

JANET HOSKINS

## Diaspora as Religious Doctrine: An “Apostle of Vietnamese Nationalism” Comes to California

In 1964, Đỗ Vạn Lý, a career diplomat in his early fifties, wandered into a small temple on the outskirts of Sài Gòn and heard a spirit medium speaking with the voice of the Mother Goddess calling him to convert to Cao Đài. Within the next few days, he was also called by the Jade Emperor [Cao Đài], saw visions of the Left Eye of God, and resolved to become a lifelong vegetarian. Soon he and his wife joined a group of spiritists to receive additional instruction, and he wrote the by-laws of a new organization that would revitalize urban Cao Đài during the years of American military intervention. He became convinced that the end of the world was near, and the Vietnamese people would have a special role to play in the salvation of humanity.

At first glance, Đỗ Vạn Lý does not seem to be the kind of person who would be inclined to doomsday thinking.<sup>1</sup> He had just returned from Washington D.C., where he spent two months as the last ambassador to the United States appointed by Ngô Đình Diệm. He had studied Political Science at Columbia University (completing an M.A. in 1948) and, as the head of the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association, vigorously lobbied for American recognition of Hồ Chí Minh’s government until 1950. Then Đỗ Vạn Lý dramatically shifted sides in the new Cold War division. He taught Vietnamese at the Pentagon and answered Ngô Đình Diệm’s call to return to work for his new government in 1954.

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But by 1964 *Đỗ Vạn Lý* had, in his own words, “lost all confidence in politics,” in both the revolutionary rhetoric of Hà Nội and the democratic capitalism of Washington. He turned instead to a new religion that he had heard about as a boy in the Mekong Delta but had been separated from for the two decades that he lived overseas; he became a Cao Đài follower as “a way of coming home,” and in doing so he merged a modernist vision of religious syncretism and a universal faith with mystical traditions he had learned from his father, a well known traditional Taoist master. As an influential convert, he immediately assumed the position of general secretary and vice chairman at the Agency for Doctrinal Dissemination [*Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý (CQPTGL)*] in Sài Gòn, and after 1975 he became the founder of the first Cao Đài congregation in Los Angeles. He had published several short books in English while he was consul-general of India but in the United States he published his longest work in Vietnamese: a spiritual manifesto for the overseas Cao Đài community in which he articulated a new diasporic vision for Cao Đài.<sup>2</sup> His book was well known in all the overseas temples I visited, and even in Sài Gòn (circulating in photocopy, since it cannot be legally published there). Why did this sudden conversion appear to him as the culmination of his search for meaning throughout his life? And how did his conversion resonate with a generation of men and women who came to believe that they had lost their country because their forced exile was part of a divine plan to globalize their religion?

In this paper I argue that Cao Đài emerged in response to the “loss of country” during the colonial period, and was therefore, already preaching a diasporic doctrine before the mass exodus of 1975—an event that is believed to have been prophesied in the earliest spirit messages. *Đỗ Vạn Lý*, as the most international of Cao Đài leaders in the twentieth century, presented the clearest articulation of spiritual nationalism in the overseas community. His life illustrates a new dynamic in sacralizing the homeland and turning diaspora into a Vietnamese religious doctrine.

### Prevailing Views: Colonial Crisis, “Substitute Religion” and Destabilization

Current scholarship on Cao Đài, such as the works of Jayne Werner, Victor Oliver, Christopher Hartney, and *Jérémy Jammes*, interprets the massive

conversions of the 1920s and 1930s as a response to the crisis of colonial dislocations. Similarly, Paul Mus saw Cao Đài as the formation of a “substitute religion” that replaced the dismantled Confucian hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> The prevailing wisdom in the mid 1950s was that although Cao Đài had attracted two and a half million people during the First Indochina War, it was now a “dinosaur” unlikely to survive the forced demilitarization of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime and destined to disappear from the scene.<sup>4</sup> Cao Đài did not vanish, however, and in fact grew modestly in numbers up to 1975, then weathered two decades of political disfavor to re-emerge today as Vietnam’s third largest religion with at least 3.2 million followers in its homeland and a global presence in the United States, Australia, Canada, and France.<sup>5</sup>

Explanations presented for early conversions (aspirations to modernity and a cosmopolitan theology) may need to be revised for more recent ones. Theories of conversion often oppose “utilitarian” approaches (motivated by a desire for group membership, wealth or status) to “intellectual” ones, in which the person goes through a cognitive process of seeking a new belief system with greater explanatory force. Joel Robbins notes that the two approaches can be better seen as stages in a single process, in which an initial attraction to a new belief system develops into a search to understand it more deeply.<sup>6</sup> Gauri Viswanathan has studied conversion in the British colonial context as a powerful political force of destabilization: “By undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nation-hood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders.”<sup>7</sup> In a description of the Indian Untouchable leader Ambedkar that could also apply to Đỗ Văn Lý, she notes: “His conversion was less a rejection of political solutions than a re-writing of religious and cultural change into a form of political intervention.”<sup>8</sup> For the colonial subject, conversion is a form of cultural critique. It is an appeal to a new universality through which the convert also participates in the colonial project of modernity. A new religion such as Cao Đài identified itself as a synthesis of global faiths, but rooted these in a specifically Vietnamese historical experience. Cao Đài represented, in effect, the greatest of missionary fears—not that native “heathens” would reject the gospel, but that they would rewrite Christianity in a rebellious mimesis.

## The Loss of Country as a Catalyst for Religious Transformation

In 1905, Phan Bội Châu famously wrote “For a human being, the greatest suffering comes from losing his country.”<sup>9</sup> While the loss he was referring to then was the loss of Vietnamese sovereignty to the French (and he was speaking of Vietnamese who were still living in their country), this early vision infused Cao Đài with a “diasporic tension” at its origins. Prophecies sent from the grave by another notable nationalist, Phan Chu Trinh, also helped shape the earliest Cao Đài scriptures. After 1975, when thousands of Cao Đài followers experienced this loss again as “exodus” and “exile,” the theme of recovering a lost homeland took on a new dimension.

Cao Đài’s aspirations to universalism build on transposing Christian themes into the context of Vietnamese anticolonial struggle. Themes of exile, exodus and long-distance nationalism are cast in a biblical idiom, but used to argue for the significance of Eastern religious philosophies in a world threatened by Western domination. Đỗ Vạn Lý often said that the last time God spoke so directly to humanity before 1925 was when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. So Vietnam was favored, as was ancient Israel, as being a country divinely selected for a special role in history. Vietnamese refugees, who often spent several years “sponsored” by Bible Belt Protestant families, explicitly compare their experiences to those of the Jews cast out of Palestine, as victims of a “holocaust,” and inscribe their exile in a theological discourse with a strong millennial component.

Đỗ Vạn Lý narrated his life as a revolutionary who eventually turned from the path of political revolution to that of spiritual revolution. The theme of his book on Cao Đài was “nationalism,” as he identified it, and the goal of his life was to help the Vietnamese people find their own spiritual destiny:

The only faith that I had an inkling could help us—all of us—to become free and whole again was Cao Đài. It was said long ago, in the first prophecies, that this was the ultimate fate of the religion. A small country one day in the future would become the spiritual leader of the world. The Vietnamese were once a people who had known nothing but slavery and oppression: subjugation by the Chinese for a thousand years, then by the French for almost a hundred years. But these were also the people who had the strongest yearning to be free. They always worked for other people, but one day they will be

the spiritual masters of all the others. I heard this message and I liked it. I said to myself that I wanted that to happen.

But of course I didn't know how to do it. After I joined the faith I learned many things. I learned the definition of liberation. I learned it from God and from the Cao Đài ministers. Liberation to God means complete and total liberation, not partial liberation. So I became a little bit wiser, a bit more understanding, and I decided I wanted first of all to be a good man.<sup>10</sup>

From Đỗ Vạn Lý's perspective, his background in political struggle had given him skills that could be transferred to religious leadership, but what he needed to discover through a personal experience of disenchantment was the importance of an ethical orientation:

Cao Đài said to us, "Try to be as good as I am and you will be the master of the world as I am." So that is why I offer my service to God. I am sincere and love my younger brothers and sisters. I had to burn the midnight oil to catch up with them on a spiritual level. I spent too much time on my worldly education, and not enough on my spiritual education, until I came to Cao Đài.<sup>11</sup>

Born in Sa Đéc in 1910, to a family headed by a scholar-official who had access through his wife to substantial lands, Đỗ Vạn Lý was an adolescent when Cao Đài began to sweep across the Mekong Delta in 1926–1934. He remembered hearing the early prophecies and being excited by them, but his father sent him to high school in France in 1930, and he did not return to Vietnam until 1954. On our first meeting he presented a relatively generic version of his calling to Cao Đài:

When I was young, I was on a quest to find the right faith. My family was Buddhist and worshipped ancestors, but they did not have much to say about the modern world. I went to a Catholic boarding school, and my French teachers wanted me to convert. But they taught me that our ancestors were really evil spirits. I could not accept that. I wanted something more inclusive. The Christians say they have a universal faith, but it seemed to exclude Asian traditions and to teach feudal values. Buddhism has idealistic values, but it did not help people in the time of French colonialism. When I found Caodaism, it was like coming home: the rituals and altars were familiar, but the message was more universal. It was a way to worship one God, but to see him as the father of all. . . . Kipling said "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." In Caodaism, we are proving that he was wrong.<sup>12</sup>

In later conversations, Đỗ Vạn Lý provided me with more details, saying that even as a young boy he became passionately committed to the cause of Vietnam's independence. His father wanted him to become a government official, and because it was becoming increasingly hard to get an advanced education inside Vietnam, he was sent to board with a French family near Paris, where he was "pampered and spoiled," but "never felt comfortable."<sup>13</sup>

After completing his baccalauréat, Đỗ Vạn Lý was admitted to the Sorbonne School of Law. He took advantage of an opportunity to study Chinese law and language as part of a study tour for French law students, and was placed in the paradoxical position of being the only Asian member of the "French Club" in Shanghai. He became drawn into emigré networks of Vietnamese nationalists in Hong Kong and southern China, and was soon spending more time on clandestine political activity than on his studies. During six years in China (1937–1943), he worked in a variety of different jobs and was active in the League for the Restoration of Vietnam [Việt Nam Phục Quốc Đồng Minh Hội], identifying himself as a follower of Phan Bội Châu.

In 1943, Đỗ Vạn Lý traveled to Japan to join the Revolutionary Army headed by Cường Để and managed by people trained at Wampo Academy in China and several military and technical schools in Japan. He took classes in chemical engineering, Japanese, and electronics, and helped Japanese forces by subtitling propaganda films for them. He headed a society for the independence of South and Southeast Asian people, and secretly even supported Korean independence groups. Since he and several others had already decided that Japan was itself a colonial power, they welcomed the Japanese surrender and worked for US forces setting up an electrical system on new US bases. In 1946, Đỗ Vạn Lý stowed away on a US ship bound for New York:

I came as a stowaway from Japan. I had hidden on a boat, and the boat was very large so they did not find me until I arrived in New York. Then I was discovered and they sent me to Ellis Island. They called me "Frenchy" when I came to the United States because I spoke French and came from a former French colony. They threatened to send me back to France, but I said that the French would kill me since I came to the United States to fight for the freedom of Vietnam. And they told me "We have no quota for immigrants from Vietnam." Then I pleaded with them that I had risked death by stowing away on a US ship. So finally they took my side, and they put me down to get in as part of the Chinese quota. They whispered to me that I should not tell anyone.<sup>14</sup>

Armed with diplomas from Paris and Tokyo, Đỗ Vạn Lý was accepted to study Political Science at Columbia, finished a master's degree and advanced to doctoral candidacy in 1950:

When I taught in US universities, I was so interested in political issues that I did not teach much about Vietnamese culture. Then we realized that so many problems that happened during the war era were cultural problems, because Americans did not know about Vietnamese culture. Since I was the first Vietnamese to get a US university education, I felt a little responsible.

During his years in New York, Đỗ Vạn Lý established the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association, edited its newsletter and worked with anticolonial activists from other parts of Asia and Africa. In 1947, *The New York Post* published an article about this association, whose members included Pearl Buck and the Socialist leader Norman Thomas. They identified “Anthony Vangly” (an Americanized version of Đỗ Vạn Lý’s name) as “an apostle of Vietnamese nationalism” who came to the United States to work for the independence of Vietnam.

In 1950, Ngô Đình Diệm came to his apartment in New York, and for three days they talked long into the night about the kind of government that Vietnam needed. Đỗ Vạn Lý came to see Ngô Đình Diệm as his patron and mentor, almost a surrogate father, and he agreed to return to work as a diplomat under Ngô Đình Diệm’s leadership in 1954. Shortly after Đỗ Vạn Lý returned to Vietnam, he married a young journalist who came from another prominent family in the Mekong Delta with many Cao Đài connections. First employed in public relations by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he represented his country as a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) delegate, attended the 1955 Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations, and served as consul general in Jakarta (1955–1956) and New Delhi (1957–1963). His five children were born during his postings in Indonesia and India. On September 30, 1963, Đỗ Vạn Lý was appointed as Ngô Đình Diệm’s last ambassador to the United States.<sup>16</sup> Although he was not feeling well, he traveled to Sài Gòn for a briefing and then to Washington DC, and waited to present his credentials:

What I was sent by Diệm to tell them was that American forces could withdraw if they were not happy. We could hold out for another three years or so. We might have to tighten our belts, cut back a bit, but we could hold on.

I knew Diệm very well, and I wanted to show the Americans how to work with him. Diệm was the only one who could stand up to both the Americans and the communists.<sup>17</sup>

But Đỗ Vạn Lý had not yet been formally received when the news of Ngô Đình Diệm's murder as part of a US-sponsored coup arrived:

The day Diệm was assassinated I knew that Vietnam could not be saved politically. I knew that this was the only way that I could help. I felt that the people who did this coup were so stupid, so self-destructive, that it was hard for me to love my country. I thought Diệm was our last chance. So I did not join Caodaism for political reasons, but to find another way to save my people.<sup>18</sup>

When President John F. Kennedy himself was assassinated three weeks later, Đỗ Vạn Lý witnessed massive national mourning as he gathered his own things to return to Sài Gòn. Đỗ Vạn Lý recalled: "They saw him as a handsome hero, when he was really the most inept. His death was a form of karmic retribution, but it could not bring back the leader that Vietnam had lost."<sup>19</sup>

## The Conversion Story

Slipping in to Huỳnh Quang Sắc Temple on the outskirts of Sài Gòn (which belonged to the syncretistic Minh Tân group), Đỗ Vạn Lý experienced a divine calling:

I came in when they were having a séance and I sat in the back of the room. I had been away from Vietnam for so long that no one could recognize me. But then I heard my name called, once, twice . . . The lights dimmed, and others sensed that something supernatural was happening. I heard my name again and came up. The priest told me to kneel. I said "Why should I kneel?" I had been in the United States and was no longer used to this. But others whispered at me to kneel, so I did. And then I heard God the Mother calling me. She said "I sent you out for many years to learn about life, about the world, about organizations. Now you have learned enough. I brought you home, to serve the faith."

Several days later, I went to a different temple at a different place. And right away I was called by God the Mother who said "You must devote yourself to the religion. You must become completely vegetarian, so that you can climb to the highest level."



A week later, I was called by God the Father, who asked for “Minh Lý.” It was a private name, a name my father had used for me that others did not know . . . even my mother did not know this name. But now it is the name that I have in the religion, the name that I use as a Cao Đài leader. God the Father [Cao Đài] said to me:

For several decades you have learned the affairs of the world  
Now the time has come for you to remember those blueprints  
(architecture) The reason for this can be revealed at this time  
Together we can build a more extensive temple of God

*[Mấy mươi năm học trường thế sự  
Đúng cơ duyên gìn-giữ sơ đồ  
Nguyên nhưn chánh giác tìm vô  
Chung tay xây đắp qui mô Đạo Trời]*<sup>20</sup>

The first task that Đỗ Vạn Lý did to help form the Agency for Doctrinal Dissemination [Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý (CQPTGL)] was to write its by-laws, which he did in a state of religious inspiration, lighting a stick of incense beside his desk and “feeling his hands shake with the power that was cursing through them.”<sup>21</sup> It is significant, in light of Cao Đài precedent, that this moment of inspiration came to him when he was alone, not in the context of a séance, and it can be seen as a sign of the more individualistic and rationalized path that CQPTGL was to follow.

In 1965, at the Minh Lý Temple of the Three Religions [Tam Tông Miếu], Đỗ Vạn Lý held the by-laws of the organization on his head in a great ceremony to inaugurate CQPTGL, with hundreds of disciples watching. Unlike other Cao Đài groups, this agency has no affiliation with any of the dozen holy sees or denominations [*chi phái*], it has no dignitaries wearing red, gold or turquoise robes, and it does not recruit converts or bestow hierarchical offices. It offers classes in meditation, religious doctrine and esoteric philosophy, and all members address each other as “brother and sister.” Starting in 1965, public séances were held quarterly and private ones even more often, producing a sense of new revelations. As Đỗ Vạn Lý describes them:

The new set of messages received by [CQPTGL] were very numerous, and at a very high intellectual level. Most of the séances were public, and they drew large crowds. Intellectuals came back into the faith, because the mediumistic sessions were conducted by people who themselves had a high literary culture. The main medium was a seven-year-old girl, Hoàng Mai, who would

receive most of the messages by automatic writing, but some of them were also spoken. When she received a spoken message, her voice was quite different from her normal one, the tones were distinct and more grown-up sounding. She was from a “sanctified” family, third generation Cao Đài.<sup>22</sup>

We published several volumes of our messages, just like the Bible. They included not only messages from Cao Đài but also from Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, Lao Tzu, and many other important spirits. The séances were what made me feel excited about the faith. They made everyone feel excited. This was the thrill of being in conversation with God.<sup>23</sup>

Meditation was practiced in a series of workshops or training sessions in which disciples were taught to represent their good and bad deeds on a graph that would show them their own progress toward inner purity.<sup>24</sup>

The political situation in Sài Gòn, as US military involvement grew more intense, also seems to have been reflected in some of the séance messages. In 1965, Lê Văn Duyệt, the southern military hero who fought to unite Vietnam in 1802 under the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), was the spirit who officially sanctioned the opening of CQPTGL on his territory of Gia Định. In the same year, the South Vietnamese government renovated his mausoleum, his image appeared on South Vietnamese currency (the 100 đồng bill) and he was “promoted” in a public séance to the position of Great Immortal [Đài Tiên], from the one of Saint [Thánh] that he had previously occupied. Lê Văn Duyệt’s ascension was part of a “Vietnamization” of the pantheon, emphasizing indigenous elements and local heroes instead of older figures from Chinese tradition. His tomb became a pilgrimage site for those wounded, displaced or traumatized by the war seeking healing and new confidence.

A number of other important religious leaders were incorporated into the pantheon, including Đỗ Vạn Lý’s father, Đỗ Thuần Hậu, who had founded his own school of esoteric meditation within a largely Buddhist-Taoist tradition.<sup>25</sup> When Đỗ Thuần Hậu was on his deathbed, Đỗ Vạn Lý received a séance message from Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu (the Taoist Queen of the Heavens, whom he calls “God the Mother”) who prescribed a “medicine” of blessed holy water, which he brought to his father. Đỗ Thuần Hậu revived and lived for one more week, then finally succumbed at the age of 86. This was interpreted as showing that his “soul had been saved” and he could be part of the Cao Đài Third Universal Redemption. Later, a posthumous séance message revealed that he had received

the title of Talismanic Monk [Huyền Pháp Đạo Nhơn] that entitled him to receive prayers and offer benedictions from the other world.

Cao Đài followers did not, however, try to convert American soldiers or invite American advisors to attend their séances and temples, as they had once done with French colonial officials who had an interest in Taoism or Free Masonry. The messages from French luminaries (Victor Hugo, Jeanne d'Arc) that had received so much attention in the 1930s were no longer emphasized, and no more communications were received from non-Asian figures. Đỗ Vạn Lý said most of his American friends had no idea what he was doing visiting villages throughout the Mekong Delta to spread the faith, and assumed that he had hidden political motivations:

After I was called by God, I spent all my time working for [CQPTGL]. I renounced all my work in politics and diplomacy. My American friends could not understand it.<sup>26</sup> They said, “The Caodaists must be paying you a lot every month for you to work so hard.” But of course there was no pay. And I had to remain a complete vegetarian even when attending diplomatic dinners. The American journalists and diplomats I knew could not believe that after being a career diplomat I would turn to religion. But I really found solace in Cao Đài teachings. I never talked to them as I have been talking to you.<sup>27</sup>

Journalists covering the Vietnam War mention Cao Đài most often through the lens of Graham Greene's 1955 novel, *The Quiet American*, which described the Tây Ninh Holy See in vivid but contemptuous prose: “In the nave of the cathedral, in the full Asiatic splendour of a Walt Disney fantasy, pastel dragons coil around the columns and pulpit; from every stained glass window a great eye of God follows one.”<sup>28</sup> *The Green Berets*, the only film made about the war while it was being fought, features a scene in which Special Forces troops describe Cao Đài followers as “spook sheeted dickheads,” and end up blowing up one of their temples—in direct violation of Sài Gòn government policies—because they suspect that communists have infiltrated it.<sup>29</sup> With the exception of a very brief description in Frances Fitzgerald's *Fire on the Lake*, American writers showed little interest in a religion estimated to have been followed by one of every five people in South Vietnam.<sup>30</sup>

The most heavily Cao Đài area, Tây Ninh Province, was considered solidly anti-communist, but Cao Đài followers in many other parts of the south, especially the Mekong Delta, included supporters of the National Liberation

Front. The urban elites who frequented CQPTGL were perceived as supportive of the Republic, although in the mid 1970s the influence of school associations [*liên trường*] caused many young people to turn left, as did the expectation of an eventual communist victory. In 1968, a sense of panic spread in CQPTGL:

After the Tết Offensive, people started to feel that Sài Gòn really could collapse. At CQPTGL, there was a séance where many of the leaders of the faith came back. Phạm Công Tắc said he had kneeled down and asked God to allow him to come back from the dead to be able to lead his people at this crucial time. But it is not possible to bring people back from the dead. Ngô Minh Chiêu said that he had wanted to help Vietnam, but he felt that he had to reach the highest supernatural rank before he could be of use. He had turned away from taking on leadership, from accepting to be the Pope, because he wanted to be spiritually stronger first. But then he was taken away too early, before he could come back to the faith to really help his people. He did not want us to think that he retreated from leadership for selfish reasons, only to cultivate himself. The highest of talismans are only bestowed on those of the highest spiritual rank.<sup>31</sup>

In 1973, Đỗ Văn Lý was asked to leave CQPTGL because he wrote a preface for a “nationalist” (i.e. anti-communist) student publication that CQPTGL governance considered “too political.”<sup>32</sup> He had consulted the head of the center, Trần Văn Quế, before writing the preface, but when its content was challenged by others, Trần Văn Quế agreed he should step down. Đỗ Văn Lý recounts:

Later there were spirit messages from Phạm Công Tắc and others asking me to return to the faith: “Please come back. All of this will soon dematerialize . . . The faith needs you to return.” But I refused, since I felt I could not return to work with people who had once asked me to leave. In the last few years before 1975, many Caodaists were starting to become more leftist because of the school associations. These young people were very taken with the legend of Hồ Chí Minh. They knew nothing about Marx or Engels, but they saw Hồ Chí Minh as a great leader . . . I left at that time and decided not to come back because I no longer felt comfortable there. I thought I did not have that much more to offer, because I could not trust those who held power over me. But I remained a Caodaist, I stayed in the faith. I went back to the Foreign Ministry and accepted a posting as Ambassador to Japan. During the day, I would wear business suits when I was working as the ambassador, but I remained a vegetarian and in the evenings I would dress in white robes.<sup>33</sup>

His family moved to Tokyo and his five children went to international schools there from 1973 until after the end of the war.

Just two months before the fall of Sài Gòn, Đỗ Vạn Lý returned, and refused American offers to evacuate him. Convinced that he needed to “see his country fall, and go down with it like the captain of a ship,” he stayed alone in his Sài Gòn villa when the North Vietnamese army marched in to take the city:

My villa was about a block from the Presidential Palace, and I watched the North Vietnamese troops parade in the streets. I saw the red flags and the red scarves waving, and I was all alone in my house. . . . I saw all my dreams fall apart. I felt I had to see it myself.

About a week after my family left, God spoke to me in the evening. He said “You have to go. You shouldn’t die needlessly. There is still much you can do for the faith.” So I asked “When?” He said “Tomorrow.” But all the ports were closed. There was no way to get out. Then God reprimanded me: “I said you should go, and you didn’t.” I said “Please forgive me. All the ports were closed.” But I packed my bags and got ready to go. Then a young Catholic priest came to my house. He said some boats were still leaving from Vũng Tàu, and many religious leaders were getting on them. I went to the port with him, and there was one boat that was there. About fifty people were on it, all of them religious leaders—Buddhist monks, Catholic priests. I was the only Caodaist, but they asked me to lead the prayers.<sup>34</sup>

After seven days at sea, with very little food or water left, they drifted to the coast of Malaysia where Đỗ Vạn Lý was identified first by a police officer and later by the former Malay High Commissioner in India. He was allowed to fly to Tokyo to meet his children, then to Guam to meet his wife (who had been evacuated), and finally to Los Angeles, where his oldest daughter Merdeka (whose name means “independence” in Malay/Indonesian), married to an American professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, was living in Westwood:

After crossing the seas in a small boat, I realized that life is very real. It is tangible, but also very fragile . . . a ripple on the surface of the ocean. I lost my equilibrium. It made me unwilling to try to organize a Vietnamese government in exile. When I first fled Vietnam and came to this country I was in a state of despair. Because I had been a diplomat, people had told me that the Americans were about to leave, abandoning the country, but I did not believe

them. It seemed inconceivable, and when it happened I was crushed. I decided that I would withdraw from the world into meditation, cultivate my own spirituality. I wanted to commune with God alone and have nothing to do with other people. We left without our books, without our sacred scriptures, without our religious objects. All we had were the clothes on our backs.<sup>35</sup>

## Rebuilding Caodaism in California

In 1979, Đỗ Vạn Lý was approached by a group of Cao Đài families who had settled in southern California to lead an inter-denominational congregation. His CQPTGL title, vice-conservator of religious enlightenment [*tham lý minh đạo*], qualified him to lead services and stage séances, and he was the most senior member of the Cao Đài community in California. Tearing up a job offer letter from an international bank, he decided that it was his religious duty to lead the Cao Đài congregation overseas instead.<sup>36</sup> He wrote a ten-page summary of Cao Đài doctrine to send to the state board that certifies religious groups, enclosed copies of French translations of the Religious Constitution and Code of Conduct, and applied for non-profit status. He also visited Thiên Lý Bửu Tòa [Court of Heavenly Reason], the first Cao Đài temple founded outside Vietnam in 1977, in San Jose, and helped to raise funds for another temple, founded in 1983, in the Paris suburb of Alfortville. Transnational Caodaism was born.<sup>37</sup>

Efforts to revive spirit séances in the United States have been controversial. In the early 1980s, Đỗ Vạn Lý tried to train several young children to receive messages at séances, based on the model of the CQPTGL medium Hoàng Mai. The training, requiring a life-long vow of vegetarianism, did not prove successful (although at least one of these “girl mediums” has remained a very committed Cao Đài follower and is now a family practice physician). At Thiên Lý Bửu Tòa in San Jose, the female spirit medium Bạch Diệu Hoa received a series of messages now published and distributed through the internet. The first volume of her messages, *The Great Vessel of Sacred Teachings* [*Đại giác thánh giáo pháp*], contains fifty-four messages, including fourteen from Cao Đài; six from Jesus Christ; two from Buddha; two from the Chinese warrior saint Quan Thánh Đế Quan; one from the Virgin Mary; four from the first disciple of Cao Đài, Ngô Minh Chiêu; two from Lý Thái Bạch (the spiritual Pope); one from the Mother Goddess (Diêu Trì Kim

Mẫu); one from Noah of the Old Testament; and one from American spirit, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.<sup>38</sup> Bạch Diệu Hoa also tried to train new spirit mediums in the 1980s using the phoenix basket to receive and write messages, but it proved too upsetting: “When the basket began to move, one of the young mediums in training got scared and cried like a baby.”<sup>39</sup> Messages received were unintelligible scribbles, and trainees became too scared to continue.

Đỗ Vạn Lý was personally close to two of the most important spirit mediums active in California, both of whom came to CQPTGL in Sài Gòn when he was there. One, Bùi Văn Khâm, was trained in the Chiêu Minh esoteric tradition and shared a number of the spirit messages he received with Đỗ Vạn Lý. Bùi Văn Khâm received these messages in verse, and they contained many Sino-Vietnamese [Hán-Việt] terms that he says he himself did not understand. He shared them in part to gain a greater understanding of their meaning (which is characteristically obscure). The main source of these messages is a female immortal or muse who was incarnated as a Việt Minh heroine who died close to Bùi Văn Khâm’s birthplace near Đà Nẵng. A prominent theme of her messages is reconciliation between Vietnamese of both sides. She describes her realization that because of her political activism, she had neglected her duty to cultivate herself spiritually, and she calls on those anti-communists who left the country (including Bùi Văn Khâm and his family) to return to Vietnam to study more deeply. The second medium, Cao Lương Thiện, received a series of messages at Thiên Lý Bửu Tòa in 2003–2004 calling for the formation of a separate California branch of Cao Đài. Cao Lương Thiện then split off from that temple to run his own meditation center, Đại Đạo Monastery, in San Jose.

While both of these mediums receive messages that concentrate on “wisdom teachings” and spiritual guidance, their practice is still very controversial. As Đỗ Vạn Lý notes, creating a new “canon” for the overseas community is a risky business:

Spiritism is a double-edged razor for Caodaists. The faith was founded through spiritism, it grew greatly through spiritism, but it also got in trouble because of spiritism. There was an inflation of spiritism—everyone was getting into the act, holding séances at their own houses, talking directly to God. So God had to restrict it, to keep it under control, to put a stop to

rampant supernaturalism without responsibility. God wanted to test the thirst for enlightenment, and he found that people really wanted it, but it was easy for it to get out of control. You have to be on the lookout for false messages. So some of these people who say they receive spirit messages may actually be fooling themselves. The séances may not be sanctioned by God. In our faith, if there is one medium who is really trusted, then he has tremendous power. He can be more powerful than the Pope or the leaders at the holy see.<sup>40</sup>

## Two Styles of Spiritual Biography: Esoteric and Exoteric

My interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý can be used to examine the ways that religious authority and charisma have been constructed within Cao Đài. A contrast emerges between two styles of Cao Đài leadership. The first, an “esoteric” [vô vi] style of leadership modeled by Ngô Minh Chiêu, stressed detachment from the world and a disciplined pursuit of personal purity and self-cultivation. The second, an “exoteric” [phổ độ] style modeled by Phạm Công Tắc, is much more activist, politically engaged and focused on expanding the number of disciples through proselytizing to a wide audience. Both styles draw on visions and spirit séances, but Ngô Minh Chiêu is notable for having written almost nothing, so he offers mainly an exemplary life (and a number of teachings presented through posthumous spirit séances in the canonical “Great Cycle of Esoterism” [Đại thừa chơn giáo]). Phạm Công Tắc, in contrast, has been a prolific publisher of religious texts, including the *Religious Constitution* [Pháp chánh truyền] published in both French and Vietnamese with his own extensive commentary and interpretation, the *New Code* [Tân luật], and the *Selected Spirit Messages* [Thánh ngôn hiệp tuyển]. His 1948–1950 sermons delivered in Tây Ninh, “Divine Path to Eternal Life,” [Con đường thiêng liêng hằng sống] outline his spiritual goals and biography from a more personal standpoint. Đỗ Vạn Lý summarized the different styles of leadership in this way:

Phạm Công Tắc had the strongest spirit of the early mediums. He had a strong character, a strong will, and he was a brilliant poet and spirit medium. This is why he became a great leader, but it is also perhaps why later he wanted too much power. He confused his own spirit with communications from the divinities. To have conversations with God, often the best medium is someone who knows very little, like the 11-year-old girl we had at [CQPTGL]. She heard only what the spirits put in her head, she was just a vehicle for their messages. She had no personal ambition or interest in power



struggles as Phạm Công Tắc did. I think that the reason Ngô Minh Chiêu declined the offer to be Pope was because he feared being involved in the power struggles that could emerge in leading a mass movement. He was an ascetic, a mystic who wanted to follow his own path to enlightenment not tangle with others. Phạm Công Tắc wanted to be the Richelieu of Vietnam, the religious leader who was a power behind the throne, perhaps even the king-maker for Cường Để or Bảo Đại.<sup>41</sup>

The life of Đỗ Vạn Lý, and his own assessments of its significance, moves between these two models. At times he tried to galvanize a large number of followers and recruit them into a unified movement (both for Cao Đài and for a “Concorde” of overseas Vietnamese in 1979 at his home near Los Angeles). At other times, he wanted to retreat from the world, and stressed that he had renounced politics for religion.

Đỗ Vạn Lý describes himself as having been “completely secular” as a young man, devoted to political action and “believing only in the independence of Vietnam.”<sup>42</sup> His childhood spent in Sa Đéc, a provincial city in the Mekong Delta was, however, filled with contacts with supernatural powers since his father led and participated in spirit séances at home. Đỗ Vạn Lý told me he first met his spiritual guide, Lê Văn Duyệt, in the family home and asked him, with the rudeness and passion of a rebellious son, “So why haven’t you kicked the French out of our country?” Later, when people asked him why he did not follow the esoteric school established by his father, the Contemplative Method of the Science of Mysterious Forces [Pháp Môn Thiển Vô Vi Khoa Học Huyền Bí], he answered:

In Asia, ideally, the son is supposed to follow in his father’s footsteps. Taoism deals with the realm beyond mortality, so I said “I want to work with immortals to attain immortality, not with mortals who want to teach me about immortality. For immortality, no one is better than Lao Tzu.” So I tried to start at the top.<sup>43</sup>

The lesson in meditation techniques “received directly” from Lao Tzu [Đông Phương Lão Tử] was transmitted at a séance in 1964 where only the four highest dignitaries—Trần Văn Quế, Đỗ Vạn Lý, Huỳnh Chơn and Chí Tin—were present. It cannot be taught to ordinary adepts, but the instruction these dignitaries provide to their “younger brothers” can be “influenced” by the knowledge they have acquired at these higher-level séances.<sup>44</sup>

Đỗ Thuần Hậu's works summarize many Taoist themes, and while Đỗ Vạn Lý saw himself as rebelling against the "passive acquiescence" of his father's tradition, other scholars have argued that Cao Đài is a form of "Vietnamese Taoism."<sup>45</sup> Ideas of the "three treasures" (breath, spirit and semen) and the five fluids are clearly Taoist, as is the idea of learning to "make the soul visible," or transparent, reflected in the notion of "glimpsing the soul" [*soi-hồn*], in which the soul is held up against the light to glimpse its inner contents (as one would hold up an egg [*soi trứng*] to check that it is still good).<sup>46</sup> To *soi đèn* is to shed light with a lamp to illuminate, and a person who has reached a certain level of practice is called *người soi*, or an "illuminated person."

But Cao Đài differs from Taoism in both its nationalist orientation and its internationalist aspirations. While someone like Đỗ Thuần Hậu would explain key religious concepts such as the way, esoteric practice and meditation [*đạo, tu hành, công phu*] through an explanation of the radicals of the Chinese characters, a Cao Đài theologian would be more likely to present the same explanation through a comparison of Buddhism and Christianity, or a reference to Aristotle's use of the image of an all-seeing eye. Cao Đài religious commentaries are often concerned with issues of translation and similarity, focusing not just on original meanings but also on ways in which these meanings may be shared across religious boundaries.

There were also many differences in style between the older esoteric discipline taught by his father and Cao Đài.<sup>47</sup> His father taught meditation both to promote "mystical" communion and to promote longevity after the age of 70:

There are certain talismanic words, which you use to call on a certain guardian spirit immortal or angel [*tiên*] to watch over you, since when you reach a deep meditative state you are vulnerable to evil spirits who can disturb your consciousness. Before Caodaism, the teaching of meditation was kept very secret, only passed from teacher to disciple ("from heart to heart, soul to soul"). After the inception of Caodaism, God made it more public, more open, so that through meditation he could save more of his children, through either the esoteric or the exoteric path.<sup>48</sup>

Đỗ Vạn Lý considered that his father had a natural gift for meditation, "a knack for the mystical," which he did not inherit. His father was able to sense things without seeing them, simply by concentrating:

People from north Vietnam would come and ask my father to tell them what had happened to their house or to their grandfather's tomb. My father would close his eyes, and concentrate, and after about three minutes, he would open them. Then he would begin describing the house or the tomb just as if he could see it directly. He had visions of places that were very far away. He knew special Oriental ways of treating people, a potion for birth control, and another for smallpox.<sup>49</sup>

Healing with the hands and visions of distant places were a characteristic of the early years of Cao Đài expansion. It is associated with the charismatic leadership of Phạm Công Tắc, who used blessed “holy water” to cure the malarial fevers in Tây Ninh when the holy see was being constructed. One spirit message in French refers to these healings and predicts that “Tây Ninh will become the new Lourdes.”<sup>50</sup> But these “miracles” are quite alien to the more “rationalized” style of CQPTGL when Đỗ Vạn Lý was part of it, particularly since this agency prided itself on the number of doctors, engineers and scientists among its ranks (including its current President, Nguyễn Văn Trạch, who is a medical doctor). As Đỗ Vạn Lý says:

My father had his own way of doing things, which I admire but I cannot fully understand. I am a man of science, who went to Western schools, but he was a man who could do certain things that seem to defy science. I am different from my father. He was very confident of his meditation technique. I am more modest. I have been trying for many years and I have not had the same results. Retrospectively, I can see that he did have some innate talents.<sup>51</sup>

The “new method” [*tân pháp*] of meditation taught at CQPTGL opens a pathway for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge and for receiving communication from divine beings, but does not advertise itself by “miraculous” cures. Its claims to grant access to secret knowledge play on the same “dynamic of display and concealment” that Robert Campany documented in his study of the quest for transcendence in early China: meditation is developed as a “mystery,” in which only those willing to observe strict prohibitions (on eating meat, other “unclean” foods and sexual relations) can hope to reach the highest levels of spiritual attainment.<sup>52</sup> Religious study combines the memorization of certain revealed texts and a series of oral instructions that guide both the bodily postures of the person meditating and allow him or her to understand the deliberately arcane terminology. Formal rules of

transmission require adepts to swear not to reveal these instructions to the uninitiated, so that the intimacy of the spirit séance (with only six participants) is transferred to the meditation room.

Not everyone can gain access to esoteric techniques of meditation, even if they strive for many years to do so. Three levels are defined by an increasing number of restrictions, and in addition, all initiates seeking to enter Chiếu Minh must perform a divination ritual [*xin keo*], in which Chinese coins are tossed to see if the spirits accept the candidate. (A successful toss produces a yin/yang pattern of paired heads and tails, achieved over three coin tosses.) Those who are not successful on a first try are advised to spend more time on moral improvement and social work in order to do better the next time, after six months have passed.

There is also attention to what Campany calls “a carefully controlled textual scarcity: the text is not to be transmitted so frequently as to dilute its power, but not so infrequently as to risk letting the text disappear.”<sup>53</sup> The archives of CQPTGL contains hundreds of thousands of messages, 90 percent of which are open to the scrutiny of interested visitors, but 10 percent of which are restricted to those “at the highest levels” of spiritual attainment.<sup>54</sup> (Participation in meditation workshops can allow disciples to “be promoted to a higher level,” and so many overseas Cao Đài followers now take part in one of these workshops while visiting family members in Vietnam.) The Tây Ninh Holy See has its own archives and has similar restrictions on a quantity (unknown to me) of messages that are considered particularly sensitive and have not been released by the ranking dignitaries for publication. Some of these messages, it is implied, might be politically sensitive, but the emphasis is more on their “high esoteric content,” which would make them unintelligible to less accomplished readers. In California, the Thiên Lý Bửu Tòa temple, which archives hundreds of messages and presents them on the internet, also has a group of “secret” communications that its governance committee decided to withdraw from general circulation.<sup>55</sup>

The “secret knowledge” contained in these messages is displayed at the same time that it is concealed through demonstrations of its wondrous “effects.” The first of these effects, evident over many centuries of East Asian culture, is an extension of the human life span—well evidenced by Đỗ Thuần Hậu, who died at 86 and was surpassed by his son, Đỗ Vạn Lý, who lived to

be 98. The followers of Ngô Minh Chiêu may mark their ascension to transcendence by having their own visions of the Divine Eye, by learning to sleep in modified meditation position with the left leg on top of the right thigh, and the left hand cradled in the right. When they die, or perhaps a few seconds afterwards, their left eyes remain open as they sit in meditation position (like Ngô Minh Chiêu, who died on a boat crossing the Mekong) and they “ride the golden dragon” to be directly united with God.<sup>56</sup> At visits to four of the most important Chiêu Minh temples in Vietnam (in Cần Thơ, Chợ Lớn, Phú Quốc, and Vĩnh Long) I was shown the “visual evidence” of this transcendence in gruesome photographs of dozens of corpses, all of them gazing outwards with open left eyes.

### How Does One Finish a Life? A Meditation on Closure

Scholars have long noted that the stories we tell ourselves about our lives are structured by a search for coherence, a wish to settle certain “unfinished business” by discovering connections and finding a narrative line that makes sense of our experiences. In Đỗ Vạn Lý’s case, I analyzed the story of his life through a series of specifically religious notions of the self and the process of spiritual perfection (“self cultivation”), and contrasted these to his erstwhile “worldly ambitions” (which he did at times acknowledge emerged in the vacuum of leadership left by the death of Phạm Công Tắc). Even though he presented Phạm Công Tắc as power hungry and self-absorbed, and perhaps a bit too close to French inspirations in the 1930s, Đỗ Vạn Lý recognized a certain kinship with him, which he saw as “weighing him down” and “needing to be cast off”:

At this point, I have been vegetarian for forty-two years, totally vegetarian, with no meat or alcohol, since I answered the calling of God the Mother and God the Father in Sài Gòn in 1963. This prepares my spirit to go up to a higher level of heaven, because it becomes lighter. Meditation also helps the spirit to become lighter. Caodaism has its own theory of “Anthropology,” of the origins of the world and of mankind. There are several levels from the point of origin down to the earth. The earth is heavy, and its air is heavy, so we come down to earth by getting heavier and heavier. When your soul descends down all those levels they are like layers of clothing that you can eventually shed to become lighter. Meditation teaches you to go back to God by shedding the clothing that makes you heavy. If we shed the outer layer,

then we can raise higher on the cosmic ladder. There are levels of enlightenment. In Cao Đài meditation, you say the sutras to invoke God to supervise for you. So if you make mistakes, you are corrected through séances or through dreams. To enroll in meditation classes, you first have to modify your behavior, to be good in terms of virtue, honesty, sincerity, showing compassion in order to be admitted. If you do not have all these qualities, you will not have complete peace. Your mind will jump about like a monkey. You need to have a good karmic life first before you can rest your mind in meditation. Meditation is a complete rest of the mind.<sup>57</sup>

This presentation of how Đỗ Vạn Lý's life was changed by joining Cao Đài is an interesting one to analyze. Perhaps the crucial moment came in the temple in Sài Gòn when he decided, after thirty years of not bowing down to anything, to kneel and submit his soul to the guidance of a higher power. This corporeal expression of submission, expressed during a period of personal and spiritual crisis, was one that he would stress in a number of our conversations:

Americans do not like to bow down. They do not want to bow all the way down, as we do, to honor the angels, immortals, bodhisattvas, and deities that we pray to. But I have told people here, "You should not be ashamed to bow down." This is a part of Vietnamese culture, a tradition that has been remembered through the generations, and one that gives Asian philosophy its ethical orientation.

One man saw me in my white robes and said "You must be a very good man to dress in those robes." I told him "I am not a good man at all. I am often carried away by my passions, so I need to look down and see the white sleeves of my robe, and that reminds me that I need to learn self control, that I should not do as I please." The white robes of Cao Đài remind us of our goal of purity, and the bowing reminds us that we should seek guidance from above.<sup>58</sup>

Đỗ Vạn Lý narrated his life by focusing on a series of heroes he tried to follow. As a young man, he left France to "go east," following in the footsteps of Phan Bội Châu, and eventually sitting at the feet of Cường Để—feet which he found, if not exactly made of clay, at least made only of flesh and blood. After Franklin Roosevelt indicated that he would support Vietnamese independence, Đỗ Vạn Lý traveled to New York and became a self-appointed lobbyist for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Hồ Chí Minh. Norman Thomas and Ngô Đình Diệm were people he respected and who influenced his political reorientation, but it was the death of Ngô Đình Diệm that left him, briefly,

without a sense of direction. He reinterpreted his confused homecoming as a divinely mandated mission once he received his calling in 1964.

But Đỗ Vạn Lý had no more human heroes after that point. Because of the direct contact that Cao Đài séances provide to spiritual beings, Đỗ Vạn Lý believed he had found a more efficacious way to train himself spiritually than the path followed by his father. He provided the organizational skills to establish the new Agency to Disseminate Cao Đài Doctrine, and set up specific protocols for visits of delegations from CQPTGL to the head temples of different denominations. He also worked with its founder, Trần Văn Quế, to provide a new context for the systematic study of Cao Đài teachings, guided by quarterly séances to consult spiritual authorities. Although this mission was “interrupted” by the fall of Sài Gòn in 1975, his contributions are clear in the charter of the organization and reflected in its more recent publications.<sup>59</sup>

In California, he was able to organize the first congregation in Los Angeles very much as he pleased, although by the 1980s an Orange County-based congregation that followed Tây Ninh procedures split off. In 1994, Đỗ Vạn Lý established a new temple in Perris, California, on land purchased in rural Riverside County. Until 2008, his final year, he traveled two hours out there each Sunday to lead services and preach to his congregation.

## Self-Cultivation, Agency and Movements for Social Change

Describing *Vietnamese Supernaturalism* in the southern region, Thien Do outlines the linkages between a narrative of the self, the development of new modes of action, and a critique of the state:

The decision to embark on self-cultivation, considered as part of a healing process, initiates the development stages of a social engagement, or means of affecting the person’s immediate social environment. Taoists (*đạo sĩ* or *ông đạo*) embodied the path of self-cultivation which began with a cathartic personal event. Their prestige was aided by popular belief in powers evinced by sacred mountains. The Taoists’ innovative approaches to healing and magic also partook of the promotion of millenarian thought. Their mythic gestures concerning individual well-being overlap or intertwine with local and national aspirations. From a solitary and self-defined identity, to a leadership role which implicitly challenges existing authorities, the Taoists’ contribution to southern history demands proper recognition.<sup>60</sup>

Đỗ Thuần Hậu is primary among the “Taoists from the mountain” that Thien Do describes, and Đỗ Vạn Lý figures prominently in Thien Do treatment of Cao Đài, although he was unaware of their family connection.<sup>61</sup> The cultural connections between what the French called “the cult of immortality” [*tu tiên*], the collective rites of the village council house [*đình*], the “three religions” [*tam giáo*] of the pagoda, and forms of trance possession and spirit writing, however, show how both father and son were drawing on cultural resources in order to deploy them to effect social change.

The idea of the self as perfectible, unique, continuously and obsessively self-evaluating, and a “project” that has to be finished properly, features in the work of some literary critics as “part of the story of modernity,” but it also has deep roots in the literary traditions of East Asian religious practice.<sup>62</sup> This idea of the self is an important component of notions of a “new socialist man,” and linked by many to the origins of nationalism. Benedict Anderson argues that although nationalism is imagined in many of the same ways religion is, it could only emerge in “the dusk of religious modes of thought”:

The literati were adepts, strategic strata in a cosmological hierarchy of which the apex was divine. The fundamental conceptions about “social groups” were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal.<sup>63</sup>

In nationalist thinking, the sacred community becomes territorialized and endowed with a particular mission, an idea that is often expressed as a doctrine of “national exceptionalism.” “American exceptionalism” is an idea that originated in 1835 with Alexis de Tocqueville, but more recent writers have noted critically that it cuts both ways, being associated as much with abuses of American power as with the idea of an inspiring example.<sup>64</sup> In Cao Đài, an idea of “Vietnamese exceptionalism” is explicitly linked to prophecies about a “chosen people” [*dân tộc chọn*; *race bénite*], selected because they were virtuous but suffered tremendously under the yoke of colonial domination. In its softer form, this idea is reflected in the unique perspective of Vietnamese colonized intellectuals who seek to heal the wounds of colonialism by reconciling the philosophies of East and West. In its stronger form, it becomes a mandate for revolutionary change, consistent with Jesus’ call for the meek to inherit the earth. And Jesus, himself the “Oriental” subject of a colonial empire based in Rome, is seen as anticolonial resistance leader who was persecuted for demanding self-determination for his people. Christian



millenarianism helps to destabilize Confucian respect for authority, and combines with Buddhist millenarianism to create a syncretistic liberation theology for a postcolonial age.

### Reformulations of Millenarian Messages from the Diaspora

The universalizing power of Cao Đài was that it claimed to restore earlier Asian teachings to their original, pristine form, no longer corrupted by historical distortions and local practices. It also claimed to absorb Christianity into the more encompassing vision of the three great religious and philosophical traditions of East Asia. But, at the same time, a more specific spiritual mission was given to the Vietnamese people whose destiny was tied to the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. On the first page of his 1989 book, Đỗ Vạn Lý quotes a message sent on September 27, 1926, from the Supreme Being, Cao Đài:

One day, a country now in servitude will arise, through My words, to become the master teacher of all humanity.

*[Ngày kia, có một nước trong vòng nô-lệ vì ta mà làm chủ nhân loại]*<sup>65</sup>

The Vietnamese were chosen, it was detailed in other messages, because they had been able to absorb many other religions with a spirit of tolerance and an appreciation for their value. While they had, in the past, suffered greatly under the colonial yoke, the Vietnamese would now be “rewarded with a compensation greater than that of any other nation.”<sup>66</sup> As Đỗ Vạn Lý explained, Vietnam was at this time given the potential to become the first nation to become “founded by heaven, organized by heaven, guided by heaven, and managed by heaven,” as long as its people agreed to embrace this universal faith and follow its precepts.<sup>67</sup>

Hue-Tam Ho Tai has interpreted this aspect of Cao Đài as an effort to blend nationalist aspirations with the familiar apocalyptic rhetoric of Vietnamese millenarianism: “The Social Darwinian vision of perpetual struggle for survival had by then percolated into popular culture and was incorporated into the millenarian rhetoric of the Cao Dai sect, but with a twist. It was presented, not as an eternal law, but as a world historical stage: in the new millennium, competition over limited resources would be rendered unnecessary by unbounded prosperity.”<sup>68</sup> Many Cao Đài followers note, however,

that the prophecy of a new world order was contingent on the response of the Vietnamese people to this new offer of salvation. Đỗ Vạn Lý gives great emphasis to this point in his 1989 spiritual manifesto.

He quotes another famous message from the Supreme Being in 1926: “From this day on, in Vietnam, there is only one religion that is genuine, and that is the religion of the Great Master who came to give it to his children, calling it the religion of the nation, do you understand?”<sup>69</sup> But Cao Đài also said: “If you, my children, do not respond to this message and take it into your hearts, then a great calamity will come, and there is nothing that even I with all my supernatural power can do to prevent it.”<sup>70</sup>

For many overseas Cao Đài followers, this “great calamity” was the fall of Sài Gòn in 1975, which was also supposedly prophesized in a famous message received October 26, 1926, and translated by Đỗ Vạn Lý in this way:

From now on, the race will no longer be divided in three parts  
As your father I brought all of you under one roof  
Whether from the South or North, many of you will have to leave  
the country  
[To show others that] I am the only true master of the faith

*[Từ nay nòi giống chẳng chia ba  
Thấy hiệp các con lại một nhà  
Nam, Bắc, cùng rôi ra ngoại quốc  
Chủ quyền Chơn Đạo một mình Ta]*<sup>71</sup>

The words he translated as “race” [*nòi giống*] have been translated by others as “people,” “country” or “descent line,” and reflect a sense of collective lineage traced back to the mythical dragon and fairy who gave birth to all of the Vietnamese.<sup>72</sup> When Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin were in fact united in 1975, there was a huge exodus of people in boats escaping to save their lives but also, later, founding new congregations of Cao Đài all over the globe. The “True Way” [Chơn Đạo] according to one interpretation of this prophecy, would only be found after an experience of exile, and this exile was itself predestined. The British Cao Đài follower, Khánh Phạm, argues that “Caodaism now depends on Caodaists living overseas to make it survive,” and a similar sentiment is echoed in studies of Cao Đài communities in Canada, Australia, and California.<sup>73</sup> For Đỗ Vạn Lý and several other commentators,

this millenarian vision had to be postponed until after the end of the Cold War because of divisions among the Vietnamese themselves (“God’s children” united under one roof but only by the threat of violence).

### The Teleology of Exile and Diasporic Theodicy

Timothy Smith argued that migration itself is a “theological experience.” Since it produces a profound dislocation in space, time and culture, it requires a dramatic reassessment of belief and practice.<sup>74</sup> Scholars have addressed the impact of exile on Vietnamese communities in a number of ways, often referring to notions of a “temporality,” or even a “teleology” of exile. The original meaning of teleology came from religious discourse: a teleological argument was an argument for God’s existence from the existence of order and design in the universe. Confucian ideology was in this sense deeply teleological, since it established the mandate of heaven that justified the hierarchical order of a just ruler and the harmonious community over which he ruled.

Cao Đai followers have argued since the early days of revelations that their religion would eventually triumph, but only after a period of many trials. This would entail much suffering, the catastrophes appropriate to the end of one cosmological era (what one might call the Age of Empire), the dawning of a New Age, and the third universal redemption of mankind. This contrasts with the interpretation of certain scholars. Ashley Carruthers for example, suggests that the key trauma of the “theologizing experience” for Vietnamese refugees was the loss of a social future, and the reconfiguration of Vietnam as “the social past.”<sup>75</sup> Vietnam, Carruthers was told by Vietnamese refugees, is a “place without a future,” a “dead end,” and the primary reason for leaving Vietnam was to “give their children a future.”<sup>76</sup> As survivors of incarceration, torture and flight, they had experienced the sense of powerlessness that comes from having one’s social future arbitrarily taken away. Carruthers concludes that this “teleology of exile that locates Vietnam firmly in the past” is perhaps a key characteristic of overseas Vietnamese communities.<sup>77</sup> He also notes that this perspective is now in contradiction with a new celebratory view of Vietnam as a Tiger Cub with consistent GDP rates of around 8 percent since 2000, second only to China. I, however, think the question of the “teleology of exile” is more complex than Carruthers acknowledges.<sup>78</sup>

Đỗ Vạn Lý's explanation of Cao Đài teachings in his huge volume published in California situates Cao Đài as a millenarian tradition (carrying on a heritage also evoked by the Hòa Hảo Buddhists and a number of earlier anticolonial organizations) with its own teleology of history, and, in some respects, almost a Vietnamese form of Zionism.<sup>79</sup> Cao Đài followers explicitly see the Vietnamese as a chosen people with a particular spiritual mission that should be fulfilled in their homeland. Today, some people argue that this millenarian goal can only be fulfilled "after the end of communist rule," while others argue that the resurgence of popular religion in the reformation period is already a sign that "God's plan for Vietnam is being realized."<sup>80</sup>

Anderson argues that "the date at the top of a newspaper" was the single most important marker of the "steady, onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time," which he opposed to the "messianic" or "millenarian" time of earlier religious world views.<sup>81</sup> But since the specific dating of séance messages is a key characteristic of Cao Đài scriptures, it offers a "historicized theology" that defies this opposition. Did Đỗ Vạn Lý's conversion from secular revolutionary to religious leader necessitate a shift also in notions of time and the significance of history? The temporality associated with a diasporic group does nourish ideas of "long-distance nationalism," but it is explicitly oriented towards future possibilities as well as past suffering. A major inspiration for any movement is to make a case that its triumph is inevitable, predestined, written in the stars, and mandated by heaven (or, if not heaven, than at least a master dialectical process that has achieved an almost transcendental status).

It is certainly clear, Carruthers argues, that overseas Vietnamese temporal identifications are not limited to a "political refugee" narrative of flight from the dystopic or aberrant modernity of socialism to a utopic modernity of freedom and democracy in the West. But there are also many other ways to narrate the story of exile and return. The Cao Đài argument that the "exodus" of 1975 was simply part of God's plan to globalize the religion and send his disciples all over the world to acquire new languages and technological expertise is based on a religious teleology that expects that these exiles will eventually return to new positions of leadership in Vietnam. And, through quite a different series of rhetorical moves, this is a conclusion that a new group of Hà Nội-based publications have also begun to advance. Now that

the Vietnamese government welcomes overseas Vietnamese to return to “rebuild the country” through investment and the development of global markets, Vietnam’s “indigenous religions” have returned to a position of much greater official favor.<sup>82</sup>

## Conversations in California: Reinterpreting the Moment of Conversion

In certain respects, the two narratives converge because of what could loosely be called the characteristics of both “California culture” and the Mekong Delta in the early years of the twentieth century—eclecticism, synthesis and an ideology of perpetual self reinvention. This is why I sometimes describe Cao Đài as a “New Age religion made in colonial Vietnam.”<sup>83</sup> In both places, a great interest developed in combining Eastern and Western philosophy, and groups of disciples gathered to work out a common ground. In French Indochina, it was colonized intellectuals educated at French-language schools in Sài Gòn who tried to fuse what they learned in the classroom from French professors with the literary and cultural heritage of the mandarin tradition of their ancestors. In California, Asian “gurus” come to teach “spiritual seekers,” and what resulted was generally an Asian religion “adapted” for westerners. What is distinctive about Cao Đài in California is that it retains a very Vietnamese perspective on fusing East and West. Jesus, for example, is defined as the son of the Jade Emperor and encompassed into a broader Taoist-Buddhist karmic system.

Since Đỗ Vạn Lý’s sessions with me were structured as a combination of “spiritual instruction” and ethnographic interview, it is legitimate to also explore what Gelya Frank has called the “biography in the shadow” that lies within any collaborative life history.<sup>84</sup> The exchanges between investigator and subject tend to blend consciousness to a certain extent, especially if their theme is spiritual exploration. Đỗ Vạn Lý told me that he experienced his religious calling after the age of 49. And while the force of historical events (Ngô Đình Diệm’s death, his own return to Vietnam after many postings overseas) would seem to be crucial in the timing of his calling, he also noted that this was the same age at which his father had received a rather different series of mystical revelations.<sup>85</sup> Forty-nine is a crucial threshold age, since it falls after four twelve-year cycles, and is perceived as a time of special vulnerability.<sup>86</sup>

When he asked me at what age I had discovered my own interest in Cao Đài, I confessed, a bit flustered, that I was 49—an age that I had considered simply transitional in moving towards the milestone of the half-century mark, but which now appeared to me as infused with new meaning.

Since he had an academic background, and was used to explaining “Vietnamese culture” to Americans, Đỗ Vạn Lý was more inclined to see my interest in Cao Đài as research (in contrast to many others who assumed I was simply preparing to convert). But he also believed that coming to an understanding of Cao Đài doctrine would also involve spiritual reorientation on my part. For this reason he shared certain meditation techniques with me, in which the very different material and cultural backgrounds between Vietnamese and American disciples would come to seem “immaterial,” since they were guided by the same deeper principles. But he was skeptical of efforts by other Cao Đài leaders to “collect” Western disciples since, as he noted, “Once you have collected them, what do you do with them? They still can’t read our scriptures in Vietnamese!” For him, the crux of Cao Đài doctrine was the idea of Vietnamese unity and Vietnamese leadership, not simply a homogenizing of Eastern and Western creeds.<sup>87</sup>

Đỗ Vạn Lý’s book, *Understanding Caodaism* [*Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*], notes that specific references to “Vietnamese teachings” occur in spirit messages most frequently in the 1960s, when the new nation was struggling to defend itself from both external threats and internal ones, communist armed forces and insidious American influence.<sup>88</sup> In conversation, he stressed the fact that “Vietnam was divinely selected” to be the home of the new religion because the country had remained moral in spite of a long history of oppression. In his final chapter, he argues: “Vietnam served as an experiment for a form of esoteric knowledge that needs to be made visible and concrete in one country, to serve as a model that can be followed in other contexts, to promote the spread of the Great Path in other countries.”<sup>89</sup>

It is here that many of Đỗ Vạn Lý’s arguments make up what I would call a specifically diasporic theology, in the sense outlined by James Clifford:

Diasporic discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity. Diasporic consciousness is thus constituted both negatively and positively. It is constituted

negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion. . . . Diasporic consciousness is produced positively through identification with world historical cultural/political forces. . . . It is also about feeling global. . . . a sense of attachment elsewhere, to a different temporality and vision, a discrepant modernity.<sup>90</sup>

Because diasporic experience includes both suffering and survival, Clifford argues that “Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension.”<sup>91</sup> While on the one hand diasporic thinking “makes the best of a bad situation,” the transcendent value that is placed on recovering the homeland is linked to a utopian vision that stretches beyond a specific territory or homeland.

Compared to other Cao Đài followers, Đỗ Văn Lý’s life is unusual because so much of it was lived outside of Vietnam before 1975. In this sense he is atypical, since most early Cao Đài leaders were generally people with a cosmopolitan education who were not able to pursue their studies overseas. However, Đỗ Văn Lý defined a perspective that was to become the diasporic perspective of a much larger Vietnamese community after 1975. His life thus combines the views of the “original disciples” (those born before the advent of Cao Đài) and the new generation that has grown up overseas (that embraces Cao Đài as a way of “returning to the homeland” through spiritual pilgrimage, and infusing their imaginary journeys with elements of long-distance nationalism).

Đỗ Văn Lý juxtaposed Vietnamese and American perspectives most explicitly in interpreting Cao Đài’s key symbol, the Left Eye of God:

Professor Hoskins, The Vietnamese and the Americans are the two peoples who worship under the sign of the eye. We have it on our temples, you have it on a sacred object in your society—the dollar bill. Yours is the right eye. Ours is the left eye. Therefore they complement each other. The left eye is closer to the heart, it is connected to morality, tradition and ethics. The right eye is closer to the brain, it is connected to technology, industry and development. America has given the idea of democracy to the world, but they have lost the ethical dimension. One day there will be a people that will develop that ideal of democracy and bring it back to the world with its original ethics. These people will be the Vietnamese.<sup>92</sup>

By articulating the left as the side of Asia/Vietnam, and also of all that is progressive, positive and forward-looking [*duông*], Đỗ Văn Lý both inverts the usual Orientalist binary and provides a logic to justify the mission he

believes will be fulfilled by Western-educated Vietnamese. This vision is part of a diasporic narrative because the remaking of the world is given meaning by ideas of a transcendent connection to “home,” making the longed for land of origin into a “holy land” [*thánh địa*] of universal importance.

## Conclusions: Diaspora as Doctrine in Vietnam and Overseas

Đỗ Vạn Lý has had a significant impact on Cao Đài thinking in both Vietnam and the United States in three ways. First, he shaped a new direction for the religion in Sài Gòn after the death of Phạm Công Tắc, when one out of five people in southern Vietnam had moved to the city. This new direction was less rigidly hierarchical, less avowedly “political,” but very much concerned with uniting the Vietnamese people across the dividing lines of both religion and Cold War politics. His conversion in 1964 can be understood as motivated both by his disenchantment with politics after the fall of Ngô Đình Diệm (due in part to Buddhist vs. Catholic conflict), and by his adolescent memories of the tremendous appeal of Cao Đài in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when it swept across the Mekong Delta as he prepared to study in France. The Cao Đài calendar he published in Perris, California was present in every overseas temple I have visited, from Paris to San Jose to Sydney.<sup>93</sup>

Second, he was the first Vietnamese religious leader to draw on his knowledge of American culture and values to work out an alternative vision of the unity of Vietnamese culture in reaction to the American model. (Another religious leader, the Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, who studied in the United States in the 1960s, would follow a different, more universalist model in his own career in exile.) While those who remained in Sài Gòn after 1975 saw Đỗ Vạn Lý as the most “pro-American” of CQPTGL leadership, after 1963 he was deeply disenchanted with America and articulated a religious vision with a separate space for Vietnamese national aspirations that was distinct from both the Sài Gòn regime and its American advisors.<sup>94</sup> In the years 1965–1975, this vision successfully recruited new supporters among intellectuals and professionals, but larger political forces determined its immediate future. In the millenarian framework Đỗ Vạn Lý came to embrace, the end of the colonial era was a cosmic rupture that would “test” the Vietnamese people and cost many of them their homeland, but eventually give birth to a new global order of peace and Asian spirituality.



Third, Cao Đài's relevance has re-emerged with the post 1995 resurgence of popular religion in Vietnam, and increased contacts with diasporic communities. Many Vietnamese scholars and public figures now talk about returning to indigenous foundations and infusing the nation with a spiritual dimension—themes that resonate with the concepts developed by Cao Đài during the colonial era and the southern Republic.<sup>95</sup> Edward Miller reminds us that rather than seeing leaders of this period as the victims of American foreign policy or unwitting collaborators, it is important to recognize their agency and their significance in articulating alternative models of Vietnamese modernity.<sup>96</sup>

Đỗ Văn Lý's fusing of religious discourse and nationalist political goals is not unusual in a post-Cold War era in which the resurgence of religious politics has challenged the predicted triumph of secular nationalism. As scholars rethink earlier trajectories that predicted that the "imagined community" of the faithful would inevitably be replaced by the nation state, we may come to see new diasporic formations as crucial to understanding the competing ideologies of order in the twenty-first century. ■

JANET HOSKINS is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She is author of *The Play of Time: Kodi Perspectives on Calendars, History and Exchange* (University of California Press, 1993), which won the 1996 Benda Prize for Southeast Asian Studies; and *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Story of People's Lives* (Routledge, 1998). She is also contributing editor of *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford University Press, 1996); *Anthropology as a Search for the Subject: The Space Between One Self and Another* (Donizelli, 1999); and *Fragments from Forests and Libraries* (Carolina Academic Press, 2000). An earlier version of this paper was presented in May 2008 at the Harvard University workshop on Biography in Vietnam organized by Hue-Tam Ho Tai. The author is grateful to participants in that workshop for their comments, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for JVS, and especially to Peter Zinoman, Sergei Blagov and Jérémy Jammes for their suggestions and additions.

#### ABSTRACT

*Religion and nationalism are analytically separated and often even seen as opposing forces. But Cao Đài history and theology fuses religion and*

*nationalism, and their relationship is the defining tension in the life of Đỗ Vạn Lý (1910–2008). As a revolutionary, diplomat, ambassador, and religious leader, he was both a political and a religious activist who articulated a vision of “Vietnamese exceptionalism” first announced in spirit messages from the 1920s, and later developed into a diasporic theodicy to explain the fall of Sài Gòn and provide a new set of goals for exiled religious practitioners.*

KEYWORDS: *diaspora, religious doctrine, nationalist politics, temporality, Đạo Cao Đài, Ngô Đình Diệm*

### Notes

1. This article was developed from eight years of research on Cao Đài and other indigenous Vietnamese religions in both Vietnam and California. Over fifty hours of conversations with Đỗ Vạn Lý from 2003–2008, at both his Perris temple and his home in Chatsworth (near Los Angeles) were supplemented by fieldwork on other Cao Đài congregations in California. See Janet Hoskins, “Caodai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion’s Struggle for Identity,” in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 191–210; Janet Hoskins, “Can a Hierarchical Religion Survive Without Its Center? Caodaism, Colonialism and Exile” in *Hierarchy: Persistence and Transformation of Social Formations*, eds. Knut Rio and Olaf Smedal (London: Berghahn Books, 2008), 113–141; as well as Janet Hoskins “Seeing Syncretism as Visual Blasphemy: Critical Eyes on Caodai Religious Architecture,” *Material Religion* 6, no. 1 (March 2010): 30–59; and Janet Hoskins, “Derrière le voile de l’oeil céleste; Le rôle des apparitions dans l’expansion du Caodaïsme” [Behind the Veil of the Celestial Eye: Visions in the Expansion of Caodaism] *Péninsule* [Peninsula] 60, no. 1 (2010): 211–247. Field research in Vietnam was carried out in 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010. Đỗ Vạn Lý is featured in my one-hour documentary, *The Left Eye of God*, available for preview and distribution at <http://www.der.org/films/left-eye-of-god.html>. I am also grateful for many religious publications donated by Cao Đài followers, especially Dr. Hum Dac Bui and Tran Quang Canh
2. See Đỗ Vạn Lý, *The Stork and the Shrimp: 34 Folk Stories from Vietnam* (New Delhi: Vietnam House, 1959); and Idem., *Aggressions by China: A Peep Into the History of Vietnam*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Vietnam House, 1960). See also Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài* [Understanding Caodaism] vol. 1 (Perris, CA: Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam Hải Ngoại [Overseas Vietnamese Community of Caodaists], 1989).

3. See Jayne Werner, *The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement* (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976); and Jayne Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Vietnam* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1981); Victor Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism; A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976); Christopher Hartney *A Separate Peace: Cao Dai's Manifestation in Australia* (PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, Australia, 2004); and J  r  my Jammes, *Le Caodaisme: Rituels m  diumiques, oracles et exegeses* [Caodaism: Mediumistic S  ances, Prophecies and Exegesis] (doctoral thesis, Universit   Paris X Nanterre, 2006); and Paul Mus, *Vi  t Nam: Sociologie d'une guerre* [Vietnam: Sociology of a War] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1952).
4. See Bernard Fall, "The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam," *Pacific Affairs* 28, no. 3 (Septmeber 1955): 235–253.
5. Government statistics for the numbers of Cao Ð  i followers counted 3.2 million in 2003, although the leaders of various denominations assert that there are closer to 5–6 million, some of them practicing in private. See Ph  m B  ch H  p, *Ng  i Nam B   v   T  n Gi  o b  n   i  * [The People of the South and Indigenous Religions] (H   N  i: T  n Gi  o, 2007). Of these, roughly half follow the T  y Ninh Holy See, which is the first and largest denomination and has 800 temples out of a total of 1346 in Vietnam. Leaders of the second largest denomination, in B  n Tre, claimed over a million followers in 1999 and have 300 temples in the Mekong Delta. See J  r  my Jammes, "Caodaistes de B  n Tre (Vi  t-nam) apr  s 1975: la pratique m  diumnique oraculaire en question" [Ben Tre Caodaists after 1975: Mediumship in Question] *As  anie* [Asia and Pacific Islands] 16, no. 1 (2005): 61–88; and "Caodaism and its Global Networks: An Ethnological Analysis of a Vietnamese Religious Movement in Vietnam and Abroad," *Moussons: Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est* [Monsoon: Human Sciences Research on Southeast Asia] 13–14, num  ro sp  cial (2010): 339–358. The government has recognized eleven denominations, but there are many smaller groups that have not received official recognition. The Agency for Doctrinal Dissemination [C   Quan Ph   Th  ng Gi  o L  y (CQPTGL)] was recognized in 2000, not as a denomination, but a center for teaching and training in meditation. While it describes itself as "ecumenical," it is perceived as bringing together the "non-T  y Ninh" denominations. Its leadership provides an alternative orthodoxy to that practiced in T  y Ninh, and it has historically contained more supporters of the current government. I estimate that the roughly 50,000 overseas followers are also evenly split between T  y Ninh and the other denominations (who collaborate through CQPTGL).
6. See Joel Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

7. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.
8. *Ibid.*, 212.
9. See Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 21.
10. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, April 2004.
11. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, May 2004.
12. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, April 2003.
13. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, May 2004.
14. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.
15. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
16. Paul Kattenburg, who had known Đỗ Vạn Lý in the early 1950s in the US, wrote the confidential biography submitted to Roger Hilsman on his arrival in Washington DC. In this document he describes Đỗ Vạn Lý as “an energetic man,” “widely read,” fluent in English, Japanese and French, whose “enthusiasm has been known to overcome his discretion.” He noted: “Ly’s idealism and his strong nationalism, and anti-French sentiments, led him, before 1950, into open connections with the DRV, but he has insisted that he was never a communist. He is now anti-communist and enthusiastically pro-United States, and when stationed in Saigon, he was helpful to U.S. representatives there.” Although his studies at Columbia had been supported by the DRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1949, Đỗ Vạn Lý later asserted in a letter to the New York Times that “communism had no place in Vietnam,” and that he was known to be close to Ngô Đình Diệm. See declassified CIA documents, Confidential Memorandum sent October 3, 1963, “Subject: Arrival of Vietnamese Ambassador Do Van Ly,” Form No. 10, 5010-104, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/vietnam.asp> (accessed December 2010).
17. Đỗ Vạn Lý’s belief in Ngô Đình Diệm was not shared by many English language historians, but more recent research using Vietnamese sources has tried to rehabilitate Ngô Đình Diệm to a certain degree, arguing that he had his own vision of democracy, but it was simply not the same vision as that of the US. For example, see Edward Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945–54,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (October 2004): 433–458. I asked Đỗ Vạn Lý about rumors that Nguyễn Đình Nhu had been secretly negotiating with communist forces, and he said: “Diệm realized how serious the situation was, and in such a situation you do whatever you can.” Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
18. Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, June 2005.

21. He said, “When I was asked to write the by-laws of Caodaism, I sat down with one stick of incense and some pen and paper, and I felt inspired. I would wake at 2 a.m. and the air was filled with the smell of a yellow flower, so I knew that God was encouraging me.” Interviews with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, April 2004.
22. Hoàng Mai is the maternal granddaughter of Lê Văn Lịch, one of the first Cardinals [Đầu sư] at the Holy See who was also an Alter Master [Pháp sư] of the Minh Sư Taoist tradition. See Huệ Nhẫn (pen name of Võ Thành Châu), *Khai Đạo: từ khởi nguyên đến khai minh* [The Inauguration of the Faith: From Its First Beginnings to the Official Declaration] (HCMC: CQPTGL, Tôn Giáo, 2005), 388. She is still at CQPTGL and I met her several times.
23. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.
24. Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*, 109 (one of the graphs is also pictured).
25. See Thien Do, *Vietnamese Supernaturalism: Views from the Southern Region* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 174–175, 270.
26. Đỗ Vạn Lý’s American friends included journalist Sol Saunders (whom he first met at Columbia); novelist and journalist Robert Sampson Elegant (who knew him at Columbia and in New Delhi, and asked me for Đỗ Vạn Lý’s current address); and US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker (who served from 1967–1975), who knew him in India and in Sài Gòn.
27. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, June 2005.
28. Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American* (1954), Viking Critical Library Edition, ed. John Clark Pratt (New York: Penguin, 1996), 83.
29. See *The Green Beret* (1968), DVD, directed by Ray Kellogg, John Wayne and Mervyn LeRoy (United States: Warner Home Videos, 1997).
30. See Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire on the Lake: Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, [1972] 2002), 56–57. See also Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*; and Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*.
31. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Perris, California, March 2003 (at his temple).
32. In 2009, the general secretary of CQPTGL, Huệ Y, told me: “It was fortunate that Đỗ Vạn Lý left when he did, because if he had not cut his ties with our organization before 1975, we would never have been able to stay open. He was a dynamic leader, but too opposed to the current government.” Interview with Huệ Y, Hồ Chí Minh City, 2009 (at CQPTGL offices). Đinh Văn Đê, a former parliamentarian who later assumed leadership at CQPTGL, had been a double agent for the NLF during the war. It was clear that he had deep disagreements with Đỗ Vạn Lý, and tried to play down Đỗ Vạn Lý’s role in leading the organization in interviews I had with him at CQPTGL in August 2004 and August 2010.

Dinh Văn Đê is now the highest ranking member of the mediums associated with CQPTGL, who present themselves as “teachers of meditation.”

33. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, June 2005.
34. Ibid.
35. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Perris, California, March 2003. Parts of this video-taped interview can be seen in the documentary I wrote and produced, “The Left Eye of God: Caodaism Travels from Vietnam to California,” distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, <http://www.der.org/films/left-eye-of-god.html>.
36. Đỗ Vạn Lý, following the example set by Ngô Minh Chiêu, declined a whole series of positions he says were offered to him, including the possibility of leading the Bảo Đại government as prime minister in 1950 (a position briefly occupied by another Cao Đài follower, Nguyễn Phan Long), and heading a Vietnamese government in exile in California (which still exists, although without his participation).
37. Several French “Cao Đài sympathizers,” (Gabriel Gobron and Gustave Meillon) had founded small spiritist circles in France in the 1940s and 1950s, but none of these survived their deaths and they did not constitute an ongoing congregation. The temple at Alfortville represented a significant institutionalization of transnational Caodaism, as well as its “Vietnamization.” See Jammes, “Caodaïstes de Bén Tre (Viêt-nam),” 61–88; and his thesis, *Le Caodaïsme*, 162–164.
38. Some American Cao Đài followers have included Joseph Smith because his revelations from the Angel Moroni are seen as part of a tradition of spiritism that Cao Đài has long been allied with. Smith’s own background as a Free Mason caused him to include many “Cao Đài symbols” (the all-seeing eye, the moon and stars, etc.) on the outside of Mormon temples. It is perhaps significant that several non-Vietnamese Cao Đài followers, like Stephen Stratford and Ngasha Beck, came from Mormon backgrounds but renounced Mormonism as racist and patriarchal, and came to find Cao Đài as a more welcoming spiritual home.
39. Interview with Ngọc Quang Minh, the general secretary and webmaster of Thiên Lý Bửu Tòa, San Martin, California, August 2004. He is the brother of the young medium who was being trained.
40. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.
41. Ibid.
42. Cao Đài’s interim Pope, Lê Văn Trung (1876–1934), was also a political figure who had, up to the time of his calling, been resolutely secular. He was a successful entrepreneur known for his fondness for worldly comforts (wine, women and opium). At the age of 50, suffering from failing eyesight and drug addiction,

- his life was totally transformed by his religious calling. He supposedly recovered his vision and was able to quit opium with no ill effects, although he only lived for another eight years. See Bui Hum Dac and Ngasha Beck, *Cao Đài, Faith of Unity* (Fayetteville, AR: Emerald Wave, 2000), 23.
43. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, May 2005.
  44. Đỗ Vạn Lý provided me with his account of this event in interviews at his house in Chatsworth in 2004. I later verified this account with the administrative council at CQPTGL in 2004 and 2010. It is also discussed by Jérémy Jammes in his 2006 doctoral thesis, *Le Caodaisme*.
  45. This argument has been made in the doctoral dissertation of Jayne Werner, *The Cao Dai*, 38. The Cao Đài scholar Lê Anh Dũng said in an email sent on November 13, 2008 that he believed there was a certain amount of truth in this assertion, but it applied mainly to “elite Cao Đài” in the esoteric tradition. See Nguyen Huy and Hum Dac Bui, *Le CaoDaisme. Theories des trois trésors et des cinq fluids* [Theories of the Three Treasures and the Five Fluids], preface and English ed. Janet Hoskins (Redlands CA: Chan Tam Publisher, 2005).
  46. The egg appears in a journalist’s account of meeting Đỗ Vạn Lý at a Washington dinner party on November 1, 1963, the night that Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime fell. He attended with “his good friend” Ambassador Bunker. Đỗ Vạn Lý’s “scintillating temperament and fast wit kept everyone amused,” as Betty Beale reported in her “Washington Letter.” He performed a sort of Taoist magic trick by standing an egg on top of a chopstick, but this “gay, laughing evening” turned into a “sleepless, mysterious night” when news of the coup arrived. See Betty Beale, “Washington Letter,” the *Sacramento Bee*, November 2, 1963. Đỗ Vạn Lý’s own memory of the occasion is that all eyes turned to stare at him and he said in exasperation “What do you want me to do now? Stand on my head?” Although he had been expecting bad news, he said he was “so heartbroken that I could not manage to be polite.” Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, January 2005.
  47. Đỗ Thuận Hậu’s school is, however, still active and under the entrepreneurial leadership of his former “disciple,” Lương Sĩ Hằng (a Chinese-Vietnamese now in the US) who operates a website ([www.vovi.org](http://www.vovi.org)) dedicated to the school and has recently published works in California in both Vietnamese and English. See Đỗ Thuận Hậu, *Phép Xuất Hồn* [The Method of Soul Travel] (Santa Ana, CA: Đại Nam, 1994); and Tinh Trong Bốn Bể [Love under Pressure], available online or at the Vô Vi center in Westminster, California. Đỗ Vạn Lý is critical of these publications, which he says “make a business” of his father’s teachings and are not true to their original intentions. He met Lương Sĩ Hằng once in California but felt that the man was not sufficiently deferential or respectful.
  48. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.

49. Ibid.
50. See Trần Quang Vinh, *Les Messages Spirites de la Troisième Amnistie de Dieu en Orient*. [Spirit Messages from the Third Universal Redemption of God in the Orient] (Tây Ninh: Sainte Siège du Caodaïsme, 1962).
51. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.
52. See Robert Campany, “Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China ca. 220 BC–350 CE,” in *The History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 336. For followers of Chiếu Minh meditation, these “unclean” foods are all those that disturb tranquility, including onions, garlic, spices, carbonated beverages, coffee, dairy products, refrigerated water, etc. See Lê Minh Sơn, *Về tổ đình Căn Thơ* [Concerning the Main Temple of the Căn Thơ Esoteric Branch (Căn Thơ: Ban Tôn Giáo Thành Phố Căn Thơ, 2004), 4.
53. Campany, “Secrecy and Display,” 302.
54. See also the doctoral thesis of Jérémy Jammes, *Le Caodaïsme*; and his “Cao-đạistes de Bén Tre (Việt-nam),” 61–88.
55. Interview with Ngọc Quang Minh, San Martin, California, August 2004.
56. The name of the Mekong River in Vietnamese, Cửu Long, means “nine dragons.” There are nine stages of spiritual attainment in Cao Đài, nine levels of the Great Temple in Tây Ninh, nine folds in the man’s black head cloth worn by each male disciple, etc.
57. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, September 2005.
58. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
59. In December 2007, I received a copy of a 2003 manuscript that states this clearly: “Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo is not a temple, nor a meditation center, does not have dignitaries, and does not register the numbers of its own disciples officially. Here the main goal is to do research on the teachings of the Great Way of the Third Redemption, gather together many intellectuals who do not have the divisive mentality of the different denominations since the aim is to unify the different branches into one, find common points and a philosophical consensus to rise above petty ambitions for rank or control of a particular group. Parallel to this research, the agency also has a lot of experience in practicing meditation (*tâm pháp*, the “method of the heart” or introspection) using both the Zen [Thiền] and the tranquil mind practice [*trình luyện*]. Although the organization is stable and the path of practicing is clear and visible, still the teaching agency has not yet attained the hoped-for result, which was to systematize all of the Cao Đài teachings. This was the original goal or mission that it was given when the teaching agency came into being in 1965. Certain unforeseen circumstances, and events after 1975, made that task almost impossible. Only now is it possible to return to it as the religion is getting back on its feet and re-establishing ties to all the different denominations



- that it should be in contact with on a regular basis.” See Ngô Bái Thiên, *Đạo Cao Đài trong khoảng ba mươi năm qua 1975–2003* [Caodaism in the Almost Thirty Years Since 1975] (unpublished typescript circulated to the author from CQPTGL). The influence of CQPTGL is documented in Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*, 107–111 especially; and Jammes, *Le Caodaïsme*, 274–316, 387–412.
60. Thien Do, *Vietnamese Supernaturalism*, 208–209.
  61. *Ibid.*, 174–175, 181, 266, and 270 for Thien Do discussions on Đỗ Thuần Hậu; 152–154, 265, and 279 for his discussions on Đỗ Vạn Lý.
  62. See Kristin Endres, “Fate, Memory and the Postcolonial Construction of the Self: The Life Narrative of a Vietnamese Spirit Medium,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 34–65; Roxana Waterson, “Introduction” *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 8.
  63. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, [1983] 2006), 11 and 15.
  64. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* [*Democracy in America*], 2 vols. 1835/1840, trans. and eds., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
  65. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 242. This can also be found in the unofficial collection of messages received at Tây Ninh. See Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh [Tây Ninh Holy See], *Thánh ngôn sưu tập* [Collected Spirit Messages] (Tây Ninh: Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, 2002), 82.
  66. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 357; also published in the compilation of materials provided by the female Cardinal [Đạo sư] Hương Hiếu, vol. 1 (Tây Ninh: Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, 1972), 115.
  67. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 490.
  68. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism*, 190.
  69. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 41. Also published in Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, *Thánh ngôn hiệp tuyển* [Official Selection of Spirit Messages] (Tây Ninh: Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, 1972), 32. English translations of many of these messages by Dr. Hum Dac Bui can be found at [www.caodai.net](http://www.caodai.net).
  70. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 38; Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, *Thánh ngôn hiệp tuyển*, 77.
  71. This prophecy has been reprinted and translated in many different ways. It appears in a book by an English Caodaist, Khánh Phan, *Caodaism* (London: Minerva, 2000), 135; in the newsletter of the “Église Caodai” [Cao Đài Church] in Alfortville, a suburb of Paris, in 2004; in Christopher Hartney’s 2004 dissertation on Australian Caodaism, *A Strange Peace*, 154; and on the first page of a privately printed and internally circulated 2003 assessment of Caodaism since 1975, published at CQPTGL in Hồ Chí Minh City. Both Christopher Hartney

and Khánh Phan translate *nòi giống* as “country.” Đỗ Vạn Lý said that the division into three can also be interpreted as referring to Vietnamese from the north, south and the diaspora, or the division of world religions into the three great Eastern traditions, Christianity and Islam.

72. The French sentence “La race française et la race annamite sont mes deux bénites” is translated into Vietnamese in Cao Đài scriptures as “Dân tộc Pháp-Việt là hai giống dân được nhiều huệ phúc nhất.” See Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, *Thánh ngôn hiệp tuyển*, 40. Since two separate words are used for “race,” the Vietnamese text could be paraphrased as “The French and Vietnamese people are the two descent lines that have been most favored.”
73. See Khánh Phan, *Caodaism*, 135; Hartney, *A Strange Peace*, 154–175; Louis-Jacques Dorais, “Faith, Hope and Identity: Religion and Vietnamese Refugees” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (July 2007): 57–68. See also Hoskins, “Cao-dai Exile and Redemption,” 191–209.
74. Timothy L. Smith, “Religion and Ethnicity in America,” *American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (December 1978): 1155–1185 (1183). See also Hartney, *A Strange Peace*, 154–175; Dorais, “Faith, Hope and Identity,” 57–68; and Hoskins, “Caodai Exile and Redemption,” 191–209.
75. See Ashley Carruthers, “The Accumulation of National Belonging in Transnational Fields: Ways of Being at Home in Vietnam,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9, no. 4 (January 2002): 423–444; and Ashley Carruthers “The Trauma of Synchronization: The Temporal Location of the Homeland in the Vietnamese Diaspora” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19, no. 2 (December 2009): 63–91.
76. Carruthers, in “The Trauma of Synchronization,” adds: “Saigon is thus not imagined as a place that can be returned to, despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of overseas Vietnamese do precisely this every year. In the exilic mode of discourse, these quotidian returns are bracketed within the mythicized Final Return that would signify the fall of communism, and, ironically, the end of Diaspora.” See Carruthers, “The Trauma of Synchronization,” 74–75.
77. Ashley Carruthers, “The Vietnamese Family and its Transnational Social Futures,” paper circulated for the 2007 conference on Anthropology in Vietnam, held in Bình Châu, Vietnam.
78. Teleological arguments abound in analyses of the Vietnam conflict. In 2006, an academic conference held at the University of Washington, Seattle, titled “Beyond Teleologies,” sought to escape the teleologies of Marxist nationalist historians who chronicled the “inevitable” triumph of the communist and “war of reunification.” United States military advisors were also teleological when they justified the use of American forces by referring to the “domino theory” to argue that they needed to forestall communist domination of the third world

until communist states would begin to self-destruct on their own. The religious teleologies of Cao Đài leaders join their own prophecies to many others that are perhaps equally fatalistic.

79. Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tìm hiểu đạo Cao Đài* [Understanding Caodaism] vol. 1 (Perris, CA: Cao Đài Giáo Việt Nam Hải Ngoại [Overseas Vietnamese Community of Caodaists], 1989), 483.
80. *Ibid.*, 489.
81. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33.
82. Recent publications from the religion department in Vietnam have tried to rehabilitate Cao Đài as an “indigenous religion of the south,” stressing its emergence in Nam Bộ and its ties to “traditional psychology,” but deliberately editing out its international networks and cosmopolitan aspirations. The congregations in Vietnam are also described as “primarily rural and economically disadvantaged,” and no mention is made of recent diasporic sources of support. See Phạm Bích Hợp, *Người Nam Bộ và Tôn Giáo bản địa* [The People of the South and Indigenous Religions] (Hà Nội: Tôn Giáo, 2007). A somewhat similar argument is presented by CQPTGL scholar Huệ Khải in his article. See Huệ Khải (pen name of Lê Anh Dũng), *Đất Nam Kỳ tiền đề văn hóa mở đạo Cao Đài* [Cochinchina as a Cultural Precondition for the Foundation of Caodaism] (Hà Nội: Tôn Giáo, 2008).
83. Janet Hoskins, “Caodai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion’s Struggle for Identity,” in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 191–210 (209).
84. Gelya Frank, “Anthropology and Individual Lives: The Story of the Life History and the History of the Life Story,” *American Anthropologist* 97, no. 4 (December 1995): 145–148 (147).
85. Đỗ Vạn Lý says he was born in 1910, so he would have been 53 in 1963. Most official records list his birth year as 1919, which he says is an “Ellis Island” birth date that he provided to show that he was the appropriate age to be starting graduate studies in the US. In an Asian setting, there is often a strategic advantage to being the “eldest brother” [*đạo trưởng*], which is how he is referred to by most Cao Đài followers .
86. There is a saying, *Bốn chín chưa qua, Năm ba đã tới*, which roughly means, “When 49 is not yet past, you already feel that you are 53.” Since 49 is 7x7, it has a certain numerical symmetry in Buddhist-influenced ritual (where the period of mourning is 49 nights). A personal message that Đỗ Vạn Lý received from Lao Tzu at a séance at CQPTGL on March 7, 1964, makes specific reference to his age: *Này Chú Môn Đố! Nhị ngoại thập ngũ phân tánh sanh, đó là một kiếp mà thôi. Lão đến chứng tâm thành của Chú Môn Đố hiển lễ* [Listen to this, My

Disciple! When you approach fifty years after your birth, you may not have that much left of this incarnation. So I have come to witness your faithfulness in performing the rites for me]. *Lão từ Nhứt Khí Tiên Thiên Biến Hóa. Chú Môn Đổ cũng do từ đó mà sơ sanh. Chú Môn Đổ hãy lo Tu Tánh Luyện Mạng để hoàn thành sứ-mạng của người giác-ngộ. Lão vẫn mong đợi ngày trùng hoan cùng Chú Môn Đổ nơi Cung Đẩu Xuất.* [I come from the first breath of the pre-celestial transformations. You were also born from the same place. You must cultivate yourself to fulfill the mission of those who can achieve full enlightenment. I long for the day when I can meet you at the entrance to heaven]. The author adds a note here that the Cung Đẩu Xuất is the same as the Bạch Ngọc Kinh, the white cloud lodge where the Supreme Being awaits all the Buddhas and Immortals. See Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tim hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 382. This spirit message shows how this calling is both a sign of election (in almost the Protestant sense that only some souls are truly elect) and a requirement to practice more intensely. Those who are “among the original beings” are called to push themselves all the way to the top.

87. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
88. See Đỗ Vạn Lý, *Tim hiểu đạo Cao Đài*, 449–456.
89. *Ibid.*, 449.
90. James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future (August 1994): 302–338 (311–312; my ellipses).
91. *Ibid.*, 312.
92. Interview with Đỗ Vạn Lý, Chatsworth, California, March 2004.
93. The publication of a calendar was a savvy move: observant Cao Đài followers must refrain from eating meat ten specific days of the lunar month, clustered around the new and full moon, so the calendar provides a ubiquitous reference and a selection of images and spirit messages from CQPTGL that buttresses Đỗ Vạn Lý’s diasporic theology.
94. Fieldwork interviews with CQPTGL leaders Đinh Văn Đê (2004, 2006, 2010), Huệ Y (2007, 2009) and Nguyễn Văn Trạch (2006, 2010) during the month of August at their center in Hồ Chí Minh City.
95. See Philip Taylor, *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Oscar Saleminck, “Embodying the Nation: Mediumship, Ritual and the National Imagination,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 3 (October 2008): 261–290; and Phạm Quỳnh Phương and Chris Eipper, “Mothering and Fathering the Vietnamese: Religion, Gender and National Identity,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 2009): 49–83.
96. Edward Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945–54,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (October 2004): 433–458.