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***Les Oracles du Cao Đài: Étude d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux* [The Cao Dai oracles: Essay on a Vietnamese religious movement and its networks]**

JÉRÉMY JAMMES

Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2014, 614p.

This book, which I would describe as monumental, is the adaptation of an academic dissertation. It distinguishes itself from previous work (French and Anglo-American) on the subject because it does not situate that subject in a single isolated perspective: neither that of ethnology nor that of historical sociology. With this book, Jérémy Jammes has responded to the archaeologist Bernard Philippe Groslier, who in 1960 called for a necessary alliance between history and ethnology in the study of Asian countries (Groslier 1960), and he has done so by linking, and even closely intertwining, the ethnological approach with the historical.

The author identifies and highlights three vectors of Caodaism: the historical vector, by inscribing the phenomenon in several religious traditions of the beginning of the twentieth century: a matrix of Sino-Viêt mediums (phoenix writing or *fuluan* 扶鸞) (Do 2003) combined with French-Viêt spiritualism, Freemasonry, and Theosophy; the sociological vector, by describing and analyzing the socio-professional environments (the urban and rural bourgeoisie of southern Vietnam) from which Caodaism originated, as well as the networks of kinship and patronage (somehow nepotistic) that it wove or reinforced in order to take root and spread; finally, the author does not neglect the political vector, in particular French colonial domination and the post-independence period.

Far from contenting himself with an analytical description of Caodaist beliefs and faith, Jammes seeks to grasp their meaning: the affirmation of an original identity while simultaneously claiming equality with the colonial masters. This led the founders, the clergy, and the faithful (whose number swelled to the hundreds of thousands in the aftermath of World War II) to follow the Catholic model with regard to ecclesial organization. These initial goals of the new religion's promoters lent Caodaism a subversive character that made its actors sensitive to the temptation of political engagement—first against the French colonization, then against the communist hegemony within national resistance and today within the reunified nation and state.

Jammes does not limit his historical investigation to the past; he continues it in a history of the present day of the Caodaist religion, a history that has unfolded in time (since 1975) and in the

space of communities that were born out of the dispersion following the Vietnam War—in France, the United States, and Australia. He observes that this expansion was accompanied by an aggrornamento, with the Cao Dai religion emerging refined or renewed from all the trials (bans, persecution, and repression). It cast off its spectacular apparatus of worship to place greater importance on meditation than on oracular spirit-mediumship *séances*. This process has been characterized by a tension between the aspiration for unity and a continued tendency for fission, a tension between the ambition to be a marker of identity (a national religion) and that of acquiring universal scope through missionary activity.

Finally, to take up the appellation of “politico-religious sect” that was popularized by French authors during and since the Franco-Vietnamese War (1945–54), and then in a jiffy borrowed by US scholars and journalists for the next two decades, Jammes demonstrates that Caodaism is a hybrid form, a sect-church alloy. He also convincingly demonstrates that Caodaism is the result of two hitherto underestimated inspirations: that of redemptive Chinese societies (which leads to social commitment for the sake of a universalist modernity) (Goossaert and Palmer 2011) and that of the nineteenth century Western occultist movements (Theosophy, Freemasonry, the spiritualism of Allan Kardec). The millenarian aspect of Caodaism becomes evident in the proclamation of the arrival of a universal god and not that of a Buddha Maitreya.

This book clarifies the ambiguity of the colonial moment, which cannot be reduced to mere economic predation, political humiliation, or the “cataclysmic” clash of cultures. The colonization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries established spaces of interactions and transactions where the ones being ruled proved to be actors who demonstrated their ability to adapt and evolve. Caodaism illustrates what the historian André Nouschi calls “returned weapons” (Nouschi 2005). At the same time, Caodaism established itself on land that had been occupied until the end of the 1920s by the European missionary Church and the Catholic religion, with the goal of competing with them.

This book is the culmination of long and patient fieldwork. The investigation led the author to stay in a Caodaist community in Vietnam, which, in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, was quite a feat, given the political context. He conducted numerous interviews on site and overseas (Cambodia, USA, France, Canada). This field research provided him with material that he could compare against archival data (eyewitness accounts as well as administrative and police reports), journalistic sources, and religious texts (the canon, exegeses, and autobiographies). In the work of Jammes, the empirical side goes hand in hand with—and is tested against—theoretical references (in particular Max Weber, Michael Taussig [1993], and Jean-Pierre Laurant [1992]). I consider this remarkable work to be a masterpiece in the domains of Vietnamese studies and Asian religions.

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***Yimin guiji he lisan lunshu: Xinma huaren zuqun de zhongceng mailuo*  
移民轨迹和离散论述——新马华人族群的重层脉络 [Migration trajectories and diasporic discourses: Multiples contexts of ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia]**

YOW CHEUN HOE 游俊豪

Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing Company, 2014, ii+243p.

The Chinese word “Huaren” has been used to refer broadly to Chinese people outside of China, but there is little consensus on the details of the term’s definition. FitzGerald (1965) employed the term “the third China,” whereas Alexander (1973) called them “the invisible China”; Heidhues (1974) perceived them to be “minorities,” but Purcell (1980) continued to write of them as “the Chinese.” Recently, scholars in the field seem to prefer the phrase “ethnic Chinese” in order to better reflect the “outside-in” nature<sup>1)</sup> of these Southeast Asians with their origins in China.<sup>2)</sup> The scientific community’s lack of consensus over the definition of the “ethnic Chinese” confirms one belief—namely, that the identity of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia entails a complex composition. To trace the origin and the impact of such an identity requires multilevel analysis, and that is what the author of this book intends to achieve.

Focusing on the cases of Malaysia and Singapore, Yow Cheun Hoe (游俊豪) discusses the anxiety of the ethnic Chinese in their search for identity: on one hand, the original inhabitants in the two countries push the ethnic Chinese to the margins of the out-group; on the other hand, the ethnic Chinese deny considering themselves as China Chinese. At first glance, this thesis is by

1) The so-called “outside-in” effect refers to the identification of ethnic Chinese Southeast-Asians as outsiders.

2) For further discussion of the terms used to refer to ethnic Chinese, see Suryadinata (1997); Wang (1992, 1–10).