The spirit of his elder brother manifested in that session, giving him no poem but a prescription of two medicinal herb ingredients. He took

⁹³ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hùm Bù and Hồng Bù, CreateSpace, 2015).

⁹⁴ For more details, please refer to his biography in Appendix I.

that medicament and was cured of his illness of twenty years.

“The next day, right at noon, Đức – calm, serene, and alone – imitated Tắc in holding the pen and prayed for poetry. The Immortal named Minh Nghĩa Tiên Ông manifested to give the following poem:

Congratulations to Minh Đức on having met the Master,

And no longer wishing for bad matters.

Congratulations to this world on gaining more face,

Congratulations to the ruffian on mending his way.

Đức received just this poem. After this event, Đức held the pen so many times with no success. From then on, Đức believed wholeheartedly, became a vegetarian, worshipped Cao Dai God, and joined fellow believers to spread the salvation everywhere.”⁹⁵

On March 13, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

Đức! *Your work of merit is holding the beaked basket to promulgate the Way. Listen!*

Later, Mr. Trương Hữu Đức and Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu formed a medium pair holding the beaked basket to serve as powerful Commanders of the Holy Master.

⁹⁵ Excerpt from the autobiography of Mr. Hiến Pháp Trương Hữu Đức, written on June 12, 1971 (the 20th day of the 5th month of Tân Hợi year).



Figure 24: Portrait of **Mr. Trương Hữu Đức** (1890 – 1976)

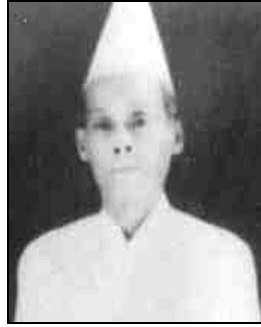


Figure 25: Portrait of **Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu** (1892 – 1961)

b) Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu (Figure 25) ⁹⁶

Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu (1892 – 1961), appellation Thuận Đức, was a writer, a schoolteacher, and a famous poet of that time.

As a colleague of Mr. Huỳnh Thiên Kiêu, appellation Quý Cao, in Nguơ Giang Thi Xã (a poetry club) around the year 1919, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu heard that the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao manifested in a séance and responded to the given rhyme of the poem “Farewell to Sweetheart” by the spirit of Miss Hón Liên Bạch (the Eighth Lady Immortal). In addition, the poetry community also passed down many other poems given by the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao.

On the night of November 15, 1925 (the 29th night of the 9th month of Ất Sửu year) (according to *Thuần Đức Thi Hiệp Tuyển – Thuận Đức’s Collection of Selected Poems*), Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu went to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house to attend the invocation session, hoping to be in touch with his old poetic friend again. The spirit of Mr. Quý Cao descended to give the following quatrain:

⁹⁶ Please refer to his biography in Appendix I.

*Separated in worlds, we are still under the same sky,
Birth and death are all that is left for a human life.
Let's cheerfully make a toast to our common will,
And affectionately exchange some recommended news.*

Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu responded:

I have prepared a poem and brought it here. I would like to read it to you and please respond to the rhyme and theme of my poem.

The spirit of Mr. Quý Cao tapped on the table twice, showing his agreement. Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu chanted:

*Many years of struggling result in bare hands,
Just like dreaming in a deep sleep.
Sun and rain have seasoned my face,
The lure of fame and profit has confused my heart.
The days passed, spring and autumn have faded.
The bright mirror has been stained with dust and sand.
Now meeting my old friend, I wonder
Which way is the right one to go over.”⁹⁷*

The spirit of Mr. Quý Cao echoed:

*The pagoda drumbeat sends abstruse sounds,
The city hustle bustle wakes people up from a deep sleep.*

⁹⁷ This poem, as well as other poems related to Mr. Thuận Đức-Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu, are all excerpted from the book *Thuần Đức Thi Hiệp Tuyển* (Thuần Đức's Collection of Selected Poems). This collection of poems was compiled by Mr. Hàn Sinh Nguyễn Trung Nhơn (i.e., (Priest) Giáo Hữu Ngọc Nhơn Thanh, the second son of Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu) from the original copies that were carefully preserved by the family. Many other books cite Mr. Bảo Pháp's poems, but they are more or less different from those in this original collection.

*Ride in the Boat of Wisdom to cross the sea of love,
 Sprinkle the Buddha willow to put out the fire of heart.
 The world is cold with the wind blowing through,
 The path of life is filled with worldly dust.
 Regretting the incomplete cultivation in past lives,
 Now brush away the karmic debts to access the Buddha
 way.*

The two poems of the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao contain many hidden meanings, framed in elegant and transcendent words, as if he were telling his friend to recall the ‘self-cultivation in past lives’, ‘ride in the Boat of Wisdom’, ‘sprinkle the Buddha willow’, ‘brush away karmic debts’, ‘access the Buddha way’. The following night, and the nights after, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu kept coming to Bourdais street, gradually absorbing the fragrance of wisdom. Later, everyone knew that the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao came to Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu, as well as to the whole group, in order to amass some work of merit.

After a short time attending invocation sessions and receiving holy blessing, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu was called by Lord AÃA (Figure 26):

***Thuần** is a literary talent and **Đức**, a genius,
 Your name in the poetry circle has been established.
 As the country wants to show the names of the talented,
 Now is the time to wield the pen and raise the flag.*

At that time, no one knew Thuần Đức was his appellation. As a result, such name revelation strengthened his faith, leading him into the path of self-cultivation and later became an eminent figure among the Cao Dai predecessors.

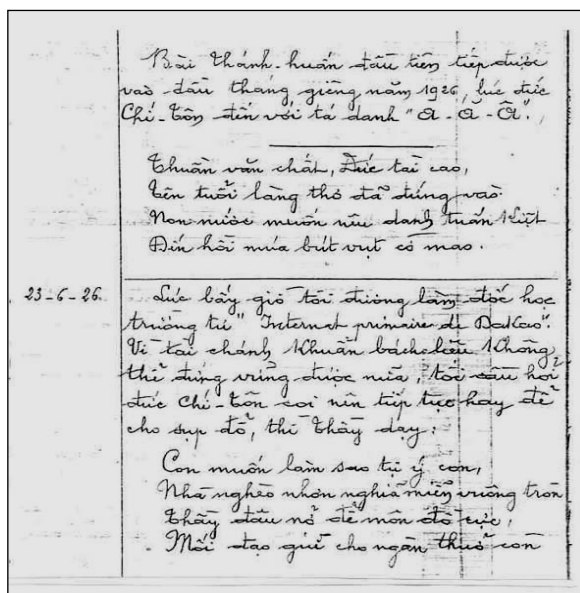


Figure 26: Above is the handwriting of Mr. **Thuần Đức – Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu** (reduced size by 70%).

The date when Lord AĂĂ gave Mr. Đức Bảo Pháp the poem “Thuần is a literary talent...” must have been before Christmas 1925, because after this event, the Holy Master proclaimed Himself Cao Dai Immortal in Christmas Eve.

c) Mr. Lê Văn Trung (Figure 27)⁹⁸

Mr. Lê Văn Trung (1875 – 1934) was a powerful figure of that time. Only a few Vietnamese received the French Legion of Honor and held a series of leading positions in society like him. Yet, he was always a patriot and very active in philanthropic activities.

⁹⁸ For more information, please refer to his biography in Appendix I.



Figure 27: Portrait of Mr. **Lê Văn Trung** (1875 – 1934)



Figure 28: Portrait of Mr. **Nguyễn Hữu Đắc** (1897 – 1974)

Around 1920 or 1921, after witnessing many ups and downs in life, he was no longer attracted by the path of fame. At that time, his eyes gradually weakened. So frustrated, he became addicted to opium, and his eye problems became more serious.

Around mid-1925, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc⁹⁹ (Figure 28), a

⁹⁹ Mr. **Nguyễn Hữu Đắc** was born on the 8th day of the 7th month of Đinh Dậu year (1897). His father was Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Chương and his mother was Ms. Huỳnh Thị Ngôn (she donated four hectares of land in Phú Thọ district to build the cemetery of Tam Tông Miếu Temple). His wife's name was Cao Thị Hòa. One of his elder brothers named Nguyễn Hữu Lợi (1894 – 1974) had been a disciple of Minh Lý religious branch since 1925.

Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc was a business owner, who served as a member of the City Council for some time. His residence was at 100 Lục Tinh street (now Hùng Vương street).

Adhering to Minh Lý Đạo on the 6th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926), he was heavenly ordained as Chí Tịnh Sư on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Canh Ngũ year (1930), then promoted to Tâm Tịnh Sư on February 4, 1973, religious name Chơn Hư. He annotated and wrote many scriptures, prayers, as well as moral books, and was also the editor of the monthly magazine Đạo Đời (1954).

He had some relationships with the Cao Dai predecessors. In the séance on the New Year's Eve of Ất Sửu - Bính Dần years at Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house, the Holy Master taught him:

Đắc, you must unite with this group to help Trung.

Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc passed away on the 11th day of the 2nd month of Giáp Dần year (March 4, 1974).

relative, brought him to Đàn Chợ Gạo (Chợ Gạo Invocation Site) in Phú Lâm district (at Mr. Lê Văn Thành's house, corner of Bà Kế street, now near the intersection of Phú Lâm and Hùng Vương streets) to pray to the Immortals for his remedies. There, Mr. Lê Văn Trung was saved by His Holiness Đức Lý Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope). According to Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu (in the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên*), that event took place in the second 4th month of Ất Sửu lunar leap-year.

Thanks to the blessing and teaching of His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch, Mr. Lê Văn Trung was determined to mend his way and quit opium completely. His eyesight gradually recovered.

Just when he started having faith in God and Buddha, Đàn Chợ Gạo (Chợ Gạo Invocation Site) was suddenly ordered to close. Fortunately, he had heard about the miracles of the table-turning group. Thus, on the 27th night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (January 11, 1926) Mr. Lê Văn Trung went to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house and asked for permission to attend the invocation. That night, Cao Dai Supreme God gave him a quatrain:

Don't worry about being old, as your mind won't grow old.

Ask nowhere far but your own heart.

Above all, Heaven looks at the heart in humanity,

True or false you would soon know.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Excerpt from the book *Đạo Sử I* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu, 1968, page 37.

There are documents stating that on the 23rd day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year, Cao Dai Supreme God ordered the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc to go to Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house to set up the invocation. At that time, these gentlemen had not been acquainted with Mr. Lê Văn Trung yet; so, they were a bit reluctant to visit such an authoritative person. But they still complied. On that day Mr. Lê Văn Trung joyfully welcomed them, and the Holy Master gave him the above poem as well as the following holy message: "**Trung**, be determined. To live is up to Me. To die is also up to Me..."

This séance session created an acquaintance between Mr. Lê Văn Trung and the gentlemen of Branch Two. And then, exactly one week later, on the 5th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year (January 18, 1926), Cao Dai Supreme God ordered the transfer of the beaked basket to Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house on Quai Testard (now Châu Văn Liêm, Chợ Lớn). Mr. Lê Văn Trung happily accepted it.¹⁰¹

That day Cao Dai Supreme God noticed Mr. Lê Văn Trung that His Holiness Đức Lý Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope) utilized Đàn Chợ Gạo (Chợ Gạo Invocation Site) to bless and guide him. Once the mission was completed, that invocation site was disbanded. Then Cao Dai Supreme God emphasized:

*Trung, my son! Be determined. To live is up to Me, to die is also up to Me. To succeed is up to Me, to fail is also up to Me. You should use your own light (eyesight) to think about my words.*¹⁰²

Perhaps this holy message of the Holy Master is not only for Mr. Lê Văn Trung but also for all of God's children.

d) Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản (Figure 29) ¹⁰³

Like Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản (1876 – 1941) was a teacher graduated from Ecole Normale Primaire d'Instituteurs (the Primary School of Teachers). In 1926, he was the Principal of Cầu Kho High School (now Trần Hưng Đạo School, Saigon District 1), and his private house was nearby and quite spacious.

¹⁰¹ These timelines were recorded according to the books *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* by Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu and *Đạo Sĩ I* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu.

¹⁰² Excerpt from the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* page 18.

¹⁰³ Please refer to his biography Appendix I.



Figure 29:
Portrait of Mr.
Đoàn Văn Bản
(1876 – 1941)

His path in joining Cao Dai was recorded by (Senior Brother) Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương as follows:

“Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản was very calm, careful, quiet, and thoughtful. As a teacher he had many connections to many literary and poetic figures. For that reason, he was close friends with the gentlemen: Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Quỳnh Cư, (School Principal) Đốc học Nguyễn Trung Hậu, (Judge) Thông Phán Trương Hữu Đức... After the table-turning group was formed, every Saturday night the two gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc were ordered to set up the invocation for the Divine to teach them at Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản’s house. Curious and courteous, he was forced to be present at the house to receive guests and prepare the offerings to set up the invocation. Therefore, he was unintentionally familiar with the worshipping, as well as with the invocation rites and prayers. Such circumstances forced him to be vegetarian, although these matters did not fit his progressive spirit.

Strangely enough, the Supreme Being descended to teach the Way to people coming from everywhere, giving poems to hundreds of séance attendants, but never mentioned Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản. Perhaps the Divine wanted to give him time to observe and reflect, before accepting him as a disciple.

Nevertheless, on the day Cao Dai Supreme God ordained the dignitaries (the 14th day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year), Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản was officially conferred the holy title Tiên Đạo Công Thần Thuyết Đạo Sư.”

Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản's private house became (Holy House) Thánh Thất Cầu Kho, one of the first Holy Houses of Cao Dai Faith.

The above four examples are typical of how to transform the heart and steer the predecessors into the Way:

- With Mr. Trương Hữu Đức, who was still skeptical, the Divine allowed him to directly receive the mysterious grace.

- With Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu, a schoolteacher and a poet, the Divine used the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao, one of his friends in the poetic circle, to use elegant poetry to gradually guide him into the path of morality.

- With Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản, who was calm and careful, spoke little and thought a lot, the Divine gave him the opportunity to reflect.

- And with Mr. Lê Văn Trung, who had high social position, wealth, power and fame, only severe illnesses could easily make him awaken and change his mind.

Each fate corresponds to its own treatment. In the end, all these gentlemen must wipe away the worldly dust and work together to spread the God-Way.

From the beginning of the year 1926, the number of séance attendants had been growing. Some came and left, some who were destined to follow the Way, remained. In order for them

to progress in accordance with the Heaven's Will, the content of the holy messages was raised to a new level: the Holy Master began to draw the disciples' attention to the "Method of the Heart".

2) METHOD OF CAO DAI AT THE BEGINNING PERIOD (1925 – 1926)

In the Last Era, human hearts are so unsteady; the true spirit of humans is obscured by material desires and worldly circumstances. Opening the Third Universal Salvation, the Supreme God simultaneously sowed the seed of the Way on two fronts: in breadth, Cao Dai Religion spreads the name of the Holy Master everywhere; in depth, Cao Dai Great Way is the medicament to remove the veil of ignorance surrounding the spark of divine light in humans. That depth is the Method of the Heart.

The Cao Dai predecessors, ahead of anyone else, were taught the True Method of Cao Dai thoroughly by the Divine. The first and the most important conditions for a disciple to receive the Method of the Heart are as follows.

a) Vegetarianism

First, practitioners must be vegetarian to practice self-restraint, reduce the desire for enjoyment, also to purify the body and mind. Next, be vegetarian to practice the Method of the Heart. Working on spiritual exercises without being vegetarian will cause impure energy to hinder the true spirit from gathering at the head crown.

Recall the preparation of Diêu Trì Banquet on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival of Ất Sửu year, Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) had instructed the predecessors to keep fasting for three days in advance to be adequately pure to attend upon the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu. That was the necessary condition for the ceremony on that day, and it was also an opportunity for the Divine to sow awareness of fasting

in the gentlemen's mind. That awareness was accepted by all of them; as a result, on Christmas Eve of year 1925, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, representing the three, pledged:

I have pledged to fast for two more days on the 15th and 30th day of each month to be pure to worship Cao Dai Supreme God.

The Holy Master replied:

Very good ... Just looking forward to the three of you walking more and more steadily on the Way.

But only several days later, on January 1, 1926 (the 19th day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year), in a séance to guide the mediums to use the beaked basket and spiritic pen, the Holy Master seriously taught:

*... There must be a diligent spirit to become miraculous. One must be **vegetarian** to have a diligent soul, and must cultivate the nature of Saint, Immortal, and Buddha, to be able to serve as a medium teaching the Way to all sentient beings.*¹⁰⁴

After switching from table-turning to beaked basket, the two gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc officially became spiritic mediums. The above message was applied to them. (Of course, the others must follow as well).

This was a rather sudden change, exactly like the case of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, who was fasting for two days and had not yet passed the ten-day fasting, when he was ordered to be full vegetarian. In the case of the gentlemen in Branch Two, the mediums had just pledged to fast for two days in not even half a month when they were ordered to be full-time vegetarian. Reading the history of Cao Dai Faith, one often encounters

¹⁰⁴ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, the 1st Edition, 1928, page 8 (*Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

similar cases.

The significance of vegetarianism was subsequently taught many times by the Divine, and later it became one of the basic conditions of Cao Dai precepts. As evidence, during the entire period of the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way at Gò Kén Holy House, there was just vegetarian food, not only at Gò Kén Holy House but also in all surrounding shops and stores.

b) Spiritual cultivation

Spiritual cultivation begins at the heart (and ends also at the heart). Since the gentlemen of Branch Two were new to the path of self-cultivation, they were given special attention and care by the Divine – from gradually sowing awareness to practicing the Method of the Heart. (The following holy messages are all excerpted from the book *Đạo Sĩ I* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu). Chronologically according to the solar calendar:

On October 20, 1925, Đức Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ (the Goddess of the Ninth Heaven) taught:

You must cultivate your heart and train your nature so that later you can return to your position.

On December 20, 1925, Cao Dai Supreme God taught:

*Strive to nurture your nature and cultivate your mind,
In the future you will enjoy the full grace of Heaven.*

Right at the beginning of the year 1926 (January 14), Cao Dai Supreme God taught the disciples on how to compose their mind:

*Recite Buddha's name sincerely,
Purity, purity, purity, purity, purity.
Purity means absolute empty,
Practice the method sincerely.*

The three words ‘vô nhứt vật’ (‘absolute empty’) were mentioned by Lục Tổ Huệ Năng (Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch) (Zen Buddhism), in his famous verses about The Heart:

*Bodhi is not a tree,
The bright mirror is also not a stand.
Originally there is not a single thing
Where is there any dust?*

On that same day, Nhất Nương (the First Lady Immortal) descended in the séance to insist that:

I urge you, my two elder brothers, to practice self-cultivation diligently, to nurture and forge your spirit, and you will surely attain enlightenment in the future. Please consider the precious position as the most important. Do not attach to the mundane world and fall into decadence.

Two days later (January 16, 1926), the predecessors received the spirit of Mr. Quý Cao again. Having a lot of questions about self-cultivation, because it was still too new for them, and now meeting with an ‘acquaintance’, the predecessors brought the subject up. The spirit of Mr. Quý Cao had no choice but replied:

... it has been a long time, but I dare not say, because I still must cultivate like you two, elder brothers. I dare not say because you two are disciples of the Holy Master, I dare not cross the line.

*Self-cultivation is like wilted grass receiving the mist,
The Way is like the trees shading the sunshine street.*

*An ascetic life, a thousand lives of glory,
 A couple years of hard work, ten thousand years of
 peace.
 Should the spirit be nurtured, it becomes stronger.
 Should the energy flow freely, it gets purer.
 To engage in the world with a serene heart,
 The source of Immortals and Buddhas is the right
 track.*

*... From now on, please ask the Holy Master and do not
 ask me, I dare not commit a sin for unauthorized
 disclosure.*

The spirit of Mr. Quý Cao feared committing sin because spiritual cultivation was a matter of inner cultivation, which must be transmitted verbally or from heart-to-heart, and could not be presented in detail. If necessary, one could only speak in general terms such as ‘nurture the spirit, refine the energy’... But an unauthorized person should never guide others, when it was not his/her duties.

On the day of the ceremony to ‘set up the Divine Altar’ at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house (January 27, 1926), Thất Nương (the Seventh Lady Immortal) descended in the séance to welcome. Through the poem, she exchanged her longing and then left the words of encouragement, in the following passage:

*Hibiscus flower blooms in the morning and fades in the
 evening. Yet, it is more valuable than a human life,
 because though it lives so short, it has beauty during its
 life. Human life is born only to suffer. In the end when
 you look back, even if you live a hundred years, you
 will not achieve anything. Death is the end. This
 temporary life is called the sea of suffering in Buddhist
 books.*

*I urge you, my three elder brothers, to consider your
 own immortality as the most important. People, who do*

not have it, seek it... As you already have it, I would feel very sorry if you neglected it.

By then, Mr. Lê Văn Trung, thanks to his determination in seeking the Method of the Heart, asked:

Am I destined to learn the spiritual method? Please tell me.

Thất Nương replied:

If you have accessed the Way, then you are predestined to it. Try to practice it. Diligence results in ascension; indolence leads to regression. Warn yourself about that. Plan for it early. A passing day is a dead day. Do not hesitate.

Witnessing Mr. Lê Văn Trung's desire to seek the spiritual teaching, that day His Holiness Đức Lý Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope) also taught him as follows:

Determined to self-cultivate, you should strive to succeed,

Purify your nature, then train your heart.

A full head of scriptures still cannot free you from the world,

Without the serene heart, do not hope for liberation.

Borrowing the terms 'self-cultivate', 'purify your nature', 'train your heart', 'the serene heart', ... His Holiness Đức Lý Thái Bạch wanted to help Mr. Lê Văn Trung to advance one more step, after the first step at Đàn Chờ Gạo (Chờ Gạo Invocation Site), Phú Lâm district.

On March 16, 1926 (the 3rd day of the 2nd month of Bính Dần year), when came the timeline necessary for the Faith, Cao Dai

Supreme God specifically taught:

***Trung, Cu, Tắc!** I insist that within the last half of the 2nd lunar month, you three should take a week off, and go down to Minh Đường Temple with **Lịch** to further learn the spiritual way... The three of you just stay in the temple...*

*Listen! **Lịch**, teach them... I am always with them. If uncertain of anything, pray and invoke Me.*¹⁰⁵

‘Learn the spiritual way’ here is to learn the meditation method. Perhaps it was very urgent that the Holy Master gave such a decisive order. Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (Minh Đường religious branch) had been converted to Cao Dai Faith just ten days earlier.

Looking back at the progress of the second source of the Faith (Branch Two), from July 25, 1925, the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang started using table turning until the end of that year. After only six months, the foundation of the propagation branch was almost formed. Cao Dai Faith was sown on earth by the Divine through Branch Two, and have achieved all the elements of a religion:

¹⁰⁵ Excerpt from the Original Holy Messages of year 1926 (*Niên Sổ Thời Thiết Lục*) compiled by Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh (handwritten version), page 75. **Lịch** mentioned in this excerpt was Mr. Lê Văn Lịch, i.e., (Cardinal) Đâu Sư Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. He will be mentioned in the subsequent chapters.

The detail of ‘learn the spiritual way’ at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple was also mentioned by Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt in his eulogy for the late Mr. Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương (shown in the book “*Biography of Đức Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhựt*” page 29).

The founder: Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhistsattva Mahasattva. The Supreme Being allows disciples to call Him **Teacher**.

The symbol: God Eye.

The followers: Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Hoài Sang, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Trương Hữu Đức, Đoàn Văn Bản, Lê Văn Trung
...

The teaching: Vegetarianism and practice the New Method of Cao Dai. Use the beaked basket to receive holy messages. Holy messages use many forms of poems, hidden in them are moral teachings.

The teachings, prayers, and cultivation methods have begun to exist, and were continuing to be completed.

This is the end of Chapter 2 Section II, with the results achieved by the **second** source of the Faith. Let's review the end of Chapter 2 Section I to compare the results of both sources of the Faith.

What a wonderful coincidence! The results from these two groups were so similar that it seemed miraculous! Up to this point, the two groups had almost no connection with each other. It is also possible (just a hypothesis!) that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had heard of the reputation of the table-turning group on Bourdais street, especially the circulation of miraculous poems. But Mr. Ngô was in seclusion, and he had a firm belief that he had received the true method; so, he did not visit that group. Secondly, the development of the second source of the Faith

was too fast: from hearing the grand name of Cao Dai on Christmas Eve, only one month has passed, and there were almost enough conditions to form the foundation for universal salvation.

The fact that the Divine established a religion from two separate sources is extremely special and only occurs in the Third Universal Salvation, with Cao Dai Faith. This event was mystic, containing the principle of combining yin and yang, creating a source of vitality for the growth of the religion. That source of vitality continued to develop so that ten months later, the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way took place, presenting the new religion of Cao Dai to the world.

SECTION III.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS FORM

A. DESTINED EVENTS TO LINK THE TWO SOURCES OF CAO DAI FAITH

After emerging and developing as two separate sources, by the end of Ất Sửu year (1925), the first and the second groups of disciples (named as Branch One and Branch Two) were directed by the Divine to join each other.

1) THE FIRST MEETING

It would make more sense to start this section with Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ.

Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ (1880 – 1939) was two years younger than Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. They both attended primary school in Mỹ Tho province, then went to Saigon city to attend Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat. They both passed the examination for Administrators at District level and then promoted to the rank of Tri Phủ (Prefect). In addition, around year 1924 or 1925, they worked together at Phòng Thương Mại dinh Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ (the Commerce Department at the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina).

Therefore, they were considered childhood friends and colleagues (Figure 30).¹⁰⁶



Figure 30: Shown in this photograph were some government officials at the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina. From left to right: Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was the fourth in the second row, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ, the second in the third row, and Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc, the third in the third row.

Besides, at the end of year 1925, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ officially became a member of Branch Two, through the introduction by the spirit of Miss Vương Thị Lễ (i.e., Miss Đoàn Ngọc Quế - Thất Nương Diêu Trì Cung - the Seventh Lady Immortal of Diêu Trì Palace) when this group was still at the initial stage of using table- turning.

¹⁰⁶ In the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, page 35, it was written that "In Saigon, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu first met Quan Phủ Vương Quan Kỳ who had been his childhood friend and colleague. He advised Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ to cultivate his mind and nature, and to worship Cao Dai God."

In the beginning of year 1926, when Cao Dai Supreme God taught the members of Branch Two to worship God Eye, they followed the instructions, but did not understand and still had questions about the meaning of this symbol.

At that time, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ knew that his friend, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, was a disciple of Cao Dai God and worshipped God Eye... But Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ did not receive Cao Dai teaching and did not know about the cultivation method that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was practicing. He only realized that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu appeared to be reticent, introvert, and restrained in interactions with other people.

Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ mentioned these details to the gentlemen of Branch Two. After discussing with each other, they agreed to postpone the meeting with Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, so they had time to learn more about Mr. Ngô's cultivation method, while each side followed its own path.

Nevertheless, it was the right time for the destined event to take place. On the night of January 22, 1926 (the 9th night of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), at home of (Schoolmaster) Đốc Học Đoàn Văn Bản (which later became (Holy House) Thánh Thất Cầu Kho), Cao Dai Supreme God gave the following decisive command:

Kỳ, Trung, Bản, Cư, Tắc! Listen:

When does the sun split in two?

Only with love can you know Cao Đài.

You all are my children and disciples,

Who wants to separate from each other?

*... Kỳ, I want you to love each other, to be together.
Listen and obey.*

*I will tell **Chiêu** again, but you should obey him.*¹⁰⁷

That was the Holy Master's command to order the disciples of Branch One and Branch Two to “**unite**” with each other, to “**listen and obey**”. Carrying out the Supreme Being's order, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ led the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Lê Văn Trung, Đoàn Văn Bản... to come and meet with Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu (by then, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu resided on the second floor of 110 Bonard street, now Lê Lợi street, Saigon District 1).

Thus, the predecessors of the Great Way played both roles of direct participants and witnesses to the miraculous event that united the two groups in accord with Heaven's Will. In the joy and happiness of that meeting, many thoughts and feelings were revealed, many previous questions were brought up, and together they were satisfactorily answered. FAITH in Cao Dai Supreme God was once again affirmed in each person's heart.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Excerpt from the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*, which includes some original holy messages, compiled and circulated by (Cardinal) Đâu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh.

¹⁰⁸ The feature that five gentlemen of one group “unite” with one person of the other group (based on the exact number of names mentioned in the

above holy message) has the appearance of the Return hexagram . Commentary of the Return hexagram has the sentence: “*Bằng lai vô cữu, phản phục kỳ đạo*”. ‘*Bằng lai*’ means having friends come to visit, ‘*phản phục kỳ đạo*’ means returning to the original source of the Way.

January 22, 1926 (the 9th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year) is a very special milestone in the history of Cao Dai Faith, marking the day Cao Dai Supreme God issued the order for the union of the two sources of the Faith, which has a very important meaning in many aspects. Even through a simple calculation of the dates could prove that January 22, 1926, is the exact time point between the lunar and the solar calendars: it is twenty-one days past ‘the solar New Year's Day’ and still twenty-one more days until ‘the lunar New Year's Day’. And counting further, it would be exactly three hundred days from that day to the Grand Opening Ceremony of the Great Way at Gò Kén Pagoda.

Back to the first line of the above poem: *When does the sun split in two?* The Almighty emphasizes that there is only one Supreme Being! One Cao Dai God! Therefore, the disciples of Cao Dai God must no longer be “split in two”. They must love each other and unite.

This statement is for the predecessors at that time and for all Cao Dai followers afterwards.

Regarding the disciples at that time, it could be listed as follows.

- **Branch One** comprised gentlemen Ngô Văn Chiêu, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Võ Văn Sang, Lý Trọng Quý...

- **Branch Two** included gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Hoài Sang, Lê Văn Trung, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Đoàn Văn Bản, Vương Quan Kỳ...

They have really pleased Cao Dai Supreme God. Thus, on January 29, 1926 (the 16th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), He descended to praise:

I am happy that you are in harmony with each other. I want you to be like that forever. This is a very solemn offering to Me...

2) THE SÉANCE ON THE NEW YEAR'S EVE OF ẤT SỬU – BÍNH DẦN.

After the two groups had contacted each other, the first thing was to determine the image format of God Eye as the symbol of worship for Branch Two.

The above timeline (with the mystic arrangement of numbers 1 – 2 – 3 – 9 – 12 corresponds to the principle of the Way) marks the beginning of the establishment of the religious form of God-Way.

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's residence (110 Bonard street) at that time are 10°46'20" N; 106°41'57" E.

The next step was to strengthen the relationship between the two groups. Cao Dai Supreme God planned some collaborative works for the two groups to work together, such as coordinating them in the task of mediumship to serve the Holy Master in the séance at the end of the upcoming lunar year.

On the eve of Ất Sửu year to the New Year of Bính Dần (February 2, 1926), receiving the order given by Cao Dai God prior to that séance, an invocation body was formed by assembling the two groups together, consisting of:

- Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu as the séance master.
- Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and Mr. Phạm Công Tắc as the medium pair.
- Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu as the reader.
- Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành as the scribe.

The delegation group visited each of the following houses of the gentlemen: Võ Văn Sang, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Vương Quan Kỳ, Lê Văn Giảng, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Phạm Công Tắc, Đoàn Văn Bản, Nguyễn Hữu Đắc, Lê Văn Trung, and Lý Trọng Quý.

That day, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc was busy and could not return home on time. His mother, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Ngôn, represented the family to receive the invocation body. The group also visited the homes of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang and Mr. Trương Hữu Đức, but they both were absent.

At each location, the delegation group set up the invocation, and each homeowner was granted a quatrain by Cao Dai Supreme God. Because these poems have historical values, they are all quoted below, mostly based on the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* by Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu combined with some other historical documents.

The poem for Mr. **Võ Văn Sang**:¹⁰⁹

*The new people gladly see the new year come,
As the Third Universal Salvation brings about wisdom.
Maintaining a serene heart is the true method,
To freely ascend to heaven and pass through earth.*

The poem for Mr. **Cao Quỳnh Cư**:

*The youngest child is commonly the most beloved,
But both caring and teaching are love.
Love without strict discipline is false love,
As deceitfulness is due to weak love.*

The poem for Mr. **Vương Quan Kỳ** (Figure 20):

*New day comes, the day is renewed,
New year comes; the Way is advanced.
Strive to earn credit from good deeds,
As the year goes by, the Way quickly progresses.*

The poem for Mr. **Lê Văn Giảng** (Figure 31):¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Mr. **Võ Văn Sang**, in year 1925, was a civil servant (a Judge, Thông Phán) working in Saigon. Before that, through the introduction of Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ, Mr. Võ Văn Sang knew that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu worshipped Cao Dai Supreme God. He also attended several invocation sessions with Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's group. (But he did not acquire Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's cultivation method). After that séance of New Year's Eve, very few people heard about him. Nevertheless, it was known that at the funeral of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu (in year 1932) the two gentlemen Võ Văn Sang and Nguyễn Văn Hoài went to Cần Thơ province to attend.

¹¹⁰ Mr. **Lê Văn Giảng** (1883 – 1932), originally from Phong Thới, Vũng Liêm (Vĩnh Long), was the seventh child of Mr. Lê Văn Thoại and Ms. Võ Thị Lương. He married Ms. Huỳnh Thị Chính (1886 – 1973) and together they had seven children: Lê Văn Như; Lê Thị Ba (died early); Lê Văn Năm; Lê Văn Sáu; Lê Văn Triệu; and Lê Văn Sạc.

On the day of preparation for the Declaration of the Faith, he and his wife, along with several of their children, attended the event. In 1926, Mr. Lê Văn



Figure 31: Portrait of Mr.
**Lê Văn Giảng (1883 –
1932)**

*The world is an ocean of grief,
Step in the Great Way and try to stick.
At home I'm ready to guide you through hardship,
No matter what calamities, they all will be rid.*

The poem for Mr. **Nguyễn Trung Hậu**, given name **Thuần Đức** (Figure 25):

*Teaching traditions and customs to humanity,
You lead them to a virtuous life, despite prestige.
You pass down valuable family discipline to posterity,
You also teach them how to clear up absurdity.*

Giảng was a secretary at Hippolito Company (specialized in selling and repairing cars, on Espagne street). After joining Cao Dai for a short time, he quit his job to focus on practicing the Way. To support his family, he established a rice mill in his hometown. In Saigon, he resided at 85 La Grandière (now Lý Tự Trọng street) and participated in religious activities at (the Holy House) Thánh thất Cầu Kho.

Mr. Lê Văn Giảng was heavenly ordained as Lễ Sinh phái Thượng (Student-Priest of Taoist faction) on June 23, 1926 and promoted to the rank of (Archbishop) Phối Sư (Minh Chơn Lý) in 1932. Around 1930, as the religion faced many challenges and his health was deteriorated, Mr. Lê Văn Giảng returned to Vũng Liêm and participated in religious activities at Ngọc Hoàng Điện (which was the Holy House established by Lady Pioneer Hương Thanh, later became Holy House Thánh thất Vũng Liêm). Mr. Lê Văn Giảng passed away in his hometown on the 16th day of the 3rd month of Nhâm Thân year (1932 and was buried at Quán An Nhon, Trung Tín, Vũng Liêm.

The poem for Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Hoài**:¹¹¹

*Essentially to seek the spiritual way,
With genuine sincerity, you are not far away.
Unaffected by vicissitudes of life, you are worry-free,
Free or worried, all is in your head and nowhere else.*

The poem for Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc**:

*Disappointed by your inability to discern right from
wrong,
I am so discouraged with this next-to-youngest son.
If you want to be rich, I promise to give you the fund,
But the wealth earned must be on par with the work
done.*

The poem for Mr. **Đoàn Văn Bản** (Figure 29):

*Your sincerity and righteousness are so appreciable,
As you care nothing about authority or prestige.
Unfortunately, you have no child to carry on the
lineage,
Seeing that, I also feel uneasy.*

¹¹¹ Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Hoài** was called Mr. Phan Hoài at that time, working as Thông Phán (a Judge) at the Saigon Court and later transferred to the Sa Đéc Court. He had family relations with Mr. Lê Minh Khá (disciple of Minh Tân religious branch), and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Cứng (who, around 1960, was Professor of Painting at some schools in Saigon). In 1925, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hoài already knew that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu worshipped Cao Dai Supreme God. He also attended several invocation sessions, but did not acquire Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's cultivation method. It is still unclear when Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hoài was born and passed away.

We really hope that our fellow believers near and far, who know information about the Cao Dai predecessors, especially those who have not been fully mentioned in this book, would please contact us with the information. We sincerely thank you.

The poem for Ms. **Hùynh Thị Ngôn** (Mr. **Nguyễn Hữu Đắc's mother**):

*Who can answer where the Fairyland is?
Cultivate your mind to find it.
Otherwise, do not be disappointed,
As it is inscribed in the mountain sacred.*

The poem for Mr. **Lê Văn Trung** (Figure 27):

*Seeing the sunshine from dispersing clouds,
Together you gather to lead the Way.
Cao Dai Faith is entrusted to eminent members,
Join each other now to diverge later.*

The poem for Mr. **Lý Trọng Quý**:¹¹²

*One wrong step, one day gone,
Be sincere and don't make mistakes.
Your sloppy past was much pardoned,
Stop committing sin that you furtively make.*

¹¹² Mr. **Lý Trọng Quý** (also named Hồ Vinh Quy) was born in 1872. In 1925, he was Thông phán (Judge) in Saigon, so he was often called Mr. **Phán Quý**. (Senior Brother) Đạo Trường Huệ Lương wrote: "Mr. Lý Trọng Quý or Hồ Vinh Quy ... was tall, easy-going, well-educated in French and profoundly literate in Sino-Vietnamese. He was very gentle, serious, and quiet."

Mr. Lý Trọng Quý, religious name Từ Huệ, practiced Chiêu Minh cultivation method and accompanied Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu in many places for religious activities. Around 1931 or 1932, he separated and worshipped Tam Giáo (called Chiêu Minh Tam Giáo, different from the Tam Giáo in Phổ Độ branch). He established an invocation site in the fishing village xóm Chài (Cần Thơ province) and spiritually received the scripture Tam Nguon Giác Thế (1931). His economic base at that time was the soy sauce factory Quảng Hoà Xương. He also lived in a boat at times.

Mr. Lý Trọng Quý passed away on the new-moon day of the 4th month of Ất Dậu year (1945) and was buried at the Chiêu Minh cemetery (buried in a lying position, and the tombstone bears the name Hồ Vinh Quy).

The delegation group toured around the city, from Bourdais street to La Grandière street, then to Đa Kao district (at Huỳnh Khương Ninh school, i.e., Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu's home), back to Thái Bình marketplace, Cầu Kho district, and Chợ Lớn district ... Accompanying the delegation group, the Holy Master "blessed" humanity prior to the advent of the special year Bính Dần. Finally, the invocation body and other group members returned to Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house just in time to celebrate the New Year's Eve.

Right at Tý time, entering the new year of Bính Dần, the gentlemen set up the invocation and received the Holy Edict from Cao Dai Supreme God:

All disciples! Listen:

***Chiêu**, in the past you promised to spread the Way, and save sentient beings. Now you must follow your words and be the master, guiding my disciples in the virtuous path until they are established. You should not withdraw. You must teach them on my behalf.*

***Trung, Kỳ, Hoài**, you three must take care of representing **Chiêu** to save people. Listen and obey.*

***Bản, Sang, Giảng, Quý**, prepare yourselves virtuously to propagate morality to sentient beings. Listen and obey.*

***Đắc**, you should unite here to help **Trung**. Listen and obey.*

***Đức**, practice holding the beaked basket. **Hậu**, practice holding the beaked basket. Later, follow the brothers to save people. Listen and obey.¹¹³*

¹¹³ The poems for the predecessors and the Holy Edict above were based on the original notes of the spiritic scribe Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành, printed in the book *Lịch Sử Cao Đài - Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*, pages 89 – 91, by author Đồng Tân, published in 1972.

The séance at New Year's Eve of Bính Dần year, with the gathering of almost all members of the two groups, was a special landmark of Cao Dai Faith. In the sacred moment when heaven and earth transitioning to the new year, and in the grace of the Supreme Being, the gentlemen of both groups harmonized their spiritual energy, together accepting the responsibility of preaching the Third Universal Salvation. Through the above holy messages, Cao Dai God has 'positioned and oriented' each person as follows:

- Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was Anh Cả (the Eldest Brother), taking care of all the disciples of Cao Dai Supreme God.
- Gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Vương Quan Kỳ, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Đoàn Văn Bản, Võ Văn Sang, Lê Văn Giảng, and Lý Trọng Quý took care of the propagation of Cao Dai Faith.
- Gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, and Trương Hữu Đức took on the task of mediumship, acting as "Trưởng Soái" ("Commander") of the Holy Master.

This assignment of tasks was the first one, through which the awareness of carrying out the mission by contracting work, dividing responsibilities, was taught by the Holy Master to each member. The predecessors of the Great Way attended the séance at Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house on that New Year's Eve until past 2 a.m.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ To this point, readers of Cao Dai history can reflect to see some more patterns of the Way through the following details:

- Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was accepted as the first disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God on the **1st day of the 1st month** of Tân Dậu year.
- The three gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang performed the 'Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way' and became disciples of Cao Dai Supreme God on the **1st day of the 11th month** of Ất Sửu year.
- And on the **1st day of the 1st month** of Bính Dần year, the Supreme Being assigned tasks and coordinated the two groups of disciples.

3) COMMEMORATION OF GOD (BÍNH DẦN YEAR)

After Tết (the Lunar New Year's Day), on the 9th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year (February 20, 1926), following the Vietnamese traditions, all the gentlemen gathered at Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ's house to hold a ceremony to celebrate Via Trời (the Commemoration of God or Heaven). After the worship, they set up the invocation. The invocation body consisted of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and Mr. Phạm Công Tắc as the medium pair and Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu as the séance master. Cao Dai Supreme God descended and taught:

*The precious lotus throne is blooming more,
All branches will then gather in the same home.
Together try to propagate good morals and
customs,
Be steadfast and diligent to come to Me.*

The branch you belong to is the one I Myself preside over, later you will understand... I am pleased and want you to be in harmony with each other forever; it is a very solemn offering to Me. You must work together to make a name for my Way. My Way is you all, and you are Me. You must empower each other, do not be jealous. Listen! You must keep your position and do as I want. One day you will clearly understand my Will.¹¹⁵

Next, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu asked the Supreme Being to use the names of the disciples present to compose a commemorative poem.¹¹⁶ The Holy Master bestowed:

¹¹⁵ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

¹¹⁶ Recall the year 1920 in Hà Tiên, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu and other disciples were named by Cao Dai Supreme God in a single poem. (Please refer to Chapter 2 Section I Part B.2). Although he was a quiet person by nature, through his wish to receive a commemorative poem from the Holy Master, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu showed that he had a lot of sympathy for the newly gathered fellow believers.

*“Chiêu Kỳ Trung độ dẫn Hoài sanh,
Bản Đạo khai Sang Quý Giảng thành.
Hậu Đức Tắc Cư thiên địa cảnh,
Huyền Minh Mân đảo thủ đài danh.”*

(Pioneer) Tiền Khai Nguyễn Trung Hậu wrote in the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* page 21 as follows:

“The twelve boldfaced words in that poem are the names of the first thirteen disciples of Cao Dai Supreme God (two of whom are named Sang: Võ Văn Sang and Cao Hoài Sang). And the three words in the last line (*Huyền Minh Mân*) are the names of the three séance attendants.”

Besides, it is thought that the word ‘thành’ at the end of the second line of the poem could be the name of Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành, who served as the scribe in the New Year’s Eve séance and was most likely present in that séance as well.¹¹⁷

The above poem, because it has no Sino-Vietnamese version to be based off, is tentatively interpreted as follows:

*My hand holds the waving flag of salvation for all
mankind (even for children still in their mother’s
wombs),
My Way is the sounding bell of salvation in the Last
Era, propagating the Faith until it is accomplished.*

¹¹⁷ According to Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hồng (daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phụng at Nam Thành Holy House), “Mr. **Tuyết Tân Thành** was tall and thin. He had a long beard and often wore áo dài (white robes). He knew many foreign languages such as French, Chinese...” Around year 1931, Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành was a dignitary of the Tây Ninh Holy See, at the rank of Giáo Hữu phái Thượng (Priest of the Taoist faction). Later, he returned to Cầu Kho Holy House and collaborated with the publisher of Đại Đồng Magazine (1932). At that time, as he had no wife nor children, he lived with a nephew in the area of Chợ Đậu (now Linh Đông ward), Thủ Đức district. Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành passed away around the year 1950 (at about seventy years old).

Those who earn a lot of work of merit will ultimately return to Heaven.

Those who wisely practice the God-Way, once fulfilling their mission, will leave good names behind in the history of Cao Dai Faith.

Three days later, on the 12th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year, when all the predecessors were present, the Holy Master reminded:

Chiêu, Trung, Kỳ, Hoài, Bản, Sang, Quý, Giảng, Hậu, Đức, Cư, Tắc:

*As siblings, you should love each other,
Virtue is more valuable than a high ranking.
Being determined to advance to Fairyland,
You should bond together like fellow countrymen.*

Back to the poem mentioning all the names of the disciples on the 9th day of the 1st month, a thoughtful analysis reveals that certainly the Holy Master did not randomly combine the predecessor's names just to include all names and make the poem meaningful. Hidden in it is an arrangement, a 'structure' beforehand, for the composition of the future Church (which the predecessors certainly did not know at that time, because the Faith was still too new) in the following order:

- Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu as Anh Cả (the Eldest Brother), was named first, and expected to be Giáo Tông (the Pope).

- Next were the gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Vương Quan Kỳ, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Võ Văn Sang, Lý Trọng Quý, Lê Văn Giảng who "*prepare yourselves virtuously to propagate morality to sentient beings*", that is, they would oversee the public propagation; later, they would have the duties in Cửu Trùng Đài (House of the Nine Initiations). As for Mr. Vương Quan

Kỳ, he was named second, standing in the middle of the trio Chiêu – Kỳ – Trung, probably because he had the responsibility of connecting the two groups.

- Then the Holy Master continued to name two people: Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu and Mr. Trương Hữu Đức, the newly ordained pair of mediums who just received the order to practice holding the beaked basket so that “*Later, follow the brothers to save people*”. Together with the medium pair Phạm Công Tắc and Cao Quỳnh Cư, these four people later took on important responsibilities in Hiệp Thiên Đài (House of Heavenly Alliance).

As for gentlemen Huồn, Minh, Mân, they seemed to be acting as representatives of humanity.

Looking back, one can recognize this order was the same as the Holy Master’s ‘name call’ on New Year’s Eve of Ất Sửu – Bính Dần year a few days before. Perhaps, the Supreme Being once again indirectly reminded the predecessors of the predetermined mission for each of them. But it is extremely regrettable that the later developments did not fully follow such an arrangement, as the Faith would undergo a lot of changes.

B. EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

1) FORMATION OF THE NEW RELIGION

a) Worship rituals for Branch One

Even after the two groups united, Branch One still maintained its reclusive practice as before. Guided and taught by the Holy Master since 1921, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had established the worship rituals. According to the book *Bốn Nguyên Chơn Truyền* (written by the gentlemen Lê Văn Huân và Nguyễn Văn Lý in 1934 under the command of the Holy Master, to preserve the original teaching for Chiêu Minh followers), the rituals include:

- Regarding the Divine Altar: Above all is the holy image of God Eye with the set of Sun-Moon-Star. Below the holy image is the tablet for Tam Thanh (the Three Purities) in the form of a cross. The vertical bar of the cross has ten words written downwards from the top to the intersection with the horizontal bar as follows: HUYỀN KHUNG CAO THUỜNG ĐẾ NGỌC HOÀNG ĐẠI THIÊN TÔN; and from the intersection downwards to the end of the vertical bar, there are eight words: CAO-ĐÀI – THÁI-BẠCH – THỒ-THẦN – TIÊN-ÔNG. On the horizontal bar, from left to right, are CHƠN THANH – THUỜNG THANH – NGỌC THANH. All are written in Sino-Vietnamese characters. The God Eye symbol and the tablet of Tam Thanh are hung on the wall.

Against the wall is a table about one-meter high, below the tablet of Tam Thanh. Looking toward the Divine Altar, inside on the right is a vase of flower, on the left is a plate of fruit, and in the middle is Thái Cực Lamp (using an oil-lamp that never be off).

In front of Thái Cực Lamp is an incense burner (where five incense sticks are placed when worship). Beyond the incense burner is a plate with three cups of white wine (without lids). Lined up with the three cups of wine on the right is a cup with lid, containing plain water and on the left is a cup with lid, containing tea. Also, on the same row with the cups, on both sides, each side is a wax lamp (only lit up when worship). Later, Chiêu Minh disciples also place a portrait of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu on this table.

In front of the Divine Altar is a lower and smaller table for the worship of Buddhas and Immortals, namely, the “Hội Đồng” (the “Council”) table, on which there is a picture of Buddha; in front of that picture is a wax lamp, and in front of the wax lamp is a sandalwood burner.

- Regarding the prayers for the four daily worship sessions:

At Tý time (from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m.): The following sequence of prayers should be recited: Hồng Thệ, Lập Nguyên, Độ Đòi, Cửu Thiên, Nhụy Châu, “Đại La”, Dâng rượu, Cửu Khổ.

At Mèo time (from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m.): Recite the prayers “Đại La”, Dâng Bông, Dâng Trà, Cảm Ứng.

At Ngo time (from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.): The same prayers as those at the Tý time, but without Lập Nguyên.

At Dâu time (from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.): Only recite the prayers “Đại La” and Dâng Trà.

The above rituals have been strictly observed by Chiếu Minh disciples until present.

b) Completing the worship rituals for Branch Two

The Second Branch, newly guided by Cao Dai God, has progressed very quickly. Their first results were the completion of worship rituals, some of which are listed below:

- Regarding the daily prayers in the early period: When the two groups united, one of the needs that Branch Two asked for support was the daily prayers. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu officially passed on many prayers (which may have been given to him by Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ and were also chanted by disciples of Branch Two). They were:

- Thông Minh Chú (Cửu Thiên Đại La, Thân phi bạch y, ...)

- Nhụy Châu (Nhụy châu Chơn Võ du du¹¹⁸...)

¹¹⁸ On the Mid-Autumn Festival, i.e., on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Nhâm Ngọ year (1942), (Divine Mother) Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu descended in the séance at Thảo Xá Hiền Cung and gave a long poem, in which there was a sentence: “*Nhị châu Chơn Võ nhớ cùng không*”. (Lady Pioneer) Tiên

- Prayers to offer the Three Treasures:
 - + Flower offering (Hoa tươi năm sắc...)
 - + Wine offering (Tửu vị hương...)
 - + Tea offering (Đồng độ thanh trà...)

These prayers were recited after the two prayers of Niệm Hương and Khai Kinh, which were borrowed from Minh Lý Thánh Hội (at this stage the predecessors had not yet officially requested prayers from Minh Lý religious branch – Please find more details in Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.3).

- Regarding the way of prayer chanting: In Lễ Khai Đàn Thượng Tượng (the ceremony to set the Divine Altar) at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house (January 27, 1926), Cao Dai Supreme God praised:

“Good! Very good! My three children.

Cư asked: *What did the Holy Master praise us for?*

*- Chanting.”*¹¹⁹

Probably the Holy Master praised the ‘good chanting’ in two aspects: Firstly, the way of chanting, the chanting voice; secondly, the prayers were selected in accord with Heaven’s Will.

- Regarding the Divine Altar: Above all is the God Eye symbol. However, below the God Eye image the arrangements are different for the two groups: Branch One worships the

Khai Hương Hiếu annotated next to it: *“Before the Inauguration of the Faith, the prayer Nhị Châu Chơn Võ was recited, because at that time the Almighty had not given prayers yet.”* The word ‘Nhị’ was also pronounced as ‘Nhự’.

All the prayers mentioned above are printed in the book *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ Kinh* (the Sino-Vietnamese version) published by Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh in 1926. (Please find more details in section Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.4).

¹¹⁹ Hương Hiếu in the book *Đạo Sĩ I*, page 45.

Cross of Tam Thanh (the Three Purities), while Branch Two reveres Tam Giáo and Tam Trấn (the Three Religious Founders and the Three Spiritual Governors, respectively). But at the beginning, they only worshipped Tam Trấn (the Three Spiritual Governors)¹²⁰.

- Regarding the worship of Tam Trấn in the Propagation Branch: In the séance following Lễ Thượng Tượng (the ceremony to set the Divine Altar) at Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house on January 31, 1926 (the 18th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), Cao Dai Supreme God taught:

*Trung, it is correct that you worship Me above all. Move the statue of Quan Trư  ng to my left side, and that of Quan   m to the right side. Set Th  i Bạch in the middle, below Me.*¹²¹

The complete worship rituals of Tam Giáo, Tam Trấn, Ngũ Chi (the Five Religious Branches of the Great Way) at the Holy Houses was later taught by the Almighty in the séance at Gò Kén Pagoda on the 12th day of the 8th month of B  nh D  n year, when preparing for the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way.

- Regarding the way of bowing: In the séance at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house on February 25, 1926 (the 13th day of the 1st month of B  nh D  n year), Cao Dai Supreme God taught:

¹²⁰ **Tam Giáo** are the three religions: Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Cao Dai followers worship the Three Religious Founders of the Second Universal Salvation: Sakyamuni Buddha, Lao-Tzu, and Confucius.

Tam Trấn – whose full name is Tam Trấn Oai Nghi  m (The Three Spiritual Governors) – represent the Three Religions and directly preside over the management of this Third Universal Salvation. They are: Nh  t Trấn, Đ  c Đ  i Ti  n L  y Th  i Bạch (the First Governor is the Great Immortal Li Tai-Pei); Nh  i Trấn, Đ  c Qu  n Th  i   m B   T  t (the Second Governor is Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva, i.e., the Goddess of Mercy); and Tam Trấn, Đ  c Quan Th  nh Đ   Qu  n (the Third Governor is Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor, i.e., the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient China).

¹²¹ Hương Hi  u in the book *Đ  o S   I*, page 46.

Trung, come to the center and bow to Me...

You do it correctly; but every time you nod, you remember to recite your Master's mantra: NAM MÔ CAO ĐÀI TIỀN ÔNG ĐẠI BỒ TÁT MA HA TÁT...

When bowing, you clasp your two hands together, but you must put your left hand in the Ấn Tý seal, while your right hand is facing up, underneath your left hand.¹²²

This is the Caodaist way to clasp hands in worship: the left hand is clenched, in which the left thumb is in the Ấn Tý seal (the tip of the left thumb presses on the corner of the left ring finger); the right hand covers the outside, with the right thumb being in the Ấn Dần seal (the right thumb presses on the corner of the left index finger). The left hand is Yang, and the right hand is Yin; this way of joining hands follows the principle of “Inside the Yin there is the pure Yang” ... When bowing, the two hands are facing the ground, and the two thumbs press on each other in the shape of a cross.¹²³

¹²² Hương Hiếu in the book *Đạo Sử I*, page 104.

¹²³ In the book *Luận Đạo Vấn Đáp* page 23, Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu explained: “Now that the Way has been spread, it is like a lotus flower that has bloomed, then it produces fruit called fructification. That is, the two hands clasp together like a fruit. But once the fruit has come, it is not allowed to be enjoyed alone. Instead, it must be sown for all living beings to enjoy together, called universal salvation. Therefore, while bowing, the two hands must spread out like sowing seeds.

Furthermore, this way of bowing also follows the meaning of the Creation of Heaven and Earth. The right hand wrapping around the left hand implies the Yin-Yang in harmony. The Yin energy holds the Yang energy to give birth to the Supreme Ultimate, which is depicted by the two hands clasping together. The Supreme Ultimate gives birth to the Twin Senses, which are the two thumbs; when bowing, the two thumbs press on each other in the shape of a cross, meaning that the Twin Senses give birth to the Four Forms, and the other eight fingers spreading out are called the Eight Directions.”

- **Regarding the religious costumes:** On that same day (February 25, 1926), the Holy Master taught Mr. Lê Văn Trung:

*From now on, you must prepare a separate set of wide-sleeved, high-collared ceremonial robe like the monk's robe, but with nine button fastenings, in sky-blue color..."*¹²⁴

A few days later when the ceremonial costume was made, the Holy Master encouraged:

***Trung**, try on the newly tailored grand robe and show it to Me... **Trung**, you look so nice!*

Then the Holy Master elaborated:

Regarding the ceremonial robe, you only use it to perform ceremonies to Me. If you wear it elsewhere, all the Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas must avoid it.

One day, April 1, 1926, when Mr. Lê Văn Trung attended the invocation without wearing the ceremonial costume, the Holy Master asked:

***Trung**, where is your ceremonial robe? Why don't you wear it to attend upon Me?*

- **Regarding the mediumship and automatic writing:** On January 3, 1926 (the 19th day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year), Cao Dai Supreme God taught clearly:

Prior to holding the beaked basket or the spiritual pen, you must change clothes to be clean, bathe to be pure, and dress formally, before coming to the front of the altar to perform your duty. Do not be careless or disrespectful. While holding the spiritic tool, you must

maintain serenity in mind and not think of worldly things; the hands holding the spiritic tool also need to be purified with the fragrance from burned sandalwood; you must quiet your mind for a while, then let your serene spirit leave the body to come to attend upon the Divine Beings and receive the order.

You must have a diligent true spirit to be miraculous, you must be vegetarian to have a diligent soul, you must cultivate the virtues of Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas, to be able to serve as a medium teaching the Way to all sentient beings.

*Those who hold the spiritic tool are like my commanders to spread the Way to the world. Children! Do not consider automatic writing a trivial matter.*¹²⁵

- Regarding the invocation prayers: When the two groups joined each other, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu transferred the invocation prayer (the one starting with “Trời còn...”) to replace the prayer starting with “Chón Bồng Lai là nơi thanh tịnh...” that the gentlemen of Branch Two had previously loaned from Minh Thiện religious branch; and he also transferred the “Thúc cơ” prayer to respectfully greet the Divine Beings descending in the séance (i.e., the one starting with “Mừng thay chi xiết nỗi mừng...”).

In the invocation session on February 3, 1926, as the gentlemen forgot to chant the “Thúc Cơ” prayer, the Holy Master reminded them: “*You should recite Mừng thay...*”

For each and every task the Holy Master taught the predecessors to perform, he then checked and reminded them, helping them to clearly understand the meaning and to further raise their awareness of all the worship rituals.

¹²⁵ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 8, the Holy See at Tây Ninh, 1928 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

2) SETTING THE DIVINE ALTAR IN PRIVATE HOME

To officially become a disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God, the first steps are joining Cao Dai Faith and setting the Divine Altar. Cao Dai predecessors called the setting of the Divine Altar in private home “Khai đàn thượng tượng”.

Thanks to Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s guidance on part of the rituals, especially on drawing the image of God Eye exactly as he had witnessed in Dương Đông, also thanks to the frequent teaching of the Holy Master via automatic writing, the gentlemen of Branch Two, one after another, set the altar in their private homes (Figure 32).

They often organized the invocation in the house where the Divine Altar was just set up, praying for the Supreme Being to bestow blessings upon the homeowners. Here are some typical examples.

On January 27, 1926 (the 14th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), the day of setting the Divine Altar at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư’s house at 134 Bourdais street (now Calmette street, Saigon District 1), Cao Dai Supreme God bestowed grace through the following two quatrains:



Figure 32: Above is a photograph of the Divine Altar for Branch Two, worshipping God Eye and Tam Trấn (the Three Spiritual Governors) according to the initial ritual.

The family of Mr. Bùi Văn Liễu (residing at 145 Phan Đăng Lưu street, Phú Nhuận district) inherited the Divine Altar shown above from his paternal grandmother Đặng Thị Sô (1861 – 1934) and his father Bùi Văn Nhàn (1889 – 1964). The altar is still carefully preserved almost intact and worshipped from the time called “Thánh Thất Lầu” (1927) until now. This is a relevant site that researchers on the history of Cao Dai Faith should visit.

*A flower has been added in my Palace,
From now on, that place is like your home.
Be faithful in worshipping Cao Dai,
You have Me in life and death.*

*The lotus throne is glad to get more bloom,
Having the same Faith is like children of the same*

home.

Be devoted in filial piety to gather later,

It is Me the Compassionate Father.

On January 31, 1926 (the 18th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), the day of setting the Divine Altar at Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ's house at 80 La Grandière street (now Lý Tự Trọng street, Saigon District 1), Cao Dai Supreme God blessed:

The sun rises high above all cloud layers,

As the lotus throne happily blooms with fresh flowers.

The propagation of the Faith is entrusted to you,

To teach my children to be at peace with the way of life.

On that same day, January 31, 1926, the Divine Altar was also set at Mr. Lê Văn Trung's home on "Quai" Testard street (now odd number from 111 to 117 Châu Văn Liêm street, Saigon District 5). The Holy Master taught:

One heaven, one earth, one private home,

You teach mankind to have a kind heart.

Holding the heavenly authority you save people,

Everyone must fulfill the Man Way to become Immortal.

3) BASIC DOCTRINE IN THE EARLY DAYS

In the early days of the founding of the new Cao Dai religion, for many reasons, there were no holy messages that discussed purely the doctrine. Nevertheless, within the holy messages *guiding the practice of the religion* at that time, the Almighty inserted some basic teachings to help believers assert their path of cultivation, not to be misled and become superstitious. Some typical holy messages are listed below.

- **Regarding the law of justice:** On February 20, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

Children! You know the criminal laws of the world are not biased, let alone the laws of Heaven. Then how can you avoid them? Even as you are my children, I still use my power to punish you and will never be biased. You must be very scared of your sins. Only when you are scared that you avoid errors and sins. You must understand that Heaven and Earth are impartial.

- **Regarding mutual love and harmony:** On February 20, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

I am pleased and want you to be in harmony with each other forever. That is a very solemn offering to Me. You must work together to make a name of my Way.¹²⁶

On February 1, 1927, the Holy Master raised awareness further:

Children! Remember to love Me; if you love Me, you will also love the Way; and if you love the Way, you will also love all living beings. If you know to respect Me, you will also know to respect the Way; and if you respect the Way, you must also respect all living beings.

- **Regarding the adherent's virtues:** In the early days of the Faith, many high-profile individuals with titles entered the Faith and participated in religious activities alongside other "commoners". On the 12th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught them altogether:

*Reigning at the Jade Palace since ancient times,
I do not need any throne on Earth.
Poor or noble, only your heart is counted,*

¹²⁶ This holy message is like the previous teaching given on January 29, 1926 (quoted in Chapter 2 Section III Part A.1).

*That heart is the lotus throne where I sit.*¹²⁷

- **Regarding Lý Tam Giáo đồng nguyên (the Principle of the Three Religions having the same Origin):** It has been mentioned multiple times by the Supreme Being. At Vĩnh Nguyên Temple on April 7, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhistattva Mahasattva, teaching the Way in the South.

*Dipankara Ancient Buddha is Me,
Sakyamuni Buddha is Me,
Supreme Master of the Way is Me,
I am also Cao Đài.*

Even prior to the above holy message, on January 23, 1926, the Holy Master had taught:

*All Gods and Buddhas are Me,
I spread the Way by splitting it into three,
I hold the authority to reunite them,
Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are of the same home.*

- **Regarding the concept of Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo phục nhứt (the Five Branches of the Great Way returning to the One),** the Holy Master taught:

In the past, I established the Five Branches of the Great Way, which are: the Way of Man, the Way of Deity, the Way of Saint, the Way of Immortal, and the Way of Buddha. Depending on the customs and morals of each locale, the right Way was created because in the old

¹²⁷ Excerpt from the book *Niên số Thời Thiết Lục*, page 56. According to the séance recording on that day, the Holy Master went on to give the poem: “As siblings, you should love each other...”.

times, people could neither observe Heaven nor examine the Earth. Therefore, they only practiced the Way of their own locales.

But now as humans are globally connected and knowledgeable of the universe, it is ironic that religious differentiation results in human rivalry. I am determined to return the Five Branches to origin and restore unity.

- Regarding Lý Nhất Bồn Tán Vạn Thù (the Principle of One emanating all beings): On February 20, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

The branch you belong to is the one I Myself preside over, later you will understand My Way is you all, and you are Me.

On July 22, 1926, the Holy Master explained it more clearly:

My true spirit gives birth to Buddhas, Immortals, Saints, Deities, and all mankind in the universe. Therefore, you all are Me, I am you all.

- Regarding Cao Dai Cosmology: Cao Dai Faith has a very clear concept of the origin, the creation and evolution of the universe.

In the early days of the Faith, the Holy Master planted the seed of awareness through the holy messages such as those listed below.

On the night of December 25, 1925, at Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house:

From the primordial chaos, nhưt Khí Hư Vô (the energy of the Absolute Emptiness) gave birth to Lưỡng Nghi (the Twin Senses), then gave birth to Tứ Tượng (the Four

*Forms), and divided into Bát Quái (the Eight Directions) before creating the universe.*¹²⁸

On February 25, 1926, the Holy Master taught:

The union of Yin and Yang gives rise to Heaven-Earth Universe, to give birth and transform over and over, that is the Way.

That is the discussion on the ontological category of the universe or the concept of Impersonal God. However, Cao Dai religion also clearly expresses the concept of Personal God by stating that in cõi Thượng Thiên (the Upper Heaven), there are Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas, in the ranks of Cửu Thiên Khai Hóa (the Nine Heavens of Creation). Above all is Thập Nhị Khai Thiên (the Creator of the Twelve Heavens).

*The Creator of the Twelve Heavens is Me, the Lord of the Universe, holding Thập Nhị Thời Thần (the Twelve Gods of Time) in my hands.*¹²⁹

Bạch Ngọc Kinh (the White Jade Palace) is where the Holy Master resides.

Opposite to the Upper Heaven is Tam Thập Lục Động (the Thirty-Six Caves). On August 22, 1926, the Holy Master elaborated:

As soon as the Authority of Bạch Ngọc Kinh (the White Jade Palace) and Lôi Âm Tự (the Thunder Sound Temple) establish the cultivation method for the Third Universal Salvation, Quỷ Vương (the Demon King) started to disturb the true method. He even borrowed my name, but he dared not sit on my throne.

¹²⁸ Huệ Chương, in the book *Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên*, Saigon, 1930, page 22.

¹²⁹ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 12, the Holy See at Tây Ninh, 1928 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

Gradually, the predecessors compiled the holy messages to form the basic doctrine of Cao Dai Faith.

4) ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE NAME ĐẠI ĐẠO TAM KỲ PHỔ ĐỘ (THE GREAT WAY FOR THE THIRD UNIVERSAL SALVATION)

The first observation is that the title ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’ is mainly used in Branch Two (the Propagation Branch) and is rarely mentioned in Branch One (the Inner Cultivation Branch). Branch One fully acknowledges Cao Dai as the Way for the Third Universal Salvation. When he was alive, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu clearly wrote (in the explanation of “What is Cao Dai Faith?” as follows:

God is very merciful, pitying the ignorant people in the sea of suffering, without anyone to guide them. So, He pardons their sins for one more period, which is the third time (The Third Universal Salvation), to save them.

Nevertheless, the title ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’ was almost never used by those who practiced the Inner Cultivation of the Heart (perhaps due to the word ‘Phổ Độ’ – ‘Universal Salvation’). Branch One (which later became Chiêu Minh school) advocated the mission: “To establish and operate the selection of esoteric disciples of Chiêu Minh Tam Thanh Vô Vi”¹³⁰ and used the title ‘Cao Đài Đại Đạo’ (‘Cao Dai Great Way’).

The title ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’ – if not mentioned as prophecies in many scriptures – was accepted by the predecessors of Branch Two on New Year’s Day of Bính Dần year (1926) through the Supreme Being’s words as follows:

I let you understand that: In the Day of Creation, I procreate mankind on the Dần Day – Tiger Day (nhân

¹³⁰ Excerpt from the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, page 45, Chiêu Minh, 1945. ¹³¹

*sanh w Dần – Humanity was born on the day of Tiger).
From now on, I will use you as my outreach arm and
feet to build the foundation of the true religion. I also
consider today is the day of the Opening of the Great
Way, taking the name ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’.*¹³¹

At the beginning of this Bính Dần year, the Almighty have used the name ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’ a few more times to instill its sense in the predecessors’ mind. For instance,

- The second line of the poem that the Holy Master gave Mr. Võ Văn Sang on New Year’s Eve was “*Phổ Độ Tam Kỳ bá thế hiền*” (“*The Third Universal Salvation brings about wisdom*”).

- In the holy message on the meaning of God Eye (from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 12, i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*), there is a passage:

*Establishing this Third Universal Salvation, only I can
allow the Spirit to unite with the Quintessence and
Energy to form the Three Treasures, which is the
miraculous mechanism to transform sentient into saint.*

On the 26th day of the 2nd month of Bính Dần year, Sakyamuni Buddha manifested in the séance at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple:

*Sakyamuni Buddha, transform the Buddha Way,
transform the Buddha Dharma, transform the Buddha
Faith, transform the Buddha Sangha, to return to the
Great Way, and announce it to all sentient beings!*

*Heartfelt congratulations! Heartfelt congratulations! In
meeting the Third Universal Salvation! Deities, Saints,
Immortals, and Buddhas rejoice greatly and laugh
heartily.*

¹³¹ Huệ Chương, in the book *Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên*, page 23, Saigon, 1930.

Next, Cao Dai Supreme God descended and clearly taught the predecessors the meaning of the name ‘Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’:

***Lịch**, have you heard what Sakyamuni Buddha stated?*

What is ‘Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’?

- It is the Third Universal Salvation.

Why is it called ‘phổ độ’? What does ‘phổ độ’ mean?

- ‘Phổ’ means to reveal, ‘Độ’ means to save sentient beings.

Who are sentient beings?

- Sentient beings are all of humanity, not just a selected group of people as you intend to save.

How to complete the two words ‘Phổ Độ’?

- Reveal the precious Dharma and no longer hide it.

*You must practice it again until you are successful; within this 5th lunar month you must be back to **Trung** to spread the Way.*

Thus, from that day on, the title ‘Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ’ and the title ‘Đạo Cao Đài’ (‘the Third Universal Salvation’ and ‘Cao Dai Faith’, respectively) have been used interchangeably, depending on the circumstances. Usually, when referring to religion, the word ‘Cao Dai Faith’ is used, in the meaning that the two words Cao Dai include both the heavenly and the human parts (as mentioned in footnote about the meaning of Cao Dai, in Chapter 2 Section I Part B.1). But when referring to a religious foundation or a major subject heading, the writer will use the words ‘the Third Universal Salvation’; this title leans more towards the heavenly part, towards the heavenly foundation.

It is noteworthy to consider the above holy message given to

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch:

How to complete the two words ‘Phổ Độ’?

- Reveal the precious Dharma and no longer hide it.

Through this holy message, Cao Dai believers realize the blessings they received in the Third Era. This is part of the meaning of the term “**Đại Ân Xá**” (“Grand Amnesty”) that is commonly heard about.

In previous periods of universal salvation, practicing the Way was very difficult. Firstly, this was only the privilege of men. Secondly, when entering the path of cultivation to receive the teaching, practitioners had to be vegetarian and observe abstinence, leave home and cut off family love, and even had to pay for the teaching... And the master had to be extremely cautious in selecting each disciple.

As Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33) followed his father (Great Master Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long, Figure 34) to practice the Minh Đường cultivation, he was very knowledgeable about the secret method of practicing the Way (accompanied by very strict rules). Just one month after joining Cao Dai, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch was taught: “*Reveal the precious Dharma and no longer hide it*” and received a specific order: “*within this 5th lunar month you must be back to Trung to spread the Way.*”

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch carried out the holy order. But perhaps he imposed many strict conditions on those who came to receive the spiritual teaching, especially on the issues of fasting and abstinence. As a result, the transmission of the cultivation method might be delayed.

At Vĩnh Nguyên Temple on the 8th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (July 17, 1926), the Supreme Being taught:

Ngọc Đầu Sư¹³² can teach the spiritual method and spread the Way. Anyone who can fast and abstain ten

¹³² Translator’s note: Ngọc Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Confucian faction) is the heavenly ordained title of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch.

days per month is eligible to receive that precious cultivation method.



Figure 33: Portrait of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (1890 – 1947)



Figure 34: Portrait of (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long (1843 - 1913)

Then the Holy Master clearly explained the reason for the need to fast and abstain, before concluding as follows:

*Therefore, I oblige you to be full-time vegetarian to practice the Spiritual Way.*¹³³

Cao Dai spiritual teaching consists of multiple levels. The fact that the Holy Master allowed “*anyone who can fast and abstain ten days per month is eligible to receive that precious cultivation method*”, of course, was merely to encourage practitioners to enter the elementary level of the spiritual method. They will gradually progress to higher levels that require complete fasting and abstinence. That fact itself was indeed a major shift, “an excessive leniency”, compared with the Ancient Canons. It demonstrated a significant aspect in the many meanings of the Grand Amnesty in the Third Universal Salvation.

¹³³ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 26, the Holy See at Tây Ninh, 1928 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

Later, Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, manifesting in the séance at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple on the 30th day of the 6th month of Đinh Ty year (1977), recalled:

*In the past, seeking the Way one must overcome numerous challenges and hardships. But now in this era of Grand Amnesty, I could not help but be surprised when the Supreme Being ordered me to transmit the spiritual teaching to the followers who kept ten-day fasting. But after understanding the reason, I completely obeyed God's Will. Nevertheless, the new method differs from the ancient one in that the level of spiritual training a disciple receives depends on his spiritual foundation, predestined disposition, and circumstances.*¹³⁴

Looking back, we see that Cao Dai God's disciples of Branch Two (the Propagation Branch) were received the precious spiritual teaching right from the very beginning, to help further clarify their mind so as to face challenges on the path of saving sentient beings.

¹³⁴ From Hiệp Thiên Đài Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam (House of Heavenly Alliance at the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam).

SECTION IV.

SEPARATION AND EMANATION

Uniting then separating, gathering then scattering, are common in this world. Yet, when discussing about religious matter, especially the establishment of Cao Dai Faith in this Third Era, it is certainly not as simple as the predecessors just “all gathering then scattering”. Indeed, there must be many hidden mysteries. But only when the event has passed for a long enough time for prejudice to lessen and when a deep sense of retrospect is considered, can the arrangement of Divine Grace be revealed to some extent.

As of today, through observations on the formation of Branch One then Branch Two (with important milestones mentioned in the previous sections) followed by the assembly of these two groups, everyone clearly recognizes that there must be the Supreme God directing this process.

During the period of joint activities, each group preserved its own practice (both in form and in contents). One still followed the inner teaching of the heart; the other followed the open teaching for the public.

Nevertheless, within each branch there is potential for the development of the other. Branch One, though practicing the

spiritual method of the heart, was the first to adopt God Eye as its symbol of worship. It is noted that the worship symbol of a religion can be seen as the characteristic form, the tangible manifestation of that religion. On the other hand, Branch Two advocated the universal salvation, but its predecessors had to learn and practice the spiritual method (of Minh Đường – at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple) before becoming heavenly ordained dignitaries.

In fact, the period of gathering and joint activities of the two branches was quite short, only about three months. But it was sufficient for the Supreme Being to pass on the spiritual method of Cao Dai to his disciples.

If in previous sessions, the two branches are temporarily likened to the two forms Yin and Yang (originated from the same root: the Innate Energy of Absolute Emptiness), then according to the philosophy of the Logic of Change (I-Ching): ‘In Yin there is the Yang root, and in Yang there is the Yin root’. The seed of Yin and Yang are latently ready. In the way of development, the Twin Senses (Yin and Yang) transform into the Four Imponderable Forms. Of the Four Forms, besides the Great Yin (the Pure Yin) and the Great Yang (the Pure Yang), there are also the Lesser Yin and the Lesser Yang. The latent potential in each branch has almost manifested in this stage. The Inner Teaching of the Heart (Branch One) has appeared with its External Feature and the Open Teaching for Public Propagation (Branch Two) has clearly exposed its Inner Teaching.

That newly manifested part is only a small proportion, but it does exist and is ready to develop.

A. THE SEPARATION

In the early days when the two branches first came into contact, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, with the responsibility of being the first disciple of Cao Dai God, passed on everything he could to the fellows in Branch Two, such as: the drawing of God Eye,

prayers, invocation rituals, ... But apart from those items, he kept his spiritual practice private and would only teach it to those who were predestined for the practice in seclusion.

In the séance on New Year's Eve of Bính Dần year, Cao Dai God instructed:

Trung, Kỳ, Hoài, you three must take care of representing Chiêu to save people.

Thus, the lifestyle of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu at this period also had a new feature:

“Usually, every Saturday he would hold a vegetarian feast at his residence, on the second floor of 110 Bonard street (now Lê Lợi street), to entertain those who had represented him in preaching the Faith.”¹³⁵

With a humble nature and a gentle voice, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu discussed and debated with fellows about work and religious activities.

Then the propagation gradually but strongly developed. Cao Dai religion was formed with mandatory rituals such as the hierarchy of dignitaries, distinctive religious garments, ranks and titles... Moreover, the fact that the worship of Tam Trấn Tam Giáo (The Three Spiritual Governors and The Three Religious Founders) in Branch Two, different from that of Tam Thanh (the Three Purities) in Branch One, somehow reduced the initially close bonds between the two groups. The love of fellow believers and of the Holy Master remained intact. But their practice of Faith was different.

- One is Public Transmission, preaching the God-Way everywhere, bringing faith to everyone in a large scale, and accepting almost every believer who seeks to join in. This

¹³⁵ Chiêu Minh, 1962, *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, page 41.

policy was actively implemented by gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Hoài Sang, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, etc... who strived to make the God-Way known to as many people as possible.

- The other is Heart Transmission, carefully selecting each disciple before confiding the spiritual method, and readily refusing anyone whose virtue is not adequate. The branch of Heart Transmission has no dignitaries and does not even let anyone know that they are practicing and focusing on the cultivation method to liberate the soul. This is the practice of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, initially supported by gentlemen Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Võ Văn Sang, Lý Trọng Quý, ... and later by the entire Chiêu Minh school.

The difference became more apparent when the ‘widespread’ salvation campaign became more successful, leading to the formation of a system of dignitaries and the completion of rituals of Cao Dai religion. The climax was in early April 1926, when in a séance the Holy Master ordered Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to prepare to be ordained as Giáo Tông (the Pope):

*Trung, Cư, Tắc, you three immediately go to Chiêu and tell him to prepare a white set of Holy Costume... Hiếu will have to work hard again; I assign you to make the costume. You must plan to make it in time for the full-moon day. You hear Me.*¹³⁶

In the subsequent séances on the 7th and 8th days of the 3rd month of Bình Dân year, the Holy Master gave detailed instructions on Giáo Tông’s Holy Costume, from the size and style of the crown, the position of the embroidered Eight Trigrams on the robe, to the design of the shoes. But several days later (the 11th day of the 3rd month) when Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương presented to the Holy Master the crown she had just made, He taught:

¹³⁶ Hương Hiếu in *Đạo Sĩ I*, page 106.

*Correct. But whom did you hurryingly make it for?*¹³⁷

This holy message was like a prophecy that the position of Giáo Tông (the Pope) would not be taken over by anyone. Nevertheless, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương still actively made the entire Holy Costume of Giáo Tông on time according to the holy order.

The 13th day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 24, 1926) was marked as the date when Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu declined the position of Giáo Tông. He returned the expenses but did not accept the Holy Costume.

This was truly a great shock to the disciples of the propagation branch. In their grief, the predecessors of Branch Two understood the Holy Master's prophecy two days earlier. It meant that from then on, they reverted to two branches as in the beginning, practicing the Faith in two separate ways.¹³⁸

Regarding Branch One, in the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu* page 45 it is written:

“At Chiếu Minh séance, Cần Thơ province, on June 27, 1926 (the 18th day of the 5th month of

¹³⁷ Hương Hiên in *Đạo Sử I*, page 109.

¹³⁸ The ranks of Giáo Tông (Pope) and Đầu Sư (Cardinal) were established by the Supreme Being from this point on. Though they were left unfilled, the Holy Costumes for Giáo Tông and Thái Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Buddhist faction) were still made ready and placed on the thrones during the First Heavenly Ordination of Dignitaries (please refer to Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.1.b for more details). On the full-moon day of the 10th month of that year – the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way – the photograph of the inner temple of Thánh Thất Gò Kén (shown in Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.2.a) showed that the Holy Costume of Giáo Tông was still placed on the throne.

On the historical aspect, there is a detail worth noting: Over a month before, following the Supreme Being's order, the members of Branch Two had received the spiritual cultivation method at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (details in Chapter 2 Section II Part C.2.b); this method was somewhat different from the practice method of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu.

Bính Dần year) the Supreme Being manifested and taught Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu as follows:

In accordance with your previous vow, I have now promised to let you sit quietly so that I can guide you to follow Me, but you must also save all living beings in time for the Long Hoa Assembly...

The event that the Supreme Being descended to teach each group separately already happened before the two branches collaborated with each other. Starting from their separation, each source of the Faith, once again, continued to be guided by the Holy Master following its own method of practice, as He previously announced in the séance on the 9th day of the 1st month of that year:

The branches will eventually become the same family. Your branches are the branches of which I Myself preside over, later you will understand.

Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu recorded the following statement in the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên*:

“From now, although the two sides have different tenets: one side (Mr. Lê Văn Trung) concerns with spreading the religion, and the other side (Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu) focuses on self-realization; but in terms of beliefs, they both worship the Supreme Being Cao Dai God.”

In fact, both the public propagation and the inner cultivation branches apply the same principle of ‘Self-liberate to liberate others.’ So, even when they split into two separate directions, they do not exactly return to the initial states. Then, is it time for the God-Way to start its emanation? Or should the Dissolution (䷺) and/or the Opposition (䷗) hexagrams in the Logic of Change be used to speculate the issue of ‘Nhân ý, Thiên cơ’ (‘human intention versus heaven secret’)? Regardless of the viewpoint, this event still does not shake the heart of the

practitioners with strong faith. Thus, after that event, the task of preaching the Faith immediately entered a phase of strong transformation for both branches.

In 1967, the two predecessors Thượng Trung Nhựt and Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, representing Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, descended in the séance at Ngọc Minh Đài and explained:

The Faith has two parts: the Invisible and the Visible.

The Visible part is the main body, with its published bylaws, to constitute an exemplary framework to forge and train people to become virtuous like Deities, Saints, Immortals and Buddhas; to be worthy of kneeling in front of the main body of the Supreme Being, the displayed part of the supernatural Creation, in which a single principle that includes both the Visible and the Invisible lies in hiding.

Therefore, the Invisible part, transmitted by heart, is the mechanism that operates and sets the universe in motion, so that all beings can receive the Innate Energy for favorable wind and rain, for transformation and growth. God is it, and man is also it; hence, it is the Way.¹³⁹

It is noteworthy about a story of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu that (Senior Brother) Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương used to recount to the brothers at Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý CĐGVN (the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam). Though it is not part of the mainstream history, its main idea is recorded here:

“In October 1926, the Governor of Cochinchina, Mr. Le Fol, received the Official Declaration of Cao Dai Faith handed by Mr. Lê Văn Trung;

¹³⁹ Hiệp Thiên Đài Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý CĐGVN (House of Heavenly Alliance at the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam) received the spiritic messages at (the Meditation Hall) Thánh Tịnh Ngọc Minh Đài (Vĩnh Hội).

meanwhile, he also received from his subordinates many reports unfavorable to the religion.

Mr. Le Fol hesitated and pondered.¹⁴⁰

Knowing that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was working at the Governor's Palace and worshipping Cao Dai God, yet his name was not listed in the Official Declaration of Cao Dai Faith, one day Mr. and Mrs. Le Fol went to Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's residence to find out. When Mr. Ngô told them about the marvels of spiritic invocation, the couple wanted to serve as medium pair to satisfy their curiosity as well as to gain experience for themselves. Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu agreed and acted as séance master to assist the mediums.

When the invocation began, Mr. and Mrs. Le Fol were unconscious. When they regained consciousness, they got a document in French foretelling that they would receive sad news in the next few days. Indeed, a few days later, news came from France announcing that Mr. Le Fol's father had passed away."

As mentioned above, although this story is not part of official history, it somehow explains the silent reaction of the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina to the document of Declaration of Cao Dai Faith, and it also shows the evidence of Mr. Ngô's indirect support for the propagation work of Branch Two.

At the end of that year, Mr. Le Fol was transferred to the position of Khâm Sự (Resident Superior) in Cambodia. Mr. Blanchard de la Brosse replaced him as Governor of Cochinchina.

¹⁴⁰ Please find more details in Chapter 2 Section V Part A on the Declaration of Cao Dai Faith.

B. THE PATH OF INNER CULTIVATION OF MR. NGÔ VĂN CHIÊU

1) RULES OF ESOTERIC SCHOOL

“Esoteric teaching is to guide predestined people who want to get away from worldly matter and find a way to transcend.

Esoteric disciples must be fully vegetarian and abstain from sexual desire, must exercise four daily sessions of meditation, endure a lot of trials and challenges without lamenting. They must not get involved in or affected by any worldly matter.

Meditation, deeds of merit, and self-discipline must be performed regularly.

To sum up, esoteric disciples must thoroughly understand the profound and hidden principles, purify the mind and repress desires, abandon themselves and their bodies, consider themselves dead but not yet buried.”¹⁴¹

In the first step, esoteric disciples must memorize the Buddhist four-line hymn, which Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu rewrote into the following eight verses:

*First, considering countless sentient beings,
I vow with all my heart to save them.
Second, considering the chain of afflictions,
I vow to cut it off like a boat setting sail.
Third, I willfully devote myself to studying
The miraculous method until being free like the wind.
Fourth, considering the profound Buddha Way,*

¹⁴¹ Chiếu Minh, in *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, page 129, published in 1962.

I vow to attain enlightenment, that is my will.

Besides, esoteric practitioners secretly received and diligently practiced the cultivation method that Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had been taught directly from the Holy Master in Phú Quốc island. These methods have principles that are closely like the Taoist alchemy and the Buddhist Zen methods. Practitioners must exercise meditation four times per day at Tý, Ngọ, Mẹo, and Dậu time.¹⁴²

But another special feature of Cao Dai New Method is that practitioners are “điểm Thần” (“spiritually enlivened”). On the 13th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year (February 25, 1926), the Holy Master explained this matter when teaching the meaning of God Eye as follows:

Spirit is the missing part of the mystic mechanism since the day the Way is closed. Founding this Third Universal Salvation, only I can let Spirit unite with Quintessence and Energy to complete the Three Treasures, the mystic mechanism to transform sentient into saint...

*I have come to reinstate your True Spirit so you can attain enlightenment.*¹⁴³

Later, in 1936, the Holy Master further discussed this topic in Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo scripture:¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Translator's notes: Tý time is from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m, Ngọ time: from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m, Mẹo time: from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m, and Dậu time: from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

¹⁴³ Excerpt from *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, page 12, the Holy See Tây Ninh, 1928 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

¹⁴⁴ Excerpt from *Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo*, Chương 'Thập Tự Tam Thanh', *Chiếu minh Vô Vi Tam Thanh*, 1936 (i.e., *Cao Dai Great Way: The Grand Cycle of Esoteric Teaching*, Chapter 'The Cross of Three Purities', trans. Anh-Tuyet Tran, Cao Dai Temple Overseas, 2015).

*Esoteric disciples must make use of the Five Primordial Elements to create and strain the Buddha relic. To create Buddha relic, you must circulate your breath to unify the five energies and converge the Three Treasures at the head crown...*¹⁴⁵

To converge the Three Treasures, you must conserve Quintessence, nurture Energy, and preserve Spirit. You must strain yourself regularly to forge Quintessence into Energy, Energy into Spirit, and return Spirit to Infinity. Once the Three Treasures converge into the golden head crown, you attain spiritual enlightenment.

To return the five energies into the origin, you must persevere in meditation to calm your mind, control your thoughts, and discipline your five senses. Once the five senses are shut, the five organs harmonize with each other, then your mind becomes serene and tranquil.

Esoteric practitioners must strictly follow regulations and interdictions (such as the Five Precepts, full vegetarianism and sexual abstinence...)

2) THE EXOTERIC PART IN THE ESOTERIC SCHOOL

Since the day Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu left Phú Quốc Island to work in Saigon in 1924 (Giáp Tý year), he still maintained his own method of practice. The fact that Mr. Ngô devoted himself to Cao Dai method at that time was known to a few friends, some of whom were quite close to him, such as gentlemen Vương Quan Kỳ, Cao Văn Sự, Nguyễn Văn Vân, Đoàn Văn Bản, Võ Văn Sang, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Trương Vinh Quy, Lý Trọng Quý, etc... Among them, many were guided by Mr. Ngô to worship God Eye. But he kept his method of practice for himself. It is not known whether at that time the Supreme

¹⁴⁵ Translator's notes: The Five Primordial Elements or the Five Forms of Life are: Fire, Water, Metal, Wood, and Earth. The Three Treasures are Quintessence, Energy, and Spirit.

Being had not allowed Mr. Ngô to teach the spiritual method or because he had not yet found suitable person to confide it. Therefore, the heart-transmitted method held by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was considered still ‘hidden’, because only he knew it, only he practiced it.

The person chosen by Mr. Ngô as his first disciple was Mr. **Lê Văn Huân**¹⁴⁶ (Figure 35), a civil servant who was working at the Saigon Court at that time.

Though still young (twenty-six years old by then), Mr. Lê Văn Huân was devoutly religious. One day, around the 6th month of Bính Dần year, he attended the invocation session at Cầu Kho (Mr. Đoàn Văn Bân’s home). While kneeling outside, he was suddenly called by the Almighty. On that day, the Divine directed Mr. Lê Văn Huân to find Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu to receive the heart-transmitted spiritual method.

¹⁴⁶ Mr. **Lê Văn Huân** – the seventh child of Mr. Lê Văn Tuấn – was born in 1900 in Phước Thái (Quán Chim) Long Thành district.

At the age of twenty-six, while working as an interpreter at the Saigon Criminal Court, he was accepted to be the first disciple of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. In 1931, when Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu retired and returned to Cần Thơ province, Mr. Lê Văn Huân continued to rent the second floor of 110 Bonard street (where Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu had previously resided). Around 1935, he transferred to work at the Court of Cần Thơ province and resided in one of the row houses owned by Mr. Nguyễn Thiện Niệm (at 43 Nguyễn An Ninh street, now 111 Châu Văn Liêm street, Cần Thơ province).

In 1939, Mr. Lê Văn Huân passed away in Cần Thơ. Notably, the day of his passing was the 13th day of the 3rd month of Kỷ Mão year, coinciding with the anniversary of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu’s ascension to Heaven. He attained the celestial title Đạo Đức Kim Tiên.



Figure 35: Mr.
Lê Minh Huấn
(1900 – 1939)

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu agreed to transfer the spiritual cultivation method to Mr. Lê Văn Huấn. From then on, the latter became the first disciple, the eldest brother of the later disciples chosen by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. Also, from then – the 6th and the 7th month of Bính Dần year (1926) – a new move began: The development of the exoteric part of the reclusive Esoteric Branch, i.e., the selection mechanism in the school for the Inner Teaching of the Heart.

The number of disciples who were received the spiritual cultivation method directly from Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was not many, a total of twenty-nine disciples. They were listed, not in the order of admission, as follows: Mr. Lê Văn Huấn, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hùynh and Ms. Trần Thị Hường, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Minh Dương and Ms. Giao Thị Thanh, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Thiện Niệm and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Luân, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lý and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Huyền, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Văn Mười and Ms. Trần Thị Cửa, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Thành Tựu and Ms. Lê Thị Trĩ, the couple Mr. Phạm Văn Thới and Ms. Hồ Thị Ngàn, the couple Mr. Bùi Quang Huy and Ms. Trương Thị Mọn, the couple Mr. Nguyễn Thiện Thương and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Nghiêm, Mr. Trần Nghĩa Trọng, Mr. Phạm Tấn Lộc, Mr. Bùi Hà Thanh, Ms. Bùi Thị Kinh, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Trinh, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Huòn, Ms. Trần Thị Ngũ, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hội, Ms. Ngô Thị Nguyệt, Ms.

Nguyễn Thị Lư.

Disciples of Chiếu Minh, male and female, change their middle name into Minh.

In the book of “*Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Văn Chiếu*”, disciples who directly received the cultivation method from Mr. Ngô Văn Chiếu dedicated a full chapter (Chapter III, page 124) to present Ngoại giáo Công truyền trong Cơ Tuyển Độ (the Open Teaching for the Public in the Inner Selection school), which comprises four parts:

- 1) The ethical part
- 2) The regime part
- 3) The philosophical part
- 4) The metaphysical or mystical part

In the **regime section** there is a passage:

“He (Mr. Ngô Văn Chiếu) said that in this world, no one be a teacher to anyone. He himself is merely a missionary. Those who study the teaching are disciples of God.

The cultivation method, according to him, is the method for ‘lay people, practicing at home’. No churches, no temples, no monasteries are established. No organization of churches, no groups in monasteries.

There is no sacerdotal hierarchy in his community. All disciples are one, they are still learning to self-cultivate, with no distinction of classes.”

C. THE WIDE-RANGE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

1) *ACQUIRING MORE CORE MEMBERS*

In the first few months of the year 1926, the propagation movement initiated by Branch Two progressed very favorably.

Many people of high profiles and of eminent social ranks continuously joined Cao Dai. Meanwhile, numerous monks, especially those from Minh Đường, Minh Sư, and Buddhism, also joined Cao Dai, creating a strong position in terms of social prestige and moral credit for this new religion.

Below are some typical cases of joining Cao Dai and later becoming heavenly ordained dignitaries.

Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (1881 – 1951)¹⁴⁷

On February 1, 1926 (the 19th day of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year), gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Cao Quỳnh Cư, and Phạm Công Tắc asked the Holy Master for permission to go to Cần Giuộc district to convert Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, who was then the District Chief.

It was because during his years of service at Hòn Chông, Hà Tiên (1920 – 1924), Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (Figure 36) had sought the Minh Sư cultivation method, had been a vegetarian and practiced meditation. Hence, his path to entering Cao Dai was very favorable.



Figure 36: Portrait of Mr.
Nguyễn Ngọc Tương
(1881 – 1951)

In the séance on the full-moon day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year (February 27, 1926) held at his house (Cần Giuộc

¹⁴⁷ Please refer to his biography in Appendix I.

District Palace), the Holy Master taught:

***Tương**, listen! From now on, wherever you are in charge of, it will be the blessings of that place.*

Whoever you govern, so do I.

Practice good moral conduct and never make mistakes.

In five years, you should persistently amass deeds of merit,

To guide people from straying.

On the 17th day of the 5th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương was heavenly ordained as Phối Sư (Archbishop) (religious name Thượng Tương Thanh). And on the 12th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, in the séance that the Holy Master taught about the preparation of the Inauguration of the Great Way, he was ordained Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop).

At the end of year 1930, taking the order of the Supreme Being, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương retired from office (he was fifty years old by then), to fully focus on religious activities, which was consistent with the previous holy message: “*In five years, you should persistently amass deeds of merit*”.

Mr. **Lê Văn Lịch** (1870 – 1947) and
Mr. **Trần Văn Thụ** (1857 – 1927)¹⁴⁸

(Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long (of Minh Đường) (Figure 34) built and presided over Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. He was the father of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33). Before passing away, Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long prophesied that Vĩnh Nguyên Temple would become an organization of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation to preach the True Teaching.

¹⁴⁸ Please refer to their biographies in Appendix I.

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch succeeded his father as Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, Cần Giuộc.¹⁴⁹

At the beginning of Bính Dần year, on the 20th day of the 1st month (March 4, 1926), following the order of the Supreme Being, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (at that time he was District Chief of that place), as a Cao Dai follower, along with many other Cao Dai predecessors, came to Vĩnh Nguyên Temple to set up an invocation session (with the prior consent of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch).

That day, (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long received the order from the Supreme Being to descend in the séance, announcing that he had attained the celestial title Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn in the West Nirvana. He advised all disciples and relatives to join and practice the new Faith. Mr. Lê Văn Lịch obeyed.

On the 28th day of the 2nd month of Bính Dần year (April 10, 1926), Mr. Lê Văn Trung received the order from the Supreme Being to set up the Divine Altar to worship Cao Dai God for Mr. Lê Văn Lịch:

Trung, after completing the gateway ceremony for adherents, you must set the Divine Altar for Lịch this same day.

After the ceremony to set up the Divine Altar, they started an invocation session, and the Holy Master gave Mr. Lê Văn Lịch the following message:

*Đầu Sư phái Ngọc (Cardinal of Confucian faction) unites the Confucians,
Leading them to the origin of the Three Teachings.
Thousands of selfless beings are about to meet,
Your great aspiration results in an impressive*

¹⁴⁹ Please find more details about Vĩnh Nguyên Temple in Appendix II.

attainment.

In the First Heavenly Ordination of Dignitaries, the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch received the title of **Đầu Sư phái Ngọc** (Cardinal of Confucian faction), religious name **Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt**.

The conversion of **Vĩnh Nguyên Temple** to **Cao Dai** must also be attributed to the contribution of (Great Master) **Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh** (birth name **Trần Văn Thụ**) (Figure 37), who was then the head disciple of Venerable **Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn** at that temple, and also the father-in-law of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33). With the consent of **Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh**, **Vĩnh Nguyên Temple** smoothly became a **Cao Dai** “temple”. Meanwhile, many other **Lão Sư** (Master) and **Đại Lão Sư** (Grand Master) did not agree to stay.

On the 10th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master bestowed upon (Great Master) **Trần Văn Thụ** the title **Chưởng Pháp phái Ngọc** (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction).



Figure 37: Portrait of (Great Master) **Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh** (Trần Văn Thụ) (1857 - 1927)



Figure 38: Portrait of (Great Master) **Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang** (Trần Thanh Nhân) (1870 - 1946)

Mr. Trần Đạo Quang (1870 – 1946)¹⁵⁰

Since the age of twelve, Mr. Trần Thanh Nhân (Figure 38) has devoted himself to the Minh Sư practice. He was determined to perform self-cultivation, gradually progressing to the final level of Thái Lão Sư (Great Master), at which his religious name was Trần Đạo Quang (when he was forty-five years old). He was then preparing to receive the Patriarch Seal of Phổ Tế Sect from Patriarch Trần Đạo Khánh (in China).

Around the beginning of Bính Dần year, the gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Vương Quan Kỳ, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Nguyễn Văn Kinh ... came to Linh Quang Temple¹⁵¹ (Gò Vấp district), where Mr. Trần Đạo Quang was the Abbot, asking for permission to set up the invocation according to the order of Cao Dai Supreme God. Although it was sudden and unexpected but based on his understanding of the Way and his self-confidence, the Great Master agreed.

That night, Cao Dai Supreme God converted Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang into Cao Dai Faith. Many disciples of Phổ Tế Minh Sư at that time followed his example, among them were Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương (later was heavenly ordained as Thượng Chương Pháp, i.e., Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction), Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh, Ms. Lê Thị Ngân (Đạo Minh), Ms. Nguyễn Thị Quyền (daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương), ...

Mr. Trần Đạo Quang was heavenly ordained as quyền Thượng Chương Pháp (Acting Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction) on the 12th day of the 12th month of Bính Dần year (January 15, 1927), and about a year later he was ordained as Ngọc Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction).

¹⁵⁰ Please refer to his biography in Appendix I.

¹⁵¹ Please find information on Linh Quang Temple in Appendix II.

**Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (1873 – 1950) and Ms.
Lâm Ngọc Thanh (1874 – 1937)¹⁵²**

The conversion of Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ to Cao Dai is quite special. First, when they got married, both were old (over forty), widowed, and had children. Second, they were both very rich. Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Figure 39) was a successful businessman in Saigon, while Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh (Figure 40) was a wealthy landowner in Vũng Liêm (Vĩnh Long province). And before adhering to Cao Dai, they both took refuge in Buddhism with (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân at Giác Hải Pagoda (Phú Lâm).



Figure 39: Portrait of Mr.
**Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (1873 –
1950)**



Figure 40: Portrait of Ms.
**Lâm Ngọc Thanh (1874 -
1937)**

After attending a few Cao Dai invocation sessions and clearly feeling the miracle, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ wrote a “Letter to inquire about the Faith” with the following content:

“Saigon, June 25, 1926

My secular name is Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ.

I beg You to give me a sure prediction of my life,
when I pass away, and which religion among the
Three Teachings I should adhere to.

¹⁵² Please refer to their biographies in Appendix I.

If I take refuge in the Faith that You preach, I beg
if You please accept it?

Please give the response in national language.

Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ bowing.”

The Supreme Being then accepted the couple as core disciples and Cao Dai predecessors. Especially, on the 4th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (July 13, 1926), the Supreme Being descended in the séance at Tân Định (Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt was also present in that séance) and bestowed his grace to the couple:

*Thơ, you and your wife kneel in the center, holding
hands:*

*Today God bless your wedding,
You are inseparable soul-and-body throughout
your lifetime.
Be determined in perfecting your virtues,
I am the Supreme God, presiding over your
marriage.*¹⁵³

This was probably the only time that the Supreme God Himself granted the marriage blessing, and this poem later became the prayer used in Cao Dai ‘wedding ceremony’.¹⁵⁴ From then on, the two of them were very active in practicing Cao Dai Faith, contributing a lot of effort and money to build the early foundation of the religion.

In addition, many other cases of converting into Cao Dai could be mentioned. For example, Mr. Ca Minh Chương (Cần Giuộc district), Yết Ma Nhung (Vạn Phước Pagoda, Hóc Môn

¹⁵³ The handwritten poem in Sino-Vietnamese is shown in Appendix I, the biography of Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ.

¹⁵⁴ The marriage rite is a special (but not mandatory) part of the wedding ceremony. This sacrament must be performed by a priest who has studied and mastered it.

district), Yết Ma Luật (Hội Phước Pagoda, Cần Đước district), and Yết Ma Giồng (Phước Long Pagoda, Chợ Đệm district) were those who had followed Minh Sư and/or Buddhism... Besides, those with social titles such as gentlemen Lê Bá Trang (Governor – Đốc Phủ), Lê Văn Hóa, Mạc Văn Nghĩa (Prefect – Tri Phủ), Ngô Tường Vân (Judge – Thông Phán), Nguyễn Phát Đạt (Property Owner – Nghiệp chủ), Ngô Văn Kim (Large Village Chief – Đại Hương Cầm), Huỳnh Văn Giới (Judge - Thông Phán), Nguyễn Văn Lai (Councilman – Nghị Viên), Nguyễn Văn Chúc (Canton Chief – Cai Tổng), Huỳnh Trung Tuất (Property Owner – Nghiệp chủ), Võ Văn Đồ (Businessman – Thương gia), etc... helped to strengthen the new religion.

There was the case of a gangster nicknamed Tư Mất (birth name Nguyễn Phát Trước) – who was listed by the French police as "bandit dangereux, chef de société secrète" (roughly translated as "dangerous robber, mafia boss") – who converted to Cao Dai and wanted to know about his deceased father. In a séance on March 9, 1926, Mr. Tư Mất was taught by the Holy Master as follows:

You want to know how your father is, ask yourself ...

*You have committed crimes, but your father is a loyal and filial person who loves his fellow countrymen. However, he has committed the sin of not teaching his children properly, causing a lot of harm to other living beings; it is only because of this related sin that he is in the purgatory...waiting for you to come. You must repent, exhort to goodness, cultivate your mind, improve your characters to save him.*¹⁵⁵

During this period, the faith in Cao Dai God was increasingly spreading, expanding throughout the South Vietnam, reaching deeply into the masses, from intellectuals and government officials to workers and farmers. Each person, joining Cao Dai,

¹⁵⁵ Excerpt from the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*, page 69.

strongly believed and was happy for the fate of the country and for their own destiny to be lucky enough to meet the God-Way.

On the other hand, the French colonial government at that time was concerned about the fast-paced development of Cao Dai Faith, thereby, worrying even more.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Being was preparing for the ordination ceremony for the predecessors, leading up to the official opening of the religion to humanity.

2) THE FIRST HEAVENLY ORDINATION

Since the beginning of Bính Dần year (1926), Cao Dai Supreme God has taught many worship rituals to the gentlemen in Branch Two ... step by step arranging for the formation of the new religion. Next, for this new religion to appear formal, it was time to determine the hierarchy of dignitaries at all levels to manage religious activities and to prepare for the establishment of a Holy See.

During the 2nd month and early in the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, the Supreme Being outlined the hierarchy of Cao Dai religion, according to which, above all is the position of Giáo Tông (the Pope), below are the Three Đầu Sư (Cardinals) of the three factions: Thái (Buddhist), Thượng (Taoist), and Ngọc (Confucian), followed by other ranks of dignitaries.¹⁵⁶ For example, in the séance on the 3rd day of the 2nd month of Bính Dần year at Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house, the Supreme God taught:

***Lịch**, listen to Me. I have decided to select the three Đầu Sư (Cardinals) to preach the Way. They should successfully unify Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo (the Five Branches of the Great Way) ...*

¹⁵⁶ The hierarchy of Cao Dai Clergy was completed on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, when the Supreme Being bestowed Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Constitution).

Cao Đài Supreme God has arranged the personnel as follows:

- Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu will receive the title of Giáo Tông (Pope), the Eldest of all adherents.

- Mr. Lê Văn Trung will receive the title of Đầu Sư phái Thượng (Cardinal of Taoist faction).

- Mr. Lê Văn Lịch will receive the title of Đầu Sư phái Ngọc (Cardinal of Confucian faction).

Đầu Sư of phái Thái (Cardinal of Buddhist faction) and other ranks of dignitaries would be assigned later.

And Cao Dai Supreme God chose the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 26, 1926) as the day for “**lễ thọ Thiên Phong Chức Sắc**” (“the Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination”), held at the private residence of Mr. Lê Văn Trung (Chợ Lớn district).

a) Design of the Holy Costumes for Dignitaries

In preparation for the Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination, the Supreme Being assigned the task of making holy costumes to (Lady Pioneer) Tiền khai Hương Hiếu (wife of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư). She recorded the milestones of making holy costumes in the book of *Đạo Sử I* as follows:

* Regarding the holy costume for Đầu Sư phái Thượng (Cardinal of Taoist faction), on the 13th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year (February 15, 1926), the Holy Master instructed:

(Trung) From now on, you must have a separate set of wide-sleeved, high-collared ceremonial robes, like the monk's robes, but with nine sky-blue ribboned buttons, and a blue turban of nine layers. You wear linen shoes when attending on Me.

* Regarding the holy costume for Đầu Sư phái Ngọc (Cardinal of Confucian faction), on the 26th day of the 2nd month of Bính Dần year (April 8, 1926), the Holy Master instructed:

Lịch, you dress like Trung, but in pink color.

* Regarding Đầu Sư phái Thái (Cardinal of Buddhist faction), though the Holy Master has not yet appointed anyone to take charge, the holy costume was still made in the above style but in yellow color.

* Regarding the holy costume for Giáo Tông (the Pope), in April 1926, (Lady Pioneer) Tiên khai Hương Hiếu received the order from Cao Dai Supreme God to make it as a white robe, embroidered with the Octagonal Plan which consists of the trigrams Qian (Heaven) ☰, Dui (Marsh) ☱, Li (Fire) ☲, Zhen (Thunder) ☳, Xun (Wind) ☴, Kan (Water) ☵, Gen (Mountain) ☶, and Kun (Earth) ☷, in the exact positions that the Holy Master had clearly pointed out, because “*Định luật luyện đạo nơi đó*” (“*The principle of practicing the Way is there*”). The Qian (Heaven) ☰ trigram alone is embroidered on the crown of Giáo Tông.

b) The first Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination (April 1926)

The Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination was held on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 26, 1926). The private residence of Mr. Lê Văn Trung¹⁵⁷ was granted the grace to receive the ceremony and arrange the decoration.

¹⁵⁷ According to (Elder Sister) Đại Tỷ Hương Nguyệt (Acting Lady Cardinal Quyền Nữ Đầu Sư of Ban Chính Đạo, and the second daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương), thanks to having visited Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt's house with her father a few times, she vividly recalled that it was an old-style bricked rowhouse with two floors, about four meters wide with a front yard, located between Nguyễn Trãi and Lão Tử streets, around 121 Châu Văn Liêm street (at that time called Quai Testard), the current house has no traces of the past. Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt worshipped the Holy Master upstairs, so the ceremony was held on the second floor.

The content of the ceremony and the arrangement of the ceremonial room (Figure 41) were detailed by the Supreme Being on the 11th night of the 3rd month (at the house of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư), and on the 13th and 14th nights of the 3rd month (in Cầu Kho Invocation Site) as follows:

In front of the Divine Altar was a large chair, raised high to serve as the throne of Giáo Tông (the Pope). Next, in front of the Giáo Tông's throne was three other chairs placed in a horizontal row as the thrones of the three Đầu Sư (Cardinals).

The four chairs were the existing sofas in the living room, which were covered to be neat and clean. Placed on the four thrones were the four sets of holy costumes for Giáo Tông and Đầu Sư: The holy costume of Thượng Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Taoist faction) (sky-blue color) was placed on the middle throne, that of Ngọc Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Confucian faction) (red color) was placed on the right throne, and that of Thái Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Buddhist faction) (yellow color) was placed on the left throne (from the outside looking in).

Placed in front of the three thrones of Đầu Sư was a tablet with the inscription “Cửu Thiên Cảm Ứng Lôi Thỉnh Phổ Hóa Thiên Tôn” (i.e., Ngũ Lôi – the Five-Thunder God). On the tablet was a talisman “Kim Quang Tiên”, the words on the tablet and the talisman were both written by Mr. Lê Văn Lịch under the command of the Supreme Being.

In front of Ngũ Lôi table was the invocation table for the Supreme Being to ordain the dignitaries. After the séance session, this table was removed.

Facing the Divine Altar, at the end of the room, was the table of Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector). At the tables of Ngũ Lôi and Hộ Pháp, the dignitaries would kneel and swear.¹⁵⁸

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhật's house in the past are: 10°45'09" N; 106°39'31" E.

¹⁵⁸ Vi Hộ Pháp, i.e., Hộ Pháp Vi Đà Tôn Giả, the heavenly title of His Holiness Vi Hộ after the Phong Thần class, was the Royal Horse King to

At exactly Tý time of the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, all the predecessors came together. (According to (Lady Pioneer) Tiên khai Hương Hiếu in *Đạo Sư I*, page 93, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu came for a while but did not attend the ceremony).

First, they started the invocation to receive the ordination. The Holy Master descended and taught:

The Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva, teaching the Way in the South.

... Đức and Hậu, you are ordained Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ

Cư, you are ordained Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ

Tắc, you are ordained Hộ Giá Tiên Đồng Tá Cơ Đạo Sĩ

Trung and Lịch, you have already received your titles, just based on your titles to follow my orders

Kỳ, you are ordained Tiên Sắc Lang Quân Nhậm Thuyết Đạo Giáo Sư

Bản, you are ordained Tiên Đạo Công Thần Thuyết Đạo Sư...

protect the Supreme Being in Heaven. In the Third Universal Salvation, He took the role of Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) in the mortal body of Mr. Phạm Công Tắc. In the holy message at Bảo Ân Đường (Pnom Penh, Cambodia) on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Bính Thân year (1956), the Holiness Đức Thanh Sơn Đạo Sĩ, after being asked by Mr. Phạm Công Tắc, said: "... previously He was in the Vi family, but now He is in the Phạm family...". Cao Dai followers call this altar Hộ Pháp altar.

Regarding the Giáng Ma Xử talisman that Đức Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) holds in his hand, some books write it as Gián Ma Xử. The word Giáng (降) can also be read as Hàng, meaning to surrender. Xử is a weapon with the shape like a pestle.

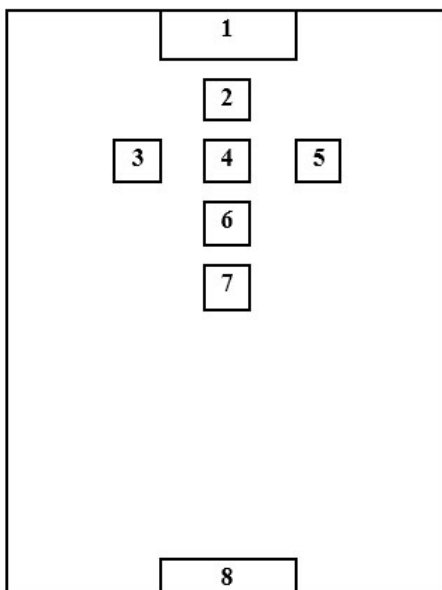


Figure 41: **Diagram of the ceremonial room for the First Heavenly Ordination on the second floor of Mr. Lê Văn Trung's house.**

1- Divine Altar	2- Throne of Giáo Tông
3- Throne of Thái Đầu Sư	4- Throne of Thượng Đầu Sư
5- Throne of Ngọc Đầu Sư	6- Ngũ Lôi table
7- Invocation table	8- Hộ Pháp table

At the end of the séance, as some predecessors had further questions, the Holy Master taught:

Just follow what I tell you to do.

After the invocation session, they divided into three groups to perform the Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination.

As being instructed, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, held the incense stick and knelt in front of the Divine Altar, composing his mind as if he were performing the mediumship. The Supreme Being entered Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's body, stepped forward and used

the incense stick as a pen to draw mystic spells on the holy costumes and thrones.

The two (Cardinals) **Đầu Sư Thượng Trung Nhật** and **Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt** came to kneel at their thrones and the Holy Master drew a talisman on them. Then they put their holy costumes on, stepped forward to perform the rites in front of the Divine Altar and of the **Giáo Tông** throne, then returned to sit on their thrones. All the disciples knelt down.

At that time, Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc**, stepped up to stand on the table of (Dharma Protector) **Vi Hộ Pháp**, his face was covered with nine inches of red cloth, his hand held the **Giáng Ma Xử** talisman (this talisman was also ordered to be written by Mr. **Lê Văn Lịch**). The two gentlemen **Trương Hữu Đức** and **Nguyễn Trung Hậu** stood to guard on both sides of Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc**. The Supreme Being (in the mortal body of Mr. **Cao Quỳnh Cư**) held the incense pen, walked to the table to summon **Ngũ Lôi Thiên Tôn** (The Five-Thunder God), then headed to the table of **Vi Hộ Pháp** (Dharma Protector) to expel the spirit of Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc**.

When it came to the oath-taking part, the two **Đầu Sư** (Cardinals) stepped down from their thrones, knelt in front of **Ngũ Lôi** table and took the vow, saying word for word exactly what was previously instructed at **Cầu Kho** Invocation Site on the 14th night of the 3rd month:

*We are **Lê Văn Trung**, heavenly blessed appellation **Thượng Trung Nhật**, and **Lê Văn Lịch**, heavenly blessed appellation **Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt**, swear to Heaven-Earth, in front of **Ngũ Lôi** precious Dharma to fulfill the Heaven Law and guide our younger brothers, who are all disciples of **Cao Dai** Supreme God, first and foremost, by following the order of the Holy Master, and daring not to usurp His power to establish Heresy. If, in the future, we break the Heaven Law, we*

swear by Ngũ Lôi to destroy us.

Then, the two Đầu Sư went to Vi Hộ Pháp table, knelt and swore the same oath as above, except for the last sentence:

... If, in the future, we violate the Heaven Law, we vow that Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) will enforce the law to condemn us in the Three Miserable Realms and be unable to escape the world.

After swearing, the two Đầu Sư returned to their thrones. The other disciples took turns to perform the rites in front of the Divine Altar, then knelt in front of Ngũ Lôi table to take the oath:

I am (last name, first name) swearing from now on to know only the Way of CaoDai God, to not change my mind, to unite with all disciples, to uphold the CaoDai laws. If I have second thoughts, Heaven-Earth will destroy me.

Then they all came to Vi Hộ Pháp table and repeated the same oath as they had done in front of Ngũ Lôi table. Each disciple was granted spiritual energy through a talisman drawn by the Holy Master using the incense pen.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Mr. **Nguyễn Thế Phương**, i.e., journalist Nam Đình (1906 – 1978) on February 2, 1955, from France (the address was 22 rue Lambardie, Paris 12^e), sent a letter to (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc, through which we learned some more details about the First Heavenly Ordination. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

“Your Excellency, thirty years has passed, and today I dare to sincerely recall the unprecedented solemn ceremony at the house of Quyền Giáo Tông (the Acting Pope) on Tổng Đốc Phương street (the former name of Châu Văn Liêm at present; its old name was Quai Testard – the author’s notes), Chợ Lớn district. That night, there were nineteen people in total, and I was so honored to be among them... After the Holy Master entered the body of Sir Cao Thượng Phẩm, he held incense and stepped up to the altar... In that solemn and

In summary, up to the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, the first heavenly ordained dignitaries of the propagation movement included:

Thượng Đầu Sư: **Thượng Trung Nhật** (Lê Văn Trung)

Ngọc Đầu Sư: **Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt** (Lê Văn Lịch)

Hộ Pháp, Hộ Giá Tiên Đồng Tá Cơ Đạo Sĩ: **Phạm Công Tắc**

Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ: **Cao Quỳnh Cư**

Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ: **Trương Hữu Đức** and **Nguyễn Trung Hậu**

Tiên Sắc Lang Quân Nhậm Thuyết Đạo Giáo Sư: **Vương Quan Kỳ**

Tiên Đạo Công Thần Thuyết Đạo Sư: **Đoàn Văn Bản**

3) THE FIRST MISSIONARY INVOCATION SITES

From March 1926 onward, the number of people joining Cao Dai Faith increased. Missionary invocation sites were quickly opened everywhere, regularly organizing spiritistic séances for Divine Beings to teach and receive followers. These public invocation sites were mostly set up in the homes of those who were willing to offer. A few (not regularly organized) invocation séances were held at the temples sympathetic to the new religion, such as Trường Sanh Temple (Cần Giuộc district), Vạn Phước Temple (Tân Xuân, Hóc Môn district), ...

At sites with a fixed schedule, on the new-moon and full-moon days or every Saturday evening, believers gathered to worship the Holy Master. In those gatherings, whoever sincerely

dignified night, the Holy Master accepted all nineteen people... The Holy Master Himself held incense pen and drew a talisman on the head of each person, when we knelt to take the oath... I was honored to make the vow that night; even when I die, I will never forget it.”

wanted to become Cao Dai followers would prepare themselves by observing vegetarianism and abstinence before asking the Management Board to write their names in the petition to join the religion. After the worship session, everyone would participate in the invocation to pray for the Divine to descend and teach.

In the first part of the séance, Divine Beings usually instructed the local officials about the common practice of the Faith, interspersed with some basic teachings. In the second part, Divine Beings called the name roll to accept new believers. There were also cases where Divine Beings rejected or advised the inquirers to retreat for a while and improve their virtues before coming back for the petition to join again. In this period of religious propagation, Divine Beings specially granted each new disciple a commemorative quatrain. Below are a few examples.

- Mr. Ca Minh Chương, joining the religion on April 3, 1926, in Cần Giuộc district, received from the Holy Master the following poem:

*Few people in this world are one hundred years old,
Yet, you are predestined to be a Thời Quân (King of Time)
at age seventy.
You often seek but do not see the right way through,
Because karma and retribution determine your fate.*

- On February 2, 1926 in Cần Giuộc, the Holy Master instructed Mr. Ngô Văn Kim:

*One tree, one mountain, one landscape,
With red sun and blue clouds, you draw leisurely
strokes.
Enjoying forest and waterfall, you despise the mundane
world.
From now on, wind and moon are your only
companions.*

- On April 7, 1926 in Cần Giuộc, Ms. Trần Thị Khá (wife of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch) received from the Holy Master the following poem:

*To recover the spiritual heart you should preserve
yourself,
As you can transform yourself into your spiritual self.
Even if the world treasures fill up the Thái Mountain,
It's still not worthy as a night is spent preserving the
spiritual heart.*

a) Distribution of the first missionary invocation sites

In addition to the private invocation site at the home of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, which specialized on the inner cultivation only, there were two other sites at the home of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc served as the medium pair) and at the house of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt (gentlemen Cao Hoài Sang and Cao Quỳnh Diêu were the medium pair), where Mr. Lê Bá Trang often attended. These two sites were generally used for Divine Beings to instruct the predecessors on the common practice of religion, and rarely for accepting followers.

Other public invocation sites were scattered throughout the city of Saigon and neighboring areas. They could be listed as follows.

- **Cầu Kho Invocation Site:** Located at 42 Général Leman, corner of Nguyễn Tấn Nghiêm street (now Cao Bá Nhạ and Trần Đình Xu streets). This place was then the private home of Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản, Principal of Cầu Kho High School (now Trần Hưng Đạo School, Saigon District 1). Gentlemen Nguyễn Trung Hậu and Trương Hữu Đức were séance mediums at this

site.

Frequenting this invocation site were gentlemen Vương Quan Kỳ, Lê Văn Giảng, Nguyễn Văn Muôi, Ngô Tường Vân, Huỳnh Văn Giỏi, Nguyễn Văn Tường, Nguyễn Phát Đạt, Tuyết Tân Thành, Lê Thế Vĩnh,... (Please refer to Appendix II on Historical Sites of Cao Dai Faith).

- Tân Định Invocation Site: Established at the house of Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh (i.e., Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ), 429 Paul Blanchy street, corner of Paul Blanchy and Champagne streets (now Hai Bà Trưng and Lý Chính Thắng streets).¹⁶⁰ Gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc were the medium pair at this site. By the 6th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ wanted to practice mediumship. Thus, on the 28th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught:

*Thơ, if you don't mind the mediumship, I will let you perform it with **Hậu** whenever the invocation takes place at your house.*

*Regarding the medium to pair up with **Hậu**, it will take a while to find one. I have allowed him to find and train that one.*

¹⁶⁰ This was a very spacious house with many rooms. In the middle of the front yard there was a large rockery hòn non bộ (a miniature mountain) facing Paul Bert street (now Trần Quang Khải street).

According to (Elder Sister) Đại tỷ Hương Hương (the eldest daughter of Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh), around 1930, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh mortgaged this house for eight thousand piasters (VND), plus another three thousand piasters (VND) to purchase the one-hundred hectares of land from Mr. Franchini (a Corsican, owner of Continental restaurant in Saigon, Vietnam). This land was in the Mít Một (Mimot) area, Tây Ninh province. He had planned to build Cốc Lạc Cảnh (Paradise Spectacle). But later he donated this land to Hội Thánh (the Holy See). Currently, the house where Tân Định Invocation Site was established, no longer has its initial architecture. It has been divided into many separate house units numbered from 441A to 443B Hai Bà Trưng street, Saigon District 1 (next to Lương Kim Vy Maternity Hospital).

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of the old Tân Định Invocation Site are: 10°47'27" N; 106°41'15" E.

Later, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh did not often perform mediumship, because he had to carry out many religious tasks.

- **Lộc Giang Invocation Site:** It was established at Phước Long Pagoda (Chợ Đệm district). The head of the pagoda was Yết Ma Giồng¹⁶¹ who had already converted to Cao Dai. Gentlemen Trần Duy Nghĩa¹⁶² and Trương Văn Trảng¹⁶³ served as the medium pair.

Frequenting this site were gentlemen Mạc Văn Nghĩa, Trương Thành Tựu, Nguyễn Hữu Dư, La Trường Miên, Lê Minh Thúc, Bùi Tấn Tước, Nguyễn Công Nhâm, Lê Văn Khỏe, Nguyễn Bình An, Nguyễn Thế Trọng.

On the 16th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (February 17, 1927), this pagoda became the Holy House Thánh Thất Lộc Giang after being approved by the Holy Master at Gò Kén Pagoda as follows:

Giồng, Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope) accepted the pagoda to be a Holy House and asked for you to be a

¹⁶¹ **Yết Ma Trần Văn Giồng** was born in Kỷ Mão year (1879) and passed away on the 24th day of the 5th month of Canh Ngọ year (1930). After his passing, Lộc Giang Holy House was reverted to Phước Long Pagoda. This pagoda still retains its old architecture, comprising three compartments with tiled roof and wooden pillars, facing Chợ Đệm river (Hamlet 4 – Tân Nhựt village, Bình Chánh district). (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS: 10°41'27" N; 106°34'01" E). Nearby is Long Triều Pagoda (larger than Phước Long Pagoda), which has always belonged to Buddhism.

¹⁶² Mr. **Trần Duy Nghĩa** (1888 – 1954), a native of Gò Công province, was husband of Ms. Hồng Thị Đỏ. They had no children. In 1926, he worked as a secretary for the Railway Department. He joined Cao Dai on February 23, 1926, and was heavenly ordained as Khai Pháp Chơn Quân on December 24, 1926.

¹⁶³ Mr. **Trương Văn Trảng** (1893 – 1965), a native of Cây Đào, Biên Hòa province, was husband of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Phò (1874 – 1917). They had a daughter named Trương Thị Nhạn. He worked together with many other Cao Dai predecessors at the Railway Department and was heavenly ordained as Thiên Phong Tiếp Pháp Chơn Quân on December 24, 1926.

*Giáo Hữu (Priest). I approved it. **Giống**, try to practice diligently, listen ...*

*I bless you all. Tell **Nghĩa** to open Lộc Giang Holy House.*

- **Thủ Đức Invocation Site:** It was established at the home of Mr. Ngô Văn Điều (Figure 42)¹⁶⁴, near Thủ Đức market. It was a five-compartment house at 52 Nguyễn Tri Phương street (now 80 Kha Vạn Cân street) (Figure 43).



Figure 42: Mr. **Ngô Văn Điều**
(1868 – 1938)

- **Phước Linh Tự Invocation Site:** (Located in hamlet 1, Long Hòa village, Lục Thành Thượng commune, now Cần Đức district, Long An province). It was headed by Yết Ma Trần Văn Xoài (1891-1955), who converted to Cao Dai Faith. This pagoda no longer exists. (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS of this site are: 10°35'26" N; 106°34'08" E).

The Buddhist pagoda Phước Linh Tự was re-established around 1969, about one kilometer from its old site.

¹⁶⁴ Mr. **Ngô Văn Điều** (1868 – 1938), the fifth child of Mr. Ngô Văn Giáp and Ms. Huỳnh Thị Bưởi, was a traditional Chinese medicinal practitioner and husband of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Tý (1875 – 1950). In 1931, he built (Meditation Hall) Thánh Tịnh Long Vân (inaugurated on November 30, 1931), near Xuân Hiệp - Thủ Đức intersection. (Previously, this meditation hall did not belong to any sects; but in 1998, it was incorporated into the system of Tây Ninh Holy See and was called Holy House Thánh thất Long Vân).

Mr. Ngô Văn Điều passed away on the 11th day of the 12th month of Đinh Sửu year (January 12, 1938), and his stupa is located behind Long Vân Holy House.



Figure 43: Inside the Main Hall of Thủ Đức Invocation Site

(After (the Meditation Hall) Thánh Tịnh Long Vân became a Thánh thất (Holy House), this Main Hall no longer exists.)

- Tân Kim Invocation Site: It was established at the house of (Councilor) Hội Đồng Quản Hạt Nguyễn Văn Lai (Figure 44)¹⁶⁵ in Tân Kim commune, Cần Giuộc district. Gentlemen Ca Minh Chương and Phạm Văn Tươi¹⁶⁶ served as the medium pair.

¹⁶⁵ Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Lai** (1876 – 1939) was husband of Ms. Đoàn Thị Vê (1880 – 1967). They donated to build Tân Kim Holy House. Joining Cao Dai on April 13, 1926, later he was heavenly ordained Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop) (of Ban Chính Đạo), and his wife was ordained Phối Sư (Bishop). Mr. Thượng Lai Thanh passed away on the 5th day of the 12th month of Mậu Dần year (1939), and his stupa was in front of Tân Kim Holy House (across the street). The invocation site of Tân Kim used to be very spacious. But in 1945, when his sixth son joined the parties resisting against the French, the French soldiers demolished the entire house. The old foundation of this Holy House is now behind Ủy Ban Xã Tân Kim (Tân Kim Commune Office), the only remaining trace is just a stony bank.

¹⁶⁶ Mr. **Phạm Văn Tươi** (1897 – 1976), a native of Quý Đức, Cần Giuộc district, was husband of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Quận (born in 1899). Graduated

Frequently attended séances at Tân Kim Invocation Site were gentlemen Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Lê Văn Lịch, Lê Văn Tiếp, Phạm Văn Ti, Nguyễn Văn Nhơn, Võ Văn Kinh, Đoàn Ngọc Chí ...



Figure 44: Portrait of Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Lai** (1876 – 1939)



Figure 45: Portriat of Mr. **Trần Văn Tà** (1888 – 1960)

- **An invocation site specialized in curing patients** of all illnesses was held particularly at home of Mr. Trần Văn Tà, 237 Galliéni street (now Trần Hưng Đạo street).

Mr. Trần Văn Tà (1888 – 1960) (Figure 45) was formerly a police officer assigned to mingle with the people at Cầu Kho Invocation Site to monitor their activities. He was then mystically guided by the Holy Master and became a loyal follower until the end of his life.¹⁶⁷ In the séance at Cầu Kho

from Trường Sư Phạm Gia Định (Gia Định Pedagogical School), he taught at many schools (including Lycée Pétrus Ký in Saigon). Joining Cao Dai on February 27, 1926, he was heavenly ordained as Hiến Đạo on the 12th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (1927). He passed away on the 8th day of the 4th month of Bính Thìn year (1976) and was buried in his hometown.

¹⁶⁷ Mr. **Trần Văn Tà** (1888 – 1960). His house was quite spacious, facing Galliéni street (now spanned from 245 to 251 Trần Hưng Đạo street, Saigon District 1, near Hồ Hảo Hớn street). But the old structure no longer exists.

On the day of drafting the Declaration of Cao Dai Faith (the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year), Mr. Trần Văn Tà brought his entire family of

Holy House on the 20th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught Mr. Trần Văn Tạ as follows:

Tạ, I entrust the suffering and illnesses of humanity to you. I will use your house as My Holy House.

He and his wife, Ms. Trương Thị Tròn, took care of the charitable work, treating illnesses simply by having the patients kneel in front of the Divine Altar to pray sincerely and drink a cup of white water taken from the altar... Many people were miraculously cured, adding to the belief in the new religion.

- Hội Phước Tự Invocation Site ¹⁶⁸: In the séance on the 22nd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year at Hội Phước Tự, in the

four (wife named Trương Thị Tròn, daughter named Trần Thị Trang, son named Trần Văn Hoàng, and himself) to participate in this event.

According to (Senior Brother) Đạo Trường Liên Hoa (Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo – the Sacerdotal Council of Cao Dai Mission), around 1930, Mr. Trần Văn Tạ built in Long Hiệu village, Long Tân commune, Nhơn Trạch district the temple Trung Hưng Thánh Bản on a hill about three thousand meters from the road. (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS are: N10°44'32" E 106°53'22"). His son, Mr. Trần Văn Hoàng, was the Abbot of this temple, but gradually deviated and called himself Thiên Sư (Heavenly Master) ... Hence, his religious practice was much different from Cao Dai Faith and has faded away. During the warring time, this temple was destroyed with no trace left.

As for Mr. Trần Văn Tạ, after a period in Nhơn Trạch, he returned to actively practice the religion at the Tây Ninh Holy See with the position of Hộ Đàn Pháp Quân until his death on the 23rd day of the 12th month of Kỷ Hợi year (1960). He was buried in the “Cực Lạc (old)” cemetery of the Tây Ninh Holy See.

¹⁶⁸ **Hội Phước Tự** (in Long Trạch, Cần Đức district, and adjacent to Phước Hậu Pagoda, Cần Giuộc district) (the coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS are: N10°37'09"; E 106°35'27") was an old Buddhist pagoda of the Đặng family. As this family had no descendants to take care of the pagoda, **Yết Ma Nguyễn Văn Luật** (1869 – 1948), a native of Phước Hậu, came to repair and preside over it. Before that, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Luật had been trained as a Buddhist monk by (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Kim at Long Huệ Pagoda (Gò Vấp district) and received the religious name Thích Chơn Truyền (Lâm Tế Sect, the thirty-ninth generation).

presence of gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, Thái Thơ Thanh, ... the Holy Master approved the conversion of Yết Ma Luật to Cao Dai Faith and accepted Hội Phước Tự (Figure 46) as a Holy House. Yết Ma Luật was heavenly ordained as Giáo Sư phái Thái (Bishop of Buddhist faction), like the case of Yết Ma Lê Văn Nhung at Vạn Phước Tự (Chánh hamlet, Tân Xuân village, Hóc Môn district) a few days before (the full-moon day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year).



Figure 46: **Hội Phước Tự** (photo taken in 1997)

- Long Thành Tự Invocation Site: (Rạch Kiến market, Long Hòa village, Cần Đước district) Invocations were regularly

Hearing the rumor about the miracles of automatic writing, on the 2nd day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year Yết Ma Nguyễn Văn Luật came to attend the invocation at Bourdais street, bringing with him a sealed poem. On that day the Holy Master descended and responded to his poem with the same rhyme and theme and thus won his heart. On the 19th day of the 3rd month of Mậu Tý year (1948), (Bishop) Giáo Sư Thái Luật Thanh passed away and was buried next to the pagoda. His tenth child (his youngest son) Nguyễn Văn Ta (1910 – 1950) and a nephew inherited the temple and continued to worship God Eye (while the statues of Buddha were still intact). Later, when the God Eye symbol was worn out and damaged, Hội Phước Tự reverted to a Buddhist pagoda again. Until now, although old and deserted, the pagoda still retains most of all its ancient features.

organized at Long Thành Tự on the 15th, 16th, 30th, and 1st day of each lunar month. Gentlemen Phạm Tấn Đãi¹⁶⁹ and Nguyễn Thiêng Kim served as the medium pair. Gentlemen Lê Văn Hóa (Tri Phủ Prefect, Cần Đức District Chief), Lại Văn Hành, Lê Văn Gia, Bùi Duy Thân, Phan Văn Sách, ...frequently attended invocation séances at this site.

- Cũ Chi Invocation Site: It was established at the home of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Mười (in Phước Mỹ village, Long Tuy Hạ commune; now Mũi Côn Đại hamlet, Phước Hiệp commune). (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS are: 104°47'06" N; 106°45'26" E). It was a spacious three-compartment, two-wing house, with yin-yang tiled roof, capable of accommodating hundreds of believers to attend the séances in every new-moon and full-moon day. After the war this building no longer existed.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Mr. **Phạm Tấn Đãi** (1901 – 1976), a native of Mỹ Lệ village, Cần Đức district, son of Mr. Phạm Thành Thiết (ordained as Thượng Phối Sư (Archbishop of Taoist faction)) and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Ruộng. (Both his parents participated in the meeting for the Declaration of Cao Dai Faith).

Mr. Phạm Tấn Đãi was a schoolteacher from 1920 to 1936 and joined Cao Dai on December 26, 1925. After the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way, Mr. Phạm Tấn Đãi was heavenly ordained Khai Đạo Chơn Quân and served as a medium pairing with Mr. Phạm Văn Tươi (who later was heavenly ordained Hiến Đạo Chơn Quân). From 1958, he oversaw Cơ Quan Phước Thiện (the Charity Organization). In 1972 he accepted the position of Acting Rector of Cao Đài University. In 1976 after accepting to be Quyền Chương Quản Hiệp Thiên Đài (Acting Chief Administrator of the House of Heavenly Alliance), he passed away at 5 p.m. on March 19, 1976.

¹⁷⁰ Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Mười** was a Hương Hào (local village chief) and husband of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Tươi. Regrettably, his grave no longer has the tombstone. His grandson, Mr. Út Rành (80 years old, currently residing at this address) only remembers that his grandfather was heavenly ordained as Giáo Sư phái Ngọc (Bishop of Confucian faction) in Tây Ninh.

Cũ Chi Invocation Site operated until about 1931. (Councilor) Hội đồng Nguyễn Văn Phán donated the thirteen hundred and sixteen hectares of land on which Mr. and Mrs. Lê Đình Ế contributed to the construction of Phước Hiệp Holy House (this land is now Cơ Quan Thủy Lợi (the Irrigation Department) of Cũ Chi District). Phước Hiệp Holy House has now been

- **Giồng Ông Tố Invocation Site:** It was established at home of Mr. **Đỗ Văn Vàng**¹⁷¹ (Figure 47) where gentlemen Hồ Văn Đình, Hồ Văn Nhựt, Huỳnh Văn Nhẫn, Nguyễn Vĩnh Phú, Nguyễn Văn Xuân, Nguyễn Vĩnh Hữu, Phan Văn Diệu, Nguyễn Tấn Tài, Lê Công Nho, ...frequently attended.

There were no permanent séance medium pair at this site, and this task was usually covered by gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc.



Figure 47: Portrait of Mr. **ĐỖ VĂN VÀNG** (1880 – 1950)

- **Vĩnh Nguyên Tự Invocation Site** (in Cần Giuộc district). It accepted new believers, but not as many as in other sites. This invocation site was mainly for Divine Beings to teach the predecessors or to bestow scriptures, internal rules, and

moved three kilometers away from that site, belonging to the Tây Ninh Holy See.

¹⁷¹ Mr. **Đỗ Văn Vàng** (1880 – 1950) was son of Mr. **Đỗ Văn Mắm** (a native of Tân Thạnh Đông, Củ Chi district) and Ms. **Lê Thị Huệ**. He was a schoolteacher at Giồng Ông Tố School, and husband of Ms. **Hồng Thị Hữu** (1883 – 1974).

Giồng Ông Tố Invocation Site was initially a three-compartment, two-wing house with round wooden pillars, yin-yang tiled roof, and a flower garden in the front. Later, Mr. **Đỗ Văn Mười** (Mr. **Đỗ Văn Vàng**'s youngest son) lived there. The house has now changed its style, located at 34 Tây A hamlet, Bình Trung Tây ward, district 2. (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS are: 10°47'06" N; 106°45'26" E). In 1927, due to the large number of believers attending this invocation site, Mr. **Hồ Văn Đình** opened another invocation site in this area (licensed by the Governor of Cochinchina Blanchard de la Brosse – the same license as the Tây Ninh Holy See in Long Thành village – number 5188, dated July 21, 1927). Then Mr. **Hồ Văn Đình** donated the 1.62 hectares of land to build Bình Trung Holy House (now belonging to the Tây Ninh Holy See).

especially the initial practice of meditation. (Further information can be found in Chapter 2 Section II Part C.2.b and in Appendix II).

The invocation sites mentioned above were established in Saigon city and its surrounding areas. Author R.B. Smith in his article entitled “*An Introduction to Caodaism*” cited a document of Phủ Toàn Quyền Đông Dương (the Palace of Governor General of Indochina) in 1934, according to which, in mid-1926 there were about twenty-one Cao Dai invocation sites throughout Cochinchina.

b) Rituals at the missionary invocation sites

The first public invocation sites were the precursors of the later Holy Houses. Once these sites were filled with large numbers of followers who frequently gathered to worship, then the necessary rituals such as prayers, choirs, logistics inside the worship hall, ritual music... specific to the Cao Dai religion should also be completed. The Almighty instructed the predecessors step by step on those matters, for example:

- Regarding the logistics of worship sessions: In the séance on the 16th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (July 25, 1926), the Holy Master taught:

Lễ Sanh (Student-Priests) are to set the solemnity in the worship sessions to pray to Me, not just to perform the offering rituals. All of them must be present at every major worship session and must dress neatly, two in front, two in back, to maintain serenity. I warn you that, if the session is not solemn, I will not descend. Children, keep that in mind!

- **Regarding the ritual music:** In the séance on the 18th day of the 5th month of Bính Dần year (June 27, 1926) the Holy Master taught:

*Nhơn*¹⁷² ... To start the worship session, do not beat trống Bát Nhã (the Prajna drum); instead, beat Ngọc Hoàng Sấm (the Jade Emperor Thunder Drum), that is, each round twelve beats, down to twelve complete rounds, and three times like that (...)

When entering the ceremony, chant “Khởi Nhạc” (“Music Launch”), you must beat the drum and play all the seven orchestral pieces to complete it.¹⁷³ When making offerings, you must play Nam Xuân three songs because (Student-Priests) Lễ Sanh must perform the seven-step routine to draw the character Tâm (Heart 心). When it is time for Thài (the declaiming verses), you play “Đảo Ngũ Cung”, then replay it for the disciples to say prayers ...

Next, the Holy Master taught how to walk the seven-step routine to draw the character 心.

- **Regarding the ritual inside the worship hall:** Also, in the séance session of that same day the Holy Master continued to teach:

Lịch, the ritual you established in my approval has all been complete. Hence, you pass it on to my disciples so they can follow and perform as it is. *Nghĩa*, you must memorize the xướng (the announcements). Ask *Đức* to do

¹⁷² After considering many historical documents, it is very likely that this is Mr. Phan Văn Nhơn, who later returned to Rạch Giá to preside over the first Holy House (1927) and became Pháp Sư Cao Thiên Đàn there. Cao Thiên Đàn is the precursor of Hiệp Thiên Đài Hội Thánh Minh Chơn Lý (the House of Heavenly Alliance at the Minh Chơn Lý Holy See), in Mỹ Tho province.

¹⁷³ The seven orchestral pieces are Xàng Xê, Ngũ Đối Thượng, Ngũ Đối Hạ, Long Đăng, Long Ngâm, Vạn Giá, and Tiểu Khúc.

*the same. You three must remember what I said. **Nghĩa** and **Đức** stand to chant as outer rite, at Hộ Pháp table; then **Hậu** and **Tràng** stand next to them; and lastly you three: **Tắc** in the middle, **Cư** on the right side, **Sang** on the left side.*

- Regarding the request for prayers from Minh Lý Thánh Hội: In August 1926, to supplement for the prayers that Branch Two had received from Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu, the Holy Master instructed the predecessors to go to Minh Lý Thánh Hội to request more prayers. Meanwhile, at Minh Lý Thánh Hội the holy message on the 28th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (August 6, 1926) issued the order to transmit the prayers, as follows:

I, Lục Đình Thần, descend and greet you all.

*Upon the order of Đạo Tổ (the Taoist Patriarch), I descend to tell you clearly that: You must prepare twelve copies of kinh Sám Hối (the Repentance prayer), which must be very good and clean, without any stain or flaw. Once prepared, you must invite **Trung, Lịch, Kỳ** to come to your house and have them perform the rites to receive those prayers. The cover of these books must have the title Tam Tông Miếu written on it.*

This can be seen as the act that the Supreme Being legitimizing the prayers previously borrowed from Minh Lý Thánh Hội.

Additional notes:

1. The book of Repentance Prayer published by Tam Tông Miếu, as in the past and present, not only contains the Repentance Prayer but also has all the parts, rituals and prayers, including Niệm

Hương prayer (the Incense Recitation) (starting with Đạo gốc bởi...) bestowed by His Holiness Đức Nam Cực Chưởng Giáo, written in Vietnamese from the mantra “Phần Hương trường” (starting with Đạo do tâm hiệp...) (this mantra is printed in the book Thái Thượng Diệu Lục volume 2, page 2 (National Library code: R1647); the prayer Tạng Thiên Đế (starting with Vì Thiên Đế...) bestowed by His Holiness Đức Thái Thượng Lão Quân on the 26th day of the 11th month of Giáp Tý year (1924); the prayer Khai Kinh (starting with Biển trần khô...) bestowed by His Holiness Đức Lữ Tổ from the prayer Khai Kinh kệ (starting with Trần hải mang mang...) (this prayer is printed in Thiện Môn Nhứt Dụng, printed at Quang Nam Đường, Hồ Chí Minh city). The Repentance Prayer (also known as Sám Hối, or Nhơn Quả prayer) was bestowed by thirteen Divine Beings in eighteen séances altogether from April 19, 1925, to November 21, 1925, and the prayer Khen ngợi Kinh Sám Hối (Praise to the Repentance Prayer) was bestowed by His Holiness Đức Đông Phương Lão Tổ.

Before that, in the séance on August 21, 1925, when His Holiness Đức Thái Thượng Đạo Tổ descended, Sir Minh Thiện asked:

Every time we distribute the Repentance Prayer, can we also include the other prayers such as Khai Kinh, Tịnh khẩu...?

His Holiness Đức Thái Thượng Đạo Tổ gave the order:

Distribute them.

Thus, requesting the Repentance Prayer means the Cao Dai predecessors also received all the prayers printed in that book, including the two prayers “Niệm Hương” and “Khai Kinh”.

It should be noted that the two prayers “Niệm Hương” and “Khai Kinh”, as well as the four mantras, and the “Tạng Thiên Đế” prayer, all had originated from Minh Sư prayers, written in Chinese characters (in which the “Tạng Thiên Đế” prayer was originally the “Đại La Thiên Đế” prayer ...), were transcribed by the Almighty into national language (Vietnamese) in the years of 1924, 1925 and given to Minh Lý disciples. The other prayers were new.

2. The Almighty instructed the three gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, and Thượng Kỳ Thanh “to come to your house” to perform the rites to receive the prayers because, at that time Minh Lý Thánh Hội did not have an official headquarter

and temporarily used Linh Sơn Temple (on Cô Giang street) for prayer reciting sessions. The term *house* here was the home of Mr. Âu Minh Chánh (1896 – 1941) in Barbier alley (now Thạch Thị Thanh street). It was an old and spacious wooden house, located at about the current house number 78/2 Võ Thị Sáu street, Saigon District 1), where invocation sessions were frequently held to receive many Minh Lý prayers. (The global positioning system (GPS) coordinates are: 10°47'22" N; 106°39'28" E).

3. It is also noteworthy that “Tứ Đại Điều Qui” (“The Four Great Rules”) in the New Codes of Cao Dai were also partly originated from Minh Lý. On the 20th day of the 10th month of Ất Sửu year (1925), Sir Minh Thiện (please find more details about Minh Lý Thánh Hội in Appendix IV) received the order from the Supreme Being to compose the rules for Minh Lý according to the old Chinese scripts.

Sir Minh Thiện recorded (in the book of *Tứ Đại Điều Quy*, published by Minh Lý Đạo) as follows:

“I took (the Four Great Rules) *Tứ Đại Điều Quy* of Mr. Thương Châu Tử (a Chinese book of Minh Sư) and translated it into Vietnamese prose to submit to the Almighty for approval. On the 4th day of the 11th month, His Holiness Đức Vạn Pháp Giáo Chủ Cửu Thiên Nguơn Quân descended and ordered me to read the text I had translated. After I finished reading it, He taught: *‘You did it good enough to use. No need to change...’*.”

When Cao Dai predecessors drafted Tân Luật (the New Codes) (at the end of 1926), they realized the need of these regulations and added the Four Great Rules in the entire Chapter 5 of the draft New Codes. It was then approved and promulgated by the Almighty.

- Regarding the complete collection of prayers: By mid-year of Bính Dần (1926) the new religion had received prayers from various sources, such as those transmitted by Mr. Ngô Văn

Chiêu or requested from Minh Lý Thánh Hội. Each source provided many necessary and appropriate prayers. During this time, many other important prayers were added, as Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu wrote in Đại Đồng magazine:

“In the early days of the religion, we only recited a few short prayers given to us by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu and Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ. Later, the Supreme Being assigned Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt (Lê Văn Lịch) the responsibility of selecting more prayers. Mr. Lê chose the “Ngọc Hoàng Kinh” prayer (starting with Đại La Thiên Đế...) and the three prayers for the Three Teachings (to praise the Three Religious Founders): Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Excerpt from the response of Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu to a fellow practitioner named Nguyễn Tú Thà in Sa Đéc province, published in Đại Đồng Magazine (Liên Hòa Tổng Hội) issue No. 16, on July 1, 1940, page 17.

It is known that the prayer Ngọc Hoàng Kinh was chosen by Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt from the prayer “Ngọc Hoàng Thiên Tôn Bửu Cáo” (bestowed by His Holiness Đức Phù Hựu Đế Quân in a séance at La Phù Sơn, China, on the 1st day of the 9th month of Tân Mão year – 1891), which is a Minh Sư prayer. In Vietnam, this prayer was printed in the book “*Văn Đế Cứu Kiếp Bảo Sanh Kinh, Vô Đế Cứu Kiếp Vĩnh Mạng Kinh*, the combined edition”, published in 1923 at Quan Âm Đường (Thâm Nhiên, Long An province); the prayer Cửu Thiên Đại La (recited by Chiêu Minh disciples) was included in this book of prayers but with some differences.

The prayer to praise the Founder of Taoism “Tiên Thiên khí hóa...” coincides with the prayer “Thái Thượng Chí Tâm Kinh” printed in the ritual section of the book *Huyền Đình Nội Cảnh*, annotated by Hàm Hư Tử in 1847, published in China.

The prayer to praise the Founder of Confucianism: “Quế hương nội điện...” has many parts that coincide with the prayer to praise (the Saintly Emperor) Đức Văn Xương Đế Quân in “*Văn Xương Đại Đồng Chơn Kinh*” published during the reign of Xianfeng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1857). In the holy message on February 25, 1926, the Holy Master stated:

Trọng Ni (Khổng Phu Tử - Confucius) is Văn Xương Tiên, who descended to earth upon my order to found Confucianism.

Around the 9th month of Bính Dần year (1926), the predecessors of Branch Two collected almost all daily prayers, which were chanted in the following order:

- Niệm Hương prayer: “Đạo gốc bởi...” (from Minh Lý – ML)
- Tịnh Khẩu Chú mantra: “Lời ăn nói...” (ML)
- Tịnh Tâm Chú mantra: “Lòng người đặng...” (ML)
- Tịnh Thân Chú mantra: “Ở trần thế...” (ML)
- An Thổ Địa Chú mantra: “Công Thổ Địa...” (ML)

(The above four mantras were only chanted in Đại Đàn - Major Worship sessions)

- Khai Kinh prayer: “Biển trần khổ...” (ML)
- Ngọc Hoàng prayer: “Đại La...” (Minh Sư – MS)
- Phật Giáo prayer: “Hồn độn...” (MS)
- Tiên Giáo prayer: “Tiên Thiên...” (MS)
- Nho Giáo prayer: “Quế hương...” (MS)
- Kinh dâng Tam Bửu (Declaiming verses for the offerings of the Three Treasures): “Hoa tươi...”, “Tửu vị...”, “Đồng độ...” (from Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu)

By then they no longer recited the Thông Minh Chú and Nhụy Châu prayers. And at the end of Bính Dần year, Ngũ Nguyên (the Five Vows) were added (which might be bestowed by the Almighty at Tân Định Invocation Site). Later, the list of daily prayers gradually changed depending on the circumstances of each locale.¹⁷⁵

(from *Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh* – *Proclamation to Sentient Beings* in 1926).

¹⁷⁵ At the Tây Ninh Holy See on the full-moon day of the 5th month of Kỷ Tỵ year (1929), the Holy Master descended and revised the Dâng Tam Bửu (the declaiming verses for the offering of the Three Treasures), also removed the mantras Tịnh Tâm, Tịnh Thân, ... The following year, on the 17th day of the 6th month of Canh Ngọ year (1930), the Holy See published the book “*Nghi*

- **Regarding the establishment of the choir:** After almost all the daily prayers had been collected, on the 5th day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year (September 11, 1926) the Holy Master taught:

Lự and Hiếu, select and train a group of about thirty-six girls so that during every Major Worship session, they chant prayers to Me ... The same goes for the men, Cu, Tắc, Sang, Phú, you must also teach thirty-six boys.

- **Regarding the funeral rituals:** On August 18, 1926, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu's mother passed away. The predecessors pray to the Holy Master for the instructions on funeral rituals. That day the Holy Master taught:

Trung, you immediately go to Cần Giuộc to summon Trương, and all my disciples must gather. Remember to summon Lịch, tell him that I need to use the four Minh Đường dignitaries to pray for Hậu's mother. All Lễ Sanh (Student-Priests) must be present to perform in the Grand Ceremony for his mother. Trung, you write the petition as follows:

“The Jade Emperor, name Cao Dai Immortal Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva, order Địa Tạng Vương Bồ Tát (Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva) to receive the soul of the name... on the ... day of the ... month of year..., and hold in Vọng Thiên Cung, waiting for Hậu's deeds of merit to be gradually promoted.”

Tiết Đại Đàn và Tiểu Đàn” (“Rituals for Major Worship and Regular Worship sessions”) which has been in use until now.

It is noted that the four mantras mentioned above were transcribed by Đức Tây Phương Phật Tổ (the Western Buddha) into national language (Vietnamese) from the Chinese version of the prayer, printed in the book *Cửu Kiếp Hoàng Kinh*, page 23, published in 1876, Ngọc Sơn Temple (Hà Nội) archive, National Library code: R3947.

Give Tắc the mantra to read and burn the petition. The four Minh Đường dignitaries continue to chant and pray.

Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu annotated under this holy message as follows:

“This funeral was the first one to follow the rituals of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation and had all the dignitaries of the religion in attendance.”

4) THE SECOND HEAVENLY ORDINATION – RELIGIOUS NAMES FOR MALE DIGNITARIES (AUGUST 1926)

The apparatus of the Third Universal Salvation was launched bustlingly until the mid-year of Bính Dần (1926), and the God-Way gradually went public. In the séance on the 28th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (August 7, 1926) the Holy Master insisted:

Today as the Way has been opened, which means that evil has also arisen. Children, you must do your best to protect yourselves at all means with all your mind and effort. Not only must you protect yourselves, but you must also protect my disciples.

In the situation where evil spirits are trying to find ways to hinder and tempt ..., they even possibly take away some of the very necessary “seeds” of the Great Way at the early days. So, the Holy Master was concerned and wanted to protect the predecessors. But firstly, each of them must accept to enter that circle of protection and take the oath to become disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God.

Thus, two days later, in the séance at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple on the 1st day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master clearly stated:

Children! Deities, Saints, Immortals, Buddhas, all are buzzing because of you. The Demon King came to the White Jade Palace, asking for permission to torture and test you. I refused to allow him to torture you. They gathered the Thirty-Six Caves to harm you. So, I send Quan Thánh¹⁷⁶ and Quan Âm¹⁷⁷ to protect you. But most of you have not made the vow, then Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas did not want to acknowledge you.

That night, the predecessors re-invoked the séance in Vĩnh Nguyên Temple at midnight, and the Holy Master taught:

In the Third Universal Salvation and the Reunion of the Three Religions, Quan Âm in Buddhism, Lý Thái Bạch in Taoism, and Quan Thánh in Confucianism are the Three Governors to open the Way.

*Thus, you¹⁷⁸ must set up for all the Three Governors to witness the ceremony. You must set up Ngũ Lôi (the Five-Thunder God) table, as I previously taught, with the Kim Quang Tiên talisman, and you must write Giáng Ma Xử talisman to place it on Hộ Pháp table. Then **Cư** hold the incense pen for Me to summon Ngũ Lôi. After that, **Cư** go to stand near Hộ Pháp table with **Tắc** and **Sang** while all the other mediums stand around the*

¹⁷⁶ Translator's note: Quan Thánh or Kuan-Ti is the Saintly Emperor, i.e., the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China, and currently the third Spiritual Governor in the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation.

¹⁷⁷ Translator's note: Quan Âm or Kuan Shi Yin or Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is the Goddess of Mercy in Buddhism, and currently the second Spiritual Governor in the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation.

¹⁷⁸ The term "you" here indicated Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt.

*three of you. You tell **Tương, Kim**¹⁷⁹, and **Thơ** to swear as before.*

The disciples make the oath like in the Heavenly Ordination Ceremony. You must insist that they maintain the quietude of mind, because all Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas witness the ceremony.

Thus, some more people were granted the grace, including gentlemen Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, Lê Bá Trang, Ngô Văn Kim, ... Since not all of them were present in that midnight séance at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, following the divine order, the next day they took the oath to receive the heavenly title in the swearing ceremony held at the home of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt.

Later, there were still some who had not yet taken the oath. So, on September 14, 1926, the Holy Master reminded:

*When new disciples have participated in the Gateway ceremony and set up the Divine Altar at home, you must swear in as soon as possible. Otherwise, Buddhas, Immortals, and Saints are very worried for you, especially for **Muối, Đát, Vân**.*

The above holy messages show the importance of the oath when someone seeks to enter the Way. From then on, every believer when joining Cao Dai Faith, even if there is no Ngũ Lôi (Five-Thunder God) table ... must kneel in front of the Divine Altar to recite the oath, be witnessed by a dignitary, register as

¹⁷⁹ Mr. **Ngô Văn Kim** (1868 – 1940) was a native of Trường Bình commune, Cần Giuộc district, and husband of Ms. Chung Thị Tạo (1868 – 1925). He was accepted into the religion by Cao Dai Supreme God on February 2, 1926, in Cần Giuộc. In the Second Heavenly Ordination Ceremony on the 3rd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, he was ordained Giáo Sư phái Thượng (Bishop of Taoist faction) (religious name Thượng Kim Thanh).

Titles and dates of receiving the heavenly conferment of titles for all dignitaries are listed in Chapter 2 Section V Part D.

a local follower, and vow to fulfill the religious rules. And only then can one truly enter the protective circle of the Divine Grace.

In Cầu Kho Invocation Site on the 20th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (August 27, 1926), the Holy Master encouraged:

Congratulations, children! I am very pleased...

You have already taken the oath. From now on, depending on the hidden merits that you amass, you will rise accordingly; or due to the sins you commit, you will fall accordingly. But each of you must be able to guide and save at least twelve people. Your moral titles and ranks are the same as the Heavenly ones.

Particularly in the séance at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (on the 1st night to the 2nd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year), the Holy Master graciously bestowed **religious names to the male dignitaries**:

*Disciples, listen to the **holy name**:*

*The **THANH Way** opened in the third era and will last seven hundred thousand (700,000) years,*

Its longevity is like the noble Earth flourishing in harmony with Heaven.

*Returning to infinity, humans generate the energy pure,
To edify the everlasting Way that reflects Buddha nature.*

THANH is your religious name.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ The word THANH means PURE and NOBLE. Original Vietnamese text:

“Các con nghe **Tịch Đạo**:

THANH Đạo tam khai thất ức niên,

Thọ như Địa uyển* thanh hòa Thiên.

Hence, the male dignitaries in Cửu Trùng Đài (House of the Nine Initiations) were granted the common religious name Thanh. The religious name is a combination of three words: the corresponding faction (Thái for Buddhism, Thượng for Taoism, and Ngọc for Confucianism) is written first, the dignitary's birth name is placed in the middle, and Thanh is the last word. The Holy Master stated:

*Thus, **Tương** is Thượng Tương Thanh*

***Kim** is Thượng Kim Thanh*

***Thơ** is Thái Thơ Thanh.*

The Holy Master also insisted:

You must swear by that name.

In a later séance, the Holy Master clarified:

Each of you has the name in the Celestial Book, and your position is predestined, not an earthly title reserved for those who show off too much.

After the second Heavenly Ordination ceremony, the Supreme Being bestowed the holy costumes upon the newly appointed dignitaries. In the séance at the house of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt on the 5th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught:

*Vô hư quy phục nhơn sanh khí,
Tạo vạn cổ đàng chiếu Phật duyên.*

***THANH** là tịch các con.”*

* In many books the word “uyển” was printed as “quyển” or “huyền”. It is unknown which word is the correct one. In this context, the word “uyển” (婉) means elegant, courteous, moderate, graceful, sweet and noble, which is the manifestation of the Earth Way (Đạo Khôn).

Trang, you should start preaching. I bestow on you the name Ngọc Trang Thanh. You must wear a pink robe like Lịch but pinned with three strips.

*Thơ, within tomorrow, tell beloved daughter **Lâm Thị** to come for my instructions. I will bestow on you the holy costume tomorrow.*

So, this time, the Holy Master assigned the task of making holy costumes to Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh (the previous time was for Ms. Hương Hiếu), according to the holy message in the séance at Tân Định on the 6th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year:

Thơ, kneel down and listen to my instructions of your holy costume: Yellow turban and robe; make them to the best with high-quality material. The turban has nine layers, the robe is pinned with three strips.

*Beloved daughter **Lâm Thị**, you help Me prepare five sets of crowns and robes for **Lịch, Trung, Tương, Trang, Thơ**. I will design the crowns. As for **Thơ's** robe, you embroider the **Eye** surrounded by six words, in ancient characters, Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ, right on the chest and the back. Run two vòng vô vi (symbolic circles of the void) surrounding it.*

In the re-invocation session on that same day, the Holy Master used water and chalk to dot on the tip of the beaked basket to draw the crown.

The period around the mid-year of Bính Dần (1926) was the time when the propagation branch fully developed. Some small details are given here as examples of the predecessors' enthusiasm for religious practice.

- On the 12th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (August 19, 1926), Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh expressed his wish to print and distribute the Daily Prayers. The Holy Master accepted and taught:

I insist that you print them together in one book.

That was the first edition of the Daily Prayers, entitled *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ Kinh* (published in 1926 by the printing house Xưa Nay – 32 pages, in 14 cm x 19 cm size), comprising two versions: one in Vietnamese and the other in Sino-Vietnamese characters.

The Vietnamese version (Figure 48) printed the prayers in the following order: Niệm Hương, Tịnh Khẩu Chú, Tịnh Tâm Chú, An Thổ Địa Chú, Khai Kinh, Ngọc Hoàng Kinh (prayer to praise the Jade Emperor Supreme God), the three prayers to praise the Three Religious Founders, declaiming verses for the offerings of the Three Treasures offerings, Invocation prayer (Trời còn...), Repentance prayer... from different sources (transmitted by Minh Lý, Minh Sư, and Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu); following the holy order, they were “*printed together in one book*”.

As for the Sino-Vietnamese version, it also included the prayers: Cửu Thiên Đại La, Nhụy Châu, Thái Dương, Thái Âm.

Both the Vietnamese and the Sino-Vietnamese versions did not have Ngũ Nguyện (the Five Vows).¹⁸¹

- Also in that same séance, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh asked to print four thousand holy images of God-Eye to distribute to new believers. With the Holy Master’s permission to print, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh went on to ask:

Venerable Holy Master, I want to open a vegetarian restaurant.

¹⁸¹ The following year (1927), (Lady Pioneer) Tiền khai Lâm Hương Thanh published the second edition of *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ Kinh* also written in two versions. The Vietnamese version had the same content as that in the first edition of 1926. But the Sino-Vietnamese version had the prayers Thái Dương Kinh, Thái Âm Kinh, and Nhụy Châu omitted. Both Vietnamese and the Sino-Vietnamese versions had the Ngũ Nguyện (the Five Vows) added.

The Holy Master replied:

That would be great for you, I accept it.

Then Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh asked:

Venerable Holy Master, who can be the restaurant manager?

The Holy Master replied:

*Arrange with each other, anyone is fine.*¹⁸²



Figure 48: The front cover of the first book of Cao Dai Daily Prayers (the Vietnamese version) printed in 1926.

¹⁸² This is probably the first vegetarian restaurant of Cao Dai followers in Saigon; the restaurant name was Long Tân, located at 156 d'Espagne street (now Lê Thánh Tôn street) behind Saigon market (then called Chợ Mới).

A psychological concern arose at this stage, after about half a year the Supreme Being had gathered and taught the predecessors of Branch Two to preach the Way of the Third Era. It was because the predecessors carried out the same religious mission, but their social status was quite different. Most of them were educated, became mandarins, and had fame and power. Only among them was Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, a monk at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. Although he was Abbot at that time, he had only attained the rank of Dẫn Ân, which is not very high in the Minh Đường clergy. Moreover, he was also the youngest among them (thirty-six years old). The gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, Lê Bá Trang (who were assigned holy costumes on the same day as Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt) all had social positions and were about ten years older than himself. Yet, in the First Heavenly Ordination on the full-moon day of the 3rd month, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch was conferred as Đầu Sư (Cardinal), the highest religious rank at that time, the same rank as the “great mandarin” Mr. Lê Văn Trung.

Bearing a mortal body in a social context that was not very modern at that time and moreover, having joined the Faith not long ago, the predecessors inevitably had the mentality of not really respecting Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, despite the many opportunities that the Supreme Being had repeatedly created for Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt to demonstrate his strength in the “spiritual practice” part.

If this mentality was allowed to develop further, it would not be beneficial to the Faith, especially to the upcoming Inauguration Ceremony. Therefore, the Supreme Being was obliged to address the issue. At the end of the séance at Giồng Ông Tố on the 14th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the

Holy Master commanded:

Trung, Thơ, Cư, Tắc, you go to Cẩn Giuộc.

The Holy Master summoned them at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple when all the disciples were gathering to perform worship rituals. That night, the invocation was set up and the Holy Master descended:

The Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai, teaching the Way in the South.

***Lịch**, invite all my disciples of Minh Đường to come and listen to my instructions...*

[I am smiling!] ... In this Last Era there is more evil than good. If I do not reform the cultivation method, no one will be able to cultivate and attain enlightenment. Therefore, I choose Ngọc Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Confucian faction) from the young generation to carry out sufficient work for the propagation.

*Most of you are not satisfied with **Lịch** sitting in that position and thus caused hindrances to the preaching of the Faith. I also see it as such. However, because of **Lịch's** previous life and **Tiêng's** virtue, I entrust him with that supreme responsibility.*

You all have titles, big or small, all ordained by Me. Just maintain your dignity. But I would make an essential point to you, which is, to pray that you will accomplish a lot of work of merit in the school I have created so as not to drop out halfway...

You must follow the religious laws until the day I establish the New Codes. Success or failure – all depend on Me.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ This holy message was taken from the book of *Tiểu Sử Đức Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhựt* page 55, revised according to “*Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*”.

Through the above holy message, the Supreme Being wants to normalize the mentality of the predecessors, raise awareness about reincarnation and the influence of virtue in the family. He also reminds them to believe in the arrangements of the Almighty. They should focus on practicing the Faith to fulfill their duties, try to cultivate their own hidden merit, and encourage family members to participate in religious activities.

“**Tiêng**” was the name of Mr. **Lê Văn Tiêng**, father of Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt). Please find more details about Mr. Lê Văn Tiêng, i.e., (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long in Appendix I.

SECTION V.

TOWARD THE INAUGURATION OF THE GREAT WAY

The opening of Cao Dai Faith progressed in a sequence that could be summarized as follows:

- In Canh Thân year (1920), Cao Dai Supreme God initiated Branch One on Phú Quốc island.
- In Giáp Tý year (July 1924), Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu returned to Saigon.
- In Ất Sửu year (1925), Cao Dai Supreme God initiated Branch Two in Saigon.
- At the end of Ất Sửu year (January 1926), the Supreme Being gave the order for the two branches to unite.
- In the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 1926), the First Heavenly Ordination took place.
- Early in the 7th month of Bính Dần year (August 1926), the Second Heavenly Ordination took place.

Over time, Cao Dai Supreme God gradually established almost all the constituents of the religion, including the basic doctrine, the new cultivation method, the rituals, the religious costumes of all ranks of dignitaries, etc... That was the internal organization. Then the time has come for the new religion to go public to humanity.

- In the 8th month of Bính Dần year (September 1926), the Official Declaration of the Faith was sent to the government.

A. OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

1) CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE DECLARATION

In 1926, Cochinchina, i.e., the South Vietnam, was a French colony. Of course, the dominant government wanted to maintain its authority and thus closely monitored all the social and political developments in this land.

Furthermore, the overall circumstances in Saigon city at that time was quite unstable. After many armed resistance wars against the French that were mercilessly suppressed by the ruling government, the Vietnamese revolutionists changed their methods of operation by inducing masses of workers, students... to participate in strikes and demonstrations, creating much difficulty to the authority. Typical examples were the ten-day strike in August 1925 of about a thousand workers at the Ba Son factory, and the funeral of Mr. Phan Châu Trinh (in March 1926) with more than one hundred thousand participants carrying numerous banners promoting patriotism. Many “secret societies” and anti-French political parties were formed, such as Công Hội (the Labor Association), Thanh Niên Đảng (the Youth Party), Hội kín Nguyễn An Ninh (Nguyễn An Ninh Secret Society), Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mạng Đồng Chí Hội (Vietnam Youth Revolutionary Association), etc... These activities indicated that the socio-political situation in Saigon would continue to be even more turbulent.

Therefore, the fact that, from the beginning of year 1926, numerous Cao Dai invocation sites had been established in many places and gathered large numbers of followers in

worship arose the concern of the French Secret Service at that time. They were even more concerned because most followers of this new religion were intellectuals, many of whom were high-ranking civil servants in the French government. These intellectuals were educated, prestigious, and able to adapt to circumstances. Hence, the colonial government easily assumed that this religion was a form of “*secret society*” that they were extremely afraid of.

The French Inspector La Laurette once mentioned about Article No. 144 of the Penal Codes at that time (Volume 6, Paragraph 6), according to which violators were subject to execution. Many secret agents were ordered to infiltrate the participants in invocation sites and report the activities to the colonial authority at all levels.

Nowadays, if readers of Cao Dai history see the progress of the founding of the Faith going smoothly, see that each day there are more followers, and see the infrastructure of the religion becoming larger and larger... that is simply because Cao Dai is the God-Way opened by the Jade Emperor Supreme God Himself.

However, in terms of human psychology and existential affairs at that time, the Cao Dai predecessors must be very worried, because they were government officials and knew quite well the French laws. Receiving such an important mission of representing God to guide and save mankind, they certainly discussed with each other a lot, considered every aspect, and dared not be careless to find ways to shield themselves from the French scrutiny. As Commanders of God, they were expected to have absolute faith in the Holy Master and perform the mission without worrying about anything else. But being human, they might wonder about their ability to overcome trials and challenges to accomplish the mission.

Then another event happened. By mid-year of Bính Dần (1926), the Holy Master arranged and directed the Propagation Branch toward the completion of many aspects, preparing to open the Faith to humanity. On the 13th day of the 8th month of

Bính Dần year (September 18, 1926), the Holy Master repeated the holy order to organize the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way:

*Children! I have established the Holy House; that place is your common home... On the full-moon day of the 10th month, the Congress of the Three Religions will be held there. Children! Notice it...*¹⁸⁴

The predecessors received the holy order to prepare for the Faith to go public solemnly, while worrying about the unstable socio-political situations aforementioned ... After carefully considering the issue, Mr. Lê Văn Trung (Figure 27), i.e., (Cardinal) Đầu Sư Thượng Trung Nhựt at that time, gathered the general opinions to reach a common decision. They unanimously supported his proposal to respectfully ask Cao Dai Supreme God for permission to formally register the missionary activities, and to officially publicize the new religion to the government. It was also a step to test the reaction of the French authorities at that time.

On the full-moon day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year (September 21, 1926), in the séance at Giác Hải Pagoda, after the Holy Master taught (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn, Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt reverently reported to the Supreme Being about the official declaration of the Faith. The Holy Master taught:

¹⁸⁴ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển 1*, Tây Ninh Holy See, 1928, page 38 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui & Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

The word *Thánh Thất* (Holy House) here refers to Gò Kén Holy House. At this time, the Cao Dai predecessors had finished discussing the location for the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way. Please find more details in Chapter 2 Section V Part C.

*Trung, you must re-invoke for Me to instruct you on how to act properly toward the government. I do not want any of you to demean yourselves...*¹⁸⁵

In the re-invocation session that same day (probably set up after they returned home), the Supreme Being taught:

*Trung and Lich, you two must gather with the Saints to ask to open the Faith. You must write a petition and submit it to Me for consideration and correction first!*¹⁸⁶

Thus, basically, the Supreme Being approved of the predecessors' declaration of the Faith to the government. He instructed the two *Đầu Sư* (Cardinals) to call for a meeting with their religious brothers to thoroughly discuss the draft of the Declaration document, then submit it to Him before sending it.

2) MEETING TO PREPARE THE DECLARATION

A week later, on the 23rd day of the 8th month of *Bính Dần* year (September 29, 1926), following the order of the Supreme Being, the meeting was held at the house of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường (Figure 49) in the alley 235 bis of Galliéni avenue (now *Trần Hưng Đạo* street).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Excerpt from the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*, which includes some original holy messages, compiled and circulated by (Cardinal) *Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh*.

¹⁸⁶ Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển I*, Tây Ninh Holy See, 1928 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Đài Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui & Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

¹⁸⁷ This was a large brick house with a high foundation built on the middle of a fourteen hundred seventy-four square meters of land lot and surrounded by many shady trees. From the house to Galliéni avenue was an unpaved alley about sixty meters long (passing Mr. *Trần Văn Tạ*'s home). In the title deed of this house, the address was written as "Galliéni avenue, alley 237 bis". Later, when road number 9 was expanded (afterwards it became *Dumortier* street, and now *Cô Bắc* street), the back of this house became the frontage and got assigned the new number 208 *Cô Bắc* street. Presently, the



Figure 49: A photograph of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường and his family in front of their house (where the meeting to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith was held).

Seating in front, from left to right, were Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường, Ms. Võ Thị Quyên (his mother), and Ms. Đặng Thị Kê (his wife). Standing behind Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường is Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tri (his son); standing behind Mrs. Đặng Thị Kê is Ms. Nguyễn Thị Phầm (his daughter); and standing in the middle is a niece.

house is still at that address, but its structure has been changed and looked different from the original one. Alley 237 at that time was quite wide; presently, there is still its trace next to the building block number 251 Trần Hưng Đạo street, whereas its inner part is now alley number 202 of Cô Bắc street. There are documents stating the homeowner's name was Võ Văn Tường. Please find more details on the biography of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường in Appendix I.

The coordinates according to the global positioning satellite system (GPS) of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường's old house are: 10°45'49" N; 106°41'36" E.

Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản (Figure 29) recounted that the meeting location was also assigned by the Holy Master as follows:

“One day, I went with a fellow practitioner named Lê Thế Vĩnh to visit another fellow, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu, at Ngã Năm Chợ Lớn.¹⁸⁸ While we were chatting, Mr. Vĩnh’s hands suddenly started shaking. We were used to it and knew that the Almighty made Mr. Vĩnh hold the spiritic pen. We gave him paper and a pencil. Indeed, the Supreme Being, via automatic writing, ordered the three of us to immediately return to Mr. Trần Duy Nghĩa’s house and organize the invocation there for Him to teach us. We three obeyed the holy order, went to Mr. Nghĩa’s house, and asked Mr. Trương Văn Trảng to come and serve as the medium pair with Mr. Nghĩa.

The Supreme Compassionate Father ordered me to coordinate with Mr. Võ Văn Tường to arrange the worship site at his house (exactly like in the Cầu Kho Holy House but not allowed to set up the altar of (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp). The arrangement was made for the Supreme Compassionate Father to use later. The Altar in Cầu Kho Holy House was ready, why did He order me to arrange it in Mr. Tường’s house? The secret of Heaven is mysterious, how could we know why? Yet, we still followed the holy order.

Not long after, the Supreme Being ordered Mr. Lê Văn Trung to draft the Declaration of the Faith and to invite followers from everywhere to gather at home of Mr. Tường in the 23rd night of the 8th

¹⁸⁸ At that time Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu had retired from teaching to focus on religious practice and temporarily moved to Chợ Lớn. In 1942, Cai Tổng Trương Vinh Quy gave him a piece of land at Cây Quéo to build a house and settle down.

month of Bính Dần year. Followers from all over received the invitation letters and came in great numbers, some on foot, some in cars, some in horse-drawn carriage, bustling along the entire Galliéni avenue...”¹⁸⁹

In the afternoon of that 23rd day of the 8th month, it suddenly rained heavily and lasted until the evening, flooding streets, disrupting traffic and communication. The rain, that came before the meeting, helped the predecessors avoid being monitored and harassed by the French policemen. The rain was probably also a simple but effective way for the Almighty to weed out the curious people who just wanted to watch for fun. The remaining people, who did not mind the rain and wind coming to the meeting, were all devoted to the Faith and the Holy Master.

Under intense circumstances where the religious activities were closely monitored by the French Secret Service, the fact that over two hundred people attended the meeting without fear for their own security (most of them held prominent positions in society such as government officials, businessmen, educators, landowners,...) was truly a testament to the success of the Faith at its early stage. People with little faith never dare to come, let alone sign their names in the Declaration document. And of course, no one could disregard or forget Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường’s dedicated services:

“As Cao Dai Great Way was still in its infancy, it did not have a place for meeting. Despite being a policeman, he was willing to offer his house right in the center of Saigon city to be used as the first

¹⁸⁹ Excerpt from the speech of Mr. Đoàn Văn Bán read at the Commemoration of the Declaration of the Faith at Cầu Kho Holy House on the 12th day of the 8th month of Mậu Dần year (1938).

meeting place for the religious leaders to sign the Declaration document.”¹⁹⁰

The meeting started at around 8 p.m., chaired by gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, and Cao Quỳnh Cư.

The (tentative) document of the Declaration was read out for all participants to listen to and comment on. Finally, they unanimously agreed on the content of the Declaration to be sent to the Governor of Cochinchina (at that time, Mr. Le Fol). After the meeting, it was almost midnight, they set up the invocation in place, and the Holy Master instructed as follows (Figure 50):

*The Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai,
teaching the Way in the South.*

Greeting all disciples,

Trung, Lịch, Trang, Thơ, Muối, Đạt, Vân, Nhung, you
collect the names of all my disciples present here
today... male and female, to attach to the document of
Declaration of the Faith.

¹⁹⁰ Excerpt from the news about the passing of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Từơng, published in Đại Đồng Magazine (Liên Hòa Tổng Hội association), issue number 10, published on January 01, 1940, page 27.

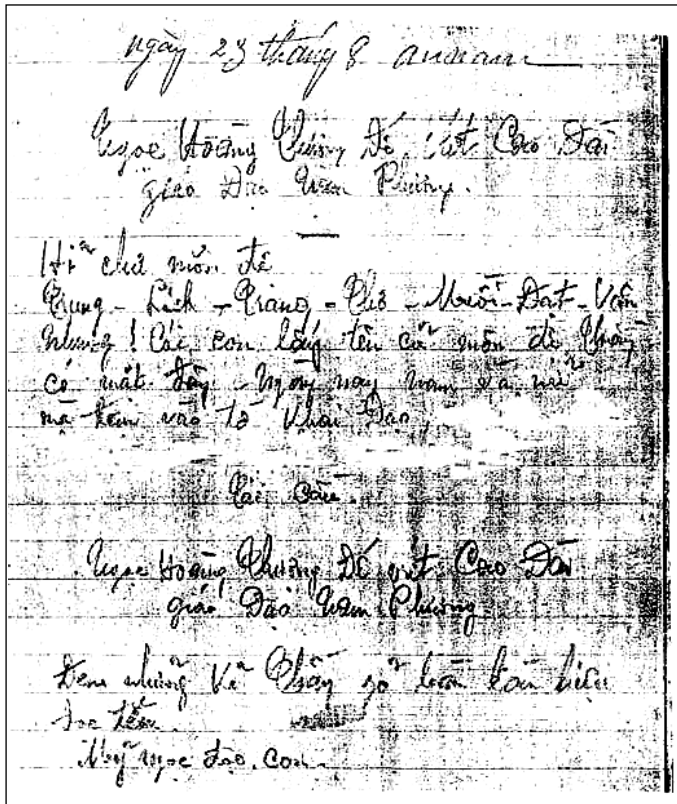


Figure 50: Photograph of a section of the spiritistic record on the 23rd night of the 8th month of Bính Dần year.

Compared to the handwriting in this picture and the one shown in page 89 of *Lịch Sử Đạo Cao Đài - Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ* written by Mr. Đồng Tân, it is obvious that this spiritistic message was recorded by Mr. Tuyết Tân Thành.

After collecting all the names and signatures of those present (a photograph of this handwritten document was shown in Appendix V), they set up the re-invocation. The Supreme Being descended and ordered Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu (given name Mỹ Ngọc) (Figure 51) to read each name. Every time the beaked basket tapped on the table, that name would officially be responsible for signing

under the Declaration document. Also in this séance, through the request of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt, the Holy Master agreed to add the name of (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang (whom the Holy Master called his birth name Nhân) to the list of the official under-signers, though he was not present in that meeting due to his religious duties.



Figure 51: Portrait of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu (1884 – 1958)

The list of names that the Holy Master selected to officially undersign the Declaration document comprised twenty-eight names from all sectors and social classes. (Please refer to the list of names shown in Chapter 2 Section V Part 3). Next, the Supreme God reviewed the content of the Declaration document and taught:

***Trung**, I insist that by next Thursday, you must come to **Le Fol** to submit the Declaration on time.*

The Holy Master set the date, which was certainly a favorable time for the Faith; it coincided with the period when Mr. Pierre Pasquier took office as Governor General of Indochina (temporarily replacing Mr. Alexander Varenne (1870-1947) from Monday October 4, 1926). At that time, Mr. Pasquier was Khâm Sứ Trung Kỳ (the Resident-Superior of Annam).

Also in that night, while quite a few faithful disciples of the propagation branch were present, the Holy Master taught them to be more conscious about the need to preach the God-Way. To somehow reflect the general situation in this early stage, here is the excerpt of this holy message:

*Disciples, I will teach you this only once, so you understand and remember. Every day, many of you go out to preach the Faith, but in your hearts, you are afraid of those who receive your teaching. I ask, is it ironic? I see it is like a teacher being afraid of his students. **Bản**, what do you think?¹⁹¹ ... [I'm smiling] ...*

You preach the Faith to others, but you yourself do not know what the doctrine is. Is it paradoxical? An ignorant teaches an ignorant; even if they talk until the end of the world, both will still be ignorant. I also see the ignorant preacher, when being provoked, turned to admit that 'my Faith is wrong'. Is such a preacher right and justifiable? It is no different from a person sitting in the house, seeing someone getting wet in the rain, then jumping out to cover the latter and praising that the rain is so cool. Such a preacher is very ignorant of the Faith.

I also see a group of disciples, when speaking of the Faith to others, feel ashamed and embarrassed. Is it against true decency? ...

Among you are many such people. I advise you to always remember that: Your Teacher is the God-Master! You should know only Him!

Back to the Declaration of the Faith document. Following the order of the Supreme Being: 'by next Thursday, you must come to **Le Fol** to submit the Declaration on time', (Cardinal) **Đầu Su** **Thượng Trung Nhật**, on Thursday, October 7, 1926 (the new-moon day of the 9th month of **Bính Dần** year) went to the Governor's Palace to submit the Declaration document and was "acknowledged"¹⁹² by Mr. Le Fol, the Governor of Cochinchina at that time.

¹⁹¹ Mr. **Đoàn Văn Bản** was then a teacher (Principal of **Cầu Kho** School).

¹⁹² "acknowledged", in the administrative sense, means received and recorded in the official dispatch book. It does not mean accepted.

Thus, in fact, the exact date of the Declaration of the Faith was the new-moon day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year. But every year, the meeting date to prepare the Declaration document, the 23rd day of the 8th month, has long been the anniversary, held annually in Nam Thành Holy House (124 - 126 Nguyễn Văn Cừ street, Saigon District 1) to commemorate the predecessors' spirit of determination for the Faith.

3) CONTENT OF THE DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

The official document that Cao Dai followers sent to Mr. Le Fol, Governor of Cochinchina, dated October 7, 1926, containing the original text in French as follows:

“Saigon, le 7 Octobre 1926

Monsieur le Gouverneur,

Les soussignés,

Ont l'honneur de venir respectueusement vous faire connaître ce qui suit:

Il existait en Indochine trois religions [:] (Bouddhisme. Taoisme, Confucianisme). Nos ancêtres pratiquaient religieusement ces trois doctrines et vivaient heureux [en paix] en suivant strictement les beaux préceptes dictés par les Créateurs de ces religions.

On était, pendant cet ancien temps, tellement insoucieux qu'on dédaignait même de ramasser les

It should be clarified that in fact, Mr. Le Fol was only the Acting Governor (took office on April 19, 1926), replacing Governor Maurice Cognacq (1870-1949) who was returning to France for work. In December 1926, according to Nam Phong Magazine No. 12, page 630: “In Cochinchina, Mr. Blanchard de la Brosse took office as Governor and Mr. Le Fol took office as Cambodian Resident-Superior”. In this book, Mr. Le Fol is called Governor as the historical documents have used to call him.

objets tombés dans la rue (Gia Vô bẻ hộ, lộ bất thập di), tel est l'adage inscrit dans nos annales.

Hélas! Ce beau temps n'existe plus pour les raisons suivantes:

1. Les pratiquants de ces religions ont cherché à se diviser tandis que le but de toutes les religions est le même: faire le bien et éviter le mal, adorer pieusement le Créateur.

2. Ils ont dénaturé complètement la signification de ces saintes et précieuses doctrines.

3. La course au confort, à l'honneur [aux honneurs], l'ambition des gens, sont aussi des causes principales des divergences d'opinions actuelles. Les Annamites de nos jours ont complètement abandonné les bonnes mœurs et traditions de l'ancien temps.

Ecœurés de cet état de choses, un groupe d'Annamites, fervents traditionalistes et religieux, ont étudié la refonte de toutes ces religions, pour n'en former qu'une seule et unique appelée CAODAISME ou ĐẠI ĐẠO.

Le nom ĐẠI ĐẠO TAM KỲ PHỒ ĐỘ, qui signifie la troisième Amnistie générale, est donné par l'Esprit Suprême qui est venu aider les soussignés à fonder cette nouvelle religion.

L'Esprit Suprême est venu sous le nom de NGỌC HOÀNG THƯỢNG ĐẾ dit CAO ĐÀI ou "Le Très Haut, DIEU TOUT PUISSANT".

Par l'intermédiaire de médium écrivant, NGỌC HOÀNG THƯỢNG ĐẾ transmet aux soussignés des enseignements divins ayant pour but de

concentrer et d'enseigner les beaux préceptes de ces trois anciennes Religions.

1. La Nouvelle Doctrine enseignera aux peuples:

2. La Haute morale de Confucius;

Les vertus dictées dans les religions Bouddhique et Taoique. Ces vertus consistant à faire le bien et éviter le mal, aimer l'humanité, pratiquer la concorde, éviter totalement la dissension et la guerre.

Les soussignés ont l'honneur de vous soumettre:

1. Quelques extraits du recueil des "Saintes-paroles" de NGOC HOÀNG THUỖNG ĐẾ, paroles estimées plus précieuses que tout ce qui existe ici-bas.

2. La traduction de quelques passages du livre de prières que NGOC HOÀNG THUỖNG ĐẾ nous a enseignées.

Le but poursuivi par les soussignés est de ramener les peuples à l'ancien temps de paix et de concorde.

On sera ainsi dirigé vers une époque nouvelle tellement heureuse qu'il est difficile de la décrire.

Au nom de très nombreux Annamites qui ont entièrement approuvé ces études et dont la liste est ci-jointe, les soussignés ont l'honneur de venir respectueusement vous déclarer [les soussignés ont l'honneur de déclarer] qu'ils vont propager à l'humanité entière cette Sainte Doctrine.

Persuadés d'avance que cette nouvelle religion apportera à nous tous la Paix et la concorde, les soussignés vous prient de recevoir officiellement leur déclaration.

Les soussignés vous prient d’agréer, Monsieur le Gouverneur, l’assurance de leurs sentiments respectueux et dévoués.”¹⁹³

Translation of the Declaration document¹⁹⁴

“Saigon, October 7, 1926

Your Excellency, the Governor of Cochinchina at Saigon:

We hereby sign below, respectfully to let Your Excellency know:

In the past, in the French Indochina there were three religions: Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Our ancestors worshipped all three religions, and by following the precious principles passed down by the Founders of these religions, they were able to live and work in peace. In history there was also a saying: “Gia vô bế hộ, lộ bất thập di” which means that people in those days were so at ease that they slept without closing their doors at

¹⁹³ Excerpt from *Le Caodaïsme au Cambodge*, author Pierre Bernardini, Université de Paris VII, pages 282-284.

In the June 1931 report of Mr. LaLaurette, the Political and Administrative Inspector, sent to Governor of Cochinchina, there was an excerpt from the Declaration of the Faith. Compared to the original text, the excerpt in this report showed some differences which were included in brackets in the text above.

¹⁹⁴ There have been many Vietnamese translated versions of the Declaration of the Faith. The translation shown in the book *Đại Đạo Cần Nguyên* by Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu was chosen to be printed here for two reasons: First, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu was one of the predecessors present in the meeting to prepare the Declaration document and so, he grasped the spirit of the meeting. Second, the language used in this translation is correct to the historical moment of that time. It is also possible that this Vietnamese version was read to the audience that day to get comments, and then Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt re-wrote it in French.

night, and on the streets, no one bothered to pick up ownerless things.

But sadly, the peaceful life was lost due to the following reasons:

1. Practitioners of these religions divided into many factions and sects, provoking each other, although the principles of these three religions were the same: do good, avoid evil, and worship the Creator.

2. They even tried to reform the true traditions of these religions, causing the decrepitude of these Faiths.

3. The opposing opinions about religion that we witness every day are also due to the baits of glory and greed of mankind. That is why the Vietnamese people now abandon all the good customs of the past.

Heart-broken by such circumstances, many Vietnamese gathered, for their root and religion, to seek a way to unite the three religions into one (return to the origin and restore the one) called Cao Dai Faith or the Great Way.

Fortunately for all living beings, Heaven follows human will. The Jade Emperor Supreme God has regularly descended to teach the Way and unite the three religions into Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ in this Southern land. Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ means the Third Universal Salvation.

All the holy messages that the Jade Emperor has taught us in spiritic séances aimed at spreading the principles of this Faith.

Cao Dai teaches on:

1. The noble ethics of Confucius.

2. The morality of Buddhism and Taoism is to do good, avoid evil, love humanity, behave in harmony to avoid chaos and war.

We hereby send to Your Excellency for inspection and consideration:

1. A copy of the holy message of the Jade Emperor Supreme God.

2. A translation of the holy scriptures.

Our goals are to make humanity enjoy the peace of the past. If so, all living beings will see a new era opening that is extremely blissful and beyond description.

On behalf of very numerous Vietnamese who have recognized our actions and have signed the Declaration of the Faith document attached herewith, we hereby declare to Your Excellency that from today, we will spread the Great Way throughout the world.

We would like to ask Your Excellency to officially accept our Declaration of the Faith.”

LIST OF THE TWENTY-EIGHT CAO DAI DISCIPLES SIGNED UNDER THE DECLARATION OF THE FAITH:¹⁹⁵

1. Mrs. **Lâm Thị Thanh**, property owner, Vũng Liêm.
2. Mr. **Lê Văn Trung**, cựu Thượng nghị viên, Ngũ đẳng bửu tinh (former Senator, recipient of the Fifth Order of Legion of Honor), Chợ Lớn.
3. Mr. **Lê Văn Lịch**, monk, Long An village, Chợ Lớn.

¹⁹⁵ This list was from the book of *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* written by Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu, but with comparison and collation to many other historical sources.

4. Mr. **Trần Đạo Quang**, monk, Hanh Thông Tây village, Gia Định.
5. Mr. **Nguyễn Ngọc Tương**, Tri phủ (Prefect), Head of Cần Giuộc District.
6. Mr. **Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ**, property owner, Sài Gòn.
7. Mr. **Lê Bá Trang**, Đốc Phủ Sứ (Governor), Chợ Lớn.
8. Mr. **Vương Quan Kỳ**, Tri phủ (Prefect), Sở Thuế Thân (the Poll Tax Department).
9. Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Kinh**, monk, Bình Lý Thôn, Gia Định.
10. Mr. **Ngô Tường Vân**, thông phán Sở Tạo Tác (Commissioner of the Artifacts and Creative Office), Sài Gòn.
11. Mr. **Nguyễn Phát Đạt**¹⁹⁶, property owner, Sài Gòn.
12. Mr. **Ngô Văn Kim**, landowner, Đại Hương Cả (Large Village Chief), Cần Giuộc.
13. Mr. **Đoàn Văn Bản**, Principal of Cầu Kho School, Sài Gòn.
14. Mr. **Lê Văn Giảng**, thư ký kế toán (Accounting Secretary) of Hippolito Co., Sài Gòn.
15. Mr. **Hùynh Văn Giỏi**, thông phán Sở Tân Đáo (Translator at the Immigration Department), Sài Gòn.
16. Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Tường**, thông ngôn Sở Tuần Cảnh (Interpreter at the Patrol Department), Sài Gòn.
17. Mr. **Cao Quỳnh Cư**, thư ký Sở Hỏa Xa (Secretary at the Railway Department), Sài Gòn.
18. Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc**, thư ký Sở Thương Chánh (Secretary at the Commerce Department), Sài Gòn.

¹⁹⁶ Some books record his name as Nguyễn Văn Đạt, but in fact, his original family name was Trần. More information is in the following part of this section.

19. Mr. **Cao Hoài Sang**, thư ký Sở Thương Chánh (Secretary at the Commerce Department), Sài Gòn.
20. Mr. **Nguyễn Trung Hậu**, Principal of the private school Đa Kao, Sài Gòn.
21. Mr. **Trương Hữu Đức**, thư ký Sở Hỏa Xa (Secretary at the Railway Department), Sài Gòn.
22. Mr. **Huỳnh Trung Tuất**, property owner, Chợ Đũi, Sài Gòn.
23. Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Chức**, Cai tổng (Canton Chief), Chợ Lớn.
24. Mr. **Lại Văn Hành**, Hương cả (Village Chief), Chợ Lớn.
25. Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Trò**, schoolteacher, Sài Gòn.
26. Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Hương**, schoolteacher, Đa Kao.
27. Mr. **Võ Văn Kinh**, giáo tập (novice teacher), Cần Giuộc.
28. Mr. **Phạm Văn Tỉ**, giáo tập (novice teacher), Cần Giuộc.

LIST OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY-FIVE PERSONS PRESENT AT HOME OF MR. NGUYỄN VĂN TƯỜNG IN THE MEETING TO PREPARE FOR THE DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

(Please refer to the photograph of the handwriting list of all the names and signatures in Appendix V)

- 1) Lâm Thị Thanh (Lâm Ngọc Thanh); 2) Nguyễn Thị Hiếu; 3) Trần Thị Lựu; 4) Trịnh Thị Thi; 5) Vương Thị Huê; 6) Trần Thị Thịnh; 7) Nguyễn Thị Thanh; 8) Trần Thị Trường; 9) Nguyễn Thị Ruộng; 10) Huỳnh Thị Chính; 11) Đỗ Thị Thi; 12) Võ Thị Tuy; 13) Hồng Thị Đỏ; 14) Trương

Thị Hay; 15) Lê Thị Tiêng; 16) Nguyễn Thị Vện; 17) Lê Thị Cúc; 18) Phạm Thị Diệu. 19) Đặng Thị Kề; 20) Trương Thị Tròn; 21) Nguyễn Thị Thơm; 22) Nguyễn Thị Sanh; 23) Nguyễn Thị Tịnh; 24) Nguyễn Thị Phẩm; 25) Trần Thị Chiêu; 26) Trần Thị Trọng; 27) Trương Thị Nhạn; 28) Lê Thị Hườn; 29) Võ Thị Quyên; 30) Lê Thị Chính; 31) Huỳnh Thị Hườn; 32) Thị Thị Tới; 33) Nguyễn Thị Là; 34) Huỳnh Thị Hai; 35) Cao Thị Tư ; 36) Phạm Hồ Cẩm; 37) Phạm Tần Tranh; 38) Nguyễn Thị Nhung; 39) Trần Thị Huê; 40) Nguyễn Thị Siên; 41) Nguyễn Thị Diên; 42) Cao Thị Nở; 43) Huỳnh Thị Ba; 44) Lê Thị Ba; 45) Đặng Thị Ngân; 46) Nguyễn Thị Nhiều; 47) Võ Thị Giáo; 48) Nguyễn Thị Thanh; 49) Trần Thị Vàng; 50) Trần Thị Trang; 51) Ngô Thị Mai; 52) Hà Văn Thuần; 53) Lê Văn Trung; 54) Lê Văn Lịch; 55) Vương Quan Kỳ; 56) Lê Bá Trang; 57) Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ; 58) Nguyễn Văn Tương; 59) Nguyễn Văn Muối; 60) Nguyễn Phát Đạt; 61) Ngô Tường Vân; 62) Nguyễn Văn Kinh; 63) Lâm Quang Bính; 64) Trương Văn Nhung; 65) Đoàn Văn Bản; 66) Huỳnh Văn Giỏi; 67) Lê Văn Giảng; 68) Nguyễn Văn Tường; 69) Nguyễn Văn Bảy; 70) Nguyễn Văn Hậu (Nguyễn Trung Hậu); 71) Trương Hữu Đức; 72) Cao Quỳnh Cư; 73) Phạm Công Tắc; 74) Cao Hoài Sang; 75) Cao Quỳnh Diêu; 76) Trần Duy Nghĩa; 77) Trương Văn Trảng; 78) Huỳnh Trung Tuất; 79) Hồ Văn Đình; 80) Hoàng Đình Phú; 81) Nguyễn Văn Tri; 82) Trần Văn Hoảng; 83) Nguyễn Thanh Vân; 84) Huỳnh Văn Liêng; 85) Huỳnh Văn Đán; 86) Huỳnh Thành Đang; 87) Đoàn Văn Đệ; 88) Cao Quỳnh Huê; 89) Nguyễn Văn Mùi; 90) Hồ Văn Ngọc; 91) Trần Văn Tạ; 92) Nguyễn Văn Đề; 93) Phạm Văn Hiến; 94) Nguyễn Đình Tòng; 95) Phí Văn Thung; 96) Tuyết Tân Thành; 97) Hồ Quang Châu; 98) Phạm Văn Phú; 99) Đỗ Văn Nghĩa; 100) Nguyễn Kim Tốt; 101) Hứa Vinh Hậu; 102) Nguyễn Văn Hoài; 103) Võ Văn Nguyên; 104) Huỳnh Văn Mai; 105) Hứa Phong Cao; 106) Lê Văn Hóa; 107) Ngô Văn Điều; 108) Trần Văn Nhâm; 109) Lê Quan Sĩ; 110) Trần Bửu Khá; 111) Trần Bửu Tùng; 112) Phạm Văn Lê; 113) Phạm Tấn Cự; 114) Phạm Văn Đơn; 115) Lê Văn Quý;

116) Nguyễn Văn Niệm; 117) Đinh Văn Nhỏ; 118) Nguyễn Thiêng Kim; 119) Lê Thiện Phước; 120) Nguyễn Văn Thân; 121) Lê Thế Vĩnh; 122) Nguyễn Văn Mạnh; 123) Trần Văn Bân; 124) Phan Văn Vi; 125) Nguyễn Văn Đức; 126) Trịnh Văn Kinh; 127) Trần Văn Vạng; 128) Hứa Văn Mùi; 129) Văn Văn Bảy; 130) Văn Văn Lụa; 131) Trịnh Văn Kỳ; 132) Huỳnh Văn Mới; 133) Huỳnh Văn Cửa; 134) Phạm Văn Long; 135) Lê Văn Phước; 136) Trương Văn Kỳ; 137) Nguyễn Văn Hương; 138) Nguyễn Văn Khai; 139) Nguyễn Văn Võ; 140) Nguyễn Văn Dụng; 141) Hà Văn Bút; 142) Huỳnh Văn Xón; 143) Trần Văn Thất; 144) Lê Văn Thao; 145) Nguyễn Văn Trương; 146) Hà Văn Vàng; 147) Phan Văn Giêng; 148) Nguyễn Văn Đồng; 149) Phạm Chí Mỹ; 150) Phan Văn Bốn; 151) Trương Văn Miên; 152) Trương Văn Thắng; 153) Lê Văn Tấn; 154) Lê Văn Sáu; 155) Lê Văn Triều; 156) Võ Văn Hường; 157) Cao Quỳnh Nở; 158) Nguyễn Văn Trò; 159) Cao Quỳnh Đức; 160) Như Nhân; 161) Trần Văn Thu; 162) Nguyễn Ngọc Tương; 163) Phạm Văn Tuổi; 164) Lê Văn Sơn; 165) Nguyễn Văn Lai; 166) Ngô Văn Kim; 167) Ca Minh Chương; 168) Phan Văn Biép; 169) Đoàn Ngọc Chí; 170) Trương Văn Vạn; 171) Nguyễn Văn Hương; 172) Nguyễn Tăng Phòng; 173) Võ Văn Kinh; 174) Phạm Tấn Đãi; 175) Nguyễn Văn Vân; 176) Hồ Văn Dầu; 177) Huỳnh Kim Chi; 178) Nguyễn Tăng Thiều; 179) Phạm Văn Thông; 180) Phạm Văn Thiệt; 181) Ngô Ngọc An; 182) Đoàn Văn Tám; 183) Hồ Văn Cẩn; 184) Nguyễn Văn Nghiệp; 185) Nguyễn Minh Đức; 186) Nguyễn Tăng Triều; 187) Nguyễn Văn Tá; 188) Nguyễn Văn Chức; 189) Huỳnh Trung Đễ; 190) Huỳnh Trung Nguyên; 191) Trần Văn Dong; 192) Nguyễn Văn Ngươn; 193) Nguyễn Văn Quynh; 194) Phạm Văn Tỉ; 195) Nguyễn Văn Thiện; 196) Ca Phước Khương; 197) Phan Công Sanh; 198) Trần Văn Nhạc; 199) Hà Văn Nguyễn; 200) Cổ Văn Lờ; 201) Bùi Quang Phô; 202) Trương Văn Tam; 203) Phan Văn Ngựa; 204) Nguyễn Văn Chấn; 205) Ca Văn Nữ; 206) Võ Thành

Mẫn; 207) Võ Văn Lịch; 208) Phan Văn Nhân; 209) Nguyễn Văn Hón; 210) Trịnh Văn Hòa; 211) Trần Văn Luyện; 212) Võ Văn Tùng; 213) Bùi Văn Nga; 214) Đặng Văn Hào; 215) Trần Văn Thới; 216) Nguyễn Văn Tôm; 217) Võ Văn Tò; 218) Hà Văn Kỳ; 219) Nguyễn Văn Hội; 220) Lê Văn Hoa; 221) Nguyễn Văn Thịnh; 222) Trần Bửu Trước; 223) Dương Văn Hoài; 224) Phan Văn Nhung; 225) Nguyễn Văn Xơ; 226) Nguyễn Văn Vững; 227) Võ Văn Cừ; 228) Huỳnh Văn Hợi; 229) Thành Văn Thàng; 230) Nguyễn Văn Cam; 231) Hồ Văn Tông; 232) Lê Văn Ngọc; 233) Nguyễn Văn Huê; 234) Đặng Văn Đầu; 235) Lại Văn Hành; 236) Lê Văn Sâm; 237) Võ Văn Quận; 238) Võ Văn Túc; 239) Nguyễn Văn Huê; 240) Phạm Văn Cho; 241) Đào Văn Còn; 242) Trần Văn Mười; 243) Nguyễn Văn Hương; 244) Nguyễn Văn Bạch; 245) Nguyễn Kỳ Phương.

Notes:

1. According to the handwriting list (displayed in Appendix V) the number of attendees was 247. When the list was recorded, there were 244 names; but the list had two duplicate numbers: 156. So, the total was 245. Also, there were two persons who were not actually present, (Great Master) Thái Lão sư Trần Đạo Quang and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trò, but they were included by the Holy Master. Hence, the total number of participants was 247.

In addition, (Senior Brother) Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương Trần Văn Quế, in his speech on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Tân Hợi year (1971), stated that “(Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân was present, but he did not sign the above document... He was probably very reserved and attended only to witness.”

2. Number 52 (i.e., number 49bis in the handwriting list) was Mr. Hà Văn Thuần, the first male name in the list. It was a borrowed name as a place holder for (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang who was not present in the meeting. As for the name of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trò (at number 155), it was added to the list in accord with the holy message on October 3, 1926.

3. The top part of the handwriting list showed the title of Mr. Le Fol as Phó Soái Nam Kỳ (Deputy Commander of Cochinchina). Phó Soái (Deputy Commander) is also understood as Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ (Governor of Cochinchina). At that time, Mr. Le Fol was Quyền Thống đốc (Acting Governor) (replacing Mr. Cognacq who was recalled to France).

4. According to Ms. Phạm Hồ Cầm (1914 – 1998) (daughter of (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc) and Ms. Trương Thị Nhạn (born in 1912, daughter of Mr. Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Tráng), they were only thirteen or fourteen years old (and members of the choir) when the meeting for the Declaration took place. But since it was such an important event that the predecessors mentioned repeatedly during their conversations, they still remembered some details of the meeting on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year as follows:

“The meeting started at around 8 p.m., and it was raining quite heavily that day. Presiding over the meeting were the two gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhật and Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt (Ladies Phạm Hồ Cầm and Trương Thị Nhạn mentioned Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư as someone who participated in running the meeting). (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân and (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Văn Thụ... wore the robes of their respective religions. After completing the content of the Declaration document, around midnight, they set up the invocation in place, asking for the command of the Supreme Being.”

5. Below are brief biographies of some of the people whose names are officially listed in the Declaration document:

- Mr. **Nguyễn Phát Đạt** (1881 – 1942) (Figure 52), was a son of Mr. Trần Đăng Khoa and Ms. Võ Thị Phú. His original name was Trần Phát Đạt, the third elder brother of Mr. Trần Hiền Vinh (Figure 53) at Thanh An Temple (please refer to Appendix II for more details). Around the age of thirty, to avoid a legal issue, he changed his surname to

Nguyễn while his four children, comprising two sons and two daughters, kept the surname Trần. Working at Sở Thương Chánh (the Commerce Department) until around the year 1930, he returned to manage the family's rubber plantation Phú Hưng but still regularly participated in religious activities at the Holy Houses Cầu Kho, Minh Tân, ... Mr. Nguyễn Phát Đạt passed away in 1942 and was buried on his family land (Bình Dương province).



Figure 52: Portrait of Mr. **Trần Phát Đạt** (Nguyễn Phát Đạt) (1881 - 1942)



Figure 53: Portrait of Mr. **Trần Hiến Vinh** (1884 - 1962)

- Mr. **Huỳnh Văn Giỏi** (1880 – 1954) (Figure 54), a son of Mr. Huỳnh Văn Ngôn and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Được, was a native of Giồng Luông, Thạnh Phú, Bến Tre province, and husband of Ms. Phạm Thị Thêu (1881 – 1953). They had eight children (six sons and two daughters).

He had been educated in Confucian traditions in Bến Tre province, before attending École Normale d'Instituteurs in Saigon. After graduating, he worked at Sở Tân Đảo (the Immigration Department). During that time, he lived next door to the house of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (on Bourdais street, now Calmette street) and so, he learned about the Faith early. On the 14th day of the 5th month of Bính Dần year, he was ordained as Lễ Sinh (Student-Priest) and on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year he was ordained to Giáo Hữu (Priest) rank at Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường's house. After retiring from work, he went back to Bến Tre province and participated in religious practice at An Hội Holy House.

Mr. Huỳnh Văn Giỏi passed away on the 20th day of the 7th month of Giáp Ngọ year (1954) and was buried on his family's land behind his house (103D Nguyễn Văn Tư street, Bến Tre town).



Figure 54: Portrait of Mr.
HUỖNH VĂN GIỎI
(1880 – 1954)



Figure 55: Portrait of Mr.
HUỖNH TRUNG TUẤT
(1873 – 1947)

- Mr. **Huỳnh Trung Tuất** (1873 – 1947) (Figure 55), was husband of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hòa (1872 – 1963). They had three children: Huỳnh Văn Sơn (ordained as a Giáo Hữu (Priest) on the 17th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year), Huỳnh Văn Cao, and Huỳnh Văn Vạn.

Originally from Rạch Kiến, Cần Giuộc district, and following Confucian traditions, Mr. Huỳnh Trung Tuất advocated resistance against the French; a typical example was his participation in the destruction of a main jail to rescue Mr. Phan Xích Long (year 1916). Since he was Hộ Trưởng (Head of the Household) and had a house in the area of Chợ Đũi, he was often called Mr. Hộ Tuất. Joining Cao Dai in the 2nd month of Bính Dần year, he was ordained as a Lễ Sinh (Student-Priest) on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year. Later, he established (Meditation Hall) Thánh Tịnh Ngọc Tuyền at his house (later it became (Holy House) Thánh thất Chợ Đũi, now at alley 306 of Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai street, Saigon District 3. This Holy House no longer exists).

Mr. Huỳnh Trung Tuất passed away on December 28, 1947 and was buried in his family's grave in the area of Ông Tạ (Hòa Hưng district, Saigon city).

- Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Chức** (1873 – 1956) (Figure 56), husband of Ms. Trần Thị Trầm (1871 – 1947).

In 1926, he was Cai Tổng (Canton Chief) at Phước Điền Trung and was encouraged by Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, District Chief of Cần Giuộc, to join Cao Dai Faith. He completed many welfare projects for the local people such as road paving, bridge constructing (bridge Thầy Cai) ...

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Chức passed away on April 24, 1956. His and his wife's graves are currently located in Thuận Bắc hamlet, Thuận Thành village, Cần Giuộc district.

- Mr. **Lại Văn Hành** (1878 – 1939) (Figure 57), husband of Ms. Trần Thị Chốt (1885 – 1968).

He joined Cao Dai on the 29th day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year at Tân Kim Invocation Site, while being a Hương Cả (Village Chief). In 1930, he donated an acre of land in Xóm Cống hamlet (Bến Lức district) for the construction of Long Phú Holy House (presently belonged to Ban Chính Đạo).

Mr. Lại Văn Hành passed away in 1939 and was buried on the land of Long Phú Holy House.



Figure 56: Portrait of Mr. **NGUYỄN VĂN CHỨC** (1873 – 1956)



Figure 57: Portrait of Mr. **LẠI VĂN HÀNH** (1878 – 1939)

- Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Trò** (1886 – 1949) (Figure 58) was the ninth child of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lừa (1846 – 1914) and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Lộc (1847 -1942). His wife was Ms. Dương Thị Ngại (1885 – 1965), and they had a daughter, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Ý.

Graduated from Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs, in 1926 Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trò was a schoolteacher in Saigon. After joining Cao Dai, he donated a plot of his family land for the construction of Tân Hưng Holy House (now belonging to Ban Chính Đạo). Around 1940, Tân Hưng Holy House was burned down; thanks to the items removed from Cầu Kho Holy House, local parishioners were able to temporarily rebuild part of Tân Hưng Holy House. Now this Holy House is stable and well constructed.

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trò passed away on the 25th day of the 7th month of Kỷ Sửu year (1949); he was at the rank Thượng Phối Sư (Archbishop of Taoist faction) (in Ban Chính Đạo). His and his wife's graves are located on the land of Tân Hưng Holy House (Long An province).



Figure 58: Portrait of Mr. **NGUYỄN VĂN TRÒ** (1886 – 1949)



Figure 59: Portrait of Mr. **PHẠM VĂN TĨ** (1887 – 1949)

- Mr. **Phạm Văn Tĩ** (1887 – 1949) (Figure 59) was a schoolteacher and herbalist in Cần Giuộc district. He was accepted into Cao Dai by the Holy Master in Tân Kim Invocation Site on March 20, 1926. In the family, he was the sixth, and his ninth younger brother, Mr. Phạm Văn Tươi, was also a Cao Dai disciple (who was later ordained as Hiến Đạo, one of the Thập Nhị Thời Quân (the Twelve Kings of Time)

at the Tây Ninh Holy See). Mr. Phạm Văn Tỉ was Đầu họ Đạo (Parish Leader) at Quy Đức Holy House (belonged to Ban Chính Đạo) and passed away in 1949. He was buried in his homeland in hamlet 1, Quy Đức commune, Long An province.

- Mr. **Võ Văn Kinh** (1880 – 1946), a native of Thanh Hà village, Tân Kim commune, Cần Giuộc district. Since childhood he lived with his single mother, Ms. Lê Thị Liên. He married Ms. Lê Thị Ngưu and they had four children: the first died early, followed by Ms. Võ Thị Cúc (given name An), Mr. Võ Văn Nhân, and Ms. Võ Thị Thủ (given name Thạnh).

Mr. Võ Văn Kinh taught Vietnamese (national language) at Quy Đức school until his retirement. He also taught Sino-Vietnamese characters at home. Before joining Cao Dai (on March 5, 1926), the schoolmaster Giáo Kinh had spent about three years in Buddhist practice under the guidance of (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Nhứt Thiện on the top of Bà Đen mountain. After converting to Cao Dai, Mr. Võ Văn Kinh actively participated in religious practice and was heavenly ordained as a Giáo Hữu phái Thượng (Priest of Taoist faction) in Ban Chính Đạo ecclesiastic hierarchy.

He passed away on the full-moon day of the 12th month of Bính Tuất year (1946) and was buried in his homeland in Thanh Hà village. Around 1980, his family exhumed his remains and stored his ashes in Huê Nghiêm Pagoda (An Dưỡng Địa), Phú Lâm district (urn # 99).

4) EFFECTS OF THE DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

a) On Cao Dai followers

The Declaration document was a way for the Cao Dai predecessors to deal with the pressure exerted by the colonial government. They used the laws of the ruling country to protect themselves. The French laws prohibited the activities of “Secret Societies” but not those of religion. Establishing the Declaration of the Faith was a tactful way to publicize religious

activities, in preparation for the upcoming Inauguration of the Great Way.

It should be noted that Vietnam at that time (1926) was divided into three regions with three different political regimes: Southern Vietnam was a French colony called Cochinchina; Central Vietnam was a French protectorate, but still under the late Nguyễn dynasty (King Bảo Đại), and was called An Nam; Northern Vietnam was completely a French protectorate (from đèo Ngang Pass and beyond) named Tonkin.

If – this is purely hypothetical – Cao Dai Faith had been initiated in the Central or Northern Vietnam, the situation might have been very different. It is not known whether this situation would have been easier or harder. But the long-lasting persecution in Central Vietnam, which began with Circular No. 40 on the 25th day of the 1st month of the 4th year of King Bảo Đại (March 6, 1928) prohibiting the practice and preaching of Cao Dai, showed that this new religion might have faced even more challenges.

As a colony, Cochinchina was not subjected to the full Law on the Establishment of Associations (year 1867) and the Law on the Organization of Associations (year 1901) that were applied in France. The indigenous people were only subject to Articles 291, 292, and 294 of the Criminal Codes (supplemented by the Decree of December 31, 1912). These Articles required those who applied for permission to operate an association or a group must submit Bản Điều Lệ or “Nội Quy” (a Charter or “Internal Regulations”) along with many other documents.

Back to the Declaration of the Faith, it was a proclamation and not an “inquiry for permission” to inaugurate the Faith. Attached to the Declaration document was just a copy of holy messages and a translation of the Prayer Book into French.

From an administrative point of view, the predecessors did not

comply with the regulations mentioned above. They did not follow the regulations, but they had an official document notifying the government. And this document was personally handed to the Governor of Cochinchina by Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt, a high-ranking ‘official’ who was acquainted to the Governor. Hence, this was also a measure the predecessors chose to test the reaction of the French government and to ease the tension with the authorities at that time.

Immediately after Mr. Le Fol, Governor of Cochinchina, received the Declaration of the Faith, the predecessors created the flyer “Phổ Cáo Chúng Sinh” (“Proclamation to Sentient Beings”) and sent it everywhere, intending to use it to inform the fellows of the situation, and in particular, to indirectly made known to the local authorities that now Cao Dai had been “welcomed and praised by the Marshal of Cochinchina for encouraging people to do good, which is a noble doctrine”.

In the séance on the 7th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year (October 13, 1926), the Supreme Being meticulously taught:

Vĩnh, read the draft of Proclamation and wait for Me to correct it. Stop reading when I lower the beaked basket.

That day, after examining the content of the “Proclamation”, the Supreme Being taught:

*Children! You must immediately take care of the propagation. From the 10th day of this month all the mediums must ask for permission to take twenty-nine days off. I insist that you divide yourselves and spread out to cover all areas... Trung, you must ask Le Fol for the Certificate of Declaration of the Faith; tomorrow you should visit him, I will be with you.*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Excerpted from *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục* page 39.

On October 15, 1926, the “Proclamation to Sentient Beings” was printed (at Imprimerie de l’Union, Saigon) with fourteen pages, size 18 x 24 centimeters, and widely distributed.

Nam Phong Magazine No. 111, (November 1926), on page 429, reported:

“Cao Dai religion issues a Proclamation to Sentient Beings of the Great Way for the Universal Salvation”.

A photocopy of the cover page of the Proclamation to Sentient Beings (Figure 60) and the end of the Proclamation (its page 14) displaying the words “Khai Đạo nơi Chánh Phủ” (“Proclamation of the Faith to the Government”) on top left corner (Figure 61) are shown below.

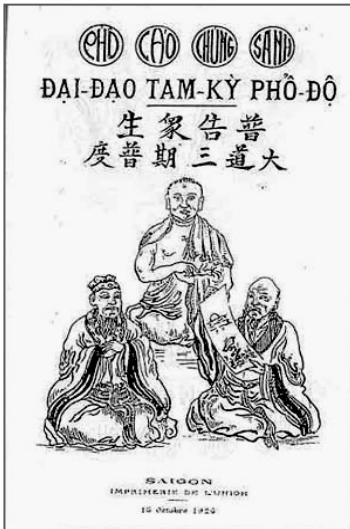


Figure 60: Cover page of the Proclamation to Sentient Beings in Binh Dân year (1926)

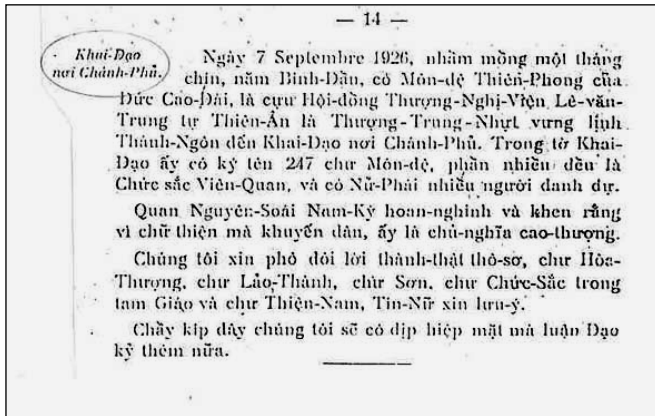


Figure 61: The last page (page 14) of the Proclamation to Sentient Beings.

b) Reactions of the colonial government

The Governor of Cochinchina at that time (Mr. Le Fol) proved to be well experienced in politics. Receiving the Declaration of the Faith, Mr. Le Fol did not show any clear attitude; he did not agree to accept it, nor did he officially prohibit it.

First, it was because the Declaration of the Faith was not a request for permission that the Governor could sign to allow the propagation of Cao Dai religion. On the other hand, prohibition would certainly meet with many adverse reactions and could also violate the law for religious propagation in France.

Nevertheless, to be cautious, Mr. Le Fol sent the secret telegram No. 146-C dated November 14, 1926, in which the Governor reminded the provincial leaders to secretly monitor the propagation of Cao Dai Faith and notify the Governor's Palace by secret dispatch.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Original French text: Néanmoins par télégramme confidentiel N° 146-C du 14 Novembre 1926, Le Gouverneur avisait les Administrateurs, Chef de province, du mouvement religieux que préparait Lê Văn Trung et son

According to Mr. La Laurette, Inspector of Political and Administrative Affairs, Mr. Blanchard de la Brosse (who was Mr. Le Fol's successor), by means of Circular No. 52-C dated March 7, 1927, reminded the provincial governors to comply with Mr. Le Fol's order stated in the secret telegram 146-C. Circular No. 52-C wrote:

“My predecessor Governor, by means of Circular No. 146-C requested you to closely pay attention to the development of Cao Dai Faith”.¹⁹⁹

Many French researchers on Religion also acknowledged that the Declaration of the Faith, in essence, was not a request for permission but an official Proclamation of the Faith by Cao Dai followers.

- Mr. Gustave Meillon, Director of the Franco-Vietnamese Institute and Professor at the National School of the Oriental Languages, when writing “*Le Caodaïsme*” (published in the *Revue des Membres de la Légion d'Honneur* “*Le Ruban Rouge*” No. 6 September 1960) also stated as follows:

“On October 7, 1926, the Governor of Cochinchina received the official declaration of the founding of Cao Dai religion. He tactfully received the document, but did not engage himself in any formal acknowledgment of the religion.”²⁰⁰

groupe de missionnaires, et les invitant, “à suivre discrètement cette propagande et à le tenir au courant sous le timbre “Sureté”.

¹⁹⁹ Original French text: “Mon prédécesseur, par Circular 146-C vous a demandé de suivre attentivement le développement du Caodaïsme.”

²⁰⁰ Mr. Gustave Meillon (Directeur de l'Institut Franco-Vietnamien et Professeur à l'École nationale des langues orientales vivantes) in “*Le Caodaïsme*”, published in *Revue des Membres de la Légion d'Honneur* “*Le Ruban Rouge*”, number 6, September 1960. Original French text: “Le 7 Octobre 1926, Le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine reçoit la déclaration officielle de la fondation du Caodaïsme. Prudent il se contente d'en prendre acte, sans toutefois s'engager formellement à le reconnaître.”

- In his third-degree doctoral thesis entitled *Le Caodaïsme au Cambodge* (Université de Paris VII, 1974), Mr. Pierre Bernardini called that document “Official Declaration addressed by the founders of Cao Dai religion to Mr. Le Fol, the Governor of Cochinchina”.²⁰¹

The word ‘déclaration’ in French language can only be translated as: proclamation, manifesto, declaration, public or official announcement... has absolutely no meaning of asking for permission.

To emphasize the meaning of the Declaration of the Faith, below is a quote of the holy message given by (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc in the séance at Nam Thành Holy House on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Canh Tuất year (1970). This séance was carried out by bộ phận Hiệp Thiên Đài Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam (the Invocation Body of the House of Heavenly Alliance at the Institute for the Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam).

Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc Quyền Thượng Tôn Quản Thế Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (Dharma Protector Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc, Acting Superior Manager of Worldly Affairs in the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation), greeting all brothers and sisters present in this séance.

To clarify the heavenly secret on the path of practicing the Faith, in obeying the Supreme Being’s command and on behalf of the deceased predecessors, today I would like to explain the significance of the 23rd day of the 8th month and of the full-moon day of the 10th month (...)

The 23rd day of the 8th month is the declaration of the Faith on the legal aspect of the secular way ... An affirmation of the temporal document has been

²⁰¹ Original French text: “Déclaration officielle adressée par les fondateurs du Caodaïsme à M. Le Fol, Gouverneur de la Cochinchine”.

recorded ... The world has accepted it with indifference to promise a warm welcome in the future...

The day of Declaration of the Faith is the day to ring the alarm bell to call on people to prepare spiritually in the fall and be ready for the winter. The day of Declaration of the Faith, the 23rd day of the 8th month, is the day that the heavenly secret is revealed to harmonize with the impact of the world. The effect of this day is aimed at the opening of the Third Universal Salvation to humanity.

Every event, every activity in history carries a purpose to achieve a lofty expectation. Posterior generations should understand the manifestation or the depth of the work, so as to willfully continue the mission of those who have deceased or preceded.

A series of events when the Supreme Being came to Vietnam to open the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation, from Dương Đông Phú Quốc, then Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, then Cầu Kho Holy House (or Nam Thành Holy House), to Gò Kén and to Tây Ninh. Each place has its own merit, its own history of an individual bead; but its characteristics are still a string of beads and a chosen people with a mission in the Third Universal Salvation...

I return to the issue of the 23rd day of the 8th month. This day is the day for the Declaration of the Faith, so that everyone with a sincere and good heart can be aware and united altogether to prepare enough momentum for the full-moon day of the 10th month to open the Great Way to mankind and the world. Two actions in two periods have two effects: One is to look outward to recognize that the world is full of sorrow and suffering, so as to seek a way of salvation; the

other is to look inward to knowing the fundamental purpose of the Faith and its goal, so as to effectively carry out the mission.

And finally, (Dharma Protector) Đức Hộ Pháp concluded:

Whether the Faith is successful or not depends on the practitioners, the leaders, their awareness and thorough practice to reach the goals that the Supreme Being has outlined. The success of the Faith is the day when all people sing together the song of love, harmony, and progress. Only then will the anniversary of the Declaration and the annual Inauguration of the Great Way be truly meaningful.

B. DIVIDING THE PROPAGATION TASK IN THE SIX-PROVINCE (LỤC TỈNH) AREA

As for the predecessors, after submitting the Declaration of the Faith to the colonial government, they felt the legal issues were temporarily settled. In compliance with the holy message on the 7th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year: “*Children, you must immediately take care of the propagation... I insist that you divide yourselves and spread out to cover all areas...*”, they promoted the spreading of Cao Dai Faith throughout the six provinces of Cochinchina by dividing themselves into three teams.

Team One (Figure 62) comprises gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, Trần Đạo Quang, Lê Văn Giảng, Lê Văn Yên, Nguyễn Văn Biện, Đào Văn Chi, Lưu Quang Viễn, Hà Văn Điền, Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh, ... in charge of the provinces: Vĩnh Long, Trà Vinh, Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng, Bạc Liêu, Long Xuyên, Châu Đốc, Hà Tiên, and Rạch Giá. The medium pair was gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc.



Figure 62: Photograph of the predecessors in “Team One”, taken in front of the house of Lady Pioneer Lâm Hương Thanh in Vũng Liêm during their missionary trip through the area of Hậu Giang (the 9th month of Bính Dần year). From left to right and from top to bottom, they are gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhật, Trần Đạo Quang, Thái Thơ Thanh, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Ngô Trung Tín, Phạm Công Tắc, the wife of (Governor) Tổng Đốc Phạm Văn Tươi, and Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh.

(This picture was re-taken by author Huệ Nhân from the original photograph posted in Hộ Pháp Đường, the Holy See Tây Ninh).

Team Two comprises gentlemen Ngọc Linh Nguyệt, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Yết Ma Luật, Lê Văn Hóa, Nguyễn Văn Ca, Trần Quang Minh, Nguyễn Dư Hoài, Võ Văn Lý..., in charge of Chợ Lớn, Gò Công, Tân An, Mỹ Tho, and Bến Tre. The medium pair was gentlemen Nguyễn Trung Hậu and Trương Hữu Đức.

Team Three comprises gentlemen Lê Bá Trang, Vương Quan Kỳ, Yết Ma Lê Văn Nhung, Sư Kinh Hối, Trần Văn Liêng..., in charge of Tây Ninh, Thủ Dầu Một, Gia Định, Biên Hòa, Bà Rịa, Sa Đéc. The medium pair was gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Diêu and Cao Hoài Sang.

Along with these three teams, there was also a “preaching” body led by (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tương and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh²⁰² (Figure 63), who were well-versed in the teachings, and converted to Cao Dai from Minh Sư.

Originally, Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tương and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh had many years in the Minh Sư practice and were sworn disciples of (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang.

²⁰² Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Kinh** (1890 – 1945) was the third child of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Khả and Ms. Thái Thị Ban. He followed the Minh Sư practice since the age of thirteen, was fluent in Sino-Vietnamese characters, and often dispensed herbal medicine to treat illnesses at home (Bình Lý village, now hamlet 6A, Bình Lý, Bình Mỹ commune, Cù Chi district). Around 1920, he established a small hermitage in Hữu Đạo, Cai Lậy district, in which he learned the cultivation method from Mr. Nguyễn Đạo Tương. Being mystically guided into the Faith by Cao Dai Supreme God in Bính Dần year, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh was heavenly ordained as a Giáo Sư phái Ngọc (Bishop of Confucian faction) on the 8th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year. He composed numerous doctrinal books such as *Giản Đạo Yêu Ngôn*, *Hội Lý Xiên Chơn Luận*... published by the Tây Ninh Holy See in 1928.

On the 3rd day of the 3rd month of Ất Dậu year (1945), he received the order to preach in Central Vietnam (the An Nam). While boarding the ship at Nhà Rồng wharf, he was hit by a bombardment by the Allied Air Forces against the Japanese. He was severely wounded and transported to Chợ Rẫy hospital where he passed away. He was buried at ngã ba Đồn intersection (now in hamlet 5, Đông Thạnh commune, Hóc Môn district). In 1980, he was re-interred in Cự Lạc Thái Bình, Tây Ninh province.

On the 21st day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master descended in the séance at Linh Quang Temple (Hanh Thông Tây) and taught:

***Tương** and **Kinh**, you must bow to **Đạo Quang** in front of Me; then from now on you call him elder brother; as for the Master, I am the only Master.*²⁰³



Figure 63: Portrait of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh (1890 – 1945)

On the 24th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tương was heavenly ordained as Thượng Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction). (Please find his biography in Appendix I).

The predecessors followed their assignments, spreading out to all places near and far, disregarding difficulties or challenges, sparing no effort to preach the God-Way wholeheartedly.²⁰⁴

Mr. Cao Thượng Sanh (i.e., Mr. Cao Hoài Sang, Secretary of the Temporal Affairs) recounted:

²⁰³ Excerpt from *Proclamation to Sentient Beings* on October 15, 1926, page 4.

²⁰⁴ According to author Tâm Thành in *Tập San Hành Đạo* Magazine issue 1, March 1962 (published at An Hội Holy House, Bến Tre province), Team One converted forty-nine thousand people, Team Two converted sixty-five thousand people, and Team Three converted thirty-eight thousand people into the religion.

It is unclear which source the author used for these figures, but they are recorded here for further research.

Every day after working full-time, we went home to have dinner, while the car was already waiting in front of our houses. Also waiting in the car were the dignitaries of Cửu Trùng Đài (House of the Nine Initiations); we got in the car and went right away ...

Each night we went to two adjacent provinces such as Tân An and Mỹ Tho, or Vĩnh Long and Sa Đéc... In other places, we arrived home from the province usually around 6 a.m.; it means we sat and held the beaked basket from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m.

The Supreme Being descended to give each new adherent a poem of either eight or four lines. Sometimes, up to one hundred or one hundred and fifty poems were given in one night. As for the remaining people who sought the Faith, if the number being so large that there was no time to give each of them a poem, the Supreme Being admitted all of them into the Faith. Once returning home in the morning, the mediums only had time to change clothes, have breakfast, and then go straight to work. When the evening came, this cycle was repeated (...) There was no night of rest.

Strangely enough, despite all the hardships, the mediums were as usual, not feeling tired or sick at all.”²⁰⁵

Among those who joined the Faith during this period were many scholars and intellectuals such as: (Governor) Tổng Đốc Huỳnh Thái Thông and his wife, the wife of (Governor) Tổng Đốc Phạm Văn Tươi, (Governor) Đốc Phủ Dương Văn Giáo and his wife; (Governors) Đốc Phủ: Nguyễn Văn Ca and Trần Nguyên Lượng; (Councilors) Nghị Viên: Nguyễn Tấn Hoài,

²⁰⁵ Excerpt from the speech of Mr. Cao Thượng Sanh in Đại Hội Ban Đạo Sử (the Congress for the Committee of Religious History) on December 15, 1958, at the Conference Hall of Hội Vạn Linh in the Tây Ninh Holy See.

Nguyễn Thế Hiển, and Nguyễn Phan Long; (Chief Justice) Trưởng Tòa Trần Quang Nghiêm; (Prefect) Tri Phủ Nguyễn Văn Đẩu; (District Chiefs) Tri Huyện: Lê Quang Hộ, and Nguyễn Dư Hoài; (Medical Doctors) Bác Sĩ: Lê Văn Hoạch, and Nguyễn Thế Vinh; ... (Businessmen) Thương Gia: Lê Văn Sanh, Lê Đình Hiển, Phạm Tấn Cự, and Lê Kim Ty..., along with many civil servants such as gentlemen: Nguyễn Văn Phùng (Railroad Department), Latapie (a French man, in the Commercial Department), Phan Trường Thọ (Hiệp Lý Palace), Nguyễn Văn Kiệt (Law Office), Hà Văn Lương (Đông Pháp Indochina Bank)...

In particular, the Almighty accepted four additional people to serve as mediums in support to the propagation teams. They were gentlemen Lê Thiện Phước, Lê Thế Vĩnh, Nguyễn Văn Mạnh, and Thái Văn Thâu.

As the number of followers increased, the new religion flourished. According to the arrangement of the Supreme Being, the next important task of the predecessors at that time was the preparation for the Inauguration of the Great Way.

C. PREPARATION FOR THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY

1) LOCATION OF THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY: TỪ LÂM PAGODA

Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, a businessman in Saigon, remarried to Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh, a landowner in Vũng Liêm, Vĩnh Long province. Before joining Cao Dai, the couple had devoted themselves to the Buddhist practice and took refuge together at Giác Hải Pagoda (Phú Lâm district).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ **Giác Hải Pagoda** was built in 1887, located on Hùng Vương street, near Ông Buông bridge in Phú Lâm district. The pagoda was about one hundred meters from the street. Part of the remaining ash of (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn has been stored in the memorial tower at this pagoda (another part of his ashes is stored in the memorial tower in front of Gò Kén

(Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân (Figure 64) (religious name Thích Từ Phong), birth name Nguyễn Văn Tường (1874 – 1938), was the Abbot of Giác Hải Pagoda. He raised funds from Buddhist disciples to build Từ Lâm Pagoda in Gò Kén, Tây Ninh province. Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ actively contributed to the construction costs of Từ Lâm Pagoda (actually, it was named Thiền Lâm Tự - please refer to Appendix II for more details).

After joining Cao Dai (in the 5th month of Bính Dần year), Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ frequently invited (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân to attend invocation sessions, thanks to which the Buddhist Monk had a lot of sympathy for the new religion.

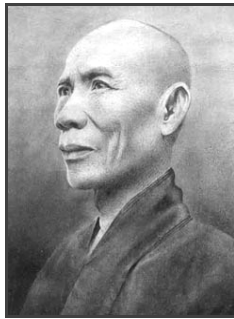


Figure 64: Portrait of
(Most Venerable Monk)
**Hòa Thượng Như
Nhân (1864-1939)**

When the need to find a place for the Inauguration Ceremony was brought up, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh (i.e., Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) suggested Từ Lâm Pagoda in Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province. This place was accepted by the Cao Dai predecessors.

On the 16th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (August 23, 1926), the following gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, and Thái Thơ Thanh presented a petition to Cao Dai Supreme God, urging for (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng

Pagoda). The pagoda land (1.2 hectares) was donated by Ms. Trần Thị Liễu in 1885.

Như Nhân to be heavenly ordained. The petition was led by Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh and had the content as follows:

“Bính Dần year, the 16th day of the 7th month.

We, kneeling here, are ignorant disciples Thượng Trung Nhựt, Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, and Thái Thơ Thanh to boldly submit this petition to Thiên Tào Huyền Kim Khuyết Bạch Ngọc Kinh, Cao Đài Huyền Khung Cao Thượng Đế to beg for approval.

We think that in the Third Universal Salvation, when the Great Way is spreading, there is Hòa Thượng (Most Venerable Monk) named Master Như Nhân who has both talent and virtue. Hence, we, ignorant disciples, respectfully submit this petition, asking for the grace of the Great Compassionate Supreme Being to ordain (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân and grant him the position to lead the Buddhist faction. If that is possible, letting him administer the Buddhist faction would be a favorable situation.

With absolute veneration, we boldly submit this petition.”

As Hòa Thượng Như Nhân was present in that séance, Cao Dai Supreme God declared name and taught:

Sakyamuni Buddha, name Cao Dai Immortal Great Bodhisattva Mahasattva, teaching the Way in the South.

Disciple Như Nhân, listen:

When the Way was closed, numerous people diligently practiced self-cultivation but very few attained enlightenments. Virtuous disciple! I love you very much, as you have the heart to preserve the true

Dharma of Buddhism. The noble position I have already bestowed on you in the long past; but it must wait until the establishment of the Third Universal Salvation, so you have enough power to act ...

Now it is time for the revivification of the Great Way, and the spreading of Heaven-Earth, I look to you for your meritorious work to make Vietnam the master of the true Dharma. Here is the Holy Land, I have established the Holy House, are you willing to help Me?

Consequently, Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn agreed to convert Từ Lâm Pagoda into Cao Dai Holy House and use this location to hold the grand ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way.

The ceremony was scheduled to be held in three consecutive days: the 14th, 15th, and 16th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (the 18, 19, and 20 of November 1926).

Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn co-signed the invitation with Mr. Thượng Trung Nhật. For diplomatic flexibility to gain favorable acceptance, the invitation included the words “Phật Giáo Chấn Hưng hay là Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ” (“Renovated Buddhism or the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation”)²⁰⁷. Nevertheless, the term “Phật Giáo Chấn Hưng” (“Renovated Buddhism”) was grudging and later caused misunderstandings.

Once the location was determined, Mr. Thượng Trung Nhật applied for permission from the ruling government to hold the Inauguration festival. The permit was issued and sent on November 7, 1926 (the 3rd day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year). Coincidentally, the date of the permit was exactly one month after the date the predecessors sent the Declaration document. It can be understood that through this permit, the French authority accepted the Cao Dai religious practice.

²⁰⁷ Original French text: Bouddhisme rénové ou Troisième Amnistie de Dieu en Orient.

It should be noted that the selection of Tây Ninh land was in accord with the holy will. But the petition to request the investiture of (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn still seemed inappropriate.

In the séance at Cầu Kho Holy House on the 20th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master sternly taught Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh as follows:

Thơ, listen! By submitting to Me the petition for Như Nhãn, you violate the Holy Will. What do you know to make such a request? (...)

I also advise you to practice self-cultivation diligently, and not to make too many promises which you are not yet capable of fulfilling ...²⁰⁸

It means the Almighty's work of maneuvering the Faith is not as simple as one might think. It must be commanded and controlled by the Holy Master Himself. Anyone who takes on a task should try to do his/her part well. No one should enthusiastically take on too much and exceed one's limit. The Holy Master gave this instruction not only to Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh but also to everyone.

2) PREPARATION FOR THE GRAND CEREMONY

a) Heavenly ordination of more high-ranking dignitaries

- To prepare for the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way, the Supreme Being continued to fill the vacant positions of top-ranking dignitaries. On the 29th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (September 5, 1926) the Holy Master ordained (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn as follows:

Virtuous disciple Như Nhãn, (...) I bestow upon you

²⁰⁸ Excerpt from *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục* page 160.

*the title **Quản Pháp Truyền Sư Thích Đạo Chuyên Luật Linh Diệu Đạo Sĩ**...*

*I ask you to help summon **Minh** to come here, because he is your disciple, to give him the position of **Thái Đầu Sư** (Cardinal of Buddhist faction) so he can go out to preach and save humanity.*

- Following the above instruction, Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn passed on the holy message to (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thích Thiện Minh, asking him to come and receive the holy ordination at Từ Lâm Pagoda.

On the way back to Tây Ninh province, the Buddhist monk Thiện Minh had an accident, fell severely, and bled. In the séance on the 13th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught:

***Thiện Minh** my son, greetings to you... Now due to the devil's test, you must shed your blood to cleanse the entire Buddhist faction (...) You must take the title **Thái Minh Tinh, Đầu Sư Đạo Thiền** (Cardinal of the Zen order) (...)*

The position of **Thái Đầu Sư** (Cardinal of Buddhist faction) had been planned beforehand by the Holy Master to assign to the Buddhist Monk Thiện Minh (but at that time no one may have known it). As evidence, in the séance at Hội Phước Pagoda (Cần Đức district) on the 5th day of the 4th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master claimed:

*My disciple **Thái Đầu Sư** is present here...*²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Excerpt from *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, 1928, page 20 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

In the 4th month of Bính Dần year (1926), a summer retreat for mindfulness practice (Vietnamese term ‘trường hương’, now called ‘khóa an cư kiết hạ’) was held at Hội Phước Pagoda, where Yết Ma Nguyễn Văn Luật was the Abbot, and (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thích Thiện Minh was the Zen Master. They organized invocation there; the Holy Master descended and

- On the 10th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master bestowed upon Mr. Trần Văn Thụ (i.e., Great Master Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple) (Figure 37) to be Ngọc Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction), with the Holy Title: Nho Tông Chưởng Giáo Tuyền Đạo Thuyền Sư Đại Đức Hòa Đạo Sĩ.

- Prior to that day, on the 24th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master bestowed upon Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương (of Minh Sư) to be Thượng Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction), with the Holy Title: Thuyết Pháp Đạo Sư Chưởng Quân Oai Linh Đạo Sĩ.

In general, regarding the heavenly appointed dignitaries at that time, there were enough Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinals) and Đầu Sư (Cardinals) of the three factions: Thái, Thượng, Ngọc (Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian, respectively). It should be also noted that the Holy Master only bestowed holy titles upon the first three Chưởng Pháp and only used the suffixes Nhật – Nguyệt – Tinh (Sun – Moon – Star) for the holy names of the first three Đầu

taught Hòa Thượng Thích Thiện Minh the above holy message. After that summer retreat, Yết Ma Luật was promoted to the rank of Hòa Thượng (Most Venerable Monk).

It is very likely that (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng **Thiện Minh** is the person mentioned by author Huỳnh Minh in the book *Gia Định Xưa và Nay* (page 212). The Most Venerable Monk's birth name was Nguyễn Văn Giáp. But in the book of *Kiến Hòa Xưa và Nay* (by the same author), his birth name was recorded as Phạm Văn Tiêng, which is exactly the name written in his personal tax papers still been preserved at Phật Quang Pagoda, Bến Tre province. According to this document, he was born in 1882 and passed away on the 11th day of the 11th month of Bính Tuất year (1945) in Vang Quới, Bến Tre province. At the age twenty-five, he was trained to be a monk in Sắc Tứ Tập Phước Pagoda (Gò Vấp district); then, he was accepted as a disciple of (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Phổ Tường at Bảo An Pagoda and was given the religious name Thiện Minh (Lâm Tế sect, the fortieth generation). Later, (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thiện Minh became the Abbot of Hội Phước Pagoda in Tân Thạch (Bến Tre province). It is known that both Tập Phước Pagoda and Giác Hải Pagoda belong to Lâm Tế sect, have a close relationship, and Hòa Thượng Thiện Minh was the Zen Master in many meditative retreats.

Sur. Those who were appointed later had their religious names in accord with the holy name system.

In addition to the above-mentioned top-ranking dignitaries, during the period before the Inauguration Ceremony, the Supreme Being also ordained many people to the ranks of Phối Sư (Archbishop), Giáo Sư (Bishop), etc... of all three factions: Thái, Thượng, Ngọc.

b) Completing Gò Kén Holy House

The propagation was vigorously carried out throughout the South Vietnam. To properly prepare for the ceremonial site, on the 13th day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, i.e., two months ahead of the ceremony, the Supreme Being ordered some of the predecessors to temporarily halt their propagating activities and return to Tây Ninh to take care of all the meticulous works at the ceremonial site. There are still many details that need to be properly done.

Gò Kén Pagoda (i.e., Từ Lâm Pagoda) was purchased in Giáp Tý year (1924), then built in the style of Giác Hải Pagoda. By the 7th month of Bính Dần year, the structure had just been completed, not yet painted, and was still quite messy. Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Figures 39 & 40) spent a lot of money to cement the pagoda yard, clear away the surrounding bushes, dig a well, plant ornamental flowers, build an outbuilding behind the pagoda... and most importantly, pave a stone road (over three hundred meters long) for vehicles to access the pagoda.

Many details of the exterior construction were accomplished in accordance with the instructions of the Almighty. The finishing work was so complicated and costly, but it was carried out perfectly.

As for the interior of the Holy House, on the 12th day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year the Supreme Being ordered some details as follows:

***Kiệt**, you must help **Thơ** in setting up the Holy House. I assign you to take care of and hire craftsmen to make seven thrones, one must be larger for Giáo Tông (the Pope), three for the three Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinals), and the other three for the three Đầu Sư (Cardinals). In particular, the throne of Giáo Tông should be made with great care, with carvings of the four sacred animals. The two armrests must be carved with two dragons, those of Chưởng Pháp must be carved with two phoenixes, and those of Đầu Sư must be carved with two unicorns ...²¹⁰*

In another passage, the Holy Master taught:

***Bính**, I assign you to prepare a Heaven-Earth sphere. Do you understand what it means? It is a globe, round like the Earth, painted in sky-blue color. The Big Dipper and the Stars must be drawn on that sphere...*

*The Seventy-Two Earths and the Three Thousand Worlds are all stars. Counting them together, there are three thousand and seventy-two stars; you must draw all of them. You must look them up in the Western Astronomy books and imitate them. At the Big Dipper, you must draw the two rudders to complete it and the North Star to make it distinctive. Above the Big Dipper, draw **My God Eye**.*

This globe should be made of glass and put inside it a lamp so that it always shines. That is an invaluable

²¹⁰ Mr. **Nguyễn Ngọc Kiệt** (1881 – 1965), a native of Cần Thơ province, joined Cao Dai in July 1926 while working as a manager of a law firm in Saigon. On the 30th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926), he was heavenly ordained as Giáo Hữu phái Thượng (Priest of Taoist faction). In 1937, when Mr. Trần Văn Sanh (1886 – 1968) converted Từ Vân Pagoda into a Cao Dai Holy House, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kiệt became Đầu họ Đạo (Parish Leader) at Từ Vân Holy House (Phú Nhuận district).

He passed away on June 5, 1965, and was buried near his home (208 Phan Đăng Lưu street, Ward 3, Phú Nhuận district).

prayer for all humanity and the world. But there may not be enough time to make it; so, you manage at your convenience to catch up with the ceremony date.

(Bishop) Giáo Sư Thái Bình Thanh then asked about the size of the Heaven-Earth globe and the Holy Master taught:

Listen, son. The diameter is three meters and three decimeters. It is so huge; but it must be that size, because it carries the mysterious foundation of Creation within it.

Next, the Supreme Being instructed Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh about the arrangement on the Divine Altar in Gò Kén Pagoda, with all the statues of Tam Giáo Đạo Tổ (the Three Religious Founders) and Tam Trấn Oai Nghiêm (the Three Divine Governors) were set above those of Jesus Christ and Đức Khương Thái Công which in turn, are above the throne of Giáo Tông (the Pope), to complete Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo (the Five Branches of the Great Way) (Figure 65):

***Thơ**, listen to the instructions. You must remember when **Bình** brings the Heaven-Earth globe back, you must make the foundation and place the globe on it in the Grand Hall. Remember to turn the Eye outward. Then you arrange the statues of Sakyamuni, Lao Tzu, and Confucius below it. Below these statues are those of Quan Thế Âm, Thái Bạch, and Quan Thánh Đế (the Goddess of Mercy Kuan Shi Yin, Li Tai-Pei, and Kuan-Ti, respectively).*

Then, right below Thái Bạch is Jesus of Nazareth, and below Jesus is Khương Thượng Tử Nha ... Draw a diagram and present it to Me for correction.”²¹¹

²¹¹ The holy messages that instruct on the worship rituals in the Main Hall are quoted from the book *Đạo Sư 2*, combined with the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*.



Figure 65: A photograph showing the Divine Altar in Gò Kén Holy House (1926).

Later, the Holy Master ordered to change the way of worship at the Holy See, only worshipping the tablets, then all the statues of the Three Religious Founders, the Three Spiritual Governors, the Five Religious Branches... were brought to be preserved and worshipped at Cực Lạc Cảnh, near Gate # 7 on the outskirt of the Tây Ninh Holy See. This holy house was built by the couple Mr. Thái Thờ Thanh and Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh in 1931. Also found in this place are statues of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhật, Mr. Thái Thờ Thanh, and Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh, made of white stone, along with many other beautiful statues.

So, on the altar are the statues of the Three Religious Founders in the Second Universal Salvation. But the prayers are to praise the Three Religious Founders in the First Universal Salvation (please refer to the footnote written as ‘Excerpt from the response of Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu to a fellow practitioner named Nguyễn Tú Thà in Sa Đéc province’, in Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.3.b). This is a rather unique “feature” of Cao Dai Faith.

Regarding Mr. Thái Bính Thanh (Lâm Quang Bính) (1876 – 1931), please find more information in the second volume of this book.

In addition, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh received orders from the Almighty to hire workers to cast a set of reinforced concrete statues of the Crown Prince Siddhartha riding a white horse, with his loyal servant Chana running behind him, leaving the royal palace to seek the Truth. The statues were made larger than life-size and placed right in front of the temple door, facing toward the main gate.

In the séance at Tân Định on the 16th day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh presented the drawing, and the Holy Master taught:

... You can build two rows of houses like that, and you can dig the well right where you planned. The Buddha image is correctly set like that. If you want to please Me, plant more flowers around the Holy House.

The seven thrones you quote them for a rather low price, add a little more. But my son! The drawing of these thrones is wrong. All the four sacred animals must be on each throne; dragon for the armrests of Giáo Tông throne, phoenix on those of Chương Pháp, unicorn on those of Đầu Sư... Add the other sacred animals to the backrest. For Giáo Tông throne, the backrest must be carved with phoenix, unicorn, and tortoise, leaving the dragon for the armrests. Do the same for the other thrones.

*Beloved daughter **Lâm Thị**, try to share your husband's works.*²¹²

²¹² In the invocation session on the full-moon day of the 5th month of Kỷ Tỵ year (1929) at the Tây Ninh Holy See, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu (Figure 51) respectfully asked:

As for the seven thrones belonging to the Way of Man, can Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal) and Đầu Sư (Cardinal) sit on them?

The Holy Master replied:

I established those seven thrones merely for each of the top-ranking dignitaries to know his position in the Worship Hall...

Then the Holy Master insisted:

I tell you to be thrifty, listen! Next year you will see. Save your assets for other useful work. When the entire country of Vietnam knows the Way, the Holy House will no longer be just like this...

c) Organizing the Grand Ceremony

For diplomatic purpose, the Supreme Being assigned Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt to make a list of invited guests, including the General Governor of Indochina, the Governor of Cochinchina, many high-ranking officials, intellectual elites, businessmen, etc... Also, the ceremony was widely open for people of all walks of life to freely attend.

It can be said that almost every detail of the Grand Ceremony, from form to content, from external to internal rituals, from the number of ceremonial children to the reception of guests, from collection to expenditure, etc ... were all taught meticulously by the Supreme Being. For instance:

On the 12th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught:

Set two chairs on both sides of (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp table, then make two flags with the words: Thượng Phẩm, Thượng Sanh. On the right side of Hộ Pháp is Thượng Phẩm (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs), and on the left side of Hộ Pháp is Thượng Sanh (Secretary of the Temporal Affairs) ...

Set guarding flags in the five directions: East, West, South, North; choose twelve ceremonial children to

During the ceremony, if they sit opposite my other disciples and accept the general reverence of humanity... they will lose their own reverence ... The dignitaries will only sit on their thrones when hội Tòa Tam Giáo (the Court of the Three Religions) meets to judge their fellow practitioners.

*hold the flags. In the center, let **Hậu, Nghĩa,** and **Đức** be in charge ...*

The next day, the Holy Master taught about the protocol for the 14th, 15th, and 16th nights of the 10th month of the Grand Ceremony as follows:

*Reciting the prayers and performing the ordinary rituals are sufficient. You tell **Cư** and **Tắc** to wash their faces and hands to be pure. Tell them to go to Nghi An site so I can ordain the Lục Tỉnh (Six-Province) disciples, then establish the Female College...*

When I ascend, tell the two kids²¹³ to return and stand at Hộ Pháp table as before.

*When the Lễ Sanh (Student-Priests) announce “Chỉnh túc y quan”, tell the twelve mediums to line up in three rows, then tell **Đạt** to walk. Next are **Tắc, Cư, Sang** walking on both of their sides. Next are the three Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinals) (tell **Nhàn** to escort **Thụ**), next are the three Đầu Sư (Cardinals) (tell **Tạ** to follow **Trung**, and **Hoàng** to follow **Thiện Minh**), next are the three Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishops) ... and the first night is over.*

The following night will be the Heavenly Ordination for all disciples, and the night that you all must sincerely fast and abstain so I can establish Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Constitution).

The third night, you also perform the daily worship rituals; after that, the two kids put on their holy costumes and enter the Nghi An site for Me to descend.²¹⁴

²¹³ ‘the two kids’ is the words the Holy Master used to call the medium pair Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc.

²¹⁴ **Nhàn** is Trần Thanh Nhân, birth name of (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang (Figure 38); **Thụ** is (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction) Chương

Continuing the séance on that day, the Holy Master gave detailed instructions on the organization and assignment of specific personnel to the four important tasks of **Lễ** (Ritual), **Khách** (Reception), **Thâu** (Collection), and **Xuất** (Expenditure).

The Ceremony at the Holy House is divided into: Lễ, Khách, Xuất, and Thâu. So, I will talk about Lễ first.

*- Regarding the **Lễ** committee, I assign **Trang** to be chief officer, **Nhung** deputy chief officer, **Ý** assistant officer...*

*- Regarding the **Khách** committee, **Tương** is chief officer, **Luật** deputy chief... **Voi** assistant...*

*- Regarding the **Thâu** committee, **Thơ**, **Như Nhân**, and **Đạo Quang** are in charge...*

*- Regarding the **Xuất** committee, **Lịch**, **Xoài**, and **Hòa** are in charge...²¹⁵*

The **Lễ** committee is responsible for everything related to offerings, logistics, worship rituals, setting flags in the five directions, ritual music, and mediums...

The **Khách** committee is responsible for welcoming all guests from the elites to the middle class to the commoners, each class has an assistant in charge. The **Khách** committee also has another very important job of preparing rooms, cooking and serving food (all vegetarian). There must be no mistakes or excuses in serving guests.

The **Xuất** committee is responsible of covering all expenses. To ensure transparency, the Holy Master taught:

Pháp Trần Văn Thụ (Figure 37); **Tạ** is Mr. Trần Văn Tạ, later appointed Hộ Đàn Pháp Quân at the Tây Ninh Holy See; **Hoàng** is Mr. Trần Văn Hoàng (a son of Mr. Trần Văn Tạ).

²¹⁵ The religious names of some of the people mentioned in the holy message above are: **Nhung**: (Bishop) Giáo Sư Thái Nhung Thanh (Yết Ma Nhung, Vạn Phước Temple - Hóc Môn); **Luật**: (Bishop) Giáo Sư Thái Luật Thanh (Yết Ma Luật, Hội Phước Temple - Cần Đước); **Xoài**: Yết Ma Trần Văn Xoài (Phước Linh Temple - Cần Đước).

*When it comes to **Xuất** (Expenditure), all three officers in charge must sign a proper paper before allowing the disbursement of money... [I'm smiling] ... I do so to prevent squandering.*

As for the **Thâu** committee, the Holy Master assigned it to three gentlemen: one was Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh, a rich and generous man who has financially contributed a lot to the Grand Ceremony, and the other two were the true monks: (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân (Figure 64) and (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang (Figure 38). However, the Thâu committee does not accept money, but only gifts.

There are many details that seem trivial but are still noted by the Holy Master. For instance,

***Thơ**, the lamp generator is making too much noise; I'm afraid it will disturb the serenity. Listen, son, move it a little far away.*

Following the order of the Supreme Being, many predecessors moved to Tây Ninh province, including Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and his wife, Ms. Hương Hiếu. First, they focused on preparing for the Grand Ceremony of Opening the Great Way; next, they would undertake the upcoming widespread propagation. They demonstrated an extraordinary example of absolute faith in the Holy Master, and together they were determined to renounce their secular lives and to practice the Way.

d) Religious Names for Female Dignitaries

At this point, the Supreme Being still had an important task, which was to grant the **Holy Names for Female College**, so that both dignitary colleges could fully receive the right to perform in the Inauguration Ceremony.

In the 14th night of the 10th month of Bính Dần year at Gò Kén Holy House, the Holy Master bestowed the grace:

*The Jade Emperor Supreme God, name Cao Dai,
teaching the Way in the South.*

Greeting all disciples, greeting beloved daughters.

*Female College, listen to my conferment of your Holy
Names:*

HƯƠNG (FRAGRANCE) of heart exhales
globally,

*Virtuous practice on the true path leads your soul,
Sincere thought of the Goddess of Mercy protects
your life.*

*For thousands of years both genres will exist
equally.*

Lâm Thị, appointed *Giáo Sư* (Bishop), received the
heavenly grace of *Hương Thanh*.

Ca Thị, appointed *Phó Giáo Sư* (Associate Bishop),
received the heavenly grace of *Hương Ca*.²¹⁶

Đường Thị, already received the heavenly mandate,
keep your position.

*As for other beloved daughters, I will hold the Congress
of Female College to have enough people and then
bestow the titles all at once.*²¹⁷

²¹⁶ **Ca Thị** is Ms. **Ca Thị Thế** (1884 – 1956), the fifth daughter of Mr. Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương. Please find more details about her in Appendix I on the biography of Mr. Ca Bảo Đạo.

Đường Thị refers to Ms. **Đái Thị Huệ** (1874 – 1936), wife of Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt. She was a Vietnamese of Chinese origin; at that time, Chinese people were called *Đường nhơn* (the *Đường* people). Other holy messages showed that the Almighty also often called her *Đường Thị*.

²¹⁷ Excerpt from the book *Đạo Sử 2*, page 19, author Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu.

The Congress for Heavenly Ordination of Female Dignitaries was held on the 14th day of the 1st month of *Đinh Mão* year (February 15, 1927).

D. THE GRAND CEREMONY OF INAUGURATION OF THE GREAT WAY (1926)

The Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way was planned by the predecessors to be held very solemnly. But they did not expect that it would have to last for three months due to the huge number of participants. Indeed, this was a very rare event in the history of religious establishment.

The ceremony location was nearly a hundred kilometers from Saigon city, and although the roads were not convenient at that time, on the opening day of the ceremony, from dawn till dusk, dozens of automobiles and many other means of transport were bustling carrying guests to attend. Among them were the General Governor of Indochina and the Governor of Cochinchina... Thousands and thousands of men and women from everywhere gathered, creating an extremely vibrant scene at Từ Lâm Pagoda that had previously been solitary and deserted. This event helped boost the excitement of the predecessors and all Cao Dai followers.

On the 14th night of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, the official ceremony began in the presence of all heavenly ordained dignitaries, whose names are listed below (which may

As for the poem to bestow the holy names for Female Dignitaries, according to the handwritten spiritist record of this holy message in the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*, left by (Cardinal) Đền Sư Thái Thơ Thanh, the first line in this poem is:

*“Hương tâm nhứt phiến **động** Càn Khôn.”*

(Translator’s note: The Vietnamese word ‘HƯƠNG’ literally means ‘FRAGRANCE’).

This line of poem is shown here for reference.

It is also noteworthy about the holy name of Ms. Ca Thị Thế. Following the above holy name system, it should have been Hương Thế. However, when comparing many historical documents, especially the holy message in the spiritist record for that day (the book *Niên Số Thời Thiết Lục*), all are recorded as Hương Ca. This holy name could be a special case, as special as her Phó Giáo Sư (Associate Bishop) rank.

not be complete) but only includes the rank of Giáo Hữu (Priest) and above.

CỬU TRÙNG ĐÀI (the House of the Nine Initiations) includes the gentlemen:²¹⁸

- Thái Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Buddhist faction): **Như Nhân** (Most Venerable Monk Hòa Thượng Thích Từ Phong – Giác Hải Pagoda) (29-7-BD).

- Thượng Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction): **Nguyễn Văn Tương** (Nguyễn Đạo Tương)²¹⁹ (Đại Lão Sư Minh Sư (Grand Master of Minh Sư) – Cai Lậy district) (24-7-BD).

- Ngọc Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction): **Trần Văn Thụ** (Trần Đạo Minh) (Đại Lão Sư Minh Đường (Grand Master of Minh Đường)) (10-9-BD).

- Thái Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Buddhist faction): **Thái Minh Tinh** ((Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thích Thiện Minh) (13-10-BD).

- Thượng Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Taoist faction): **Thượng Trung Nhựt** (Lê Văn Trung) (15-3-BD).

- Ngọc Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Confucian faction): **Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt** (Lê Văn Lịch) (15-3-BD).

- Thái Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop of Buddhist faction): **Thái Thơ Thanh** (Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) (3-7-BD).

- Thượng Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop of Taoist faction): **Thượng Tương Thanh** (Nguyễn Ngọc Tương) (3-7-BD).

²¹⁸ The numbers and letters in parentheses at the end of each line are the date in lunar calendar on which the heavenly ordination took place, written in the format of day-month-year (letters BD stand for Bính Dần year). For example, (29-7-BD) is the 29th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year.

²¹⁹ (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction) Thượng Chưởng Pháp Nguyễn Văn Tương passed away on the 5th day of the 11th month of Bính Dần year. Hence, the Holy Master ordained Mr. Trần Đạo Quang as Quyền Thượng Chưởng Pháp (Acting Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction) on the 12th day of the 12th month of Bính Dần year.

- Ngọc Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop of Confucian faction): **Ngọc Trang Thanh** (Lê Bá Trang) (3-7-BD).

- Phối Sư (Archbishop):

Thượng Hóa Thanh (Lê Văn Hóa) (19-8-BD).

- Giáo Sư (Bishop):

Thái Nhung Thanh (Yết Ma Nhung) (15-7-BD).

Thái Luật Thanh (Yết Ma Luật) (22-7-BD).

Thái Bính Thanh (Lâm Quang Bính) (7-8-BD).

Thượng Kỳ Thanh (Vương Quan Kỳ) (14-5-BD).

Thượng Chức Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Chức) (19-8-BD).

Thượng Kim Thanh (Ngô Văn Kim) (3-7-BD).

Thượng Hành Thanh (Lại Văn Hành) (29-8-BD).

Thượng Vinh Thanh (9-9-BD).

Thượng Định Thanh (Tống Quốc Định) (28-9-BD).

Ngọc Vân Thanh (Ngô Tường Vân) (8-6-BD).

Ngọc Đạt Thanh (Nguyễn Phát Đạt) (8-6-BD).

Ngọc Muối Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Muối) (8-6-BD).

Ngọc Kinh Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Kinh) (8-6-BD).

Ngọc Thông Thanh (Bùi Văn Thông) (28-9-BD).

- Some of the dignitaries were heavenly ordained as Giáo Hữu (Priest) on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year:

Thượng Hoài Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Hoài).

Thượng Hoài Thanh (Dương Văn Hoài).

Thượng Hoài Thanh (Nguyễn Tấn Hoài).

Thượng Lai Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Lai).

Thượng Bút Thanh (Hà Văn Bút).

Thượng Châu Thanh (Lê Văn Sơn).²²⁰

Thượng Viễn Thanh (Phạm Trí Viễn).²²¹

Thượng Tín Thanh (Ngô Trung Tín).

Thượng Nhơn Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Nhơn).

- Giáo Hữu (phái Thượng) (Priests of Taoist faction):

Thượng Giới Thanh (Huỳnh Văn Giới) (23-8-BD).

Thượng Bản Thanh (Đoàn Văn Bản) (25-8-BD).

Thượng Lân Thanh (Nguyễn Ngọc Lân) (2-9-BD).

Thượng Thấp Thanh (Phạm Văn Thấp) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Sơn Thanh (Huỳnh Văn Sơn) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Cúc Thanh (Lê Văn Cúc) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Phương Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Phương) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Kinh Thanh (Võ Văn Kinh) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Thiên Thanh (Bùi Văn Thiên) (17-9-BD).

Thượng Cúc Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Cúc) (17-9-BD)

²²⁰ In this special case the Holy Master changed his name “Son” to “Châu”.

²²¹ Document dated November 20, 1930, signed by the two gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhật and Phạm Công Tắc on behalf of Cửu Trùng Đài (House of the Nine Initiations) and Hiệp Thiên Đài (House of Heavenly Alliance) at the Holy See, identified nineteen people as “*no longer in the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation*”. At the top of this list were (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn, followed by Mr. Tống Quốc Định, and Mr. Phạm Trí Viễn, all with the same reason: “*Since the day being ordained until now, they have not practiced the religion.*” This document caused some public opinions afterwards.

Thượng Nghi Thanh (27-9-BD).

FEMALE COLLEGE

- Giáo Sư (Bishop): **Hương Thanh** (14-10-BD).

- Phó Giáo Sư (Associate Bishop): **Hương Ca** (14-10-BD).

HIỆP THIÊN ĐÀI (House of Heavenly Alliance) included:

- Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) – Hộ Giá Tiên Đồng Tá Cơ Đạo Sĩ:
Phạm Công Tắc (15-3-BD).

- Thượng Phẩm (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs) – Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ:²²² **Cao Quỳnh Cư** (15-3-BD).

- Thượng Sanh (Secretary of the Temporal Affairs): Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ (15-3-BD):²²³ **Cao Hoài Sang** (15-10-BD).

²²² Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was bestowed the holy title Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, before being heavenly ordained as Thượng Phẩm (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs).

²²³ In the speech presented on April 19, 1977, the day of the procession of the relics of Mr. Hiến Thế Nguyễn Văn Minh (1894 – 1970) to the Holy See, Mr. Bảo Pháp Hồ Tấn Khoa clearly stated:

“On the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, the Supreme Being bestowed the holy titles upon Mr. Phạm Công Tắc as Hộ Giá Tiên Đồng Tá Cơ Đạo Sĩ, upon Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư as Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ, and upon the gentlemen: Đức Hậu, Nghĩa, Trảng, Tươi, Chương, Kim, Đãi, Mai, Nguyên, Phước, Mạnh altogether as Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ.”

These twelve gentlemen were likely appointed as Thập Nhị Thời Quân (the Twelve Kings of Time). However, on the day of establishing the Constitution of Hiệp Thiên Đài, the 12th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (1927), the three gentlemen Kim, Mai, and Nguyên were absent. Later, the Supreme Being added three other gentlemen: Cao Đức Trọng, Lê Thế Vĩnh, and Thái Văn Thâu. Regarding Mr. Nguyễn Thiêng Kim, it is still unclear whether he was Nguyễn Thiên Kim (the son of Mr. Đoàn Văn Bán and Ms. Huỳnh Thị Thê) mentioned in Chapter 2 Section III Part A.2.

Trương Hữu Đức – Nguyễn Trung Hậu

Trần Duy Nghĩa – Trương Văn Tràng

Phạm Văn Tươi – Ca Minh Chương

Nguyễn Thiêng Kim – Phạm Tấn Đãi

Hùynh Văn Mai – Võ Văn Nguyên

Nguyễn Văn Mạnh – Lê Thiện Phước

In summary, the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way, arranged and “presided” by the Almighty Cao Dai – the Founder of the new religion – was attended by all the highest-ranking dignitaries of the three factions (Thái, Thượng, Ngọc (Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian, respectively)) of Cửu Trùng Đài (House of the Nine Initiations); and the three dignitaries of Hiệp Thiên Đài (House of Heavenly Alliance): Hộ Pháp, Thượng Phẩm, Thượng Sanh (who later represented for the three branches Đạo, Pháp, Thế); along with the dignitaries of the Female College and a huge crowd of believers and guests. Only the position of Giáo Tông (the Pope) was missing. But in fact, the term ‘missing’ is not quite right, because not until the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year that the Supreme Being bestowed Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Constitution) in which all the positions of dignitaries were approved; and from that day on, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch (i.e., the First of the Three Spiritual Governors) has also held the additional position of Giáo Tông (the Spiritual Pope) of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation.

History of Cao Dai Faith

Volume I: THE FOUNDING PERIOD

EPILOGUE - A BRIEF CONCLUSION

A BRIEF CONCLUSION OF VOLUME 1

The Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way at Từ Lâm Pagoda (Gò Kén, Tây Ninh) on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926) marked the completion of the period during which the Holy Master transformed the heaven secret to found Cao Dai Faith. It ended the period of many years the Supreme Being humbly came to earth to guide the predecessors of Branch One and Branch Two, to meticulously teach them everything from the virtue of dignitaries to the rituals and the cultivation method... of the new religion.

Prior to this ceremony, there were also various important timepoints such as: the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way, the period of formation of the religion, the Heavenly Ordinations, the Official Declaration of the Faith ... But in this book, why would the Inauguration of the Great Way be selected as the landmark to end the period of Founding Cao Dai Faith?

It is because prior to the Inauguration Ceremony, there were only two factors 'Heaven' and 'Man', while the third factor 'Earth' had not yet come into play. This was a very special fact. At that time, the predecessors were in contact with the Divine regularly, but did not receive any instructions on the

location of the Inauguration Ceremony. Then from their hearts, they proposed to select Từ Lâm Pagoda in Tây Ninh province. Their idea was immediately accepted by the Holy Master, because Tây Ninh is truly the Holy Land. Does it mean that the Holy Master let them make such decision to emphasize the ‘God–Man union’? Once the location was selected, the three factors of Heaven–Earth–Man had fully united, and the Inauguration of the Great Way was the grand ceremony to open to humanity the God-Way under the name of Cao Dai.

Thus, it is reasonable to choose the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration to mark the end of the first volume of the book *History of Cao Dai Faith*. The second volume of this book will mention the process of the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way, the grace of the Holy Master to bestow Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Constitution) and Tân Luật (the New Codes), as well as the subsequent period of propagation of the Faith. The second volume of this book will also discuss the trials and challenges that the predecessors encountered, and the important event of moving the Holy See from Gò Kén to the new location about five kilometers away, but still in Long Thành village, to create the Tây Ninh Holy See.

In retrospect, the founding of the Great Way for the Third Era can be summarized in the following milestones:

- At the end of Canh Thân year (1920), Cao Dai Supreme God guided and accepted Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu (Branch One) to be the first disciple. In Giáp Tý year (1924) Mr. Ngô returned to Saigon.

- At the end of Ất Sửu year (1925), Cao Dai Supreme God accepted the gentlemen of Branch Two in Saigon as his

disciples; then, the two branches were combined.

- At the end of Bính Dần year (1926), the Inauguration of the Great Way was held.

Thus, in terms of the time up to the Inauguration Ceremony, Branch One went through six years; for Branch Two, it took only one year. But, in terms of personnel, Branch One mainly had only one member while Branch Two had many core members working together in unison.

Another way to consider these milestones is as follows:

- On the 1st day of the 1st month of Tân Dậu year (1921) Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was accepted as the first disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God.

- On the 15th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926), the Inauguration of the Great Way took place.

The time span between these two dates is 5 years 10 months and 15 days. The series of numbers 5-10-15 reveals a principle implied in the Hà Đồ (the Yellow River Chart) and Lạc Thư (the Lo River Writing). The number 15 is the expanding number of the magic square of Lạc Thư (i.e., the sum of the numbers in any direction of the matrix is 15); once condensing, this number is also the number 5 and number 10 at the center of Hà Đồ. The path from Lạc Thư back to Hà Đồ is the Return to the Origin, the path following Trung Đạo Hoàng Cực (the Middle Way of August Being) ...

Studying the history of founding Cao Dai, researching about the ontology²²⁴, numerology²²⁵, chronology, and even

²²⁴ Translator's note: Vietnamese term equivalent to Ontology is 'lý'. Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence or reality in general, as well as of the basic categories of being and their relations. Ontology deals with questions concerning what entities exist or

geography²²⁶ ... of the establishment of this God-Way, one can draw many valuable lessons.

Also from those great lessons, in contemplating on the Third Universal Salvation, believers will understand – intuitively but very clearly – that God is the “Absolute Essence”, and that humans have an original point of that Essence but are falling into the “Relative Universe”. To escape this sinking life, they need to actively and wholeheartedly unite in the revolving mechanism of the Way.

By doing so, humanity will resonate with the extremely brilliant outcome of the God-Way for the Third Universal Salvation.

can be said to exist, and how such entities can be grouped, related within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences (from <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

²²⁵ Translator’s note: Vietnamese term equivalent to Numerology is ‘số’. Numerology is any of many systems, traditions or beliefs in a mystical or esoteric relationship between numbers and physical objects or living things (from <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

²²⁶ Translator’s note: Vietnamese term equivalent to Geography is ‘địa lý’. Modern geography is an all-encompassing discipline that foremost seeks to understand the Earth and all its human and natural complexities – not merely where objects are, but how they have changed and come to be. (from <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

History of Cao Dai Faith

Volume I: THE FOUNDING PERIOD

THE SUPPLEMENTAL PART

APPENDIX 1. BIOGRAPHIES OF THE
PREDECESSORS

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IN THE PREPARATION OF THE
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APPENDIX I.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PREDECESSORS

1. NGÔ MINH CHIÊU (NGÔ VĂN CHIÊU) (1878 – 1932)
2. CAO QUỲNH CƯ (1888 – 1929)
3. PHẠM CÔNG TẮC (1890 – 1959)
4. CAO HOÀI SANG (1901 – 1971)
5. CA MINH CHUÔNG (1855 – 1927)
6. NGUYỄN TRUNG HẬU (1892 – 1961)
7. TRƯỞNG HỮU ĐỨC (1890 – 1976)
8. CAO QUỲNH ĐIỀU (1884 – 1958)
9. THƯỢNG TRUNG NHỰT (LÊ VĂN TRUNG)
(1876 – 1934)
10. NGỌC LỊCH NGUYỆT (LÊ VĂN LỊCH) (1890 – 1947)
11. TRẦN VĂN THỤ (Thái Lão Sư TRẦN ĐẠO QUANG) (1857 – 1927)

12. NGUYỄN VĂN TƯỜNG (Thái Lão Sư NGUYỄN ĐẠO TƯỜNG) (1879 – 1926)
13. TRẦN THANH NHÀN (Thái Lão Sư TRẦN ĐẠO QUANG) (1870 – 1946)
14. THƯỢNG TƯỚNG THANH (NGUYỄN NGỌC TƯỜNG) (1881 – 1951)
15. NGỌC TRANG THANH (LÊ BÁ TRANG) (1878 – 1936)
16. THÁI THƠ THANH (NGUYỄN NGỌC THƠ) (1873 – 1950)
17. Ms. HƯƠNG THANH (LÂM NGỌC THANH) (1874 – 1937)
18. Ms. HƯƠNG HIẾU (NGUYỄN THỊ HƯƠNG) (1887 – 1971)
19. THƯỢNG KỶ THANH (VƯƠNG QUAN KỶ) (1880 – 1939)
20. THƯỢNG BẢN THANH (ĐOÀN VĂN BẢN) (1876 – 1941)
21. THƯỢNG TƯỚNG THANH (NGUYỄN VĂN TƯỜNG or VÕ VĂN TƯỜNG) (1887 – 1939)

1. Mr. NGÔ MINH CHIÊU (NGÔ VĂN CHIÊU) (1878 – 1932)



Figure 66: Portrait of Mr.
NGÔ MINH CHIÊU
(NGÔ VĂN CHIÊU)
(1878 – 1932)

Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu²²⁷ (Figure 66) was born on the 7th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year (February 8, 1878) in a small house behind Quan Thánh²²⁸ Pagoda in Chợ Lớn. Yet, in his identity card (Titre d'Identité) number C.03007, issued on June

²²⁷ His paternal grandparents were Mr. Ngô Văn Chại and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Tính, who had three children: Ngô Văn Xuân, Ngô Thị Đây, và Ngô Thị Tồn. Ms. Ngô Thị Tồn was married to Mr. Giang Văn Tài (1842 – 1933) and they had no children.

Regarding Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's birthday, through the collection of data, including Mr. Ngô's handwritten documents, his identity card (Titre d'Identité), his Birth Certificate, his Death Certificate, ... all only record the date in solar calendar, which is February 28, 1878. In the book *Lịch sử Quan phủ Ngô Văn Chiêu*, from the first edition (1932) to the later editions, all record that same date in solar calendar but clearly state that it was the 7th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year. According to lịch Vạn niên (the hectocentennial calendar), February 28, 1878, is the 27th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year. Respecting Mr. Ngô's notes, we record his birthday as the 27th day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year (February 28, 1878).

²²⁸ This pagoda was built in 1873, located at 242 Lê Quang Liêm warf (now Trần Văn Kiêu warf). Since 2006, due to the East-West highway project, the pagoda no longer exists. The coordinates according to the global positioning satellite system (GPS) of the back part of the pagoda is: 10°44'36" N; 106°38'56" E.

11, 1921, in Hà-Tiên, his native place (lieu d'origine) was recorded as Điều Hòa commune, Thuận Trị canton, Mỹ Tho province.

He was the only child of Mr. Ngô Văn Xuân and Ms. Lâm Thị Quý (birth name Lâm Thị Tiền) (1858 – 1919).

At the age of six, he lived in Mỹ Tho with his aunt named Ngô Thị Đây (whose husband was a Chinese, sold traditional medicine and planks, had a lot of prestige, and was commonly known as “Uncle Phu”; they had no children)²²⁹, because his parents had to move to Hà Nội city for their work. That house was in the Chinese quarter, next to the “Nhà việc” (“Administrative Office”) of Điều Hòa commune, and this place was recorded by Mr. Ngô as his hometown.

At the age of twelve, Mr. Ngô threw off his shyness to visit Mr. Đốc Phủ Lê Công Xứng²³⁰ (an acquaintance of his father), asking for sponsorship and introduction to be admitted to the boarding school Collège de Mỹ Tho (now Nguyễn Đình Chiểu School). After graduating from this school, he moved to Saigon city to attend Lycée Chasseloup Laubat (now Lê Quý Đôn High School).

²²⁹ When Mr. Ngô's aunt and her husband passed away, they were buried in the Chinese cemetery near Chợ Cũ, Cầu Quay (Mỹ Tho province).

²³⁰ Mr. **Lê Công Xứng** (1853 – 1920), (Governor) Đốc Phủ Sứ of Mỹ Tho province (the word ‘Xứng’ is written on his tombstone). His old house next to the theater near the bridge cầu Quay still exists today.

According to Ms. Trương Phụng Hảo (the People's Artist Phùng Há), who was once a wife of Mr. Lê Công Phước (i.e., George – Bạch Công Tử), Mr. Governor Đốc Phủ Xứng had with his first wife a daughter named Lê Thị Quyên (Madeleine), and an adopted daughter named Marie. And he had with the second wife a son named Mr. Lê Công Phước.

Some historical documents recorded that: After Mr. Ngô had completed his studies, (Governor) Đốc Phủ Xứng wanted to wed his daughter (probably Miss Quyên) to Mr. Ngô. But Mr. Ngô “dared not” accept it because of differences in their lifestyles. Following his aunt's advice, he married an orphan-girl named Bùi Thị Thân who was a resourceful trader.

At the age of twenty-one, he passed the Thành Chung examination. On March 23, 1899, Mr. Ngô was appointed to work at Sở Tân Đáo (the Immigration Department) in Saigon city.

After finishing school, Mr. Ngô married Ms. Bùi Thị Thân (1879 – 1955), a native of Thạnh Trị village, who was then trading at Mỹ Tho market. Altogether they had nine children. The first daughter, named Ngô Thị Ngữ, died five days after birth in Mỹ Tho; the second daughter, named Ngô Thị Hồng, died at the age of three in Saigon; their subsequent children were Ngô Thị Yên Ngọc (born in 1904), Ngô Thị Nguyệt (May 27, 1906), Ngô Văn Nhứt (September 10, 1908), Ngô Văn Tinh (November 20, 1910), Ngô Tường Vân (September 1, 1913), Ngô Thanh Phong (November 15, 1915), and Ngô Khai Minh (September 9, 1920).²³¹

Ms. Bùi Thị Thân passed away on December 30, 1955, and was buried in a small cemetery on the road from the national highway Quốc lộ 1 to Nguyễn Huỳnh Đức Mausoleum (Tân An province).

The life of Mr. Ngô as a civil servant can be summarized as follows:

- Apprenticeship as a secretary at Sở Tân Đáo (the Immigration Department) from March 23, 1899, to January 1, 1903, then transferred to Dinh Thượng Thơ (the Minister's Palace of Cochinchina – Bureaux du Gouvernement de Cochinchine).

²³¹ The numbers in parentheses after a name are the date of birth.

Once back to Saigon, on October 12, 1924, Mr. Ngô wrote a letter to his children in Tân An province as follows:

“I brought back all the clothes that your aunt Cô Ba Lang made for me a few years ago, that have all worn out, so you can mend them... I am very poor; I have no money left. The money in the storehouse is for you. You must be thrifty to avoid shame...”

It is because, in addition to sending home the living expenses, Mr. Ngô opened a savings book for each of his children (which he called the money in the storehouse); every month, he deposited an equal amount of money into it. Hence, the entire salary of (Prefect) Quan Phủ “had no money left”.

- On May 1, 1909, Mr. Ngô moved to work in Tòa Hành Chánh (the Administration Office) of Tân An province. On January 1, 1917, he passed the examination for Tri Huyện (District Chief) rank, and continued to work in Tân An province. As an honest civil servant, his budget was quite tight (Figure 67). Hence, he bought a thatched house for about sixty piasters (VND), located on a piece of rental land at 31 Lagrange street, Tân An province, and rebuilt it into a tile-roofed three-compartment house for his family to live together (now this address is changed to 27 Phan Đình Phùng street).²³²

- On March 1, 1920, Mr. Ngô transferred his official duties to the Administration Office of Hà Tiên province. After eight months working there, on October 26, 1920, he was appointed District Chief of Phú Quốc island, until July 29, 1924.

Mr. Ngô was promoted to Tri Phủ (Prefect) during this time (January 1, 1924).

- On July 30, 1924, Mr. Ngô was transferred back to Saigon, working at the Commerce Department (Room 2) of the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina.

- In 1931, at the age of fifty-four, Mr. Ngô retired from work and returned to Cần Thơ province. He often stayed at the house of Mr. Lý Trọng Quý (39 Nguyễn An Ninh street – now 107 Châu Văn Liêm street).

²³² Much later, on April 28, 1964, his two daughters, Ngô Thị Yến Ngọc and Ngô Thị Nguyệt, purchased that piece of land from Mr. Phạm Văn Hy and Ms. Trần Thị Nho (Property Title Deed No. 355). The house and vegetable garden totaled to one thousand and eighty-two squared meters. The house has still been kept by the family almost in its original features: wooden walls, wooden pillars, and tiled roof. The Divine Altar is set high in a small square attic, which is used for meditation practice and other memorabilia ...

This is a very important historical site of Cao Dai Faith that needs to be respected, because it is the first place in the world to receive the Grand Name 'Cao Đài Tiên Ông'.

Tableau des services effectués dans
Administration locale de Cochinchine.
 J.C. 1899 page 422
 Clair secrétaire le 23 mars 1899 à 400 francs
 Secret. aux 3^{es} cl. 14 juillet 1904 à 450^{fr}
 — 2^{de}. 14 juillet 1904 à 300^{fr}
 — 1^{re}. 14 juillet 1908 à 480^{fr}
 Secret. tit. 3^{cl.} 14 juillet 1910 à 540^{fr}
 — 2^{de}. 1^{re} janvier 1913 à 600^{fr}
 — 1^{re}. 1^{re} janvier 1916 à 600^{fr}
 Huynh de 2^{de}. 1^{re} janvier 1917 à 600^{fr}
 — 1^{re}. 14 juillet 1920 à 2000^{fr}
 Thu de 2^{de}. 1^{re} janvier 1924 à 1612^{fr}
 — 1^{re}. 1^{re} juillet 1926 à 1932^{fr}
 Après 4 ans le 1^{er} 7/13 all

Figure 67: A page of Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu's handwriting in his small notebook, clearly recording the positions and salaries from the time he started working until his retirement.

From the time he faithfully believed in Cao Dai – during the time working in Hà Tiên (1920) until his passing (1932) – throughout those twelve years, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu truly lived away from his family, focusing on his spiritual practice. Yet, he still fulfilled his family duties by taking out his monthly salary to support his wife and children. Mr. Lê Văn Ngung (Figure 12) served as the spiritic medium to help Mr. Ngô learn the cultivation method and was also Mr. Ngô's personal attendant throughout his life of spiritual practice.

In Giáp Tý year (1924), returning from Phú Quốc to Saigon, Mr. Ngô resided in a rental apartment at Bá Huê Lầu, 54 Pellerin street (now Pasteur street). After that, he moved multiple times. During the period he stayed at Paul Bert street (now Trần Quang Khải street), in Đa Kao district, he frequently visited the nearby Ngọc Hoàng Temple. Later, he relocated to the first floor of a building on d’Espagne street (now Lê Thánh Tôn street), where a dental office was on the ground floor near Bến Thành marketplace.

In Saigon, he lastly stayed on the second floor of 110 Bonard street (now Lê Lợi street), where the ground floor was Thái Sơn Hỏa shop of a Hainanese (a Chinese of Hainan origin).

During his time working in Saigon, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu occasionally took leave to travel far away for religious purposes, among which was a trip to mount Tà Lơn (in Cambodia).

In Tân Mùi year (1931), Mr. Ngô resigned from work and returned to Cần Thơ province for recuperation (Figure 68). The following year, he passed away at about 3 p.m. on the 13th day of the 3rd month of Nhâm Thân year (April 18, 1932) while on the Mỹ Thuận ferry (Tiền River, part of Mekong River)²³³.

²³³ By then, Mr. Ngô was in Cần Thơ province. Probably foreseeing his time of ascension, Mr. Ngô ordered (Councilor) Hội Đồng Võ Văn Thơm to take him by car to Mỹ Thuận (the Tiền River); escorting him were the spiritic medium Lê Văn Ngung, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Trinh (wife of Councilor Hội Đồng Thơm), Ms. Trần Thị Hương (wife of Mr. Tư Huỳnh), and his fifth daughter cô năm Ngô Thị Nguyệt.

Why did not Mr. Ngô leave his body in the Cần Thơ ferry (on the Hậu River), which also belongs to Mekong River? This mystery has not been clearly explained. But the Hậu River flows into the sea in only three branches, whereas the Tiền River from Vĩnh Long (Mỹ Thuận) begins to branch out to flow into the sea through six estuaries. Perhaps the fact that Mr. Ngô left his body on the Tiền River achieved the (concrete and abstract) meaning of the following line of the prayer Ngọc Hoàng Kinh (the prayer to pay respect to the Supreme Being): ‘Thời thừa lục long...’ (‘Often ride on six dragons ...’)



Figure 68: Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu was recuperating in Cần Thơ, the 27th day of the 2nd month of Nhâm Thân year (1932) (Original photo kept at his house in Tân An)



Figure 69: The hexagonal stupa of Mr. Ngô Minh Chiêu at Chiếu Minh Cemetery (Cần Thơ province). (GPS: 10°01'08.1" N; 105°46'07.5" E)

The stupa of Mr. Ngô (Figure 69) remains at Chiêu Minh cemetery (Cần Thơ province).

For Mr. Ngô Minh Chiêu, the 13th day of the 3rd lunar month signified many special landmarks:

- The day he saw the God Eye for the first time.
- The day he declined the Giáo Tông (Pope) position.
- The day he ascended to Heaven on Mekong River.
- Also the day Mr. Lê Minh Huân (Figure 35), the first disciple of Mr. Ngô, passed away.

2. Mr. CAO QUỲNH CƯ (1888 – 1929)

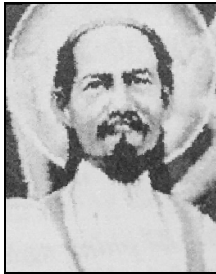


Figure 70: Portrait of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (1888 – 1929)

Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (Figure 70), given name Bội Ngọc, was born in Mậu Tý year (1888) in Hiệp Ninh village, Hàm Ninh Thượng commune, Tây Ninh province. His father, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân (1844 – 1898), passed away on the 4th day of the 11th month of Bính Thân year. His mother, Ms. Trịnh Thị Huệ (1853 – 1946)²³⁴, passed away on the 25th day of the 9th month of Bính Tuất year (1946). In the family, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu

²³⁴ In the Heavenly Ordination of Female Dignitaries on the 14th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (1927), she was granted the title of Giáo Sư (Bishop).

was the second child and Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was the third one²³⁵ (the first child died early).

In 1907, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư married Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương, and two years later they had a son named Cao Quỳnh An (who died in September 1929, while studying in France). In 1925, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư worked as a secretary at Tham Tá rank in Sở Hỏa Xa (Saigon Railway Department), (the building in front of Bến Thành marketplace). He rented the house at 134 Bourdais street (now Calmette street), where he took care of his mother and mother-in-law.

During a gathering of friends for playing poetry and music²³⁶ at the house of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang (Hàng Dừa street), Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư proposed the idea of using the table-turning method to contact the deceased people. Everyone fervently welcomed his idea. The first spirit they received was Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân (Figure 17), his father. The next step, when switching from table turning to holding the beaked basket, was also thanks to the help of his friend, Mr. Phan Tý (Figure 21), who lived near his house. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was sworn brothers by Thất Nương of Diêu Trì Cung (the Seventh Lady Immortal) and was called Trưởng Ca (Eldest Brother).

²³⁵ According to Ms. Lâm Thị Nền (daughter-in-law of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu) and Ms. Cao Thị Ngọc Lang (daughter of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang), the Cao Quỳnh and the Cao Hoài families have the same surname Cao but have different genealogies. Instead, the Cao Quỳnh family is related by blood to the Cao Triều family in Bạc Liêu province (surname of Mr. Cao Triều Phát). When Ms. Lâm first became a daughter-in-law in the Cao Quỳnh family, she had to go to Bạc Liêu province to pay respect at the ancestral temple there.

²³⁶ Thần Chung Newspaper in the issue of the spring of Tân Mão (1951) had an article by author Vương Liêu about the “Bầu Rô” theater troupe (Governor General Toàn Quyền Albert Saraut was considered the director of this troupe), according to which, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was Phó Trưởng ban Âm nhạc (Deputy Head of the Music Department). The article included a photo of the Bầu Rô troupe in front of “Nhà hát Tây” (“the French Theater”) (now Hồ Chí Minh City Theater) on its opening day of November 1, 1918; this detail confirmed Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's musical talent.

From then on, the work of opening the God-Way was spread widely. On the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (1926), Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư received the Heavenly Decree as Tá Cơ Tiên Hạc Đạo Sĩ. On the full-moon day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master blessed and allowed him to organize the first Diêu Trì Banquet at his house. Forming the medium pair with Mr. Phạm Công Tắc, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư made his home the invocation site where many heavenly ordained dignitaries were spiritually guided into the Faith. In the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way held at Gò Kén Pagoda, the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, he was appointed to be Thượng Phẩm (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs). From that day on, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and his wife, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương (Hương Hiếu), renounced all secular activities and relocated to Tây Ninh province, devoting themselves to practicing the Way.

After the Inauguration Ceremony, (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân claimed his pagoda back. Following the Almighty's guidance, when he and many others were looking for land to build the Holy See, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư met a friend named Cao Văn Điện who introduced him to purchase forest land from Mr. Aspar (a Frenchman). The work of reclaiming this wild and dense land must be credited to Mr. Cao Thượng Phẩm; not only did he endure the misery of staying in the middle of the forest, but he also had to mobilize laborers of diverse background and origin, in addition to deal with the French provincial governor. Ms. Hương Hiếu recounted:

“His Excellency Cao Thượng Phẩm was questioned by the French about many things, and even at the worship time he was not allowed to enter the Main Hall for daily prayer sessions ... because at that time the French Government suspected and persecuted the religion; they also

in a letter sent to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu (December 17, 1928).

3. Mr. PHẠM CÔNG TẮC (1890 – 1959)

Mr. Phạm Công Tắc (Figure 72), given name Ái Dân, penname Tây Sơn Đạo, was born on the Đoan Dương Festival, the 5th day of the 5th month of Canh Dần year (June 21, 1890) in Bình Lập village, Tân An province. He was the eighth child of Mr. Phạm Công Thiện (a native of An Hòa village, Trảng Bàng district, Tây Ninh province) and Ms. La Thị Đường. In 1890, Mr. Phạm Công Thiện was working as a civil servant in Tân An province. At that time, the family was Catholics.



Figure 72: Portrait of Mr. **Phạm Công Tắc (1890 – 1959)**

Mr. Phạm Công Tắc started his schooling at the age of six. In 1905, he attended Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat (now Lê Quý Đôn High School), and in 1907 he passed the Thành Chung examination. While in school, Mr. Phạm Công Tắc participated in the movement of Minh Tân Công Nghệ Xã (initiated by gentlemen Dụ Thúc Lương Khắc Ninh, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu...), planning to go East on the fourth trip of Đông Du

movement²³⁷, but he unfortunately failed. He temporarily took refuge in An Hòa (Tây Ninh) for a while, then changed his fighting methods. He wrote articles published in magazines and newspapers such as *Công Luận*, *La Cloche Fêlée*, *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, *Nông Cổ Mìn Đàm*, etc..., using the school of speech to serve the ideal of gaining national independence. Typical articles published in *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* such as: “Thượng bất chánh hạ tất loạn”²³⁸ on December 12, 1907; and “Dân tộc đoàn kết và thời đàm”²³⁹ on January 23, 1908.

Due to his family's poverty, in Canh Tuất year (1910) Mr. Phạm Công Tắc became a secretary of Sở Thương Chánh Sài Gòn (Saigon Commerce Department)²⁴⁰. At the age of twenty-one (year 1911), he married Ms. Nguyễn Thị Nhiều (1892 – 1968). They had many children; but most of them died early (including the youngest son named Phạm Công Thiện), leaving only two daughters: the third child named Ms. Phạm Hồ Cầm (1914 – 1998) and the fourth one, Miss cô tư Phạm Tàn Tranh (1915 – 1990).

In 1925, Mr. Phạm Công Tắc was converted by Cao Dai Supreme God on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 26, 1926). He was ordained as Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) with the Holy Decree Hộ Giá Tiên Đồng Tá Cơ Đạo Sĩ.

Mr. Phạm Công Tắc participated in all important events during the period of establishing the Propagation Branch of the Faith. They can be listed as follows: the first and subsequent sessions of table turning in June 1925; the Diêu Trì Banquet on the full-moon night of the 8th month of Ất Sửu year (1925); the Outdoor Ceremony to beseech for the Way on the new-moon night of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year; the séance to receive

²³⁷ Translator's note: Đông Du (Going East) was the movement to arrange for Vietnamese revolutionists to flee the country and re-assemble in Japan.

²³⁸ Translator's note: “If the leader is not right, the follower will rebel”.

²³⁹ Translator's note: “National unity and discussion on current events”

²⁴⁰ Original French text is ‘Bureaux des Douanes et Regies’.

the Grand Name of Cao Dai (Christmas 1925); the séance on the New Year's Eve and the Commemoration of God in Bính Dần year; the assembly of Branch One and Branch Two; the First Heavenly Ordination of Dignitaries; the meeting to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year; the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way in the middle of the 10th month of Bính Dần year; ... In all those events, Mr. Phạm Công Tắc played a major role, arranging the organization and serving as the medium to receive spiritual energy from the Almighty.

Early in 1927, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Nhiều (mother of Mr. Phạm Công Tắc) was ordained to Giáo Hữu (Priest) rank. In that same year Mr. Phạm Công Tắc was transferred his official duties to Pnom-Penh. Taking this occasion, he propagated the God-Way in Cambodia. During this period, he temporarily stayed at the house of Mr. Cao Đức Trọng (who was the eldest brother of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang and later was appointed as Tiếp Đạo).

After (Acting Pope) Quyền Giáo Tông Lê Văn Trung ascended to Heaven on November 19, 1934, the internal religious affairs and secular issues were much in turmoil. Thus, on December 12, 1934, Hội Thánh and Hội Nhơn Sanh (the Clergy and the Congress of Humanities) in Tây Ninh urged (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc to assume the authority of both Hiệp Thiên Đài and Cửu Trùng Đài (House of Heavenly Alliance and House of the Nine Initiations). Hence, in such circumstances he took tremendous responsibility and accountability for maneuvering the religious boat in the stormy sea.

In 1936, unable to wait any longer, (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp actively mobilized and promoted the construction of the Tây Ninh Holy See. The Holy See was created under the guidance and protection of the Divine Grace.

Then the Faith was challenged again. In 1941, Hộ Pháp was detained by the French; on July 27, 1941, he had to board the

ship Compiègne to go into exile in Madagascar (in Africa). Returning to Vietnam in 1946, he continued to build the Tây Ninh Holy See (which started to open in 1947 but was not completed and inaugurated until 1955).

In Bính Dần year (1956), Hộ Pháp endured another round of trials, and on the 5th day of the 1st month of that year, he had to go into exile in Kampong Cham (Pnom-Penh, Cambodia) along with some other dignitaries. Regarding this matter, Dharma Protector declared as follows:

I am forced to go abroad to preserve my personal freedom so as to bring about a new solution to unify the people and the world, and to find a method of peace and co-existence.

Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc ascended to Heaven on the 10th day of the 4th month of Kỷ Hợi year (May 17, 1959) at the age of seventy, and his Liên đài²⁴¹ was temporarily kept in Kampong Cham (Pnom-Penh) (Figure 73).

On the 10th day of the 10th month of Bính Tuất year (November 30, 2006) at 1:30 p.m., the remains of Dharma Protector were respectfully welcomed by the dignitaries of the Tây Ninh Holy See and then placed in the stupa in front of the Holy Temple.



Figure 73: **Funeral of the Dharma Protector Phạm**

²⁴¹ Translator's note: Liên đài (lotus platform) is an equi-hexagonal or equi-octagonal casket (not a coffin) for burying a deceased person in the Buddha's sitting posture.

Công Tắc at the Pnom Penh Holy See, with the participation of many local believers and those from other places. Photo taken on May 20, 1959.

4. Mr. CAO HOÀI SANG (1901 – 1971)



Figure 74: Portrait of Mr. Cao Hoài Sang (1901 – 1971)

Mr. Cao Hoài Sang (Figure 74), given name Thanh Thủy, religious names Huệ Nghiêm and Huệ Giác, was born on the 29th day of the 7th month of Tân Sửu year (September 11, 1901) in Thái Bình commune, Tây Ninh province. His father was Mr. Cao Hoài Ân (1878 – 1909), one of the first Vietnamese judges (the spirit of his father got into contact with him several times in the period of using table turning). His mother was Ms. Hồ Thị Lự.²⁴²

²⁴² Ms. **Hồ Thị Lự** (1878 – 1972) was ordained to the rank of Giáo Sư (Bishop) in Pnom-Penh on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Đinh Mão year (1927); then promoted to the rank of Phối Sư (Archbishop) on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Ất Hợi year (1935), and was bestowed by Đức Lý (the Spiritual Pope) to the title of Nữ Đầu Sư Hàm (Honorary Lady Cardinal) on the 20th day of the 10th month of Mậu Thân year (concurrently with Ms. Hương Hiếu). Ms. Hồ Hương Lự passed away on the 22nd day of the 11th month of Nhâm Tý year (1972). It can be said that Ms. Hương Lự was a shining example of a virtuous lady. Being a young widow while the family was poor, at times she had to row a boat at Thị Nghè wharf to make a living and raise her children. She had followed the Minh Sư practice, before

Mr. Cao Hoài Sang was the youngest child in the family. His elder sister was Ms. Cao Thị Cường (1898 – 1973) (who later became Director of the Orphanage at the Tây Ninh Holy See), and his eldest brother was Mr. Cao Đức Trọng (1897 – 1958) (who was Tiếp Đạo in Hiệp Thiên Đài – House of Heavenly Alliance).

In 1921, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang married Ms. Võ Thị Giáo (1902 – 1948), a native of Cai Lậy. They had nine children: Cao Hoài Hà (1922 – 1992), Cao Ngọc Thanh (1924), Cao Xuân Phong (1927), Cao Hoài Thoại (1930), Cao Thị Ngọc Lan (1934), Cao Thị Cúc (1935), Cao Văn Tùng (1938 -1990), Cao Thị Thu (1941 – 1993), and Cao Minh Tâm (1943).

While in school, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang often visited Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu (in Phú Nhuận district) and became a close friend of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư. Graduating from Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat with the Thành Chung Diploma, he worked as a secretary of Sở Thương Chánh (Commerce Department) since 1920, and from there he became acquainted with Mr. Phạm Công Tắc. Together they rented the row houses of phố Hàng Dừa complex on Arras street (now Cống Quỳnh street) near Thái Bình marketplace. It was there that on July 25, 1925, they carried out the first table-turning session.

Around year 1930, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang rented the house at 121 Bourdais Street (near Mr. Trương Hữu Đức's house at number 131). In 1941, his family moved to 142 Marchaise street (now Ký Con street).

Converted by Cao Dai Supreme God on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang was heavenly ordained to be Thượng Sanh Hiệp Thiên Đài (Secretary of the Temporal Affairs, House of Heavenly Alliance). Before that, although still very young, he had already aspired toward spiritual tendencies. He and his wife, Ms. Võ Thị Giáo,

joining Cao Dai and wholeheartedly guiding her children to the virtuous path. All her children became high-ranking dignitaries in Cao Dai Clergy.

attended the meeting to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith at the house of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường on Galliéni street.

The religion went through many ups and downs. In 1956, (Dharma Protector) Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc had to go into exile in Pnom-Penh. At the request of Hội Thánh (the Clergy), Mr. Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang returned to assume the position of Chủ Quản Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh (Chief Administrator of the Tây Ninh Holy See) (May 14, 1957). From then on, he completely renounced secular life for religious practice. Under his administration, many projects were completed, such as the construction of the main gate and other gates of the Holy See, which had not yet been completed; the establishment of the Broadcasting (Radio) Station for preaching the religion; the opening of the offices of Ban Thế Đạo, Bắc Tông Đạo, Đường Nhơn, Tàn Nhơn, Đầu Sư Đường ...

Being a connoisseur of music (expertised in Vietnamese stringed instruments such as đàn tranh²⁴³ and tỳ bà²⁴⁴), when he was in Saigon, Mr. Cao Hoài Sang often interacted and taught at trường Quốc gia Âm nhạc Sài Gòn (Saigon National Music School).²⁴⁵ He reformed Bộ Nhạc (the Music Department) according

²⁴³ Translator's note: a zither-like string instrument like the Japanese koto.

²⁴⁴ Translator's note: a shallow wooden pear-shaped and four-stringed lute like the Chinese pipa.

²⁴⁵ On the full-moon day of the 10th month of Nhâm Tý year (1972), on the occasion of Đại Tường (the Grand Memorial Day) of His Excellency Thượng Sanh, the professors and artists of Saigon National Music School held a concert to pay tribute to His Excellency at Cửu Trùng Thiên (Tây Ninh Holy See). In the speech of Professor and Musician Nguyễn Văn Thịnh (Director of the School), he stated:

“Thanks to His Excellency’s encouragement and the effort he put into composing the unique songs in terms of literature to popularize and disseminate to the masses who love ancient music, our traditional music has been saved and balanced against a declining, near-collapse situation due to the overwhelming attraction of a foreign music genre. (...) His Excellency Thượng Sanh is a talented person of the country, a gentle and upright sage, with rare virtue and prestige. (...)”

to the Will of the Supreme Being, trained musicians at the Radio Station, and perfected religious music on the basis of traditional Vietnamese musics.

In early April 1971, Mr. Cao Thượng Sanh returned to Saigon for recuperation and ascended to Heaven at 5 p.m. on the 26th day of the 3rd month of Tân Hợi year (April 21, 1971) at his private residence, number 23/26 Cô Bắc Street, District 1 (Figure 75). The Liên đài (lotus platform)²⁴⁶ of Mr. Thượng Sanh is currently at the Tây Ninh Holy See.

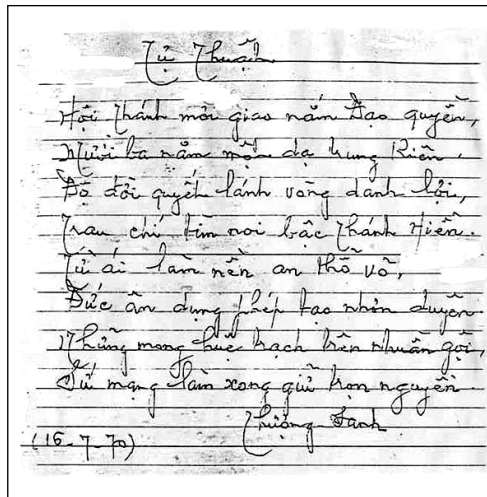


Figure 75: A handwriting of His Excellency Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang. The first two lines of this biography were revised by himself, who manifested in the séance (one day after his passing), as follows:

Today's performance of our group of talented musicians is to express gratitude and pay tribute to His Excellency's kindness prior to his passing, for allowing this group to perform a night of music in the Holy Land, the image of which will never fade in the minds of the whole group..."

²⁴⁶ Translator's note: Liên đài (lotus platform) is a hexagonal or octagonal casket (not a coffin) for burying a deceased person in the Buddha's sitting posture.

*“Từ lúc đưa tay nắm Đạo quyền,
 Nguyên đem thi thố tâm trung kiên”*

Translated as

*“From the moment I hold the religious authority,
 I vow to demonstrate my loyalty.”*

This poem has been used as bài Thài (the Declaiming Verses) during the offering ceremony.

5. Mr. CA MINH CHƯƠNG (1855 – 1927)

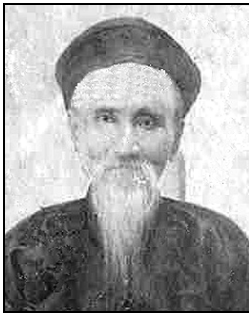


Figure 76: Portrait of Mr. **Ca Minh Chương (1855 – 1927)**

Mr. Ca Minh Chương (Figure 76) was born in Ất Mão year (1855) in Thanh Ba hamlet, Mỹ Lộc Tây village, Phước Điền Trung commune, Cần Giuộc district. He married Ms. Phạm Thị Kế (1860 – 1933). They had six children in total, but most of them died early, leaving only the fifth child named Ca Thị Thế.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Ms. **Ca Thị Thế** (1884 – 1956) got married to Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lâu (1886 – 1918). In 1915 she suffered from a mild mental illness, while pregnant with her sixth daughter (Nguyễn Thị Nhạn). One day at the end of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, in Đàn Tân Kim (Tân Kim Invocation Site), Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh was instructed by the Divine on how to calm Ms. Ca Thị Thế, who was cured since then. On the 14th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, Ms. Ca Thị Thế was heavenly appointed as Phó Giáo Sư (Associate Bishop). She passed away on June 16, 1956, and was buried in her

Growing up in a Confucian family (the fourth child in the family, given name Sang) and thanks to his humble nature, Mr. Ca Minh Chương was elected to the position of Hương Bộ. After working as local civil servant for some time, he retired and taught at Mỹ Lộc school (next to Tôn Thạnh Temple) until the age of sixty-seven. During his teaching years, he followed the Minh Sư practice until the Tam Bộ grade.

“Mr. Ca Minh Chương lived a saintly life. When teaching, he fulfilled his duties in the Way of Man while also performing spiritual exercises of the God-Way. He strictly observed full vegetarianism and complete abstinence, while receiving the Minh Sư teaching ... In Bính Dần year, at Hội Thượng Nguyên (the Festival of the Superior Era)²⁴⁸, I and my two brothers, Cư and Tắc, received Holy Order to spread the Faith in Phước Lộc district; on that day Mr. Ca Minh Chương attended the invocation to receive the precious words from the Great Compassionate Being. Pre-destined people quickly understand the holy messages. So, he immediately sought the Way ...”²⁴⁹

On April 3, 1926, the Holy Master accepted Mr. Ca Minh Chương as his disciple. From then on, he devoted himself to serving the God-Way even though his family was in turmoil (his wife was badly ill, his daughter had mental disorder). The Holy Master gave him a consolation poem:

*Seeing your family in turmoil,
My heart is moved and filled with sorrow.*

hometown, near the (old) stupa of her father, Mr. Bảo Đạo, in Thanh Ba hamlet.

²⁴⁸ Translator’s note: It is the full-moon day of the 1st lunar month of a year.

²⁴⁹ Excerpt from the eulogy read by Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt at the funeral of Mr. Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương in Cần Giuộc district (printed in the book *Tiểu Sử Đức Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhựt*, page 28).

*Your wife is in great pain,
 Your foolish child speaks nonsense.
 These burdens turn your hair snowy white.
 When the forest pine blooms rosily under the sunshine,
 Your work of merit and virtue are enough,
 I have combined them altogether from your three
 lifetimes.*

Mr. Ca Minh Chương was ordained as Bảo Đạo in the 12th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (1927), exactly as foretold in a holy message “*Thất tuần dĩ định vấn thời quân*” (“You are predestined to be a *Thời Quân* at the age of seventy”); (please refer to Chapter 2 Section IV Part C.3). But not long after being ordained, he passed away in his hometown on the 19th day of the 10th month of Đinh Mão year (November 13, 1927)²⁵⁰. On the 8th day of the 8th month of Mậu Thân year (1968), his remains were exhumed by Hội Thánh (the Clergy) and brought into Liên đài (lotus platform) in the Tây Ninh Holy Land.

²⁵⁰ Ms. Bà Năm Nguyễn Thị Sửu (born in 1913 – maternal granddaughter of Mr. Bảo Đạo) recalled:

“On the day of Mr. Ca Minh Chương’s funeral, when the dignitaries from Tây Ninh arrived, our family already enshrouded him, and we were about to put mourning clothes on. After performing veneration rites at the Divine Altar, Mr. Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư performed the sacrament: Fanning the Long Tu Phiến (the magic fan made up of dragon beard) on the coffin three times. Right at that moment, I saw a five-color streak rising from the top of the coffin... Others might not see it like me, but this has made me remember it until now.”

Perhaps this is the “Ritual” that Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư was taught by the Holy Master to also perform at the funeral of (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction) Ngọc Chương Pháp Trần Văn Thụ, which was taken place earlier.

Having lived together and been schooled by Mr. Bảo Đạo since her childhood, Ms. Bà Năm still remembers many details about him. She said that he passed away at the age of seventy-three, and the Ca family was originated from Phước Kiến (Fujian, China).

On February 11, 1954, obeying the order of the Supreme Being, His Excellency Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương descended at Cung Đạo of the Holy See to pass on the temporal part of Bảo Đạo authority to Mr. Hồ Tấn Khoa, while the spiritual part has still been his responsibility.

6. Mr. NGUYỄN TRUNG HẬU (1892 – 1961)

Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu (Figure 25), real name Nguyễn Văn Hậu, given name Thuận Đức, was born in the 5th day of the 3rd month of Nhâm Thìn year (April 1, 1892) in Bình Hòa commune, Gia Định province. His father was Mr. Nguyễn Phục Lễ, given name Văn Nhiêu (1856 – 1915), a traditional medicine practitioner. His mother was Ms. Lê Thị Cơ (1854 – 1926).

On October 4, 1919, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu married Ms. Diệp Thị Nguy (born on January 14, 1901), a native of Phú Hựu village, An Mỹ canton, Sa Đéc province, whose parents were Mr. Diệp Văn Chỉ and Ms. Dương Thị Kiển. Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Trung Hậu had eight children, five sons (with the middle name Trung) and three daughters (with the middle name Như), as follows: Trung Ngôn (1920 – 1974), Trung Nghĩa (1924), Trung Hiếu (1926 – 1989), Như Hạnh (1929), Trung Nhon (1931), Trung Đạo (1934), Như Lý (1937), and Như Hương (1940).²⁵¹ His five sons and two daughters-in-law later all received the title Hiền Tài.

Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu was a schoolteacher, graduating in 1911 from Ecole Normale Primaire d'Instituteurs (now belonging to the area of Võ Trường Toản High School, 11 Nguyễn Bình Khiêm street, Saigon District 1). In 1922, he directed a boarding primary school named Internat Primaire de

²⁵¹ The numbers in parentheses are the year of birth, and those who have passed away have the year of death added.

DaKao (later became Huỳnh Khương Ninh School) located at the corner of Huỳnh Khương Ninh and Phan Liêm streets.

The devotion to morality and the thought of transcendence came to him in his youth. At the age of twenty-seven (year 1919), Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu wrote the poem “Xuất gia” (“Renunciation”):

*Entering the Buddha home, I follow the sacred Way,
Looking back at the troubling world, I find nothing
happy.
Leaving the intricate path and stepping on the serene
way,
I seek the door of compassion and avoid the door of
vanity.
Once the flesh passes through the wind and dust,
The bones are entrusted to the mourning shadow.
Let's put out the fire of the heart from here on,
Let water drop from the willow branch wash away the
sorrow.*

At the end of year 1925, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu was converted by Cao Dai Supreme God, and on April 26, 1926 (the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year) he received the Holy Decree ordaining him as Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ. Then on February 13, 1927 (the 12th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year), he was granted the title Bảo Pháp Chơn Quân by the Supreme Being.

During his teaching years, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu wrote articles for some newspapers such as Đuốc Nhà Nam, Hoàn Cầu Tân Văn... Regarding his religious activities, he was editor-in-chief of the magazine “La Revue Caodaïste”²⁵² (1930

²⁵² The office of this magazine was located at the house of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phùng, 155 Ayot street (later became Nguyễn Văn Sâm street, Saigon District 1); and collaborating in the editorial office were gentlemen Tuyét Tân Thành, Lê Thế Vinh...

– 1931), and editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine “Đại Đồng” of Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (1932).

Regarding books, Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu was one of the predecessors who wrote the first books on Cao Dai doctrine, including the following:

- Luận Đạo Vấn Đáp (1927)
- Tiên Thiên Tiểu Học (1927)
- Chơn Lý (1928)
- Đức Tin (1928)
- Ăn Chay (1928)
- Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên (1930)
- Thiên Đạo (1955), co-authored with Mr. Phan Trường

Mạnh

- Luân Hồi Quả Báo (1956), co-authored with Mr. Khai Đạo Phạm Tấn Đãi.

During his time of service at the Holy See, Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu re-established “Đạo Đức Văn Đàn” (a poetic and literal circle) (previously formed by Mr. Tiếp Đạo Cao Đức Trọng in 1950) to teach prosody of Tang poetry²⁵³, declamation and response in literature and poetry. This activity received support from numerous dignitaries and followers.

On May 14, 1957, Mr. Bảo Pháp became Director of Hạnh Đường (School of Virtue). He opened courses to teach Giáo Hữu (Priests) and Lễ Sinh (Student-Priests) at the Tây Ninh Holy See. Due to old age and poor health (high blood pressure), on December 25, 1958, Mr. Bảo Pháp returned to his private home in Gia Định province for recuperation.

After a serious illness for exactly one hundred days, Mr. Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu passed away at 4:50 p.m. on the 7th

²⁵³ Translator’s note: Tang poem is a type of poetry in which each poem consists of eight lines of seven words and construction of the poem is strictly organized.

day of the 9th month of Tân Sửu year (October 16, 1961) in his private home at 186/42 Ngô Tùng Châu street (now 101/71 Nguyễn Văn Đậu street, Bình Thạnh district). On the 7th day of the 9th month of Giáp Dần year (October 21, 1971) his remains were exhumed and placed in a stupa in the Tây Ninh Holy Land. Strangely, at the time of the reburial, his body was almost intact.

One of the memories about Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu that has still been circulated is as follows:

Early in 1935, in preparation for the launch of Bát Nhã²⁵⁴ boat at the Tây Ninh Holy See, a number of Confucian scholars (including several Yết Ma) received the orders from the Divine to ask Mr. Nguyễn Trung Hậu for the pair of parallel sentences to be attached at the front of the boat (although his expertise leaned more toward Western studies). He wrote:

- *Vạn sự viết vô, nhục thể ký quy tam xích thổ.*
- *Thiên niên tự hữu, linh hồn trực đáo Cửu Trùng Thiên.*²⁵⁵

These two parallel sentences were very good, but when presented, they were perfected by Đức Lý Giáo Tông (the Spiritual Pope) as:

- *Vạn sự viết vô, nhục thể thổ sanh huân tại thổ.*
- *Thiên niên tự hữu, linh hồn Thiên tử phản hồi Thiên.*²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Translator's note: 'Bát Nhã' is the Vietnamese phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit word 'Prajna Paramita', which means 'Perfect Wisdom'. 'Bát Nhã boat' is the funeral boat for Cao Dai dignitaries.

²⁵⁵ Translator's note: These verses literally mean

- *Ten thousand beings are nothing, the corporal body returns to earth at three feet depth.*
- *Thousand years is its existence, the spiritual nature returns to Heaven of the Nine Initiations.*

'Ten thousand beings' means all beings or everything; 'thousand years' alludes to everlasting.

These parallel sentences, from the day of launching Bát Nhã boat at Khách Đình (November 8, 1935) until now, has been used for all Bát Nhã boats in Cao Dai Faith.

7. Mr. TRƯƠNG HỮU ĐỨC (1890 – 1976)

“Trương Hữu Đức was born on the 2nd day of the 2nd month of Canh Dần year (1890), on the birth certificate it was written as 1892. His father was Mr. Trương Văn Tự, cựu Cai Tổng (former Canton Chief) of Cần An Thượng, Hiệp Hòa village (Chợ Lớn), and Giáo Sư phái Ngọc (Bishop of Confucian faction). His mother was Ms. Lê Thị Nhụy, also known as Sót.

He entered Cao Dai Faith in Ất Sửu year (1925), when table-turning was still in use. Because in the beginning, the followers were all appointed by the Supreme Being, so there was no petition to join the Faith.

Among the first twelve disciples of the Supreme Being mentioned in the quatrain in the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages), there was the name Đức (later, ordained as Hiến Pháp Hiệp Thiên Đài), who joined Mr. Hậu as the medium pair to serve in the propagation of

²⁵⁶ Translator's note: Literal meaning of these verses

- Ten thousand beings are nothing, the corporal body made up of earth gets back to earth.

- Thousand years is its existence, the spiritual nature bestowed by Heaven returns to Heaven.

the Faith. Mr. Hậu later was ordained Bảo Pháp.”²⁵⁷

Mr. Trương Hữu Đức (Figure 24), pen name Thân Dân, and his wife, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Sanh, were present and signed in the list of two hundred and forty-five participants in the meeting to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith. (She was later conferred the title of Lễ Sanh (Student-Priest) on February 15, 1927, at Gò Kén Pagoda). During this time, his family lived on Alsace Loraine street (now Phó Đức Chính street), near the house of Mr. Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Trảng.

Mr. Trương Hữu Đức received the Holy Decree ordained him as Tiên Đạo Phò Cơ Đạo Sĩ on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 26, 1926). On the 12th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (February 13, 1927) he was heavenly ordained as Hiến Pháp (Hiệp Thiên Đài - House of Heavenly Alliance).

During the period he worked as an interpreter (approved by the Holy Master) for Mr. Nadau, Chánh Sở Mật Thám (Chief of the Saigon Secret Service), Tổng Nha Mật Thám Hà Nội (the General Office of Secret Service in Hà Nội) sent a dispatch to Saigon, asking Mr. Nadau about the title: Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ printed in the Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh document (Proclamation to Sentient Beings) (please refer to Figures 60 and 61 in Chapter 2 Section V Part A.4.a). The interpreter in Hà Nội translated it into French as “The Big Religion for the salvation of the three regions of Vietnam”; hence, if Cao Dai religion engaged in politics, it must be dissolved immediately.

When asked by Mr. Nadau about this issue, Mr. Trương Hữu Đức corrected the translation and explained it clearly: “the Third Universal Salvation” and not “the three regions of the South, Central, North Vietnam”. He also showed the version of the Proclamation to Sentient Beings written in Sino-

²⁵⁷ Excerpt from the autobiography of Mr. Hiến Pháp Trương Hữu Đức (written on June 12, 1971).

Vietnamese characters. Thanks to his clarification, Cao Dai Faith and its followers were saved.

Since 1945, due to the troubling socio-political circumstances, Mr. Trương Hữu Đức had to move to many places such as from his hometown Hiệp Hòa, to the Holy See, then to Lộc Giang, and back to Hiệp Hòa, before getting down to live in Đền Phật Mẫu (Temple of the Divine Mother) near Băng Ky bridge (with many other dignitaries of Hiệp Thiên Đài). In 1952, Mr. Trương Hữu Đức retired and lived in Hiệp Hòa. In 1955, he sold all his assets and returned to the Holy See to focus on religious practice. Later, he held additional positions in: Bộ Pháp Chánh (the Ministry of Justice), Ban Kiểm Duyệt (the Censorship Committee), Ban Đạo Sử (the Religious History Committee), and Thư Viện (the Library).

On the 21st day of the 5th month of Tân Hợi year (1971), Mr. Trương Hữu Đức was elected as Quyền Chủ Quản Hiệp Thiên Đài (Acting Chief Administrator of the House of Heavenly Alliance) at the Tây Ninh Holy See. And in the 4th month of Quý Sửu year (1973), he was officially appointed to this position by Đức Lý (the Spiritual Pope).

Mr. Hiến Pháp Trương Hữu Đức passed away at 8:15 p.m. on the full-moon day of the 12th month of Ất Mão year (January 15, 1976) at the age of eighty-seven.

8. Mr. CAO QUỲNH ĐIỀU (1884 – 1958)

Mr. Cao Quỳnh Điều (Figure 51), given name Mỹ Ngọc, religious name Cao Liên Tử, was born in 1884, in Hiệp Ninh village, Hàm Ninh Thượng commune, Tây Ninh province. He was one of the children of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Tuân (Figure 17) and Ms. Trịnh Thị Huệ. Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (Figure 70) was his younger brother.

Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu married Ms. Võ Thị Giáp, and they had a son named Cao Quỳnh Đức (1906 – 1993)²⁵⁸. About five years later, they separated from each other. In 1912, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu remarried to Ms. Trần Thị Lựu, but the two had no children. Prior to this remarriage, Ms. Trần Thị Lựu had a son named Nguyễn Văn Thân (born in 1908), who was raised by Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu and re-named as Cao Huệ Chương.

In 1927, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu was ordained as Tiếp Lễ Nhạc Quân. In that same year, Ms. Trần Thị Lựu was ordained as Giáo Hữu (Priest) (on the 14th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year). In October 1929, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu renounced from secular life and returned to the Holy See to focus on religious practice.

In 1930, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu was ordained Bảo Văn Pháp Quân, officially in charge of the ritual music at the Tây Ninh Holy See. Prior to this position, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu received the order from Hội Thánh (the Clergy) to compose three new songs for the ritual offering of the Three Treasures (Flowers – Wine – Tea) to replace those originally given by Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu. In the séance on the full-moon day of the 5th month of Kỷ Ty year (1929), the Supreme Being revised the lyrics, and these songs for the offering of the Three Treasures were published by the Clergy and have been widely used from then on. Also in that period, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Diêu wrote some books on Cao Dai Faith such as: Đại Đàn Nghi Tiết (1929), Đạo Mạch Tri Nguyên (1930 – using the penname Huệ Chương), Mạch Đạo (1932) ...

On the 4th day of the 9th month of Mậu Tuất year (October 16, 1958), Mr. Bảo Văn Pháp Quân Cao Quỳnh Diêu passed away in the Tây Ninh Holy See, at the age of seventy-five. His ashes are currently kept at Báo Ân Từ (Tây Ninh Holy See).

²⁵⁸ In 1927, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Đức married Ms. Lâm Thị Nền (born in 1911), who helped supplement some details about the Cao family.

9. Mr. THƯỢNG TRUNG NHỰT (LÊ VĂN TRUNG) (1876 – 1934)

Mr. Lê Văn Trung (Figure 27) was born on the 10th day of the 10th month of Bính Tý year (1876) in Phước Lâm village, Phước Điền Trung canton, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province, in a small farming family. His father was Mr. Lê Văn Thanh (1845 – 1878), who died when he was just several years old; his mother was Ms. Văn Thị Xuân (1849 – 1912); their graves are still in Phước Lâm village. Mr. Lê Văn Trung had a younger brother named Lê Văn Diệu (Huyện Diệu), who was a contractor in the railroad construction industry.

Mr. Lê Văn Trung married Ms. Trương Thị Hảo (daughter of Mr. Trương Dần and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Thuận), and they had two children named Lê Thị Báu and Lê Văn Trực. Sadly, during an epidemic, his wife and the two children died. A long time later, he remarried Ms. Đái Thị Huệ (1874 – 1936), second daughter of Mr. Đái Hồng Hươn and Ms. Huỳnh Thị Đào. They had no children, and both participated in religious practice.

During his school years, Mr. Lê Văn Trung was an excellent student. Graduating from Lycée Chasseloup Laubat in 1893, he also passed the civil service examination²⁵⁹ and started working at Phòng 2 - Bureau 2 (section of Labor and Market)²⁶⁰ of the Governor's Palace of Cochinchina from July 14, 1894. In 1906 (on March 6), Mr. Lê Văn Trung resigned from his civil service position, ran for the election and was elected to Hội Đồng Quản Hạt quận Nhì (the Council of the Second District, encompassing Gia Định, Chợ Lớn, Tây Ninh, Thủ Dầu Một, Bà Rịa, and Cape Saint Jacques). In 1911, at the age of thirty-six, he was elected to the Indochina Senate. On May 18, 1912, he was awarded đệ Ngũ Đẳng Bắc Đẩu Bội Tinh (the Fifth

²⁵⁹ Original French text: Secrétaire du Gouvernement de Cochinchine.

²⁶⁰ Original French text: section des Travaux et Marchés

Order of Legion of Honor Medal)²⁶¹ and was appointed to the Advisory Council.

Although he was active in high-ranking positions in politics, Mr. Lê Văn Trung still financially supported the patriotic movement of Minh Tân Công Nghệ Xã (led by gentlemen Lương Khắc Ninh, Trần Chánh Chiếu...). He was also one of the founders of the prestigious Girls'school in Saigon (1911) named 'Collège des jeunes filles', i.e., 'trường Áo Tím', which later became Gia Long High School and now Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai School.

But from around the year 1920 onwards, the career path has no longer attracted him, partly because of his worries about the fate of the country, and partly because of his sadness over the loss of his wife and children. On October 6, 1925, he asked to withdraw from the Indochina Senate. At that time, he suffered from some ocular diseases that caused his eyes to be almost blind, and he was also addicted to opium.

In mid-1926, Mr. Lê Văn Trung was brought by a relative, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Đắc (Figure 28) (a follower of Minh Lý), to Đàn Chợ Gạo (Chợ Gạo Invocation Site) (Phú Lâm district). In this séance, he was fortunate to receive the gracious teaching from Đức Giáo Tông Lý Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope), who enlightened his mind. He was determined to give up his opium addiction, his eyesight was also gradually recovered, and he could see things clearly again. Right at that period, Đàn Chợ Gạo was shut down. Having faith in God and Buddha, on January 11, 1926, Mr. Lê Văn Trung went to attend the séance at the house of Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư. And since then, he became an active and eminent disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God.

On the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year (April 26, 1926), the Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination was held at his home on Quai Testard street (now around 121 Châu Văn

²⁶¹ Original French text: Chevalier de l'Order National de la Légion d'honneur

Liêm street, Saigon District 5)²⁶². In this ceremony he was ordained *Đầu Sư Phái Thượng* (Cardinal of Taoist faction), religious name *Thượng Trung Nhựt*.

On the 14th day of the 1st month of *Đinh Mão* year (February 15, 1927), in the Ceremony of Heavenly Ordination of Female College, Ms. *Đái Thị Huệ* (1874 – 1936) (wife of Mr. *Lê Văn Trung*) was granted the title of *Giáo Sư* (Bishop), religious name *Hương Huệ*.

On April 15, 1928, Mr. *Thượng Đầu Sư*, following the order of *Cao Dai Supreme God*, became *Chưởng Quản* (Chief Administrator) of the *Tây Ninh Holy See*. Religious Decree No. 2, published on the 3rd day of the 10th month of *Canh Ngọ* year (1930), officially granted Mr. *Thượng Đầu Sư* the title “*Quyền Giáo Tông về phần xác*” (“Acting Pope in the temporal part”).

Mr. *Thượng Trung Nhựt* passed away at 3 p.m. on the 13th day of the 10th month of *Giáp Tuất* year (November 19, 1934) at *Giáo Tông Đường*, *Tây Ninh Holy See*²⁶³. Referring to the solar calendar, this date was exactly eight years from the Inauguration of the Great Way on November 19, 1926.

²⁶² Quai Testard street is different from Testard street (now *Võ Văn Tần* street). In the past, *Châu Văn Liêm* street had a canal in the middle called *Phố Xếp* canal (dug in 1778), leading to *Bến Nghé* canal. The even-numbered side was *Quai de Hội Hiệp*, and the odd-numbered side was *Quai Testard*. This canal was filled in 1920. Later, Mr. *Lê Văn Trung* moved to live at 319 *Cây Mai* street (now *Nguyễn Trãi* street), before relocating to the *Tây Ninh Holy See* (in 1928). Regarding his house where the First Heavenly Ordination was held, please refer to the footnote in Chapter 2 Section IV part C.2.b.

²⁶³ *Niết Bàn Magazine* No. 29, page 1136 (page numbers are from volume 1), published on December 31, 1934, posted an article (written by the magazine Editorial Board) reporting the funeral of Mr. *Thượng Trung Nhựt*. The end of this article included the sentence:

“We would like to point out a good example in the religious community for fellow practitioners to follow.”

The statue of (Acting Pope) Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhựt was carved on the front of the bell tower of Tây Ninh Holy See.

10. Mr. NGỌC LỊCH NGUYỆT (LÊ VĂN LỊCH) (1890 – 1947)

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33), given name Thạch Ân Tử, religious name Lê Xương Tịnh, was born on the 1st day of the 9th month of Canh Dần year (October 14, 1890) in Long An commune, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province. His father was Mr. Lê Văn Tiêng, Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple in Cần Giuộc district, who achieved the rank of Thái Lão Sư (Great Master) with religious name Lê Đạo Long and was granted the celestial title of Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn (please find more details about Great Master Lê Đạo Long and Vĩnh Nguyên Temple in Appendix II). His mother was Ms. Trần Thị Đắc (1854 – 1910).

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch married Ms. Trần Thị Khá (1889 – 1943) (daughter of Great Master Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh). They had two daughters: Ms. Lê Thị Nhiều (born in 1911) and Ms. Lê Ngọc Trang, religious name Bạch Tuyết (1919 – 1986).

Following his father's path, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch practiced the Minh Đường cultivation method and achieved the rank Dẫn Ân (Nhị Thừa), religious name Lê Xương Tịnh.

On the 20th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year (March 4, 1926), the Supreme Being gave order to the predecessors to go to Vĩnh Nguyên Pagoda to set up the invocation. In that séance, Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn descended and taught:

Lịch, listen to Me. I am your father, who received the order from His Holiness Cao Dai Immortal, name Cao

*Dai Supreme God, Teaching the Way in the South.
In the past I received the teaching from Minh Đường
Great Way, which is one of the five religious branches
of the Great Way. I achieved the rank of Đại Lão (Grand
Master) in China ... The Jade Emperor was touched by
my merits and virtues; He did not let me reincarnate,
and entrusted Thái Ất Chơn Quân to guide me. Thus, I
have received the Holy Decree granting me the title
Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn in the Western Paradise
(...)*

Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 77) and many disciples at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple then happily joined Cao Dai. On April 10, 1926, Mr. Lê Văn Trung (Figure 27) received the holy order to set up the Divine Altar for Mr. Lê Văn Lịch. And on April 26, 1926, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch was ordained Đầu Sư phái Ngọc (Cardinal of Confucian faction), religious name Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt. Then, Cao Dai Supreme God ordered him to compose the Daily Prayers. Ngọc Hoàng prayer (starting with the words Đại La Thiên Đế) and the three prayers to pay respect to the Three Religious Founders were composed by Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt based on Minh Sư prayers. These prayers have been used by the entire religion from then on.

After a period of preaching in the Lục Tỉnh area, returning to the Holy See, Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt was exiled by the French in Côn Đảo island from January 4, 1944, until August 25, 1945. As the situation at that time made it impossible to practice the religion at the Holy See, Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt returned to Vĩnh Nguyên Temple and helped the followers in this area to establish the following Holy Houses: Vĩnh Minh Quang (Vàm Láng), Vĩnh Sơn Quang (Tân Niên Tây), Vĩnh Hòa Quang (Tân Phước).



Figure 77: Photo of Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt standing in front of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple on the full-moon day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (1926).

(Original photo provided by Sister Giáo Sĩ Hoàng Mai, his maternal granddaughter)

Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt passed away at 6 p.m. on the 2nd day of the 9th month of Đinh Hợi year (October 3, 1947) at his private residence (on Lacaze street, now Nguyễn Tri Phương street, near Đào Duy Từ intersection) in Chợ Lớn, and was buried at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple.

A noteworthy detail about Mr. Lê Văn Lịch and Mr. Lê Văn Trung is that they were both from Cần Giuộc and had the same ancestor (the eighth generation) in the Lê family registry; that started with Mr. Lê Đức Thanh (originally from Quảng Ngãi province) who had two sons: Mr. Lê Đức Trục (branching to Mr. Lê Văn Trung) and Mr. Lê Đức Đệp (branching to Mr. Lê Văn Lịch).

Notes: Many historical documents incorrectly record the year of death of Mr. Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt as Kỷ Hợi (1959) instead of Đinh Hợi (1947).

On another note, his religious name Lê Xương Tịnh was revealed by the Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, Mr. Bạch Lương Ngọc (1910 – 2000). According to the Minh Đường rules, one must achieve at least the Dẫn Ân rank – having the middle name Xương – to be capable of doing the missionary work and overseeing a temple.

11. Mr. TRẦN VĂN THỤ (Thái Lão Sư TRẦN ĐẠO MINH) (1857 – 1927)

Mr. Trần Văn Thụ (Figure 37) was born in Đinh Tỵ year (1857) in Đức Hưng village, Dương Hòa Hạ commune, Gia Định province. In his childhood, he was educated in Confucian traditions and always exhibited moral and spiritual tendencies.

In Đinh Mùi year (1907), Mr. Trần Văn Thụ received the teaching of the true Minh Đường tradition from (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long. He practiced it and achieved the rank of Thái Lão Sư (Great Master), religious name Trần Đạo Minh, and became the chief disciple of Mr. Lê Đạo Long at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. During his residence at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, Mr. Trần Đạo Minh also built a pagoda in his hometown (local people called it Ông Lão Temple, like other Minh Sư temples).

On March 4, 1926, Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn (i.e., (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long) descended at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple to instruct (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh and the local followers to join Cao Dai. Mr. Trần Đạo Minh obeyed the order. His decision was a tremendous support for Mr. Lê Văn Lịch, while some others Lão Sư (Masters) at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple were against it.

On the 10th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year (1926), Mr. Trần Văn Thụ was ordained as Ngọc Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction), with the Holy Decree as Nho Tông Chưởng Giáo Tuyền Đạo Thuyền Sư Đại Đức Đại Hòa Đạo Sĩ²⁶⁴ (recorded according to the book of *Đạo Sử* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu).

After the Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way, Mr. Ngọc Chưởng Pháp Trần Đạo Minh took on the responsibility of receiving Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Constitution) and writing Tân Luật (the New Codes) ... at Gò Kén Holy House. Early in 1927, the Holy House was relocated to Long Thành village (Tây Ninh province) where the construction had not yet completed and was still deserted. By then, Mr. Ngọc Chưởng Pháp was quite old and had to frequently return to Vĩnh Nguyên Temple for recuperation.

Mr. Ngọc Chưởng Pháp Trần Văn Thụ passed away on the 14th day of the 5th month of Đinh Mão year (1927) at his private residence (now 52-56 Lân Bình Thái street, Cần Giuộc district). The funeral was presided over by Mr. Thượng Trung Nhựt and serviced by many other heavenly ordained dignitaries. The coffin was brought back to his hometown in Thới Hiệp village, Dương Hòa Hạ canton, (now hamlet 1, Hiệp Phước commune, Nhà Bè district), next to his old temple.

On the 19th day of the 10th month of Đinh Mão year (November 13, 1927) at Gò Kén Holy House, during the funeral of Mr. Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương, the Supreme Being descended and insisted:

*Tức, you must tell **Cư** to come down in time to perform the ceremony exactly as I previously taught for the funeral of **Thụ**.*²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ His biography included in the book *Đạo Nguyên Chính Nghĩa* recorded his holy title as: Nho Tông Khai Hóa Tuyền Đạo Thiển Sư Đại Đức Đại Từ Đại Hòa Đạo Sĩ.

²⁶⁵ Excerpt from the book *Đạo Sử II* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu.

This holy message shows how much the Holy Master favored Mr. Trần Văn Thụ and even cared for his funeral.

Due to the need to clear land for the construction of Hiệp Phước Industrial Center (Nhà Bè district), on the 18th day of the 12th month of Ất Hợi year (1996), local followers and family of Mr. Trần Văn Thụ reinterred his remains at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple, the stupa next to the tomb of Mr. Lê Đạo Long.

Mr. Ngọc Chương Pháp attained the celestial title Thiết Quang Chơn Nhơn.

In 1938, he and Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn descended and contributed to the teaching in *Đạo Nguyên Chánh Nghĩa* scripture (published by Vĩnh Nguyên Temple in Kỷ Mão year – 1939). (Cardinal) Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh (Figure 39) witnessed many miracles when copying this scripture and decided to write the Introduction to that book.

12. Mr. NGUYỄN VĂN TƯƠNG (Đại Lão Sư NGUYỄN ĐẠO TƯƠNG) (1879 – 1926)

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương (No picture found!) was born in Kỷ Mão year (1879) in Hữu Hòa village, Hữu Đạo commune, Cai Lậy district, Mỹ Tho province. His father was Mr. Nguyễn Văn Ty (1857 – 1891) and his mother was Ms. Cao Thị Huệ. He had two elder sisters and three younger brothers (namely, Mr. Cả Lòng, Mr. Sáu Triết, and Mr. Bảy Tiên). Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương married Ms. Võ Thị Tước (1880 – 1947) and they had three children: Ms. Nguyễn Thị Quyền (1900 – 1987), the second child died early, and Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thế (1905 – 1992).

In his youth, thanks to his education, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương was appointed as Hương Bộ (and thus, was often called Mr. Bộ Tương). When he was about thirty years old, he resigned and

became a monk of Phổ Tế sect, Minh Sư branch, at Long Hoa Temple (Cai Lậy district), receiving the teaching from (Master) Lão Sư Trần Văn Quang (who later became (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang). Afterwards, they both went to reside and practice the religion at Linh Quang Temple in Hạnh Thông Tây (Gò Vấp district, Saigon). Thanks to his diligent practice of spiritual cultivation, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương attained the rank of Đại Lão Sư (Grand Master), religious name Nguyễn Đạo Tương.

According to the documents from Mr. Trần Chuân (i.e., Grand Master Đại Lão Sư Trần Đạo Cơ), (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tương already knew Cao Dai Faith and hence, he an his disciple, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Kinh, let the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc... come to Linh Quang Temple to set up the invocation for the Holy Master to mystically guide Mr. Trần Đạo Quang into Cao Dai.

On the 24th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (September 1, 1926), the Supreme Being bestowed upon Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương the title *Chưởng Pháp phái Thượng* (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction), with the Holy Decree as *Thuyết Pháp Đạo Sư Chưởng Quản Oai Linh Đạo Sĩ*.

After joining Cao Dai, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương guided his wife and daughter to follow him. In the Heavenly Ordination of Female Dignitaries (the full-moon day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year), Ms. Võ Thị Tước received the title of *Lễ Sanh* (Student-Priest), and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Quyền received the title of *Giáo Hữu* (Priest) (thanks to her devotion to follow the Minh Sư practice since her childhood).

Unfortunately, right after the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. *Thượng Chưởng Pháp Nguyễn Văn Tương* fell ill and passed away on the 5th day of the 11th month of Bính Dần year (1926) at his private residence (in Hữu Đạo, Cai Lậy

district) at the age of forty-eight. On the 7th day of the 11th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master taught:

*Trung and Lịch, listen! You both must apply the grand ceremony rituals to bury **Tương** ... The grand ceremony rituals are those performed in the burial of someone at Thái Lão (Great Master) rank ... In the proclamation, you must address Tòa Tam Giáo (the Tribunal of the Three Doctrines) and pray for his salvation with all your hearts. Then I will save him. You understand it, children.*²⁶⁶

At that time, because the Holy House was still temporarily located in Gò Kén, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương was buried in his hometown (Hữu Hòa hamlet, Hữu Đạo commune, Cai Lậy district). Ms. Võ Thị Tước, Ms. Hai Quyền, and Mr. Tư Thế later were also buried nearby. Through the war and floods, his tomb was much damaged. Hence in 1997, local followers and his family built a relatively stable stupa dedicated to him.

Mr. Ông Năm Nguyễn Bá Liêm (born in 1905 - a medicinal herbalist at Thuộc Nhiêu market – a friend of Mr. Tư Thế) said that Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tương was calm, of average height and fair skin, with bun hair and sparse beard; he often practiced spiritual cultivation at home. When he passed away, his funeral was held very solemnly in the full presence of Cao Dai dignitaries.

The house of Mr. Chuồng Pháp in Hữu Đạo was quite spacious, comprising three compartments with rosewood pillars ... But around the year 1945, it was thoroughly destroyed by the war. Therefore, the family no longer has his picture to worship.

²⁶⁶ Excerpt from the book *Đạo Sĩ II* by (Lady Cardinal) Nữ Đầu Sư Hương Hiếu.

13. Mr. TRẦN THANH NHÀN (Thái Lão Sư TRẦN ĐẠO QUANG) (1870 – 1946)

Mr. Trần Đạo Quang (Figure 38), birth name Trần Thanh Nhân²⁶⁷, was born in Dần time on the 10th day of the 11th month of Canh Ngọ year (December 12, 1870) in Ban Dầy, Cai Lậy district, Định Tường province. He was the unique son (the fifth child) of Mr. Trần Chí Hiếu and Ms. Dương Mỹ Hậu. They were farmers and followers of Phổ Tế sect (Minh Sư).

At the age of twelve, Mr. Trần Thanh Nhân willfully follow the Minh Sư teaching; three years later, he made a vow to be a vegetarian and received the teaching from (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Cửu.

In Canh Dần year (1890), Mr. Trần Thanh Nhân left home to become a monk; he passed Nhị Bộ (the Second Initiation) in 1891, and Tam Bộ (the Third Initiation) in 1892. In Giáp Ngọ year (1894), he advanced to Nhị Thừa (the Second Cycle of Initiation), passing through the four levels: Thiên Ân (1894), Chứng Ân (1900), Dẫn Ân (1903), and Bảo Ân (1906). In Canh Tuất year

²⁶⁷ Many books record his name as Trần Văn Quang. But his name Trần Thanh Nhân was based on the confirmation from the senior monks at Linh Quang Temple (of Minh Sư) and especially from Ms. Nguyễn Hương Sang, whose birth name was Nguyễn Thị Sang, born on the 7th day of the 12th month of Ất Tỵ year (1904), and was often called Cô Tư Thanh Sang. She practiced the Minh Sư teaching since the age of eighteen and was a close and trustworthy disciple of Mr. Trần Đạo Quang. In 1980, Ms. Cô Tư Thanh Sang was ordained Nữ Đầu Sư (Lady Cardinal) of Minh Chơn Đạo Holy Church.

In addition, author Hành Sơn (i.e., Senior Brother Đạo Trường Thanh Long – Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo) in the article “*Lược sử Đức Ngọc Chương Pháp Trần Đạo Quang*” noted as follows:

“On the missionary trip to Annam (the Central Vietnam), Mr. Ngọc Chương Pháp did not have the Poll Tax Certificate; he had to use the name **Hà Văn Thuận** of a villager to get an identity card to go to the Central Region. Therefore, he registered real estate properties in Đà Nẵng or elsewhere under the name Hà Văn Thuận.”

(1910), he continued into Tam Thừa (the Third Cycle of Initiation) and attained the two levels:

- Đảnh Hàng: religious name Trần Vận Quang

- Thập Địa (1914): religious name Trần Đạo Quang, rank Đại Lão Sư (Grand Master); he was forty-five years old by then.

With the trust by twelve other Đại Lão Sư (Grand Masters), (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang received the title Thái Lão Sư (Great Master) and became the Abbot of Linh Quang Temple (Gò Vấp district)²⁶⁸, the Patriarchal Temple of Phô Tế sect (Figure 78). While (Patriarch) Tổ Sư Trần Đạo Khánh was preparing to transfer the Founder's Seal "An Nam Đệ Nhất Tổ"²⁶⁹ to (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang, at the beginning of Bính Dần year (1926), the gentlemen Thượng Trung Nhựt, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Lê Bá Trang, Nguyễn Văn Kính... obeyed the order of Cao Dai Supreme God to come and propose to set up the invocation at Linh Quang Temple. That day Cao Dai Supreme God descended and instructed (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang to converge into the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation. After asking a few questions, (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư requested some time to arrange his religious affairs and obey the order. His quick decision was a great surprise within the Minh Sư community. But thanks to this fact, many Minh Sư followers from the South to the Central region followed his example to convert into Cao Dai.

²⁶⁸ Please find more information about Linh Quang Temple in Appendix II.

²⁶⁹ Translator's note: 'An Nam Đệ Nhất Tổ' means 'the First Vietnamese Patriarch' or 'the First Patriarch in Vietnam'.



Figure 78: Photo of Mr. Trần Đạo Quang sitting in front of Linh Quang Pagoda at Hạnh Thông Tây (the old pagoda).

At this time, Mr. Trần Đạo Quang already joined Cao Dai and amazingly, his three tufts of beard knitted together (see photo); many people guessed this was some kind of miracle.

(This photo was given to author Huệ Nhân by Lady Cardinal Nữ Đầu Sư Hương Sang (Minh Chơn Đạo) at Linh Quang Temple, Hóc Môn district, on March 15, 1996).

On the day of the Inauguration of the Great Way, the full-moon day of the 10th month at Gò Kén pagoda, Cao Dai Supreme God especially appointed (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang to the Thâu (Collection) committee, along with Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh and (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhãn. After the Inauguration Ceremony, when Mr. Thượng Chương Pháp Nguyễn Văn Tương passed away (on the 5th day of the 11th month of Bính Dần year), the Supreme Being bestowed upon Mr. Trần Đạo Quang the title of Quyền Chương Pháp phái Thượng (Acting Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction). In the séance on the 19th day of the 12th month of Bính Dần year, Đức Lý Thái Bạch (the Spiritual Pope) taught:

*Thượng Trung Nhựt, you must write to Đạo Quang Quyền Chương Pháp (Đạo Quang, the Acting Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction), stating that...*²⁷⁰

A few years later, when Ngọc Chương Pháp Trần Văn Thụ passed away, Mr. Trần Đạo Quang was granted the title Ngọc Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction) at the Tây Ninh Holy See. Mr. Trần Đạo Quang practiced the religion at the Holy See for a while; when the time came for changes at the Holy See, he then returned to Linh Quang Temple.

In 1931, Mr. Trần Đạo Quang collaborated with many other seniors to establish Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church (in Mỹ Tho province). Then in 1935, when Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church endured schism, he went to Hậu Giang and joined gentlemen Cao Triều Phát, Phan Văn Thiệu... to establish Minh Chơn Đạo Holy Church. During this period, he continued to practice the religion with the title Ngọc Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction).

From the day Mr. Trần Đạo Quang joined Cao Dai, a very large number of Minh Sư disciples wanted to follow him. In 1937, he went to Central Vietnam to guide and receive thousands of followers converting into the new Faith. Also in

²⁷⁰ Excerpt from the book *Đạo Sĩ II* by Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu.

that year, he presided over the construction of Trung Thành Holy House (Đà Nẵng province), which was inaugurated on the 8th day of the 4th month of Mậu Dần year (1938). Then, following the holy order, he returned to Bạc Liêu province to take care of the construction of Bát Quái Đồ Thiên (Hà Tiên district).

Mr. Trần Đạo Quang passed away at Dậu time on the 17th day of the 2nd month of Bính Tuất year (1946). Due to the warring time, Minh Sư disciples buried him in the Minh Sư cemetery, near Linh Quang Temple (Hanh Thông Tây).

Later, as Linh Quang Temple and the cemetery had to be cleared due to the expansion of Tân Sơn Nhứt airport, his remains were reinterred in the cemetery behind Thánh Tịnh Minh Kiến Đài (Gò Vấp district) on the full-moon day of the 8th month of Bính Thân year (1956).

14. Mr. THƯỢNG TƯƠNG THANH (NGUYỄN NGỌC TƯƠNG) (1881 – 1951)

Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (Figure 36) was born on the 26th day of the 5th month of Tân Ty year (June 22, 1881) in An Hội village, Bảo Hựu commune, Bến Tre province. His father, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Đầu (1857 – 1882), passed away when he was just thirteen months old. His mother was Ms. Võ Thị Sót (1856 – 1919).

As a child, he lived with his paternal grandfather, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Chơn (1832 – 1908). He was taught Sino-Vietnamese characters and national language at home. At the age of fourteen, he went to provincial school, and at the age of seventeen (1898) he passed the entrance exam to the Collège de Mỹ Tho. At the age of nineteen (1900), he went to Saigon to

attend Lycée Chasseloup Laubat and graduated in 1902.

In 1902 he married Ms. Trương Thị Tài (1886 -1906), who passed away four years later, leaving two children: Nguyễn Thị Tú (1903 – 1926) and Nguyễn Ngọc Hón (1906 – 1951). In 1908 he remarried to Ms. Bùi Thị Giàu (1884 – 1937) and had five more children, three sons: Nguyễn Ngọc Kỷ (1910 – 1978), Nguyễn Ngọc Bích (1911 – 1966), and Nguyễn Ngọc Nhứt (1918 – 1952); and two daughters: Nguyễn Thị Yên (1913), and Nguyễn Thị Nguyệt (1915).

Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương passed the examination for the position of thư ký Thượng Thơ (secretary of the Minister) and worked at the Minister's Palace in Saigon for a year. Then he was transferred to work in Bến Tre province from 1903 to 1919. In Bến Tre, he participated in many cultural, educational, ethical activities (such as co-organizing the establishment of Hội Buôn An Nam, Hội Khuyến Văn ...). By the end of year 1919, he passed the examination for the position of Tri Huyện (District Chief) and became the head of Châu Thành district (Cần Thơ province) for three months before transferring to Hòn Chông district, Hà Tiên province.

From 1924 to 1927, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương was the Head of Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province. During this time, he was promoted to the rank of Tri Phủ Thượng Thơ (Prefect of the Minister) and converted to Cao Đài Faith (around the end of the 12th month of Ất Sửu year). On February 19, 1926 (the 7th day of the 1st month of Bính Dần year), the Holy Master accepted his request to join the Faith:

Tương, be at ease. One step in the Way is one step of joy.

He led many intellectuals into the God-Way, and that is why the authorities once again transferred him to work far away.

From 1927 to 1930, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương was Head of Xuyên Mộc district, Bà Rịa province, where he reclaimed land, opened schools, established markets, built the road connecting

Long Hải with Nước Ngọt ..., greatly benefitting the locality, which was still quite primitive by then. And at the same time, he also preached the God-Way.

On the 17th day of the 5th month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương was ordained as Phối Sư phái Thượng (Archbishop of Taoist faction), religious name Thượng Tương Thanh; then on the 3rd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, in the séance the Holy Master instructed on the preparation for the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way, he was ordained as Thượng Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop of Taoist faction).

At the beginning of Tân Mùi year (1931), Mr. Thượng Tương Thanh renounced from secular life to focus on religious practice at the Tây Ninh Holy See. His first document (No. 1, sent to the Holy Houses) was issued on February 2, 1931.

Early in 1927, receiving the order from Đức Lý Giáo Tông (the Spiritual Pope) at Gò Kén Pagoda, Mr. Thượng Tương Thanh and Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh co-signed the title deed of the newly purchased real estate property to build the Holy Land (Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province). Then the Second Article in the Second Religious Decree issued on the 3rd day of the 10th month of Canh Ngọ year (1930) appointed (Principal Archbishop) Chánh Phối Sư Thượng Tương Thanh to concurrently hold the position of Quyền Thượng Đầu Sư (Acting Cardinal of Taoist faction).

From 1931 to 1934 at Tây Ninh Holy Land, Mr. Thượng Tương Thanh contributed to land reclamation, education, and healthcare improvements. During this period, the religion underwent many upheavals. In 1934, he retreated to Kỳ Vân Mountain (Đất Đỏ, Bà Rịa) for a while. Then on July 24, 1934, he resumed his religious practice, temporarily establishing offices at Bình Hòa Holy House (Gia Định province) and An Hội Holy House (Bến Tre province).

On the 14th day of the 10th month of Giáp Tuất year (November 20, 1934), the two gentlemen Acting Cardinal Thượng Tương Thanh and Acting Cardinal Ngọc Trang Thanh left Tây Ninh to establish Ban Chính Đạo (the Religious Reformation Committee) in Bến Tre province²⁷¹. On the 11th day of the 1st month of Ất Hợi year (1935) at An Hội Holy House, Bến Tre, the Congress elected Mr. Thượng Tương Thanh to be Giáo Tông (the Pope) of Ban Chính Đạo.

Besides the missionary work to preach the God-Way to mankind, Mr. Thượng Tương Thanh also paid great attention to the spiritual cultivation. Since the day he renounced secular life for religious practice at the Tây Ninh Holy See, he diligently performed the four daily meditation sessions. During the period of 1934 – 1942, he went through ten major meditation retreats, some lasting up to one hundred and twenty days.

And from the day of his last meditation retreat, the 22nd day of the 2nd month of Nhâm Ngọ year (1942), to the day he passed away, the full-moon day of the 5th month of Tân Mão year, it is a total of exactly nine years and eighty-one days. Taoists call this practice period Cửu niên diện bích (Nine years facing to the wall). His Liên đài (lotus platform) is in front of An Hội Holy House.

²⁷¹ According to the book *Tiểu Sử Đức Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương* page 53, on the full-moon day of the 1st month of Mậu Dần year (1938) the task of Ban Chính Đạo (the Religious Reform Committee) ended.

“From now on, there is only one Hội Thánh Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (one Church of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation) to guide humanity in cultivation practice accordingly with the true teaching and the New Codes of the Supreme Being.”

15. Mr. NGỌC TRANG THANH (LÊ BÁ TRANG) (1878 – 1936)



Figure 79: Portrait of Mr.
**Ngọc Trang Thanh (Lê Bá
Trang) (1878 – 1936)**

Mr. Lê Bá Trang was born on February 18, 1878, in Tân Quy Đông village, Tân Vĩnh Hòa commune, Sa Đéc province.²⁷² He was the son of Mr. Lê Văn Lâu and Ms. Trần Thị Nga.

As a child, he went to Sa Đéc provincial school. Then he went to Saigon to attend Lycée Chasseloup Laubat. After graduating, he worked as a secretary at Dinh Toàn Quyền (the Governor's Palace). Then he passed the examination for the rank of Tri Huyện (District Chief) and worked at Tòa Bô (the Administrative Court), Bến Tre province... Next, he became the Head of Thủ Đức district (Gia Định province), where he was promoted to the rank of Tri Phủ hạng Nhất (Prefect, the First Grade). In 1925, he was the Head of Châu Thành district (Chợ Lớn province) and was promoted to the rank of Đốc Phủ Sứ (Governor). In March 1927, he was the Head of Vũng Tàu district. Also, around 1917, while being Tri Huyện (District Chief), he was a member of Hội Khuyến học Sài Gòn (Saigon Association for Promoting Education).

With his first wife, Ms. Trần Thị Ngoạn (1878 – 1926), given name Huồn, Mr. Lê Bá Trang had a daughter named Lê Thị Mạnh (given name Tam) (1900 – 1966), whose husband was Mr. Lê Toàn Hích (1894 – 1924). After his first wife passed

²⁷² Details on Mr. Lê Bá Trang and his family are drawn from the document of ancestral branches which bears confirmation number 1448/TVH/CT given by the office of xã Tân Vĩnh Hòa on July 3, 1973.

away, Mr. Lê Bá Trang married Ms. Huỳnh Thị An (commonly known as Ms. Bà Hai An), a native of Sa Đéc province, and had no children. They both participated in religious practice.

Joining Cao Dai in May 1926, Mr. Lê Bá Trang was ordained as Phối Sư phái Ngọc (Archbishop of Confucian faction), religious name Ngọc Trang Thanh (Figure 79), on the 3rd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year. In 1929, he resigned from secular work and returned to the Tây Ninh Holy See to practice the religion. In 1930, he was concurrently appointed Quyền Ngọc Đầu Sư (Acting Cardinal of Confucian faction) (Đạo Nghị định Religious Decree No. 2).

In 1934, the two Acting Cardinals: Quyền Đầu Sư Thượng Tương Thanh and Quyền Đầu Sư Ngọc Trang Thanh left Tây Ninh to establish Ban Chính Đạo (the Religious Reform Committee) at An Hội Holy House (Bến Tre province). In the Congress on the 7th day of the 11th month of Giáp Tuất year (1934) at An Hội Holy House, Mr. Ngọc Trang Thanh was elected as Thượng Chương Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Taoist faction) of Ban Chính Đạo.

Mr. Ngọc Trang Thanh passed away on the 30th day of the 5th month of Bính Tý year (July 17, 1936) in Bến Tre province. His Liên đài (lotus platform) was brought to the Tây Ninh Holy See on July 21, 1936. Currently, his relics were enshrined in the basement of Bát Quái Đài (the Octagonal House) at the Tây Ninh Holy See, along with the relics of five other top-ranking heavenly ordained dignitaries: Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhật (Acting Pope), Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư (Secretary of the Spiritual Affairs), Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương, Thái Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh (Cardinal of Buddhist faction), and Nữ Đầu Sư Lâm Hương Thanh (Lady Cardinal).

16. Mr. THÁI THƠ THANH (NGUYỄN NGỌC THƠ) (1873 – 1950)

Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Figure 39), real name Nguyễn Văn Tơ, was a native of Bãi Xàu, Sóc Trăng province. He was born in 1873, the seventh child of Mr. Nguyễn Hưng Học (1839 – 1899) who was a native of Huế city, and Ms. Trần Thị Thảo. (Their children included: Nguyễn Thị Đỏ, Nguyễn Thị Điều, Nguyễn Văn Tường, Nguyễn Văn Thọ, Nguyễn Thị Huyền, Nguyễn Văn Tơ, and Nguyễn Văn Lựa).

In his youth, he was taught first in Confucian traditions and later in modern education. He followed his father's career as a medicinal herbalist²⁷³ and he also worked as a translator for the provincial newspaper for a while.

In his twenties, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ went to Saigon, resided in the Cầu Kiệu area (Tân Định district), and worked as a merchant, a contractor, then a rubber plantation owner. Thanks to his business acumen, he became successful and well-off; he brought his parents to Saigon to fulfill his filial duties.

With his deep devotion to religion, before becoming a disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ took refuge in Buddhism with (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân at Giác Hải Pagoda. It was there, around 1919, he met Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh, a landowner in Vũng Liêm (Vĩnh Long province). They wedded and together they took care of religious works.

Prior to meeting Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ had married Ms. Mai Thị Thành (1880 – 1904), and had a

²⁷³ According to Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương (daughter of Cardinal Đào Su Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) (she was ordained as a Giáo Hữu (Priest) in the First Heavenly Ordination of Female College on the 14th day of the first month of Đinh Mão year), Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ had a talent in reading patient's pulse and in prescribing traditional Chinese medicine, but he rarely used these skills when he was doing business in Saigon. Yet, he went to Mỹ Tho province many times to treat (Governor) Đốc Phủ Lê Công Xứng due to their close friendship.

daughter named Nguyễn Thị Hương (1901 – 1998), who was ordained as a Giáo Hữu (Priest) on February 15, 1927. Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương was married to Mr. Trương Văn Tuấn (Professor at Lycée Chasselout Laubat). The family lived together in the villa at 439 Paul Blanchy street, corner of Champagne street (now Hai Bà Trưng street, corner of Lý Chính Thắng street), and together they managed Đức Lưu Phương Printing House at 394 – 398 Paul Blanchy street.

Predestined to enter the God-Way, on June 25, 1926, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ petitioned to join the Faith (Figure 80), and his house became Đàn Tân Định (Tân Định Invocation Site).

On the 3rd day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year (August 10, 1926), Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ was ordained as Phối Sư phái Thái (Archbishop of Buddhist faction), religious name Thái Thơ Thanh. On the 12th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, in the séance that the Holy Master instructed on the preparation of the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ was ordained as Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop).

In 1930, according to Religious Decree No. 2, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, along with the two gentlemen Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang, concurrently held the position of Quyền Đầu Sư (Acting Cardinal). In this period, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ carried out the solid construction of the Holy See after a few holy messages. The work did not go smoothly. In 1936, His Excellency Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) directly participated in this project and the work was complete.

In 1931, Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ and Ms. Hương Thanh purchased another one-hundred acre of land in Tây Ninh province (from Động Đình Hồ to Mít Một intersection), planning to establish a large landscape called “Thái Cực Toàn Đồ”. This project was not consented by many dignitaries. Hence, he later handed over the land ownership to the Holy See and only established “Cực Lạc Cảnh” near gate #7 on the outskirts of the Holy See.

(Cardinal) Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh, later on, due to frequent illness, could no longer be active in duties at the Holy See. Returning to Saigon, he frequently participated in religious practice at Cầu Kho Holy House and Vĩnh Nguyên Temple.

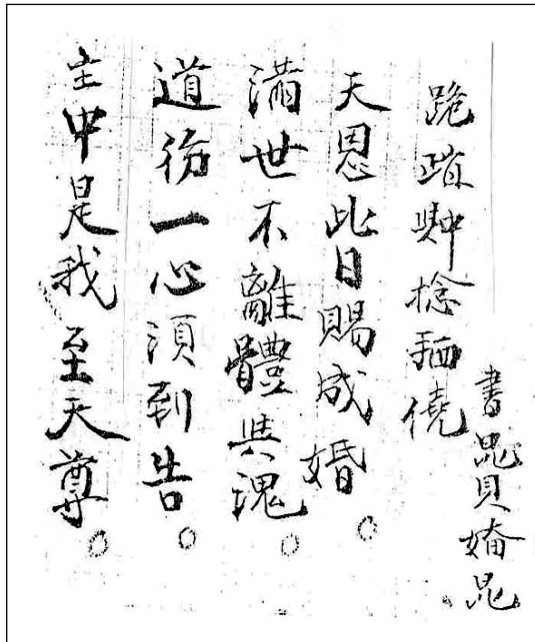


Figure 80: The handwriting of Mr. Thái Thơ Thanh in Chinese character recorded the poem that the Supreme Being bestowed upon him and Ms. Lâm Hương Thanh on the 4th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (1926). (This séance was carried out by the medium pair Cao Quỳnh Cư và Phạm Công Tắc).

In 1939, (Cardinal) Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh established a small temple named Bạch Vân Am in Phú Lâm district (at 52 Bà Kế street) and resided there until his passing at 9 p.m. on the 20th

day of the 7th month of Canh Dần year (1950). His funeral was held at Nam Thành Holy House, after which his remains were placed in a stupa next to the Tây Ninh Holy See.

17. Ms. HƯƠNG THANH (LÂM NGỌC THANH) (1874 – 1937)

Lady Pioneer Hương Thanh (Figure 40), real name Lâm Ngọc Thanh, was born in Giáp Tuất year (1874). As her father died early, she lived with her mother, Ms. Trần Thị Sanh (1855 – 1906) and her second aunt, Trần Thị Thọ (1851 – 1940),²⁷⁴ in her hometown Trung Tín village, Vũng Liêm district, Vĩnh Long province.

Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh was married to Mr. Huỳnh Văn Xây²⁷⁵ (1878 – 1908), and they had a daughter named Huỳnh Thị Hồ (born in 1898, commonly known as Nguyệt). After her husband, Mr. Huyện Xây, died in an accident, Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh turned toward spiritual aspiration. In front of her house in Vũng Liêm, she built a Buddhist pagoda (which later became Vũng Liêm Holy House). Around 1919, she took refuge in Buddhism with (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân (Giác Hải Pagoda). It was there that she wedded with Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ.

²⁷⁴ Ms. Trần Thị Thọ was married to Mr. Khâm Sứ; they had no children. In the book *Vĩnh Long xưa và nay*, author Huỳnh Minh called her “Nhà từ thiện nổi tiếng khắp Ba Kỳ” (“The famous philanthropist throughout the Three Regions of Vietnam”), because she was often at the forefront of fundraising for the relief of natural disasters, establishing schools, ...

Ms. Trần Thị Thọ was awarded by King Khải Định the gold medal “Kim Bội Tinh” (1916) and the gold plaque “Hảo nghĩa khả gia” (1918). The French government also awarded her many medals in recognition of her charity.

²⁷⁵ The same name as that of Mr. Phủ Xây, the husband of her fourth aunt.

In mid-1926, during a spiritistic pen holding session at Đàn Tân Định (Tân Định Invocation Site) (with the presence of gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Phạm Tấn Đãi, ...), through the supplication of Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, the Supreme Being miraculously revealed every action of Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh at that time in Vũng Liêm, thereby gaining the trust of this couple. On the 5th day of the 6th month of Bính Dần year (July 15, 1926), Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh converted into Cao Dai. She recounted:

Recalling the period when I just joined Cao Dai, it made me think that life is not beneficial for the soul. So, I no longer attach to my possessions. If we keep cherishing these worldly materials, we don't know when we can return to the original place and position.

From then on, Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh devoted herself to religious practice, donating a lot of money to the early propagation movement such as renovating Gò Kén Holy House, covering the costs of organizing the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration, purchasing the land in Tây Ninh, etc... As for the borrowing of Gò Kén Pagoda, she stated:

Before I join Cao Dai, the Almighty mystically instilled in my mind the vow to refuge in Buddhism. (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Giác Hải was my master. My husband (Mr. Huyện Thơ) and I donated a large sum of money to build Từ Lâm Pagoda (Gò Kén) ... That is why we were able to borrow Gò Kén Pagoda easily.

During the period of reclaiming newly purchased forest land in Long Thành village to build the Tây Ninh Holy See, thanks to her broad connections with the government, many times Ms. Lâm Ngọc Thanh helped the followers to avoid suspicions that hindered their religious practice.

Lady Pioneer Lâm Hương Thanh was ordained as Giáo Sư (Bishop) on the 14th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (November 18, 1926) and was promoted to Phối Sư (Archbishop) on the 14th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (February 15, 1927). On that same day, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Hồ was ordained as Giáo Sư (Bishop). Lady Pioneer Hương Thanh was bestowed by Đức Lý Giáo Tông (the Spiritual Pope) to the rank Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop) on the 9th day of the 3rd month of Kỷ Ty year (April 18, 1929).

Despite her high-ranking status and wealth, Ms. Hương Thanh often got close to fellow practitioners in the occasions such as setting the Divine Altar at their homes, reading holy messages, preaching in many places; thus, she was very well beloved and admired.

Later, due to her illness (diabetes), Ms. Hương Thanh frequently returned to Vũng Liêm to recuperate. Lady Pioneer Lâm Hương Thanh passed away in her hometown on the 8th day of the 4th month of Đinh Sửu year (May 16, 1937). And seventeen days later, on the 24th day of the 4th month of Đinh Sửu year (June 3, 1937), she was granted the rank of Nữ Đầu Sư (Lady Cardinal) by the Supreme Being and her statue was carved on the front of the drum tower of the Holy See.

After her ascension, her remains were buried at Bửu Long Temple (belonged to Ms. Hai Thọ) for the first five years, then placed in a newly built stupa next to her home (Figure 81). In 1947, due to the disturbance by French soldiers, her remains were temporarily moved to the cemetery near Thánh Tịnh Ngọc Thanh Quang (across Vũng Liêm river) for a short time, before being placed in a stupa at the Tây Ninh Holy See.



Figure 81: **Trace of the Stupa of (Lady Cardinal) Nữ Đầu Sư Hương Thanh in Vũng Liêm.**

**18. Ms. HƯƠNG HIẾU (NGUYỄN THỊ HƯƠNG)
(1887 – 1971)**



Figure 82: Portrait of Lady Pioneer **Hương Hiếu** (Nguyễn Thị Hương) (1887 – 1971)

Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu (Figure 82) was born in Đình Hới

year (1887) in a residential property located on Paul Bert street (now Trần Quang Khải street), Đa Kao, Saigon. She was the daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Niệm (a native of Cần Thơ province) and Ms. Trần Thị Huệ (a native of Gia Định province).

According to her identity card (Titre d'Identité) number B.06853-B issued on August 19, 1935, in Tây Ninh province, her name was Nguyễn Thị Hương. But she also often wrote her name as Nguyễn Thị Hiếu. (It was so because her paternal grandmother named her Hương to match with her father's name Niệm, showing the virtuous tradition in the family.²⁷⁶ Her maternal family called her Hiếu). From her father, she had two stepbrothers named Nguyễn Văn Thiệt and Nguyễn Văn Thà.

At the age of seven, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương attended trường Nhà Trắng²⁷⁷, then at the age of seventeen, she learned household arts and housekeeping. In 1907, she married Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư and two years later they had a son named Cao Quỳnh An (Figure 83).

From the beginning of Cao Dai Faith, when table-turning was still in use, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương took charge in scribing holy messages. Then in the preparation for the First Heavenly Ordination of Dignitaries, the Holy Master assigned her the task of making the holy costumes for Giáo Tông (the Pope), Đầu Sư (Cardinal), and many other ranks of dignitaries. Thanks to her education and training from a young age, she was able to accomplish all these tasks and assignments.

Obedying the Holy Master's instructions, the whole family of Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương moved to Tây Ninh, first to help organizing the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration, then to

²⁷⁶ Translator's note: The combination of her father's name 'Niệm' and her name 'Hương' would become 'Niệm Hương', which literally means 'praying in the fragrance of lit incense or sandalwood'.

²⁷⁷ Translator's note: 'Trường Nhà Trắng' was an all girls'school, run by Catholic nuns, in which French was the main language.

undertake the major relocation of the Holy House from Gò Kén to the North of Long Thành village and reclaim the dense forest to establish the Holy Land. Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương was ordained as Giáo Sư (Bishop) on the 14th day of the 1st month of Đinh Mão year (February 15, 1927), religious name Hương Hiếu.



Bức ảnh
 quý trọng của quý gia
 đình Đức Cao Thượng Phẩm
 Cậu Cao Quỳnh An
 mới vừa lên 5 tuổi
 (chụp hình hồi năm 1915 d.l)
 Nữ Đầu Sư
 Hương Hiếu

Figure 83: The handwriting of (Lady Cardinal) Nữ Đầu Sư Hương Hiếu: “The precious photo in memory of the family of His Holiness Đức Cao Thượng Phẩm. The young mister Cao Quỳnh An just turned five years old”. (Signed: Lady Cardinal Hương Hiếu)

(Original photo provided by (Lady Student-Priest) Lê Sanh Hương Huyền, at the Holy See Tây Ninh)

Staying alongside Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư throughout the long and difficult period of clearing the jungle in Long Thành village, in the morning Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương took charge in the catering task to serve all laborers of the forest clearing project (up to several hundred people); whereas in the evening, she often helped local women to prepare for their gateway ceremony and learn the prayers.

Then in 1928, challenges came to the missionaries again, according to her words in the book *Đạo Sĩ*: “A group of unloving people (Mr. Tư Mất’s group) sow ill will” and maltreated her and her husband. Being so distressed, Mr. Cao Thượng Phẩm (i.e., Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư, Secretary for the Spiritual Affairs) fell sick. The couple retired to Thảo Xá Hiền Cung. The following year his illness became more severe, leading to his death (on the 1st day of the 3rd month of Kỷ Ty year).

Indeed, this Kỷ Ty year (1929) was very heartbroken for Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hương. She also had to mourn her mother on the 14th day of the 9th month of Kỷ Ty year. And a month before that day, she received the news that her only son had died in a foreign land. Overcoming all challenges, she was bravely determined to continue her religious duties at the Tây Ninh Holy See. In 1930, she was assigned the missionary work in Sa Đéc province (and later concurrently in Thủ Dầu Một province); then in 1933, she returned to the Holy See to teach and train Giáo Nhi (Teacher of Ritual Children).

In 1935, Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu was promoted to the rank of Phối Sư (Archbishop) and taught the course on making holy costumes at “Linh Đức” shop. In 1942, when the religion was in decline, she returned to Saigon. In 1946, when the religion was revived, she was back to the Holy See to preside over the three departments Hòa (Reconciliation), Lại (Administration), and Lễ Viện (Rituals) (of the Female College). In 1950, she was promoted to the rank of Chánh Phối Sư (Principal Archbishop). On the 20th day of the 10th month of Mậu Thân year (December 9, 1968), Nhứt Trần Oai Nghiêm Đức Lý (the First Spiritual Governor,

i.e., the Spiritual Pope) graciously conferred on her the title of *Đầu Sư* (Cardinal).

In this period, she diligently collected ancient holy messages to write the two books *Đạo Sử I* and *II*, preserving a lot of valuable historical documents. In addition, she also compiled the book *Nữ Trung Bá Hạnh*, teaching virtues and wisdom to women.

Among the female dignitaries, Lady Pioneer Hương Hiếu was the second *Nữ Đầu Sư* (Lady Cardinal), after Lady Pioneer Hương Thanh. But in fact, Ms. Hương Hiếu was the first *Nữ Đầu Sư* (Lady Cardinal), appointed when she was still alive.

Ms. Hương Hiếu passed away in *Nữ Đầu Sư Đường* at 2 p.m. on the 11th day of the 5th month of Tân Hợi year (June 3, 1971), and her stupa was next to the Tây Ninh Holy See.

19. Mr. THƯỢNG KỲ THANH (VƯƠNG QUAN KỲ) (1880 – 1939)

Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ (Figure 20), given name Mỹ Lương, was from Chợ Lớn province. He was born on May 29, 1880 (in his birth certificate, it was written July 4, 1880, in Chợ Lớn). He was a paternal grandson of (Marshal) Thống Chế Vương Quan Hạc and maternal grandson of (Governor) Tuần Phủ Huỳnh Mẫn Đạt²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁸ According to the funeral announcement in *Đại Đồng Magazine* No. 11 (April 1, 1940), Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ was a descendant of Dương Ngạn Địch, a general in the Ming dynasty of China exiled to Vietnam. This news also noted that it is unclear why his surname Dương was changed to Vương. And it is also puzzling that in his handwriting in Vietnamese (national language), he wrote his middle name as the word Quan without letter ‘g’, but in his handwriting in Chinese characters, he wrote the word Quang (光), which means light.

His second elder stepbrother (from another mother) was Mr. Vương Quan Trân, also known as Vương Thế Trân (1863 – 1927), who married Ms. Đỗ Thị Sang (1866 – 1931) (the eldest daughter of Governor Tổng Đốc Đỗ Hữu Phương) and they had two children: Vương Thị Lễ (1900 – 1918) and Vương Hiếu Nghĩa (1905 – 1985).

Miss Vương Thị Lễ (Figure 19) was born on the 8th day of the 1st month of Canh Tý year (1900), attended school ‘Sainte Enfance’ (belonging to the Saint Paul de Chartres convent) until ‘Brevet Elémentaire’ (the French High School Diploma). She passed away on the 25th day of the 10th month of Mậu Ngọ year (November 28, 1918), at the age of nineteen. The spirit of Miss Vương Thị Lễ later got into contact with the second branch of Cao Dai Faith (Branch Two) when table-turning was still in use; she aliased herself Đoàn Ngọc Quế²⁷⁹, (in fact, she was Thất Nương, the Seventh Lady Immortal, accompanying the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu).

Through the introduction by the spirit of Miss Vương Thị Lễ, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ became acquainted and joined in religious activities with the gentlemen of Branch Two since November 17, 1925 (this date was recorded by himself in his notebook) (Figure 85). Prior to that period, in 1924 he and Mr.

²⁷⁹ Miss **Vương Thị Lễ** was buried in Vườn Bà Lớn cemetery (Bà Lớn was the wife of Governor Tổng Đốc Đỗ Hữu Phương (1842 – 1920), maternal grandmother of Miss Vương). Vườn Bà Lớn in the past was very spacious, with many mango trees, and now in Ward 1, District 3, near Ngã Bảy intersection.

In the period when table-turning was still in use, thanks to Miss Vương’s guidance, the gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang came to find her grave there. This cemetery was exhumed in Mậu Thân year (1968). All the thirteen sets of ashes of Đỗ Hữu family were brought into a tower built in Đỗ Hữu Từ Đường (in the middle of Vườn Bà Lớn).

In 1979, before leaving for France, Mr. Vương Hiếu Nghĩa placed all those urns of ashes in a glass coffin and lodged the coffin in Huệ Nghiêm Pagoda (An Dưỡng Địa), Phú Lâm district.

Ngô Văn Chiêu were co-workers at the Commerce Department of the Governor's Palace. As colleagues, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ knew Mr. Ngô's cultivation practice. But fate led him to practice with Branch Two. Thanks to this relationship, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ was one of the liaisons connecting the two branches. (Please find more details in Chapter 2 Section III).

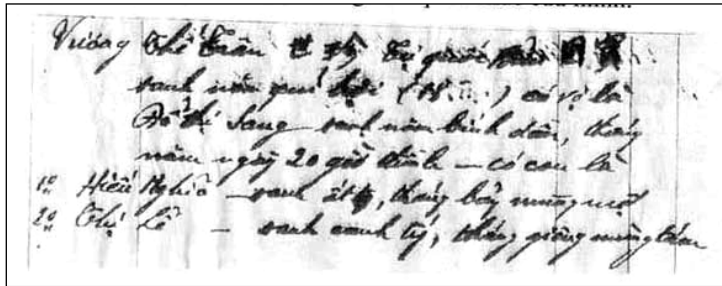


Figure 85: The handwriting of Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ stating details about Miss Vương Thị Lễ.

Performing religious tasks together in Branch Two since the end of 1925, on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ received the Holy Decree ordained him as Tiên Sắc Lang Quân Thuyết Đạo Giáo Sư. On the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926), another trial occurred in which Miss Vương Thanh Chi,²⁸⁰ daughter of Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ, was “possessed”, causing so much confusion in the Inauguration Ceremony of the Great Way at Gò Kén Holy House. Perhaps that is why, even Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ received the holy ordainment to the rank of

²⁸⁰ Ms. **Vương Thanh Chi** was born on April 28, 1908. She married Mr. Lê Văn Trân (religious name Địa Linh Tinh, the second son of Mr. Lê Minh Khá). They both practiced the religion together at Tam Giáo Điện Minh Tân (her religious name was Thanh Dương). She passed away on June 21, 1980, and was buried in the family cemetery in Thủ Đức district, near the soccer field.

Giáo Sư (Bishop), he could hardly continue his religious practice at the Tây Ninh Holy See.

Hence, he went to Saigon and collaborated with the Holy Houses of Cầu Kho, Huỳnh Quang Sắc, and some other places. During this period, he composed some books written in Cambodian and Chinese to preach the God-Way. On the 24th day of the 7th month of Nhâm Thân year (1932), he was appointed as Thượng Phối Sư (Archbishop of Taoist faction) of Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church (Mỹ Tho province).

Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ passed away on the 18th day of the 10th month of Kỷ Mão year (1939) and was buried in Tân Sơn Nhì. On the funeral day, the two gentlemen Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Figure 39) and Đoàn Văn Bản (Figure 29) read the eulogy to farewell him. His ashes are currently kept in Bình Hòa Holy House (Gia Định province).

20. Mr. THƯỢNG BẢN THANH (ĐOÀN VĂN BẢN) (1876 – 1941)²⁸¹

Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản (Figure 29), given name Văn Long, was a native of làng Tân Uyên village, Chánh Mỹ Trung canton, Biên Hòa province. He came from a middle-class family; since his parents died early, he lived with an uncle who was a relative of his father.

Prior to the year 1914, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản was awarded a scholarship to the Ecole Normale Primaire d'Instituteurs (the Gia Định Pedagogy School). After graduating, he was sent to teach in many places. In 1925, he was the Principal of Cầu Kho School. His house was across the street from this school, at 42

²⁸¹ His year of birth (1876) is deduced from 1936, the year he retired from work (at sixty years old). Unfortunately, his relatives have not been found; and his tombstone is made of laterite, so the writing is no longer legible.

Général Leman street (now Cao Bá Nha street, corner of Trần Đình Xu street). With his first wife he had no children, but with his second wife he had a daughter named Đoàn Thị Quối (born in about 1914).

(Senior Brother) Đạo Trưởng Huệ Lương Trần Văn Quế wrote about Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản as follows:

“He was tall and thin, with a large, fair-skinned, pockmarked face, deep but spirited eyes, and little beard... His family was poor and had few children, so he had a lot of time to study and socialize. First, he focused on the teaching career, in which he had many initiatives, was loved by his supervisors and respected by his subordinates... He treated his colleagues and subordinates very kindly, politely, and fairly, but was no less determined.”

On the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Bính Dần year, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản received the Holy Decree ordained him as Tiên Đạo Công Thần Thuyết Đạo Sư. On the 14th day of the 5th month of that same year Bính Dần, he was ordained to the rank of Lễ Sinh (Student-Priest) and was promoted to Giáo Hữu (Priest) on the 25th day of the 8th month of that same year. After the Inauguration of the Great Way, he was appointed as Giáo Sư (Bishop). And on July 24, 1932, he was ordained as Phối Sư (Archbishop) (of Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church). But a few years later, because he did not agree with the way of religious practice there, he and most of followers of Cầu Kho Holy House withdrew.

In 1936, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản joined Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (the General Association of the United Congregation) as Phó Hội Trưởng (Vice President). In this same year, he retired from work. In the following year, he handed over Cầu Kho Holy House to the parishioners and returned to Tân Uyên village to establish a small wooden Holy House on a mound of land in Bưng Tre hamlet, Tân Nhuận commune (now zone 5 Uyên Hưng commune, Tân Uyên village) for his convalescence.

In mid-1941, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản passed away and was buried next to his Holy House. This Holy House now only has a brick foundation among the wild trees. The graves are unattended!

21. Mr. THƯỢNG TƯỜNG THANH (NGUYỄN VĂN TƯỜNG or VÕ VĂN TƯỜNG) (1887 – 1939)



Figure 86: Portrait of Mr. **Thượng Tường Thanh** (Nguyễn Văn Tường) (1887 – 1939)

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường (Figure 86) was born in 1887 in Lương Hòa Lạc commune, Mỹ Tho province. He was the son of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tịnh and Ms. Võ Thị Quyên (1867 – 1934).

His father passed away a month before he was born. Not long after that, his mother brought him to Saigon to live with his fourth uncle (who was a civil servant), and he was sent to school under his uncle's guardianship. Growing up, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường joined the police force, working as an interpreter at Chaigneau Police Station (on Yersin street, Saigon District 1). In schooling and working, he used the surname Võ of his mother and uncle, but in filial matter and

worship, he kept the original surname Nguyễn (his children later did the same).

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường married Ms. Đặng Thị Kê (1888 – 1943) and they had two children: Nguyễn Văn Tri (1910 – 1984) and Nguyễn Thị Phầm (1912 -1947). At first, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường and his family temporarily stayed at his workplace (Chaigneau Police Station). Around 1921, he purchased a land plot of fourteen hundred seventy-four squared meters in the alley number 237 bis of Galliéni street (now Trần Hưng Đạo street) to build his own house facing Galliéni street. Around 1930, street No. 9 (later became Dumortier street, now Cô Bắc street) was opened and run along the back of this house; hence, his house became the street frontage at number 208 Cô Bắc street to this day.

After joining Cao Dai, on the 14th day of the 5th month of Bính Dần year Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường was ordained as Lễ Sanh phái Thượng (Student-Priest of Taoist faction), and on the 26th day of the 10th month of that same year, he was promoted to Giáo Hữu (Priest). In the meeting to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year at his own house, his entire family of four were present. From then on, this place always held the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Faith.

During the Commemoration on the 23rd day of the 8th month of Mậu Dần year (1928), Mr. Thượng Trung Nhật recalled:

“The Supreme Being descended and ordered me to have his disciples gather at the house of Mr. Tường in the evening of the 23rd day of the 8th month. I obeyed and announced it to our fellow believers. On the 23rd day of the 8th month of Bính Dần year, that was, September 29, 1926, our fellow believers gathered there. The Supreme Being descended and ordered me to write down the names of all male and female attendants to cosign in the document of the Declaration of the Faith submitted to the

Government. At that time, there were two hundred and forty fellow believers of both sexes present in the séance... That is the story of today's anniversary.”²⁸²

In 1938, the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Faith was organized in Cầu Kho Holy House. In 1941, Cầu Kho Holy House was demolished, and the ceremony was held again at the house of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường. In 1950, when the construction of Nam Thành Holy House was completed, the Commemoration of the Declaration of the Faith was held in this Holy House.

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường often participated in religious practice at Cầu Kho Holy House. In 1931, he and some fellow believers collaborated with Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church in its early days, where he was ordained as Thượng Phối Sư (Archbishop of Taoist faction) on the 24th day of the 7th month of Nhâm Thân year (1932). After that, Minh Chơn Lý Holy Church underwent a major transformation, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường and many others retired to Cầu Kho Holy House to continue their religious practice.

Mr. Thượng Tường Thanh passed away at 6 p.m. on the 26th day of the 9th month of Kỷ Mão year (November 7, 1939) and was buried in his family graveyard at Gò Xoài (next to Trường Thọ Communal House – Phước Long village, Thủ Đức district).

²⁸² Excerpt from the book *Tiểu Sử Đức Quyền Giáo Tông Thượng Trung Nhựt*, page 33.

APPENDIX II.

HISTORICAL SITES

1. QUAN ÂM TEMPLE (PHÚ QUỐC)
2. VĨNH NGUYÊN TEMPLE (LONG AN)
3. TỪ LÂM PAGODA (TÂY NINH)
4. CẦU KHO HOLY HOUSE (SAIGON)
5. THANH AN TEMPLE (THỦ DẦU MỘT)
6. HIỆP MINH TEMPLE (CÁI KHÉ, CẦN THƠ)
7. LINH QUANG TEMPLE (HÓC MÔN)

1. QUAN ÂM TEMPLE (PHÚ QUỐC)

Phú Quốc is a large island in the South of Vietnam (five hundred sixty-seven squared kilometers wide, and forty kilometers away from Hà Tiên district), located in the Gulf of Thailand. Dương Đông is the main town of Phú Quốc island. Dương Đông Mountain is close to the town, and comprises many famous temples, including Sùng Hưng Temple (Figure 87) at the bottom and Quan Âm Temple near the top of the mountain.



Figure 87: Sùng Hưng Temple (Phú Quốc)

Quan Âm Temple belongs to Minh Sư religious branch²⁸³ and surpasses other temples in terms of quietness and seclusion.

²⁸³ Quan Âm Temple probably belongs to Hoàng Tế sect (its Ancestral Temple was Quan Âm Đường in Thâm Nhiên village, Long An province). (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Ngưỡng (at Quan Âm Đường, Tân An) (born in 1917) said that in the past, more than sixty years ago, he once served (Master) Lão Lâm Đạo Ngươn (Lâm Xương Quang) (1886 – 1945) in meditation retreats in Phú Quốc.

Poet Đông Hồ²⁸⁴, on his visit to Quan Âm Temple on December 15, 1927, described it as follows:

“The temple was built on the mountain top, in front of it is a high mountain, behind it is a vast sea, very good in spectacle and landscape. It is surrounded by stony walls and winding bamboo fences, with disengaged flowers and secular trees, to create an extremely serene and mysterious scene.”

The first Quan Âm Temple was established by the two gentlemen Huỳnh Kim Chung (religious name Huỳnh Đăng Khoa) (? – 1939) and Đỗ Minh Châu, who assigned Mr. Đỗ Kim Cự (1874-1955), son of Mr. Đỗ Minh Châu, to preside over. Later, Mr. Cự assigned Mr. Đỗ Văn Đồ (often called Tám Gia) to take care of the temple. Mr. Tám Gia had epilepsy and an erratic temperament.

In 1921, Mr. Tám Gia caused so much trouble that Mr. Ngô had to move the invocation for his spiritual cultivation to the nearby Sùng Hưng Temple, at the foot of Dương Đông mountain. From then on, Quan Âm Temple gradually declined; later, as no one looked after it, the temple was abandoned and destroyed.

In 1961, some disciples of Chiêu Minh including gentlemen: Nguyễn Văn Truyền, Bùi Thiện Hùng, Trần Minh Trí... found traces of Quan Âm Temple. Ban Trị Sự (Board of Directors) rented this public land lot No. 129 under the contract dated

²⁸⁴ Mr. Đông Hồ **Lâm Tấn Phác** (1906 – 1969) was a poet from Hà Tiên. He collected, translated, and introduced the poetry of Tao Đàn Chiêu Anh Các (founded by Mạc Thiên Tích (1706 – 1780) on the full-moon day of the 1st month of Bính Thìn year (1736)). Throughout his career of over forty years, Mr. Đông Hồ wrote many genres: essays, poems, literary research, ... in total of about twenty works.

Mr. Lâm Tấn Phác had a paternal aunt named Ms. Lâm Thị Đào Hoa, who was a second-rank wife of Mr. Huỳnh Kim Chung (mentioned above, in this section). This article titled “*Thăm đảo Phú Quốc*” (“*Visiting Phú Quốc Island*”) was published in Nam Phong magazine No. 124, year 1927, page 545.

December 6, 1961, then rebuilt on the old temple foundation the new Cao Đài Hội Thánh (Cao Dai Holy Church) (Figure 88), belonging to Chiếu Minh Tam Thanh, preserving the ground and the altar base exactly at the same position as the old temple.



Figure 88: **Cao Đài Hội Thánh (Phú Quốc)**

Photo of Cao Dai Holy Church, built on the foundation of the old Quan Âm Temple. Current address is in ward 1, Dương Đông town.

It is noteworthy that, according to a drawing for construction permit of the kitchen of Dương Đông Communal House in 1962, the road at the foot of the mountain in front of Quan Âm Temple, passing Sùng Hưng Temple (now Lý Tự Trọng street, connecting with a section of Trần Hưng Đạo street, in Dương Đông Town), at that time was called “Đốc Phủ Chiêu” street. Indeed, many people were the Chief of Phú Quốc district, but few had the streets named after them like Mr. Ngô.

2. VĨNH NGUYÊN TEMPLE (LONG AN)

Vĩnh Nguyên Temple was built in Mậu Thân year (1908) in Long An village, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province, now Long An province.

Its history started with (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long (Figure 34), secular name Lê Văn Tiêng (born on the 23rd day of the 10th month of Quý Mão year – 1843 – in Long An village, Chợ Lớn province), son of Mr. Lê Phước Nghệ and Ms. Nguyễn Thị Nguyễn. Adoring the self-cultivation, in 1876 he received the Minh Đường lineal traditions (when he was thirty-four years old) from His Excellency Di Minh Tử Ngô Đạo Chánh. He then persevered in this practice until reaching the final rank of Thái Lão Sư (Great Master), religious name Lê Đạo Long. Wishing to guide people onto the path of virtue, (Great Master) Lê Đạo Long used his own means to build Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (Figure 89). It is there that he taught many disciples, among whom were those attaining the rank of Thái Lão Sư (Great Master) such as gentlemen Trần Đạo Minh, Nguyễn Chánh Sắc, Nguyễn Đạo Chí, Nguyễn Đạo Cần...

Prior to the day of his passing, (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long summoned all his children and disciples to gather, with the presence of (Prefect) Tri Phủ Huỳnh Khắc Thuận, Chief of Cần Giuộc District. After announcing his last words and passing on all responsibilities, he bathed to purity and paid tribute to the Divine. At 7 a.m. on the 3rd day of the 12th month of Quý Sửu year (1913), he sat in meditation, while his disciples knelt and bowed to see him off in Phật Đường Hall at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. When he was alive, he prophesied:

This place will later become the site for Thập Nhị Khai Thiên của Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (the Founder of the Twelve Heavens of the Great Way for the Third Universal

*Salvation) to preach the true spiritual tradition.*²⁸⁵



Figure 89: **Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (Long An province).**
(Photo taken when the temple had not been rebuilt).

Continuing his father's religious career, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33) became Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple; at that time, he attained Dẫn Ân rank (in the Second Cycle of Initiation). On March 4, 1926, the Cao Dai predecessors were ordered to organize an invocation at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. In this séance, His Excellency Lê Đạo Long descended and reminded about his previous prophecy; he also announced that he had attained the Celestial Title Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn. He advised the followers at Vĩnh Nguyên to join Cao Dai.

Obeing that order, (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Minh (Figure 37), who was the chief disciple of His Excellency Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn, and Mr. Lê Văn Lịch joined Cao Dai. Mr. Lê Văn Lịch was ordained as Đầu Sư phái Ngọc (Cardinal of Confucian faction), religious name Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, and Mr. Trần Đạo Minh was given the title Ngọc Chương Pháp

²⁸⁵ Excerpt from his biography in the book *Đạo Nguyên Chánh Nghĩa* (published by Vĩnh Nguyên Temple in 1939). Legend says that this prophesy was placed in a bamboo tube. Later, his disciples opened it and learned about his prediction.

(Legislative Cardinal of Confucian faction). From then on, Vĩnh Nguyên Temple became one of the first establishments of Cao Dai.

His Holiness Đức Đông Phương Chưởng Quân in the séance on the 20th day of the 2nd month of Quý Sửu year (1973) gave the following holy message:

*Ngô Văn Chiêu saw and received the worship symbol of God Eye. In terms of numerology, God Eye is the number **One**, symbolizing the Supreme Ultimate. Next is the establishment of the Twin Senses at Vĩnh Nguyên Temple. That is the Sun-Moon Yin-Yang. From the Supreme Ultimate to the Twin Senses, this transformation becomes the principle to engender all living beings; this principle is represented by Hộ Pháp (Dharma Protector) ...*

Since its convergence to Cao Dai, Vĩnh Nguyên Temple has received many important holy messages that formed the foundation for the early stage of the Faith, such as the events in which the Holy Master:

- ordered (Cardinal) Đầu Sư Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt to compose the Daily Prayers. Based on the Minh Sư prayers, he compiled the Ngọc Hoàng prayer and the three prayers to pay respect to the Three Religious Founders.

- ordered (Cardinal) Đầu Sư Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt to teach the initial meditation method to the predecessors (the gentlemen Lê Văn Trung, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ...).

- guided the drafting of the New Codes.

- conferred the ordination upon some dignitaries and granted religious names for male dignitaries.

In the holy message on the 25th day of the 5th month of Kỷ Dậu

year (1969), the Holy Master ordered the reconstruction of Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (making it face on the opposite direction to the one it had been). Vĩnh Nguyên Temple was re-inaugurated on the 13th day of the 3rd month of Quý Sửu year (1973). Every year, on this day, Vĩnh Nguyên Temple holds a commemorative ceremony. The other two anniversaries are: Commemoration of His Excellency Đức Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt on the 2nd day of the 9th month, and Commemoration of His Excellency Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn on the 3rd day of the 12th month.

Converging from Minh Đường to Cao Dai, Vĩnh Nguyên Temple still retains its original name whose significance was explained by His Excellency Đức Như Ý Đạo Toàn Chơn Nhơn as follows:

Vĩnh means eternal, immutable,

Nguyên means original, eternal, everlasting.

*Only the original is eternal, everlasting, and immutable. All beings are born from the eternal one. Impermanence comes from the immutable one...*²⁸⁶

3. TỪ LÂM PAGODA (TÂY NINH)

Từ Lâm Pagoda (also known as Gò Kén Pagoda) (Figure 90), whose proper name is Thiên Lâm Pagoda²⁸⁷ (Figure 91), was

²⁸⁶ Excerpt from the holy message on the full-moon day of the 3rd month of Giáp Dần year (1974), received by Bộ Phận Hiệp Thiên Đài CQPTGL / CĐGVN (the Invocation Body of the House of Heavenly Alliance in the Institute for Cao Dai Teaching in Vietnam).

²⁸⁷ Based on the master map with notes, seals and signatures of the provincial chief of Tây Ninh dated July 15, 1925, allowing the construction of this pagoda – along with related documents afterwards – from the beginning, the pagoda was named Thiên Lâm Tự. But the reason this book still calls it Từ Lâm Tự is to match with the historical documents left by the predecessors.

built on a mound of about four acres covered with many ‘kén’ trees (a kind of vine with hard stems, dark green leaves, and round red fruits the size of jackfruit seeds). The land behind the pagoda used as a cemetery was purchased in 1931 (at the price of fifty piasters VND). The road leading to this pagoda is paved with stone, about three hundred meters long. In front of the pagoda are now the three stupas of (Most Venerable Monks) Hòa Thượng: Như Nhân, Minh Đạt, and Hồng Tăng (disciple of Hòa Thượng Như Nhân).



Figure 90: Từ Lâm Pagoda (Gò Kén Pagoda)

Since around 1920, due to the serious decline of Buddhism, many monks with enthusiastic heart established the “Lục Hòa Liên Xã” (it is not the Church of Giáo Hội Lục Hòa Tăng), promoting the movement to revive Buddhism. Leading this movement was the young monk Thiện Chiếu (Nguyễn Văn Tài) (1898 – 1974), who was then Abbot of Linh Sơn Pagoda (at Douamont street, now Cô Giang street).

In addition, at that time, both this pagoda and the Tây Ninh Holy See were in the same village of Long Thành; now the pagoda belongs to Long Trung hamlet, Long Thành Trung commune, Hòa Thành district.

(Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân²⁸⁸ (Figure 64), Abbot of Giác Hải Pagoda (in Phú Lâm), also actively participated in the revival of Buddhism, collecting donations from Buddhists (including Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) to further develop Từ Lâm Pagoda in Tây Ninh province.



Figure 91: **Photo of a part of the plan for the pagoda construction (signed by Province Chief of Tây Ninh on July 15, 1925, on the back page) shows the pagoda name is Thiền Lâm Tự.**

²⁸⁸ (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng **Như Nhân** (1864 – 1939), secular name Nguyễn Văn Tường, a native of Đức Hòa, Long An province, was son of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Bàu and Ms. Đoàn Diệu Hoa. Exerting his will of self-cultivation at the age of seventeen, he took refuge in Buddhism with (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Minh Đạt (religious name Thích Trí Lượng) at Thiền Lâm Cô Tự (in Xóm Chùa hamlet, Tây Ninh) and received the religious name Thích Từ Phong (belonged to Lâm Tế Sect, the thirty-ninth generation). Around 1890, he went to Giác Lâm Pagoda (the Ancestral Temple of Lâm Tế Sect) in Tân Bình to continue his self-cultivation.

In 1885, Ms. Trần Thị Liễu donated a 1.2-acre plot of land in Phú Lâm district to build Giác Hải Pagoda, and he came there to be the Abbot. At that time, he was ordained as Hòa Thượng (Most Venerable Monk). (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân passed away on the 5th day of the 12th month of Mậu Dần year (1939) and was buried at Thiền Lâm Pagoda. In 1952 his remains were cremated, and a part of his ashes was lodged in Giác Hải Pagoda (Phú Lâm district).

On the 16th day of the 7th month of Bính Dần year, Cao Dai predecessors received the order to organize invocation at Từ Lâm Pagoda. Following the Holy Master's instruction, (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân agreed to convert Từ Lâm Pagoda into Cao Dai Holy House and used this place for the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way on the full-moon day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year (1926). At that time, this pagoda was situated in the middle of a vast field of shoots surrounded by a few secular trees; the scene was desolated and lonely. To visit the pagoda, one must use primitive means of transport.

Because the pagoda was newly built and not yet completed, a lot more work needed to be done. Mr. and Mrs. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ actively contributed to the expenses for the cleaning up of this site, for the building of a stone road of more than three hundred meters for cars to reach the pagoda, and for the decoration of the pagoda ... to make it a convenient place for the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration.

After the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration, (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Như Nhân reclaimed the pagoda and no longer accepted the title Thái Chưởng Pháp (Legislative Cardinal of Buddhist faction); concurrently his disciple, (Most Venerable Monk) Hòa Thượng Thiện Minh, also declined the title Thái Đầu Sư (Cardinal of Buddhist faction). As a result, Cao Dai predecessors purchased the land plot at North of Long Thành village and built the present-day Tây Ninh Holy Land.

4. CẦU KHO HOLY HOUSE (SAIGON)

Cầu Kho Holy House was one of the first holy houses of the missionary movement (in early 1926), established in the three-compartment, wooden-walled and wooden-pillar, tiled house of Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản (Figure 29) at 42 Général Leman street (the land is currently located at number 102 Trần Đình Xu street, corner of Cao Bá Nhạ street). Before transforming his house into a holy house, in 1925, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản worshipped Cao Dai Supreme God under the guidance of Mr. Ngô Minh Chiêu.

“In the beginning, gentlemen Trung, Kỳ, Cư, Tắc, Sang Hậu, Đức, Bản, Giảng gathered every night at the house of either Mr. Trung (on Quai Testard street, Chợ Lớn province), or Mr. Cư (on Bourdais street, Saigon), or Mr. Bản (in Cầu Kho, Saigon), to pray for the Supreme Being to descend and teach them. But every time there were people who requested for accepting into the religion, the Supreme Being taught them to be in the Grand Ceremony at Cầu Kho Holy House. Therefore, Mr. Bản’s house became a regular ritual site and was called the Little Holy House.

The original Cầu Kho Holy House was very cramped, lacking in furniture, because the house owner at that time was in a tight spot and could not afford to buy proper objects for worship. The altar was merely a small chair²⁸⁹ made of ironwood. “God Eye” was simply drawn on a piece of paper of three decimeters high and two decimeters wide. Even the mat and cushions were not enough to spread out for everyone to kneel and worship.

²⁸⁹ ‘chair’ is the old Southern Vietnamese term for a small and low table.

Despite such a poor situation, the dozens of new believers never minded and kept coming to this site every Saturday night to attend invocations.”²⁹⁰

Gradually, thanks to the contributions of fellow believers, by 1929, this place became a relatively complete holy house (Figure 92), in which the Divine Altar to revere the Supreme God was set up in the central compartment, that of Đức Quan Thánh²⁹¹ was in the left, and that of Đức Quan Âm²⁹² was in the right compartment of the house; in front there were also the bell and drum. The religious practice at this site was organized into committees:

- Ban Thuyết Đạo (the Preaching Committee) comprised gentlemen Vương Quan Kỳ, Lê Văn Giảng, Huỳnh Văn Mới, Đoàn Văn Bản, Nguyễn Văn Đồi...

- Ban Nghi Lễ (the Ritual Committee) comprised gentlemen Nguyễn Văn Phùng, Lương Văn Bồi, Hà Văn Lương, Nguyễn Văn Hòa...

- Ban Nhạc (the Music Committee) comprised gentlemen Nguyễn Văn Đức, Nguyễn Văn Thân, Trần Văn Lô...

- Ban Bảo Trợ (the Sponsoring Committee) comprised gentlemen Huỳnh Trung Tuất, Hồ Vinh Quy, and ladies Phạm Thị Thôi, Nguyễn Thị Sâm, Tôn Nữ Thị Kiều, Hứa Thị Nhiều...

- Ban Phổ Tế Học Đường (the Charity and Education Committee) comprised Mr. Huỳnh Đích and Miss Nguyễn Thị Hồng, Miss Nhờ, Miss Tiếng, who opened free classes.

²⁹⁰ Excerpt from the book *Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên* by Nguyễn Trung Hậu in 1957, page 22.

²⁹¹ Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor, the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China.

²⁹² Kuan Shi Yin Bodhisattva, the Goddess of Mercy.

The Holy House also had a Bát Nhã boat for use in funerals, managed by Mr. Lương Phát Lợi. The training of ritual children was managed by Ms. Ba Diêu and Ms. Mười Nhuận.

In 1936, Mr. Đoàn Văn Bản retired from work; he and his wife returned to his hometown in Tân Uyên (Sông Bé province), handing over the Holy House to fellow practitioners. In 1938, local followers demolished the old Holy House and rebuilt two spacious multi-stored wooden houses. Also in this year, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phùng (1893 – 1961) was elected as Chánh Hội Trưởng (President). Meanwhile, Liên Hòa Tổng Hội (the General Association for the United Congregation) – in which Mr. Nguyễn Phan Long was Hội Trưởng (President), gentlemen Đoàn Văn Bản and Trần Quang Nghiêm were Hội Phó (Vice Presidents), together with gentlemen Nguyễn Hữu Đắc, Nguyễn Hữu Lợi, Trần Văn Quê, Trương Kế An, Nguyễn Văn Đức, Phan Trường Mạnh – also used this place as their headquarters.



Figure 92: Photo of the officials in front of Cầu Kho Holy House, around 1929. This holy house has no trace left.

In 1941, the colonial government took back the land (because it was public land) to build a dwelling complex for civil servants, and Cầu Kho Holy House was demolished. The house frame, the altar system..., even glassware and common utensils were moved and re-assembled on the foundation of Tân Hương Holy House in Long An province (which had been previously destroyed by French soldiers) and was then managed by Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trò. Thanks to this fact, numerous historical relics of Cầu Kho Holy House are still preserved, such as the beaked basket, the altar system, the sculpted ornamental panels surrounding the Holy Statue ...

In 1948, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phùng together with Mr. Phan Thanh called for a meeting of fellow believers at 7 Cao Bá Nhạ street (the house of Mr. Phùng) to express their will in re-building Cầu Kho Holy House.

This new Holy House was built on Mr. Hui Bon Hoa's land on Nguyễn Cư Trinh street (with no land rental fees). The construction was temporarily completed by the end of 1948. On October 30, 1948, (the Sainly Emperor) Đức Quan Thánh Đế Quân²⁹³ descended to name it Nam Thành Holy House.

5. THANH AN TEMPLE (THỦ DẦU MỘT)

Thanh An Temple (Figure 93) is the name of Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site). Located on Hùng Vương street, Thủ Dầu Một town, Sông Bé province, the temple was called chùa Ông Ngựa (Temple of Horse God) by the locals (because in front of this temple there was a statue of Xích Thố - Red Horse). In the main hall, a statue of (the Sainly Emperor) Đức Quan Thánh Đế Quân²⁹⁴ is worshipped. The statues of Ba Ông (the Three Gods)

²⁹³ Kuan-Ti, the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China.

²⁹⁴ Kuan-Ti, the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms in Ancient China.

have been there for over one hundred years, since the time this temple was built.

In the early twentieth century, Mr. Trần Hiến Vinh²⁹⁵ (Figure 53) (1884 – 1962) was the head of the temple passed down by his ancestors. He renovated and expanded the main hall, paved the entire temple floor with tiles, to make it a decent place of worship. Also in those years, Mr. Tư Vinh and his older brother Mr. Trần Phát Đạt (Figure 52), along with friends including gentlemen Nguyễn Văn Trọng, Lê Văn Hôn, Trần Duy Khánh, Phan Văn Tý (Figure 21) ..., gathered in this temple for spiritic invocation. Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trọng served as the medium to hold the beaked basket. Perhaps because the purpose of the temple was mainly for charity and praying for traditional healing prescriptions, it was called Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site). The name Minh Thiện has been around since then.

About two years after Mr. Trần Hiến Vinh passed away (1962), the temple was named Minh Chơn. By then, Mr. Trương Kế An and some fellow followers set up the Divine Altar to worship God Eye and perform Cao Dai rituals (while keeping all other worship statues intact). But around 1972, Mr. Trương Kế An was sick and could no longer practice Cao Dai rituals, and the temple has been reverted to worship (the Saintly Emperor) Đức Quan Thánh until present.

The period when it was still Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site), which coincided with the beginning of Cao Dai Faith, the following pre-destined events took place at this site:

²⁹⁵ In the list of friends of Mr. Vương Quan Kỳ (recorded by Mr. Vương himself), there is the name of Mr. Trần Hiến Vinh. The two were of the same age and probably in the same classes at Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat.

The coordinates according to the global positioning system (GPS) of Thanh An Temple are: 10°58'41" N; 106°39'20" E.



Figure 93: **Thanh An Temple, also known as Đàn Minh Thiện (Thủ Dầu Một).**

- With **Branch One**: In 1902, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu (before knowing Cao Dai) went to Thủ Dầu Một to attend Minh Thiện invocation to pray for his mother's longevity. On that day Mr. Ngô received a poem in which the Divine encouraged him to practice self-cultivation "*Thủ bồi nhĩ lễ...*" (please review these details in Chapter 2 Section I Part A.2). In 1919, a year before becoming disciple of Cao Dai Supreme God, Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu came back to Đàn Minh Thiện to pray for the prescription to cure his mother's illnesses. On that day (the Saintly Emperor) Đức Quan Thánh descended and gave him a quatrain.

Also, because Mr. Ngô had known from Đàn Minh Thiện how to use a beaked basket, later in Tân An province, when he received the holy order to switch from spiritic pen to beaked basket, he easily adapted.

- With **Branch Two**: On the Eve of the Mid-Autumn Festival of Ất Sửu year (1925), gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư,

Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Hoài Sang received the order to use beaked basket to invoke and serve upon the Divine Mother Đức Diêu Trì in the Peach Banquet Ceremony. They were very confused, because up to that time they had only used table-turning. Fortunately, Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư (Figure 70) had a friend named Phan Văn Tý (Figure 21, 1888 – 1962) (a native of Thủ Dầu Một province, and a follower of Đoàn Minh Thiện) whose residence was across Bourdais street from Mr. Cao's home. Mr. Phan Tý had a beaked basket; thus, he lent it to them and conscientiously guided them to operate it, in accordance with the holy order.

- With **Minh Tân** religious branch: In 1920, Mr. Lê Minh Khá (Figure 94), a former Village Chief of Vĩnh Hội, after many times attending Đoàn Minh Thiện to ask for prescription to cure his illness, he was guided by (the Saintly Emperor) Đức Quan Thánh to establish Minh Tân religious branch. (Please refer to Appendix IV). Then in 1926, the Divine ordered Minh Tân to join Cao Dai.



Figure 94: Portrait of Mr. **Lê Minh Khá (1868 – 1946).**

Despite the numerous pre-destined experiences with Cao Dai as mentioned above, Thanh An Temple is now closed its invocation activities and operates independently, fully reverting to its original tradition.

6. HIỆP MINH TEMPLE (CÁI KHẾ, CẦN THƠ PROVINCE)

Hiệp Minh Temple (Figure 95) was built in 1911 in Thới Bình village, An Bình commune, Cái Khế district, Cần Thơ province. It was also called Đàn Cái Khế (Cái Khế Invocation Site). Its current address is 97 Huỳnh Thúc Kháng street, An Nghiệp ward, Cần Thơ city.

The story began with Mr. Phan Thông Lý, whose ninth son named Phan Thông Sang got seriously ill. He attended the invocation at Quang Xuân Temple, next to his house, and received the prescription to successfully treat his son's illnesses. (The invocation rituals at Quang Xuân Temple were in the same style as those at Nam Nhã Đường (belonged to Minh Sư religious branch) in Bình Thủy district, Cần Thơ province). Hence, Mr. Phan Thông Lý wholeheartedly built on his homeland a temple named Chánh Minh (in 1911), where invocation using beaked basket was organized, mainly to treat patients; and he received religious name Nghiêm Hòa. A few years later, he passed away. The temple was then under the management of three gentlemen: Phan Thông Ý (Chơn Từ), Phan Thông Giai (Khánh Nhơn), and Nguyễn Văn Bảy (Thiên Ân), who were together called Tam Quyền (Three Authorities). From then on, the temple changed its name to Hiệp Minh.

The period when Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu came to seek prescriptions for his mother, Mr. Phan Chánh Thống (religious name Khuê Quang) was concurrently the séance master and spiritist reader, Mr. Giáo Thọ Bửu Nghiêm was the active medium, Mr. Thiên Ân was the supportive medium, and Mr. Chơn Từ was the scribe. It was there that Mr. Ngô received many holy messages, especially the poem starting with the verse “Trời còn sông biển đều còn...” (“As long as Heaven exists, so do rivers and oceans ...”),²⁹⁶ which later Mr. Ngô was ordered to add the last four lines to make this poem the

²⁹⁶ Please refer to Chapter 2 Section I Part A.2 for more details.

invocation prayer used in the early days of Cao Dai.

Besides, according to the research of (Brother) Đạo huynh Phan Lương Minh (at Cao Đài Thượng Đế in Cần Thơ province), the three prayers for offering the Three Treasures (flowers, wine, tea) starting with “Hoa tươi năm sắc...”, “Tửu vị hương...”, and “Đông độ thanh trà...”, which are still chanted by some Cao Dai Holy Churches, also originated from Dân Hiệp Minh.



Figure 95: **Hiệp Minh Temple (Cái Khế, Cần Thơ province)**

In 1942, Hiệp Minh Temple was renovated and has remained stable until present. Its spiritic activities have long been closed, but its elegant landscape and quiet appearance are still as before.

7. LINH QUANG TEMPLE (HÓC MÔN)

Linh Quang Tự or Linh Quang Phật Đường is the Ancestral Temple of Phổ Tế sect, Minh Sư religious branch.

Originally, around 1905, a Lão Sư (Taoist Master) of Minh Sư from Long Liên Temple in Hunan (China) came to Vietnam to establish religious practice. He recruited followers and built Linh Quang Temple in Hạnh Thông Tây, on the land that is now next to Trung tâm dạy nghề (the Vocational Center) of Gò Vấp district (across the Catholic Church of Hạnh Thông Tây). At that time, Minh Sư religious branch was quite developed in that locale.



Figure 95: **Linh Quang Temple (Hóc Môn)**

In 1950, due to the land clearance for the expansion of Tân Sơn Nhứt Airport, the temple was temporarily moved to Bình Hòa village, in a rental house at number 240 on the alley next to Hưng Gia Temple on Lê Quang Định street. In 1953, (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Cơ (born in 1883, Abbot of

Linh Quang Temple from 1946 until his death in 1989) used the compensation fund for the clearance to buy land in Hóc Môn district and rebuild Linh Quang Temple (Figure 96). On August 4, 1953, the temple was officially moved from Bình Hòa to Hóc Môn, and its current address is 21/3 Lê Lợi street, Hóc Môn district. After multiple relocations, the temple can only retain its altar system and panels ... with elaborate carvings but are now somewhat damaged.

(Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang was Abbot of Linh Quang Temple in Hanh Thông Tây, when the Holy Master guided him into Cao Dai. Many disciples also followed him to join Cao Dai.

(Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang passed away in 1946 and was buried in Minh Sư cemetery near Linh Quang Temple (across Thới Hòa Temple). In 1956, his remains were reburied in the family cemetery of Mr. Lê Hồng Quang (behind Thánh Tịnh Minh Kiến Đài), one day after the inauguration ceremony of the reconstructed Minh Kiến Đài.

Due to the troubling circumstances of that time, Mr. Phan Khắc Sửu had to use his prestigious relationship with the government to get the permission for the reburial of only (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang. The old temple and Minh Sư cemetery no longer exist.

APPENDIX III.

AUTOMATIC WRITING IN CAO DAI FAITH

1. HUYỀN CƠ (MYSTIC PSYCHOGRAPHY)
2. XÂY BÀN (TABLE TURNING)
3. CHẤP BÚT (SPIRITIC PEN)
4. ĐẠI NGỌC CƠ (THE BEAKED BASKET)

Since ancient times, communicating with the invisible, spiritual world has always been interesting and desirable for many people. That communication is done through various means such as fortune telling, table turning, intuition ...

Initiating the Third Universal Salvation via Cao Dai Faith, the Supreme Being chose automatic writing as the means to communicate and teach. On the 8th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, the Holy Master explained:

The True Way does not use extraordinary things; but to establish the Third Universal Salvation, I must borrow the Immortals' automatic writing. You should not be surprised.

Various types of automatic writing are used by the Divine, including: Huyền cơ (mystic psychography), xây bàn (table turning), chấp bút (spiritic pen holding), and lastly, the use of Đại Ngọc Cơ (the beaked basket).

1. HUYỀN CƠ (MYSTIC PSYCHOGRAPHY)

“Enclosed in an envelope is a talisman, in the middle of which is a blank sheet of paper. The talisman and the paper sheet are folded in two, placed in the envelope and hung at the rooftop of the temple, in a place where no one can reach. The envelope is tied to eight threads that extend from the envelope to the ground and held by eight séance attendants wearing ceremonial costumes who stand in a circle.

Prior to the prayer recital, the envelope is hung above an altar on which all offerings, such as incense, lamps, tea, and flowers, are properly arranged. The prayer session starts and lasts for

forty-eight hours, especially at Tý, Ngọ, Mẹo, and Dậu time.²⁹⁷

Of course, the eight séance attendants must strictly observe vegetarianism and abstinence, and the invocation site must be pure. After forty-eight hours, the séance master climbs up the ladder to detach and bring the envelope down. Then the envelope is opened. Sometimes, nothing is seen on the paper sheet, if the invocation is not completely sincere. At other times, many poems are found in that envelope, written in an honest and sufficiently legible style with a kind of greyish substance, which is not from coal or pencil. They are written in national language.”²⁹⁸

In the past, huyền cơ (mystic psychography) was often used in Minh Lý religious branch. Later, when opening Cao Dai Faith, the Almighty did not use it, because it required many strict conditions and took a lot of time.

In 1968, at Giáo Hội Cao Đài Thống Nhất (the Unified Cao Dai Holy Church) (Minh Tân religious branch), the Supreme Being instructed on a different form of huyền cơ (mystic psychography) as follows: Construct a lò Bát Quái (an Eight-Trigram furnace) of 0.81 meter in diameter and 0.96 meter in height, covered with a white piece of wood, on top of which a vòng tròn Vô Cực (symbolic Circle of the Void) is drawn. On the outside of that circle, the eight words “Liễu Nhứt Chơn Nhơn Trán Giữ Trung Phù” are written in vermillion; inside the circle, the twenty-nine alphabetic letters and the five diacritical marks (of Vietnamese language) are written in red color. Covering vòng Vô Cực (the Circle of the Void) is a transparent plastic frame also

²⁹⁷ Translator’s note: Tý time is from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m., Ngọ time is from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Mẹo time is from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m., and Dậu time is from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

²⁹⁸ Huệ Lương in *Cao Đài Giáo Lý*, issue No. 76, published in the 3rd month of Nhâm Tý year (1972), page 20.

octagonal. On the frame there are two bars forming a cross (symbolizing Tứ Tượng - the Four Forms). Tied at the center of the cross is a golden thread with a black pen at the bottom end where its tip just touches the center of the Eight-Trigram map.

In invocation session, a male medium sits inside lò Bát Quái (the Eight-Trigram furnace) and was spiritually assisted by four dignitaries of Hiệp Thiên Đài (House of Heavenly Alliance) sitting outside the furnace. Surrounding them are numerous guarding dignitaries as strictly instructed by the Divine. When the Almighty descends, even with no direct influence of the medium sitting underneath, the yellow thread becomes stiff like a zinc wire, pointing the pen tip toward the alphabetic characters in the circle above him. The scribes record the holy message accordingly.

This type of huyền cơ (mystic psychography) was successfully performed three times in the total of five invocation sessions using this technique; the last one was at Tý time on the 30th day of the 2nd month of Kỷ Dậu year (1969).

2. XÂY BÀN (TABLE TURNING)

Table turning technique (La technique de la table tournante) was popular in Europe and was introduced to Vietnam in the 1920s. Initially, gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc, Cao Hoài Sang, Cao Quỳnh Diêu, etc... applied this technique as follows:

Several people sat around a small table (one leg of the table did not touch the ground). Both hands were placed face-down on the table (with the tip of one thumb contacting the little finger of another hand). Nearby is another table, displaying incense, lamps, tea, and fruits to solemnly worship the Divine. Everyone quietly meditated; when the invocation was activated, the table shook, and its leg tapped one stroke after

another. These strokes were counted accordingly with the letters in alphabetical order until the letter needed, the table would stop tapping. Putting these single letters together would form complete words, then prose sentences or verses... To answer a question, the table tapped once for no, and twice for yes or correct.

When operating table turning, all participants are awake and thus, it was difficult for their energy to reach the level of spiritual communication. Moreover, it took a long time and a lot of effort to receive a single sentence or idea. Later, the predecessors were ordered to switch to using the beaked basket.

3. CHẤP BÚT (SPIRITIC PEN HOLDING)

“Chấp bút (spiritic pen holding) is the technique in which the medium does not rely on the beaked basket, instead he/she writes or holds a pen. The pen may be a brush pen in the style of writing Chinese characters or a pencil in the style of writing national language.

It is essential that the medium be in a quiet place and maintain a calm mind. While writing, the medium is usually alert, as the divine spirit only enters the medium's hand. At that time, the medium's hand no longer follows the medium's will.”²⁹⁹

The pen may also be made of wood, about two decimeters long and larger than a thumb. One end is shaped like a lotus bud, while the other end is carved with a lotus flower (where there is

²⁹⁹ Huệ Lương in *Cao Đài Giáo Lý*, issue No. 76, page 25, published in 1972.

a hole for incense stick). The entire body of the pen is painted with gold lacquer.

Mr. Ngô Minh Chiêu, while working in Tân An province at the end of year 1919, along with some of his acquaintances, practiced holding spiritic pen to invoke spirits for prescriptions to cure people's illnesses.

4. ĐẠI NGỌC CỎ (THE BEAKED BASKET)

It is called đại ngọc cỏ (the beaked basket) to distinguish it from tiểu cỏ (the planchette)³⁰⁰. The planchette is a piece of thin heart-shaped board, with three balls underneath for easy motion when the pointed end is pointing to the alphabetic letters written on a paper sheet. The method of tiểu cỏ using a planchette (also called xây cỏ – the turning plank) lacks many conditions and the ritual is not solemn; hence, it can only invoke low-grade spirits. The Almighty forbids the use of this method.

The structure of đại ngọc cỏ (the beaked basket) includes a basket made of twenty-eight bamboo shoots (the bamboo shoots are chosen with the shoots facing East, because according to Taoism, the East is the source of life energy), covered on the outside with white (or yellow) cloth. The basket is assembled with a small wooden stick made of mulberry wood, about seven decimeters long, and the top carved with a phoenix (thus, 'phò cỏ' is also called 'phò loan'³⁰¹), above the phoenix head is a small hole for incense stick and below the phoenix head is a short pen-brush for writing. The entire assembly of a beaked basket forms the shape of the Seven Stars constellation (the Great Bear).

³⁰⁰ Vietnamese term: Tiểu Cờ; French term: planchette.

³⁰¹ Translator's note: 'Phò cỏ' literally means 'escorting the beaked basket'; 'phò loan', 'escorting the phoenix'.

The general director of an invocation session is the séance master. The invocation process is as follows: First, all attendants prostrate in front of the Divine Altar then divide into the male and female groups to stand along both sides of the worship hall. Next, the séance master performs special sacraments to ward off evils. Then, everyone moves to the center of the hall and kneels in attendance. The invocation body of Hiệp Thiên Đài (the House of Heavenly Alliance), including the séance master, the mediums, the scribes ... take their designated positions and chant the invocation prayer. When the spiritual energy begins to descend, they continue to chant the Thúc cơ prayer (Greeting prayer).

Holding the beaked basket are two mediums: one yang (active) and one yin (supportive).

In the early days of the Faith, there were many medium pairs, as listed below (the names of the active mediums come first):

Cao Quỳnh Cư – Phạm Công Tắc
 Trương Hữu Đức – Nguyễn Trung Hậu
 Trần Duy Nghĩa – Trương Văn Tràng
 Ca Minh Chương – Phạm Văn Tươi
 Phạm Tấn Đãi – Nguyễn Thiêng Kim
 Cao Hoài Sang – Cao Quỳnh Diêu

In the case of Mr. Phạm Công Tắc, he was initially an active medium, but he ceded his active role to Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư. Later, after Mr. Cao Thượng Phẩm passed away, Mr. Phạm Công Tắc was able to either perform mediumship alone or pair up with any other mediums.

When the sacred energy of the Divine descends, the medium has left his/her true spirit and is completely in a trance state... A person who acts as a reader reads the brush strokes lightly

written on the table by the medium. The reader (who already received sacred energy) sees those strokes luminously glowing as if they have phosphorescence. Hence, he/she can read each word clearly for another person to take notes and transcribe the holy message. Sometimes, the medium simultaneously writes and speaks, without the need of a reader.

Holding the beaked basket is a very mystic privilege; so, the mediums and the attendants must be completely pure, clean, and sincere. This is a blessing for Cao Dai followers and thus, it needs to be especially respected. Only those who are responsible for holding the beaked basket, and only when invocation is necessary, then it should be organized. Anyone who takes it lightly will get serious penalties.

The Supreme Being advised:

*The mediums who hold the beaked basket or spiritic pen serve as my commanders to spread the Way to the world; do not think automatic writing is a trivial matter... Hence, when holding the beaked basket, you must wait for my order and then carry it out.*³⁰²

³⁰² Excerpt from the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, the Holy See of Tây Ninh (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

APPENDIX IV.

RESEARCH ON THE MINH RELIGIOUS BRANCHES

1. MINH SƯ
2. MINH ĐƯỜNG
3. MINH LÝ
4. MINH THIỆN
5. MINH TÂN

The Minh religious branches that spread in Vietnam include Minh Sư, Minh Đường, Minh Lý, Minh Thiện, and Minh Tân. Because they are five branches in total, they are sometimes confused with Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo (the Five Branches of the Great Way), which are: Nhơn Đạo (the Way of Man), Thần Đạo (the Way of Deity), Thánh Đạo (the Way of Saint), Tiên Đạo (the Way of Immortal), and Phật Đạo (the Way of Buddha).

1. MINH SƯ

Minh Sư was established long ago, and honored Bồ Đề Đạt Ma (Bodhidharma)³⁰³ as its first Patriarch, even though he was not the founder of this religion. However, Minh Sư took the year of the coronation of Hoàng Đế (the Yellow Emperor) (2697 – 2597 BC) as its first religious year (probably to be aligned with the period when Nhiên Đăng Cổ Phật, Dipankara Ancient Buddha, founded Buddhism). Hence, the year 2000 corresponds to the Minh Sư year of 4698. Minh Sư adopts Buddha realm as its foundation.

Starting from the Fifth Patriarch Hoàng Nhẫn (Daman Hongren), Buddhism in China split into two branches: Thần Tú (Yuquan Shenxiu) established the Northern School (in the Luoyang, Chang'an, and Shandong region ...), and the Sixth Patriarch Huệ Năng (Huineng) preached the traditions of Southern School (in the Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi region ...). Southern Buddhism comprises many branches, among which is Nam Tông Phật Đường (Southern Buddhist Temple) commonly known as Minh Sư (Enlightened Master). After the epoch of the Sixth Patriarch, this religious branch was idle for seventy years. Then in the year 783, Mã Công Đạo Nhứt (Mazu Daoyi, 709 – 788) and Bạch Ngọc Cư Sĩ (Bai Yujusi, a lay Zen Master) both succeeded as the Seventh Patriarch. In the year 956, the Eighth Patriarch La Công Húy (La Gonghui) passed away in prison. Due

³⁰³ Translator's note: Bồ Đề Đạt Ma (Bodhidharma) was the twenty-eighth Zen Patriarch of India, who preached Zen traditions to China in the year 520).

to the persecution, Nam Tông Phật Đường (Southern Buddhist Temple) was suspended for seven hundred years. Under the Ming dynasty (in 1623), Mr. Huỳnh Công Đức Huy inherited the patriarchal mission to become the Nineth Patriarch ... Then in 1863 under the Qing dynasty, Đông Sơ Tổ Sư (the Fifteenth Patriarch) received the secret mandate of Y Đạo Tổ Sư to preach the religion to Vietnam. First, he built (Buddhist Temple) Quảng Tế Phật Đường in Hà Tiên district (which still exists today).

Mình Sư temples carry the suffix Phật Đường (Buddhist Temple) after the temple names; they worship Đức Vô Cực Từ Tôn (the Divine Mother) and Đức Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế (the Jade Emperor Supreme God), along with Buddhas and Immortals of the Three Ancient Religions. In front of the worship hall, ngọn Nhiên Đăng (the Dipankara Buddha lamp) at the center of vòng vô vi (Circle of the Void) shines constantly. Minh Sư disciples recite their own set of prayers such as Ngọc Hoàng Kinh, Địa Mẫu Chơn Kinh, Văn Đế and Võ Đế Cứu Kiếp Chơn Kinh, Bắc Đẩu Chơn Kinh, Cao Thượng Ngọc Hoàng Bồn Hạnh... (these prayers are received via automatic writing).

The practice of Minh Sư is very strict; all followers must observe full vegetarianism and complete abstinence. The cultivation path for male practitioners is divided into Tam Thừa (the Three Cycles) as follows:

- * Nhất Thừa (the First Cycle) consists of Nhất Bộ, Nhị Bộ, and Tam Bộ (the First, Second, and Third Grade, respectively).
- * Nhị Thừa (the Second Cycle) consists of four grades:
 - Thiên Ân
 - Chứng Ân, the practitioner's middle name is changed to Minh
 - Dẫn Ân, the practitioner's middle name is

changed to Xương

- Bảo Ân, the practitioner's middle name is changed to Vĩnh

* Tam Thừa (the Third Cycle) consists of two grades:

- Dẫn Hàng, ranked Lão Sư (Master), the practitioner's middle name is changed to Vận

- Thập Địa, ranked Đại Lão Sư (Grand Master), the practitioner's middle name is changed to Đạo

Lão Sư (Masters) and Đại Lão Sư (Grand Masters) jointly elect a worthy person among them to be Chưởng Môn (the Sect Leader), called Thái Lão Sư (Great Master). While the cultivation map for male practitioners has nine steps, the one for female disciples has only seven steps with no change in their initially middle names; the highest grade is also Thái (Great) as that for male practitioners, but the cultivation method for female is only up to the Bảo Ân grade. Both male and female followers wear black religious robes.

In Vietnam, the Minh Sư religious branch has three sects: Phổ Tế, Đức Tế, and Hoàng Tế. Phổ Tế sect is originated from Thanh Sơn Temple on mount La Phù Sơn (Hong Kong); Đức Tế sect is from Triều Nguyên Temple, also on mount La Phù Sơn; both were propagated from China to Vietnam in the nineteenth century. In 1863, after establishing the temple Quảng Tế Đường in Hà Tiên, the followers of Đức Tế sect went to Saigon to build the second temple named Quang Nam Đường. Both temples were built by (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Ngô Đạo Chương (Ngô Cẩm Tuyền), but he did not become Patriarch.

Some other temples belonging to Đức Tế sect are Khánh Nam Đường (Bình Thạnh district), Nam Nhã Đường (Cần Thơ province), Vận Bửu Đường (Gò Công province) ... Those belonging to Phổ Tế sect are Linh Quang Tự (Hóc Môn), Long Hoa Đường (Cai Lậy district), Phổ Hòa Đường (Mỹ Tho province) ... And those belonging to Hoàng Tế sect are Quan

Âm Đường (Thâm Nhiên, Long An province), Quan Âm Đường (Tân An town), Trọng Văn Điền (Bình Điền district) ... Altogether, there are more than fifty Minh Sư temples in Vietnam.

In the early days of founding Cao Dai, the Supreme Being selected many Minh Sư monks to become high-ranking dignitaries of Cao Dai Clergy, such as (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Trần Đạo Quang (Figure 38), (Grand Master) Đại Lão Sư Nguyễn Đạo Tương ... Besides, Mr. Ngô Minh Chiêu (Figure 66) often discussed the cultivation practice with the Minh Sư monks in Tân An province and in Ngọc Hoàng Temple (Saigon). The mother of Mr. Tư Ngung (who was the medium and personal attendant of Mr. Ngô) had already been a nun at Quang Nam Phật Đường even before her son, Mr. Tư Ngung (Figure 12), became a medium.

2. MINH ĐƯỜNG

The Minh Sư religious branch in China comprised many former courtiers of the Ming dynasty and thus, sometimes it was scapegoated as ‘Phản Thanh phục Minh’³⁰⁴. Coming to Vietnam this slogan became ‘Bãi Pháp phục Nam’³⁰⁵. To avoid such misunderstanding, a Minh Sư sect changed its name to Minh Đường. The Minh Đường also used the same prayers, scriptures, practice rules, and titles as the Minh Sư ... with no difference but the name.

Before the year 1926, Vĩnh Nguyên Temple (Cần Giuộc district) (Figure 89) belonged to Minh Đường branch. (Great Master) Thái Lão Sư Lê Đạo Long (Figure 34) passed it on to

³⁰⁴ Translator’s note: ‘Phản Thanh phục Minh’ literally means ‘Resist the Qing dynasty to restore the Ming dynasty’.

³⁰⁵ Translator’s note: ‘Bãi Pháp phục Nam’ literally means ‘Rid the French to restore the South (Vietnam)’.

his son, Mr. Lê Văn Lịch (Figure 33), who was then at the rank of Dẫn Ân.³⁰⁶

The Minh Đường practice is also like the Minh Sư, involving the four daily meditation sessions. Thus, in early 1926 Cao Dai Supreme God ordered the following gentlemen Cao Quỳnh Cư (Figure 70), Phạm Công Tắc (Figure 72), and Lê Văn Trung (Figure 27):

*You should go down to Minh Đường Temple with **Lịch** to further learn the spiritual way ... **Lịch**, teach them...*

After Vĩnh Nguyên Temple joined Cao Dai, Minh Đường religious branch is now rarely heard of.

3. MINH LÝ

To introduce Minh Lý religious branch (Figure 97), it would be best to quote the original article of the Abbot of Tam Tông Miếu as follows:

“Minh Lý is also a branch of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation.

The founding history of Minh Lý religion is recorded in the ‘Sám Hối’ (‘Repentance’) scripture of the religion. Because it was founded during the French colonial period, it is not possible to clearly state the method of founding the religion by ‘huyền cơ’ (‘mystic psychography’).

Before the Divine gave the name Minh Lý to this religion, that is, before the religion was officially

³⁰⁶ In the book *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, year 1965, volume 1, page 29 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui, and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015), there is a holy message as follows: “**Lịch**, summon all my Minh Đường disciples to come here and listen to Me”. (Please refer to Chapter 2 Section III and Appendix II for further details on Vĩnh Nguyên Temple).

founded, in 1922 and 1923 there were already many people who sympathized with the religion, thanks to the nurturing of the Immortals by means of mystic psychography.

Minh Lý religion was established not only in the year of Tý (Mouse), but also the month, day, and hour were all Tý:

Year: Giáp Tý (1924)

Month: Bính Tý (the 11th lunar month, Winter Solstice)

Day: Bính Tý

Hour: Mậu Tý, 11 p.m., beginning of the Bính Tý day

To have a place for worshipping and practicing the religion, in 1927 Minh Lý followers built the first temple named Tam Tông Miếu in ‘Bàn Cờ hamlet’³⁰⁷. The temple underwent two repairs and renovations in 1941 and 1957.

Inside the Tam Tông Miếu temple, the worship is arranged as follows:

³⁰⁷ Now it is at 82 Cao Thắng street, Ward 4, District 3, Hồ Chí Minh city.

With the land donation by Mr. Trần Kim Ký, and financial support from Ms. Ba Ngõ, Ms. Huỳnh Thị Ngôn... the construction of Tam Tông Miếu temple began. The ceremony of laying the first stone was held on August 10, 1926, and completed on February 2, 1927. (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS: 10°46’14” N; 106°40’53” E). Even before the construction, on the 20th day of the 11th month of Ất Sửu year (January 3, 1926) the Divine Mother Đức Điều Trì Kim Mẫu bestowed the temple name as Tam Tông Miếu.

BỮU ĐIỆN (the WORSHIP HALL)

Lịch Đại

Địa Mẫu

Tổ Tiên

Từ Tôn

Thanh Phước

Thập Điện

Chánh Thần

Minh Vương

Long Thần Hộ Pháp

Môn Quan Thổ Địa

The altar in BỮU ĐIỆN (the WORSHIP HALL)
has five levels, listed top-down as:

The 1st level: Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu (The Divine Mother)

The 2nd level: Hồng Quân Lão Tổ (The Great Eternal Patriarch)

Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế (The Jade Emperor Supreme God)

} *Tam Cực* (the Trinity, the
Three Personalized Gods)

The 3rd level: Tam Giáo Tổ Sư (The Three Religions's Patriarchs)

The 4th level: Tứ Đại Bồ Tát (The Four Great Bodhisattvas)

The 5th level: Ngũ Đẩu Tinh Quân (the Five Star Gods)

As aforementioned, Minh Lý is a branch of the Great Way for the Third Universal Salvation. Hence, Cao Dai and Minh Lý share the same basic doctrine and ultimate goals. But due to the differences in origination and mission, they practice their religion according to their own means.

FACILITY AND ORGANIZATION:

- (The Holy Land) **Thánh Sở Tam Tông Miếu**: operated by Ban Quản Trị (Board of Directors) and is the site for 'Ngoại Giáo Công Truyền' (the Exotericism or Public Propagation).

- (The Pure Land) **Tịnh Đường Bát Nhã Long Hải**: operated by Ban Giám Đạo (Board of Cultivation)

Supervisors) and is the site for ‘Nội Giáo Tâm Truyền’ (the Esotericism or Inner Cultivation).

The Minh Lý Holy Church is managed by ‘Hội Đồng Hội Thánh’ (the Holy Church Council) divided into

- a. Vertical branch (đạo thống – the religious hierarchy) with eight ranks of dignitaries (Bát chánh – the Noble Eight), belonging to ngành đạo đức (the virtuous branch).
- b. Horizontal branch (chính thống – the administrative hierarchy) with nine departments, belonging to Hành Chánh Đạo (the religious administration).

Devotional uniforms: black.”

[end of excerption]

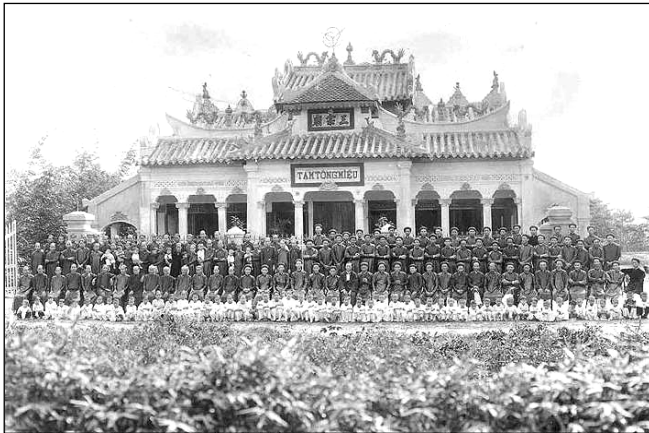


Figure 97: All Minh Lý followers in front of Tam Tông Miếu in 1930 (The temple was in its original structure, which is quite different from the present one).

Additional notes:

* Initially, Mr. Âu Kiệt Lâm (1896 – 1941) and some friends purchased books from France to study nhân điện (human magnetism). Then they developed faith in the Divine and learned to invoke using ‘huyền cơ’ (‘mystic psychography’). Gradually they received guidance from the Divine directing them into the Way. The six predecessors of Minh Lý are

- Âu Kiệt Lâm (religious name Minh Chánh)
- Nguyễn Văn Xung (Minh Giáo) (1891 – 1957)
- Nguyễn Văn Đề (Minh Đạo) (1893 (?) – 1925)
- Lê Văn Ngọc (Minh Truyền) (1887 – 1965)
- Nguyễn Văn Miết (Minh Thiện) (1897 – 1972)
- Võ Văn Thạnh (Minh Trục) (1895 – 1976)

* Before constructing the temple Tam Tông Miếu, Minh Lý followers temporarily borrowed Linh Sơn Temple (on Douaumont street, now Cô Giang street) as a place to recite Sám Hối kinh (the Repentance prayer) on the 14th and 30th days of each lunar month (as the full-moon and the new-moon days were reserved for the temple owner) during the period from September 1925 through February 1927. The preceptor of Linh Sơn Temple at that time was (Master) Sư Thiện Chiếu (birth name Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1898 – 1974) was willing to lend the temple.

4. MINH THIỆN

In the early twentieth century, a group of intellectuals and scholars in Thủ Dầu Một frequently gathered for invocation. The medium at that time was Mr. Nguyễn Văn Trọng, who used the beaked basket. He was illiterate, but while performing the mediumship he wrote in Sino-Vietnamese characters very clearly and miraculously. By 1917, the Minh Thiện branch was formed, including gentlemen Trần Phát Đạt (Figure 52), Trần Hiến Vinh (Figure 53), Lê Văn Hôn, Trần Duy Khánh... The place of practice was often called Đàn Minh Thiện (Minh Thiện Invocation Site); they worshipped Đức Quan Thánh (the Saintly Emperor)³⁰⁸ and recited Minh Thánh prayer in the temple named Thanh An Temple.³⁰⁹

In 1919 Mr. Ngô Văn Chiêu came to this temple to pray for his mother's medicinal prescription. Mr. Trần Hiến Vinh recalled:

“On that day, Mr. Ngô and Mr. Phủ Kim came to attend the invocation. Mr. Kim knelt inside while Mr. Ngô knelt in the outer corner. When Đức Quan Thánh (the Saintly Emperor) descended, He immediately called Mr. Ngô in and gave him a quatrain...”³¹⁰

Around 1922, Mr. Phan Văn Tý (Figure 21) brought a beaked basket from Đàn Minh Thiện to his house, which was located near Mr. Cao Quỳnh Cư's house (on Bourdais street). Later, following the holy order in preparation for the ceremony of Diêu Trì Banquet in Ất Sửu year (1926), the predecessors of 'Branch Two' borrowed the beaked basket from Mr. Phan Tý and asked him to guide them in practicing the mediumship.

³⁰⁸ Kuan-Ti, the Saintly Emperor and the deified hero of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient China.

³⁰⁹ This temple was on Hùng Vương street, Thủ Dầu Một town. Please refer to Appendix II for further details on Thanh An Temple.

³¹⁰ Excerpt from the book *Lịch Sử Quan Phủ Ngô Minh Chiêu*, 1962, page 22.

The invocation prayer starting with “Chốn Bồng Lai...” was also borrowed from the Minh Thiện branch. Later, it was replaced by the prayer starting with “Trời còn...”. The former prayer, starting with “Chốn Bồng Lai...”, comprises thirty-eight verses in total, and here is an excerpt:

*“Chốn Bồng Lai là nơi thanh tịnh,
 Thú triều ưa trắng cảnh nước ngồi,
 Gió thanh quét sạch bụi đời,
 Tĩnh trong sơn thủy, cuộc ngoài Càn Khôn.
 Lặn qua khỏi chốn hầu môn,
 Công danh biệt ngoại, cảm tôn như nhàn.
 Gậy lê dò chốn Quảng Hàn,
 Dấu Kiều còn tạc Minh Hoàng thuở xưa.
 Hội Đào một tiệc say sưa,
 Mê man chẳng thấm ngàn thừa Xuân Thu.
 Trường sanh có thuốc nhiệm màu,
 Đạo vàng sẵn nấu một bầu đơn sa.
 Nghêu ngao vui thú yên hà,
 Sớm vào biển Thánh, tối ra non Thần,
 Trải qua một cuộc phong vân,
 Tay nâng bầu cúc, chơn lần đóa mây...”*

Presently, Thanh An Temple in Thủ Dầu Một is still bustling with visitors but has long since closed its invocation activities.

5. MINH TÂN

Mr. Lê Minh Khá (1868 – 1946) (Figure 94) was a native of An Phú village, Chợ Lớn province, a former Village Chief of Vĩnh Hội; he married Ms. Nguyễn Ngọc Tâm (1876 – 1937)³¹¹.

Around 1917, Mr. Lê Minh Khá was seriously ill. He went to Đàn Minh Thiện (in Thủ Dầu Một) and was given by the Immortal a medicinal prescription to cure his illness. Then in 1920, due to a new illness, he returned to Đàn Minh Thiện to ask for treatment again. This time, he was cured by Đức Quan Thánh Đế Quân (the Saintly Emperor) and was advised to practice self-cultivation. Following the holy order, that year Mr. Lê Minh Khá established at his private home (236 quai de la Marne – now Bến Vân Đồn) an altar to worship the Three Religious Founders, along with the Buddhas and Immortals.

The following year, the Divine ordered the establishment of Cao Thâm Đàn (Cao Thâm Invocation Site) on rubber plantation land (Gia Lộc commune, Trảng Bàng district), and assigned his two sons Lê Minh Sanh and Lê Văn Trân to safeguard it.

In 1922, the Almighty ordered Mr. Lê Minh Khá to establish Cao Minh Đàn (Cao Minh Invocation Site) at his home, in which the worship method was much more solemn: on the upper level of the altar was vòng Thái Cực với ngọn linh đăng (the Infinity Circle with the sacred lamp), while the lower level was to worship Buddhas and Immortals. Next, the Almighty instructed him to buy a plot of six hundred and one squared meters of land (currently at 221 Bến Vân Đồn) and move Cao Thâm Đàn (Cao Thâm Invocation Site) from Trảng Bàng to that location, establishing Cao Tân Đàn (Cao Tân Invocation Site) (which is adjacent to the right side of the current Minh Tân). The religious mechanism at that place proceeded very quickly. In

³¹¹ Wedding in 1894, the couple had five children: Lê Ngọc Ý (1895 – 1941), Lê Văn Vị (1898 – 1945), Lê Ngọc Trinh (1902 – 1941), Lê Minh Sanh (1906 – 1988), and Lê Văn Trân (1908 – 1966). Among them, Miss Lê Ngọc Trinh practiced self-cultivation since childhood and was one of the predecessors of Nữ Chung Hòa Phái (the United Feminine Faction).

1925, the Divine ordered the merging of Cao Minh and Cao Tân into Minh Tân Đàn (Minh Tân Invocation Site).

On the altar, top-down order, there were the tablets for: Điều Trì Kim Mẫu (the Divine Mother), Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế (the Jade Emperor Supreme God), Immortals and Buddhas... There was a separate altar for Đức Lê Sơn Thánh Mẫu. All were temporarily placed at Cao Tân Đàn (Cao Tân Invocation Site). By then Cao Minh Đàn (Cao Minh Invocation Site) became the private place of worship for Mr. Lê Minh Khá's family.

In 1928, on the lot at 221 Bến Vân Đồn, he started building the new temple, which was inaugurated in 1930. The Divine bestowed it the name Tam Giáo Điện Minh Tân. (By then, the main hall had an additional altar to worship Đức Tề Thiên Đại Thánh (the Monkey Saint). (The coordinates according to the global positioning system GPS: 10°45'36" N; 106°41'48" E). Cao Tân Đàn (Cao Tân Invocation Site) was dissolved and all the worship tablets were transferred to Minh Tân. After the establishment of these official invocation sites mentioned above, an invocation body was formed for the Divine to teach the cultivation practice and bestow many miracles on local believers.

Prior to the Grand Ceremony of Inauguration of the Great Way, on the 26th day of the 9th month of Bính Dần year (November 1, 1926), His Holiness Đức Thái Thượng Đạo Quân (the Great Taoist Patriarch) descended in the séance at Minh Tân Đàn (Minh Tân Invocation Site) and gave order to all male and female followers of Minh Tân to join Cao Dai.³¹² The local followers there strictly followed the holy order. Thus, on the 6th day of the 10th month of Bính Dần year, all male and female followers of Minh Tân submitted the petition to join Cao Dai. From then on, Minh Tân completely became a Cao Dai Holy House.

³¹² *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, Tây Ninh Holy See, 1928, page 46 (i.e., *Collection of Selected Cao Dai Holy Messages*, trans. Hum Bui and Hong Bui, CreateSpace, 2015).

Mr. Lê Minh Khá passed away on the full-moon day of the 1st month of Bính Tuất year (1946) at the age of seventy-nine and was buried in his homeland in Thủ Đức district, near the soccer field.

APPENDIX V.
LIST OF THE 245 SIGNATURES
ATTACHED TO THE DOCUMENT
OF DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

Danh sách 244 vị Môn đệ nam - nữ của Đ
Cao Đài Thượng Đế tham dự buổi họp tại nhà
ông NGUYỄN VĂN TƯỜNG, địa chỉ Gallieni, Saigon
ngày 29-9-1926. Tổng số tín đồ là 244-ĐẠI
LỄ, ở đây LỄ TOL. Phái Lạc Môn Kỳ (trong tổng
số 244 vị, hiện diện)

A photograph (consisting of eleven pages) of the names and signatures of two hundred and forty-five people present in Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tường's home to prepare for the Declaration of the Faith.

- 1 Lâm. thi. Thanh 林正清記
- 2 Nguyễn. thi. Miếu 16th (Quay)
- 3 Trần. thi. - Lưu. M^{me} Caoquyết Diêu
- 4 Trần. thi. Thi. Thi
- 5 Vương. thi. Miếu 16th
- 6 Trần. thi. Chính 正
- 7 Nguyễn. thi. Thanh 正清
- 8 Trần. thi. Vương 王
- 9 Nguyễn. thi. Hương 香
- 10 Nguyễn. thi. Chính M^{me} Giảng chính
- 11 Đỗ. thi. Thi. Thi
- 12 Võ. thi. Duy Duy
- 13 Hằng. thi. Đỗ. thi. Thi
- 14 Vương. thi. Thi

- 15 Lê-thị Tung $\frac{+}{2}$
- 16 Nguyễn-thị Văn $\frac{1}{11}$
- 17 Lê-thị-Bước $\frac{1}{11}$
- 18 Phạm-thị Diệu $\frac{1}{11}$
- 19 Đặng-thị-Kiều $\frac{1}{11}$
- 20 Trường-thị-Tròn $\frac{1}{11}$
- 21 Nguyễn-thị-Thơm $\frac{1}{11}$
- 22 Nguyễn-thị-Sanh $\frac{1}{11}$
- 23 Nguyễn-thị-Bình $\frac{1}{11}$
- 24 Nguyễn-thị-Thắm $\frac{1}{11}$
- 25 Trần-thị-Chiêu $\frac{1}{11}$
- 26 Trần-thị-Trong $\frac{1}{11}$
- 27 Trường-thị-Nham $\frac{1}{11}$
- 28 Lê-thị-Huân —
- 29 Võ-thị-Quỳnh $\frac{1}{11}$
- 30 Lê-thị-Chinh $\frac{1}{11}$
- 31 Nguyễn-thị-Huân

32	Chí thi Sĩ
33	Nguyễn thi Lã Lữ
34	Nguyễn thi Hai Nhi
35	Cao thi Bửu Du
36	Tham. hà Cẩm Cầm
37	Tham. hân Thanh. Thanh
38	Nguyễn thi Nhung i. Nhung
39	Trần thi Mỹ Huệ
40	Nguyễn thi Tiên *
41	Nguyễn thi Diễm *
42	Cao thi Diễm
43	Nguyễn thi Bả Ba
44	Cao thi Ba i. Ba
45	Đặng thi Ngân *
46	Nguyễn thi Diễm i. Diễm
47	Võ thi Ngọc i. Ngọc
48	Nguyễn thi Thanh i. Thanh
49	Trần thi i. Trần
50	Trần thi i. Trần
51	Ngô thi i. Ngô

49	bí	Hà văn Chuẩn	Hj	
50	bí	Lê văn Trung		Thiam
51	bí	Lê văn Lịch	Thiam	
52		Trương quang Thy	Thiam	
53		Lê bá Trang	Thiam	
54		Nguyễn ngọc Thô	Thiam	
55		Nguyễn văn Trường		Kg
56		Đhe vi - huyên - san - Min	Thiam	
57		Kim Tôn Nguyễn phai dat		Thiam
58		Khổng - huyên - Ngô tiêng - Văn	Thiam	
59		Nguyễn văn Hình	Thiam	
60		Lâm Quang Bình	Thiam	
61		Trương văn Thung		張文戎 記
62		Đoàn văn Đan	Thiam	
63		Thuyênh văn Giỏi	Thiam	
64		Lê văn Giảng	Thiam	
65		Nguyễn văn Trường	Thiam	
66		Nguyễn văn Bay	Thiam	
67		Nguyễn văn Thạc	Thiam	
68		Trương hien Đức	Thiam	
69		Bao Quynh Cu	Thiam	
70		Phạm công Tắc	Thiam	
71		Cao hoài Đăng	Thiam	

73	Cao Quỳnh Diêu	Kiên	
73	Trần Duy Nghĩa	Định	
74	Trương Văn Giảng		Grang
75	Nguyễn Trung Quát	Đuẩn	
76	Hồ Văn Đình		Ry
77	Hoàng Đình Phú	Định	
78	Nguyễn Văn Từ		Ưn
79	Trần Văn Hoàng	Hoàng	Th
80	Ngô Thanh Văn		
81	Nguyễn Văn Công	Đức	
82	Nguyễn Văn Dân		Ph
83	Nguyễn Thành Đăng	Đ	
84	Đoàn Văn Đế		
85	Cao Quỳnh Hân	Đ	
86	Ngô Văn Hữu		M
87	Hồ Văn Ngọc	Ng	
88	Trần Văn Từ		
89	Ngô Văn Đế	Đ	Ng
90	Phạm Văn Hiến		Đ
91	Ngô Đình Long	Ng	
92	Phí Văn Hưng		thung
93	Trịnh Văn Thành	Th	

94	Hồ Quang Chấn		<u>Lô Huit</u>
95	Tham van Thi	<u>Phu</u>	
96	Đo van Thinh		<u>Thuy</u>
97	Ng. Kim Lot	<u>Col</u>	
98	Phu Kim Hoi		<u>Phu</u>
99	Ng. van Hoa	<u>Phu</u>	
100	Vo van Hoang		<u>Phu</u>
101	Hoang van Mai	<u>Phu</u>	<u>Phu</u>
102	Phu phong Cao		<u>Phu</u>
103	Le van Hoa	<u>Phu</u>	
104	Ng. van Dien		<u>Phu</u>
105	Phu van Pham	<u>Phu</u>	
106	Le quan Gi		<u>Phu</u>
107	Phu van Kha	<u>Phu</u>	
108	Phu van Hung		<u>Phu</u>
109	Phu van Le	<u>Phu</u>	<u>Phu</u>
110	Phu van Loi		<u>Phu</u>
111	Phu van Dong	<u>Phu</u>	
112	Le van Qui	<u>Phu</u>	<u>Phu</u>
113	Ng. van Hien	<u>Phu</u>	
114	Phu van Pham		<u>Phu</u>
115	Ng. Thung Kim	<u>Phu</u>	<u>Phu</u>
116	Le Thien Phuc		<u>Phu</u>
117	Ng. v. Phan		<u>Phu</u>

118	Lê thế Vinh	thế Vinh	
119	Hop. văn Mạnh		none
120	Trần văn Dân	thanh	
121	Phan văn Di		trần
122	Nguyễn. Ng. văn Đức	Đức	
123	Trình văn Thành		trần
124	Trần văn Vàng	Vàng	
125	Trần văn Mầu		trần
126	Vân văn Bàng	Bàng	
127	Tân văn Lúa		Lúa
128	Trình văn Hy	Hy	
129	Trần văn Văn	Mai	trần
130	Nguyễn văn Lưu	Lưu	
131	Phan văn Long		trần
132	Lê văn Thước	thước	
133	Trần văn Hy		trần
134	Hop. văn Hoàng	Hoàng	
135	Ng. văn Khai		trần
136	Ng. văn Võ	trần	
137	Hop. v. Dung		trần
138	Hop. v. Trút	trần	trần
139	Nguyễn v. Xóm		trần
140	Trần v. Phát	trần	

141. Lê v. Chao 雜記
142. Ng. v. Trường 12/4
143. Lê v. Vang 詩
144. Phan v. Giảng 詩 in: quếng Kỵ
145. Ng. v. Đông. v.illage Bưởi Lược Đông Gocong 12/10/1911
146. Phạm chu. My v.illage Núi Hư 3 Gocong 12/10/1911
147. Phan v. Tron
148. Trương v. Miên
149. Trương v. Khaing
150. Lê v. Fân
151. Lê v. Sai
152. Lê v. Triêu
153. Võ v. Hoàng
154. Cao Quỳnh 16/10
155. Ng. v. Tru 10/10/1911
 Phụng dạy dân tại vao huy
 theo (huy) ngày 3.10.1911 và cho anh Truong hay.
156. Cao Quỳnh Đức 10/10/1911

156	10-hu. Nhan	
7	Trần v. Chu	
8	Nguyễn. Ngọc. Cường	Nguyễn. Ngọc. Cường
9	Phạm. Văn. Tuấn	
160	Lê. Văn. Sơn	
1	Nguyễn. Văn. Lân	
2	Ngô. Văn. Thìn	
3	Cao. Minh. Cường	
4	Phạm. Văn. Bích	
5	Đoàn. Ngọc. Chi	
6	Trương. Văn. Văn	
7	Nguyễn. V. Hùng	
8	Nguyễn. Văn. Thông	
9	Võ. V. Kinh	
170	Phạm. Văn. Dài	
1	Nguyễn. Văn. Văn	
2	Hồ. Văn. Dân	
3	Huy. Văn. Kim. Chi	
4	Nguyễn. Văn. Thiên	
5	Phạm. Văn. Thông	
6	Phạm. Văn. Thông	
7	Ngô. Ngọc. An	
8	Đoàn. Văn. Hải	
9	Hồ. Văn. Hải	
180	Nguyễn. V. Nghi. Giáp	
1	Nguyễn. Văn. Đức	

- 184 Nguyễn-tông-Trúc 李忠
 3 Nguyễn-văn-Ca 李加
 4 Nguyễn-văn-Chức 李職
 5 Huỳnh-trung-Dĩ 黃中
 6 Huỳnh-trung-Nguyên 黃中
 7 Trần-văn-Dang 陳文
 8 Nguyễn-văn-Nguyên 李元
 9 Nguyễn-v. Nguyễn 李元
 190 Phạm-văn-Cổ 潘文
 1 Nguyễn-văn-Cổ 李元
 2 Ca-phước 李福
 3 Phạm-công-Sanh 潘公
 4 Trần-văn-Nhà 陳文
 5 Hà-văn-Nguyên 何文
 6 Cổ-văn-Lôi 古文
 7 Bùi-quang-Thà 裴光
 8 Trương-v. Tâm 張文
 9 Phạm-v. Hoàng 潘文
 200 Nguyễn-v. Chấn 李振
 1 Ca-văn-Nai 李文
 2 Võ-thành-Nai 武成
 3 Võ-văn-Lịch 武文
 4 Phạm-v. Nhân 潘文
 5 Nguyễn-v. Hân 李元
 6 Trình-v. Hoa 程文
 7 Trần-quang-Liên 陳光

208	Hà Văn - Bỉnh	手記
9	Bùi Văn Ngai	手記
210	Đặng Văn Hoa	手記
1	Trần Văn Thanh	手記
2	Nguyễn Văn Công	手記
3	Võ Văn To	手記
4	Hà Văn Hỷ	手記
5	Nguyễn Văn Hối	手記
6	Lê Văn Hòa	手記
7	Nguyễn Văn Chính	手記
8	Trần Văn Xuân	手記
9	Đặng Văn Hoài	手記
220	Phạm Văn Nhung	手記
1	Nguyễn Văn X	手記
2	Nguyễn Văn Xuân	手記
3	Võ Văn Cẩn	手記
4	Trần Văn Hối	手記
5	Trần Văn Chánh	手記
6	Nguyễn Văn Cảnh	手記
7	Hà Văn Công	手記
8	Lê Văn Ngọc	手記
9	Nguyễn Văn Huệ	手記
230	Đặng Văn Đĩa	手記
1	Lê Văn Hành	手記
2	Lê Văn Sơn	手記
3	Võ Văn Lữ	手記
4	Võ Văn Quý	手記
5	Nguyễn Văn Huệ	手記
6	Phạm Văn Chơ	手記
7	Đặng Văn Côn	手記
8	Trần Văn Mễ	手記
9	Nguyễn Văn Hùng	手記
240	Nguyễn Văn Bạch	手記
1	Nguyễn Văn Phú	手記
2	Nguyễn Văn Phú	手記

PHÒNG ANH BÀN SÀO
SAIGON, ngày 18-05-1955
Trần Văn T. QUANG-TAM

APPENDIX VI.

ABOUT AUTHOR HUỆ NHÃN

1. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY
2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FROM AUTHOR HUỆ NHÃN
3. REFERENCE BOOK SECTION

1. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY



Mr. Huệ Nhân (secular name Võ Thành Châu) was born into a devoted Cao Dai family. His father, Mr. Võ Thành Nhơn (religious name Chí Hùng) (1918 – 2004), attained the celestial title Trường Sinh Chơn Thánh. And his mother, Ms. Trần Thị Nhân (religious name Thanh Hà) (1919 – 1982), attained the celestial title Nguyệt Quang Tiên Nương. His maternal grandmother, Ms. Phan Thị Thiêm (1898 – 1964), was a Chiêu Minh disciple who attained the celestial title Diệu Hạnh Tiên Nương.

At the age of eighteen, Mr. Huệ Nhân joined Cao Dai and from then on, he has actively engaged in religious practice at Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo (the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way). He completed all the training courses on Cao Dai Teaching at the Institute, right in its early days, and participated in the operations of Thanh Niên Vụ (the Youth Department) as well as Văn Hóa Vụ (the Culture Department) of the Institute.

He has traveled on many long journeys to the Cao Dai Holy Churches, especially those in remote countryside of South Vietnam, where he met fellow believers who shared their steadfast faith in Cao Dai ... These pilgrimages inspired him to dedicate countless hours in researching on the history of Cao Dai, taking the opportunities to return to those sites and reconnecting with beloved fellows to collect historical data and documents. He sincerely acknowledged them in his books. (Please refer to the documents attached in this section).

In terms of secular achievements, Mr. Huệ Nhân attended Pétrus-Trương Vĩnh Ký High School, then Cao Đăng Công Chánh (Ecole Supérieure des Travaux Publics - College of Civil Engineering), presently Trung tâm Kỹ thuật Phú Thọ (Phú Thọ

Engineering Center). After graduating, he worked for Công Ty Cấp Nước (the Water Supply Company) until the age of forty-five when he retired from work to fully focus on religious practice.

Currently in his seventies, Mr. Huệ Nhân is Phó Tổng Thư Ký Cơ Quan (Associate General Secretary of the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way). He, along with his wife and the two children, lives a modest life, aiming to fulfill religious and secular responsibilities.

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FROM AUTHOR HUỆ NHÃN

In the process of searching for historical documents to write this book on History of Cao Dai Faith, besides the assistance from colleagues at Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo (the Institute for the Teaching of the Great Way), we have received a lot of enthusiastic support from fellow practitioners near and far. When contacted, they provided many documents, images, handwritten notes, and recounted stories witnessed by themselves... which are extremely necessary for the compilation.

Hereby, we would like to express our sincere thanks = in chronological order of contact = to them.³¹³

Senior Brother Đạo Trường **Thiên Giác Tinh** (Thánh Tịnh Minh Kiến Đài); Senior Brothers Đạo Trường **Khai Ngộ** and **Tường Định** (Abbots of Tam Tông Miếu - Minh Lý Thánh Hội); Archbishop Phối Sư **Ngọc Tấn Thanh** (the Holy See of Tây Ninh); the Venerable Monk Đại Đức **Thích Thiện Phước** (Abbot of Giác Hải Pagoda); Tỳ Kheo **Thích Chơn Huệ** (Abbot of Thiên Lâm Pagoda - Gò Kén, Tây Ninh); the two eldest brothers Huynh trưởng **Bạch Hổ** and **Liên Hoa** (Đàm Thi) (Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Từ Thị Hai** (Abbot of Chiêu Minh Tổ Đình-Cần Thơ); Mr. **Phan Thông Tư** (the owner of Hiệp Minh Pagoda Cái Khế, Cần Thơ); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Nguyễn Thị Sen** (Abbot of Linh Quang Pagoda - Hóc Môn); Mr. Thừa Sứ **Lê Quang Tấn** (The Holy See of Tây Ninh); Ms. **Phạm Hồ Cầm** (second daughter of the Dharma Protector Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Lê**

³¹³ Note from author Huệ Nhãn: The titles of the listed dignitaries were recorded at the time we contacted them. By the time this book is published, many of these titles may have changed and were not updated.

Thị Nhiều (eldest daughter of Sir Cardinal Đầu Sư Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt - Vĩnh Nguyên Pagoda); Senior Brother Đạo Trưởng **Bạch Lương Ngọc** (Abbot of Vĩnh Nguyên Pagoda); Mr. **Ngô Văn Tinh** (second son of Sir Ngô Minh Chiêu); Brother Đạo Huynh **Ngô Mạnh Thường** (grandson of Sir Ngô); Mr. and Mrs. **Nguyễn Ngọc Khiết** (great-grandchildren of Sir Ngô); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Phạm Thị Trung** (Phú Hữu Holy Temple); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Nguyễn Hương Hương** (eldest daughter of Sir Cardinal Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh); Ms. **Nguyễn Thị Huôn** and Miss **Vương Thị Thu Vân** (daughter-in-law and granddaughter of Sir Vương Quan Kỳ); Lady Cardinal Nữ Đầu Sư **Hương Sang** (Hội Thánh Minh Chơn Đạo); Acting Lady Cardinal Quyền Nữ Đầu Sư **Hương Nguyệt** (second daughter of Sir Nguyễn Ngọc Tương), Eldest Brother Huynh Trưởng Khai Pháp **Nguyễn Đông Pháp** and Eldest Brother Huynh Trưởng Khai Thế **Nguyễn Văn Lãnh** (Hội Thánh Ban Chỉnh Đạo); Brother Đạo Huynh **Lê Minh Trứ** (eldest son of Sir Lê Minh Huân) along with the two Sisters Đạo Tỷ **Trần Thị Hồng** and **Trần Thị Nhan** (Chiếu Minh Đàn Phú Thọ); the Grand Taoist Master Đại Lão Sư **Nguyễn Đạo Ngưỡng** (Quan Âm Đường - Tân An); Lady Bishop Nữ Giáo Sư **Hương Chính** (Bà Rịa Holy House); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Hồng Huệ** và Brother **Lê Minh Nghĩa** (Minh Tân Pagoda); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Nguyễn Thị Hồng** (eldest daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phùng - Nam Thành Holy House); Ms. **Trần Ngọc Anh** (eldest daughter of Mr. Trần Hiền Vinh - Thanh An Pagoda); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Lâm Thị Thiệt** (Abbot of Cao Đài Hội Thánh - Phú Quốc); Ms. **Nguyễn Thị Sêu** (maternal granddaughter of Sir Bảo Đạo Ca Minh Chương); Ms. **Diệu Liên** (maternal granddaughter of Sir Nguyễn Văn Tường); Sister Đạo Tỷ **Nguyễn Thị Nguyên** (youngest daughter-in-law of Mr. Ngô Văn Điều); Eldest Brother Huynh trưởng Cãi Trạng **Lê Minh Khuyên** (The Holy See of Tây Ninh); Ms. **Lâm Thị Nền** (daughter-in-law of Sir Cao Quỳnh Điều); Ms. **Nguyễn Thị**

Chi and Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Bá** (grandchildren of the Legit Cardinal of Taoist Faction Thượng Chương Pháp Nguyễn Văn Tương); Ms. **Nguyễn Thị Ba** (Dương Đông - Phú Quốc); Taoist Master Lão Sư **Trần Văn Như** (Abbot of Quang Nam Đường); Eldest Brother Huynh Trưởng **Lê Văn Thoại** (Hữu Phan Quân – The Hole See of Tây Ninh); Ms. **Trương Thị Nhạn** (eldest daughter of Sir Tiếp Pháp Trương Văn Trảng); the two Sisters Đạo Tỷ **Cao Ngọc Thanh** and **Cao Thị Ngọc Lang** (eldest and second daughters of the Secretary of the Temporal Affairs Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang); Mr. **Lê Văn Triệu** (second son of Sir Lê Văn Giảng); Lady Priest Nữ Giáo Hữu **Hương Bia** (Phú Nhuận Holy House); Hiền Tài **Nguyễn Văn Hồng** (The Holy See of Tây Ninh); Brother Đạo Huynh **Nguyễn Văn Đồ** (Tam Kỳ Nguyên Nguyên Bản Bản, Tân An); Brother Đạo Huynh **Trần Văn Thoại** (Tứ Ván Holy House); the Most Venerable Monk Hòa Thượng **Thích Thiện Tín** (disciple of the Most Venerable Monk Hòa Thượng Thiện Minh - Phật Quang Pagoda, Bến Tre); Ms. **Trương Phụng Hảo** (the Female People's Artist nữ Nghệ sĩ Nhân dân **Phùng Há**); Mr. **Nguyễn Văn Thơ** (Mười Thơ)(Hiệp Phước, Nhà Bè); Bishop Giáo Sư **Ngọc Thêu Thanh** (Trường Bình Holy House - Ban Chính Đạo, Cần Giuộc); Brother Đạo Huynh **Nguyễn Văn Ba** (Bình Trưng Holy House, Thủ Đức); Archbishop Phóì Sư **Nguyễn Văn Trầm** (second son of Cardinal Đầu Sư Nguyễn Văn Vân - Minh Chơn Lý); Brother Đạo huynh **Trần Văn Tô** (Giáo Tông Đường TTTN); Brother Đạo huynh **Phan Lương Minh** (Chiêu Minh - Cần Thơ); the two brothers nhị vị Đạo huynh **Nguyễn Văn Hai** and **Trần Văn Vinh** (Bát Quái Đồ Thiên - Hà Tiên); Ms. **Lê Ngọc Sáo** (maternal granddaughter of Sir Lê Bá Trang); Bishop Giáo Sư **Ngọc Nhơn Thanh** (Nguyễn Trung Nhơn, second son of Sir Bảo Pháp Nguyễn Trung Hậu) (The Holy See of Tây Ninh), *in addition to many other dignitaries, officials, believers, and friends everywhere.*

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Sincerely,

Huệ Nhân (Võ Thành Châu)

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