

scholarship spanning comparative political theory (particularly as it relates to gender), Indonesian political history and anthropological discussions of Muslim women's agency. The book is thus highly stimulating and a work of interest beyond the study of contemporary political developments in Indonesia.

The one section of the book that I found disappointing was the conclusion. I expected the author to take a position on a number of debates canvassed but not fully resolved in the earlier chapters. For example, the author notes that politically less-well-connected female candidates enjoyed greater opportunities in the first decade after the end of the New Order era than they do in the present, but she does not explain this shift. She also fails to take a position on the quota system for female candidates and, specifically, on the question of whether this regulation would result in greater attention to the needs and priorities of women. Finally, in addition to listing the names of female local government leaders, it would have been useful for the author to inform readers of the percentage of female members of local parliaments and the trends in those percentages.

Despite these minor reservations, this a great study of the rise — and in two cases decline — of three female local government leaders and of the role of Islam, gender and political networks in their electoral careers.

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Les Oracles du Cao Đài: Étude d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux [The oracles of Cao Đài: A study of a Vietnamese religious movement and its networks]. Preface by Georges Condominas. By Jérémy Jammes. Paris: Les Indes savants, 2014. xvi+614 pp.

Les Oracles du Cao Đài is a very impressive work, over six hundred pages long, based on over fifteen years of research in

Vietnam and France, as well as archives in both countries. Its encyclopaedic scale began with a doctoral dissertation, finished in 2006, which has been expanded, updated and filled with new data and subtle interpretations. Both a detailed ethnography of contemporary practices and a historical analysis of documents, it presents a critical but sympathetic analysis of the production of Caodai scripture through a process of mediumistic reception, selection, editing and publication. Messages, which Jammes calls “oracles”, have been received from a wide variety of divine entities, starting with the Jade Emperor (who is called Cao Đai, “the highest power”), the Tang dynasty Taoist poet Li Bai (called Lý Thái Bạch in Vietnamese, the “invisible Pope” who oversees these seances), and the Mother of the Western Heavens (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu), and including European figures like Victor Hugo and Jeanne d’Arc. Caodaism is a synthesis of the Chinese tradition of literary spirit-writing and more international influences from Theosophy, Freemasonry and the French Spiritism of Allan Kardec. Jammes traces these various influences in great detail, and takes seriously the exegetical explanations of Caodai historians and theologians, something that many earlier scholars failed to do.

This book is also a careful reading of the varied political stances that Caodaists have taken over the past eighty years, and the reasons for the diversity of these positions. Caodaists have been described as “collaborators” (allied at one time with the Japanese and later with the French), “reactionaries” and “opportunists”. Their eclectic beliefs and shifting alliances mean they are often described as the “most misunderstood” movement in Vietnam. The detailed historical and ethnographic research that Jammes has done allows us to see Caodaists as they see themselves, and to appreciate the symbolic and ritual complexity of this new religion.

There are three completely original arguments in Jammes’s book that shed new light on Caodaism. The first is an historical argument that the core elements of Caodai theology come from a Sino-Vietnamese heritage of once “secret societies” which deploy spirit mediumship to produce a cannon of texts transmitted over

time. While Jammes traces out influences from a very wide variety of sources, the most important lines of transmission come from the merging in the early temples of these societies of the “three doctrines” of East Asia — Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism — with a new technology for contacting the spirits. Although some earlier scholars have indicated that this might prove to be a fruitful area of investigation, no one has taken the time to prove it as effectively as Jammes has done.

The second is an ethnographic argument about the shifting emphases of Caodai religious practice, and especially the relationship of spirit mediumship to meditation. In a nuanced account of the esoteric origins of Caodaism in ascetic and mystical practices which involve renouncing worldly ties, Jammes lays out the basis for a strategic shift in emphasis forced by the communist government’s ban on spirit mediumship since 1975. He documents the performance of clandestine spirit-medium seances at a teaching agency (Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý) in Saigon, and the diffusion of these messages internationally, but notes that agency leaders carefully monitor and control their content in order to purge it of political references and criticisms of the government (which had been characteristic of spirit messages during the colonial period). During that earlier period, Caodaism was tied to a passionate non-aligned nationalism. Since 1975, this agency has invested much of the mystique of spirit mediumship in secret, esoteric forms of meditation, which offer the possibility of “having conversations with divinities” and receiving new religious texts. Thus, although the official position of Vietnamese Caodaists has to be that the “age of revelations” has passed, in fact their theology is constantly expanding and adapting itself to new contexts, not only through extensive commentaries on earlier messages but also through new incidents of religious inspiration.

The third is an argument about the international communication networks linking Caodai communities in Vietnam and overseas. It is this argument, based on an analysis of largely Vietnamese-language Internet sites, which ties in most closely to issues of religion and globalization. The diffusion of spirit messages, sometimes

undated, makes it possible to work around the official censorship of mediumistic seances, and engage Caodaists in the United States, Europe and Australia in a series of transnational conversations and publications that present various interpretations of their spiritual mission in the twenty-first century. As the Vietnamese government gradually moves to adopt a more liberal policy towards Caodaism, this international network has managed to bring back a significant number of important religious leaders, who have returned to Vietnam after many decades in California or France. A new generation of spirit mediums are being trained in Saigon now, and renewed interest in religion and ritual — evident all over the country since the beginning of *Đổi Mới* — suggests that Caodaism's once important position in the public sphere of southern Vietnam may soon be revived.

Jammes's important study shows us how fieldwork, archival and digital research can be brought together to understand a dynamic religion, described as “doomed” in the 1950s, and again in 1975, but now resurgent as Vietnam's third largest religion (after Buddhism and Catholicism) with 4.4 million followers.

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Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace. By Ann Marie Leshkovich. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014. xi+272 pp.

This book, winner of the 2016 Harry J. Benda Prize of the Association of Asian Studies, focuses on the lives of women traders in the Bến Thành market in Ho Chi Minh City. In a study of Vietnam's transition from a post-socialist country to a market-based economy, women traders might seem to be an unlikely topic. In the skilled hands of anthropologist Ann Marie Leshkovich, however, they prove an excellent case study, lying at the crossroads of several processes of