



BOARD OF STUDIES  
NEW SOUTH WALES

(2)

Across the world and throughout the ages, humanity's quest for knowledge and fulfillment have led them to establish <sup>various</sup> codes of beliefs and practices which alleviate the tension and anxiety caused by "not knowing". From Socialism to Christianity, Voodoo to Democracy, ideologies have underpinned the ideas and events of history, and motivated the weak and powerful alike.

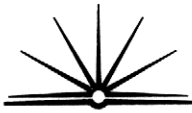
In modern times, however, the advent of technology and a globalised world ~~have~~ have rendered the traditional practices of many belief systems redundant. Whereas the past heralded a hoard of missionaries bringing "salvation" to foreign shores, today it is the Internet and mass media who speak forth and proselytise <sup>to</sup> the "unsaved." In order to survive, belief systems are forced to embrace the advent of this change - often, in the process, gaining new members, and increased global awareness.

One belief system whose brilliant use of technology to



expand its believer numbers is the eclectic theosophy Cao Dai. Officially inaugurated in 1926 by the Prefect Ngo Van Chieu, this modern religion of Vietnamese origin works under the premise of uniting all of humanity through religious, and social, acceptance. With its notorious panoply of Saints, ranging from Joan of Arc to Gollyguk, Cao Daists believe that God sent forth all religions ~~at the past~~ in order to prepare the world for his revelation that all belief systems at the past ~~and~~ and present worship the same Father.

This message, one of peace and acceptance, was shared with Ngo Van Chieu through the seance-like means of Spiritism. In a contemporary world view, where <sup>the</sup> increasing secularisation of society has led to a spiritual "new age" eclecticism, this concept of spiritism has been embraced by Cao Dai's 8 million followers. Although popular in Vietnam since its inception in the 1920's, the 3



Cao Dai

million non-Vietnamese, prescribers, from as far abroad as Africa, have found solace in this syncretism of ancient religious doctrines.

Not all Cao Daists, however, worship in the same manner or to the same degree. In ~~an~~ a formal, yet accepting manner, the Cao Dai doctrine provides two frameworks for customary practice - the exoteric and esoteric worship. Whilst the Superior order maintain a strict and unrelenting devotion to esoteric practice, wearing only white cotton robes and abstaining from sexual intimacy, the exoteric practitioners continue their day-to-day lifestyles, visiting the temple only twice a month and abstaining from meat for six of every thirty days. In providing two outlets for worship, that of the devout and that of the practicing, the Cao Dai belief system establishes a level of devotion which isolates no-one, and allows for greater believed numbers.

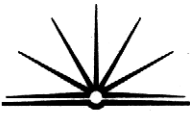
The esoteric and exoteric practices are not, however, the only customs within Cao Dai. Although purporting to be a belief system founded on gender equality and the balancing principles of yin and yang, men and women remain differentiated within the religion. During worship men must stand to the right of the temple whilst the women remain to the left, whilst females may only rise to the third-highest <sup>rank in</sup> Cao Dai hierarchy, that of Cardinal. This subjugation of women, although inherent in many belief systems, is in opposition to ~~the~~ today's overwhelming world-view that women and men are born equal, this ideology being advented by the feminism and suffrage of the women's movement.

This world view has not impacted only on Cao Dai and other religious belief systems. Socialism, as an offspring of ~~that~~ Marx and Engel's "Communist Manifesto", heralds the equality of women



and men and females' status as valuable contributors to the social framework. In a sense, it is more common of non-theological belief systems to be affected by contemporary world-views, as religious systems often entail notions which many facets of society would consider archaic and discriminatory. Although Cao Dai makes no mention of women having been created from man's ribs, it is still bound by the filial piety and masculine superiority of Confucius' doctrines, therefore alienating many would-be members who have been effected by the customs, technology and world views of the modern world.

While Cao Dai utilises this technological innovation to spread the news of its conception over multiple web sites, non-religious belief systems are perpetuated through the actions and influence of followers, who impact greatly throughout the world. Socialism, democracy and feminism ~~are~~ just for secular belief systems, not



only draw on ~~the~~ contemporary world-views,  
but also create them, whilst establishing  
customs which are both relevant, and progressive.  
This is not to say that religious belief systems  
such as Cao Dai ~~do~~ not contribute to our world,  
simply that they must often adapt and alter  
to changing world views in order to retain  
both their member base, and their survival.  
By creating customs and utilizing technology,  
Cao Dai has done just that.