



# The University of Sydney

School of Letters, Art and Media  
Faculty of Arts

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31 March 2008

An Open Letter to Caodaists

Dear Leaders and Members of the Caodaist Faith,

Presently Caodaism is slowly breaking out of the Vietnamese community to become a world religion, yet this is happening at a very slow rate. Knowledge of Caodaism worldwide is not widespread or extensive. This is unfortunate. Comparative in size to the Caodaist religion is the Baha'i Faith. It is much more well known and is very effective in spreading news of itself through English-language journals both general and academic. Clear information on Caodaism in languages that are not Vietnamese remains limited to a number of websites and some academic and general books that are hard to get.

People and potential converts interested in Caodaist Scripture who know no Vietnamese find it hard to continue their studies into the religion. Translations of major Caodaist texts into English and other major languages are scarce. If the government of Vietnam allowed overseas Caodaists to run an information booth in Tay Ninh (a future possibility) there would be little information in foreign languages that could be found and much that would need to be written.

The Buddhist monk Kumarajiva (344-413) is famous in China because he gave new life to Buddhism there. Together with hundreds of scholars paid for by the Emperor, this monk was able to translate Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese. He did this by inventing a new vocabulary of Buddhist terms in the Chinese language. Before he arrived in China, Buddhism was barely known and understood as a branch of Daoism rather than a religion in its own right.

With the political system in Vietnam changing rapidly, Caodaism needs to prepare to take any opportunities afforded by evolving situations – including the distribution of information on Caodaism to visitors. This will be especially important if the Vietnamese Government allows the establishment of information centres in Tay Ninh and other places throughout the homeland.

I propose to develop a program that aids the development of information on Caodaism through the translation, amplification and publication of essential texts, commentaries and general information on the religion. This needs to take place in three major steps.

Caodaists should be eager to take advantage of Government grants that could help them. One of the most lucrative is a research grant offered by the Australian Government.

### Linkage Grants

For several years the Australian Federal Government through the body called "The Australian Research Council" have been running a program called the 'Linkage Grant.' This grants system was designed to aid in the production of research as collaboration between industry, community groups and the Australian University System. It is geared around solving particular problems. The solving of these problems must have some relevance to Australian culture and society. This can be easily argued given the active presence of Caodaism in the Australian society.

A full-time academic staff member of an Australian university must prepare the proposal. The proposal needs to suggest a plan of research carried out over four or five years. The research needs to be relevant to both the university and the Industry/Community Partner and of use to the Industry Partner. For the purposes of the grant an Industry/Community partner can include a social group such as a religion like Caodaism.

The mathematics of the Grant are designed to quintuple any money given by an outside group. Each dollar given to the grant by the Industry or Community Partner becomes 20% of the overall grant sum. The Australian government supplies the remaining 80%. For example a \$100 000 donation by an organization outside the University (\$20,000 each year for five years) will attract (if the grant is successful) a \$500 000+ monetary contribution by the Australian Government, providing an overall amount for research and problem solving of over \$600 000. This money can be used for research, travel, translations, editing projects, books, website building and information dissemination on the worldwide web and so on...

If an Industry/Community partner or partners (such as the Caodaist Association of NSW or The Caodai Overseas Missionary or both) agree to put in \$20 000 (AUD) in actual funds and \$10 000 in additional (non-cash) benefits each year this will total over 5 years \$150 000. This means a contribution of \$100 000 in money and \$50 000 in such things as services, translators, office space, accommodation for researchers while in Vietnam or Australia or North America, food, stationary and so forth. If the grant is successful (it can take a couple of applications to be successful – we can apply twice each year) the Australian Government will then provide over \$600 000 in additional funding.

This money would be collected and administered by trained financial officers at the University of Sydney so there is no possibility of fraud.

If Caodaists agreed to such a proposal, they would need to commit to providing \$20 000 (AUD) to the Grant for five years and offer \$10 000 a year services in kind – paper, photocopying, accommodation, an office at the Wiley Park temple, volunteer help with translating and other facilities for each of the five years. (for example: a researcher staying in a house in Vietnam would be counted as using up approximately \$200 (AUD) in-kind services each night).

If the grant were unsuccessful, Caodaists would pay no money whatsoever.



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