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Comparison of the Worship of the Tu Di Gong between Japan and Vietnam

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Abstract

The Japanese, like many peoples in the world, believe in polytheistic religions which is indicated by their significantly diverse types of worship. Based on the original ideas of Shinto (a Japanese folk religion), there are two main worship groups: human worship and nature worship. Among these, Tu Di Gong is of the most popular. The article provides an overview of Tu Di Gong in Japan in comparison with Vietnam.

1. The worship of the Gods of Land of the Japanese

Japanese folk culture in general, the worship of Tu Di Gong in particular has not attracted much attention of researchers and academics in Vietnam. There are not many specific studies analyzing in detail the worship of the Gods of Land in Japan and comparing to the same type of worship in Vietnam. While the Vietnamese people worship the Gods of Land who are also called the gods protecting the land, in the belief of the Japanese, there are many different gods protecting the land.

Definition: There are many different interpretations; however, according to Takashi Kakiyama in the “*Gods of Japan*” (*Nihon no kami* / 日本 の 神), the Gods of Land worshiped in Japan include: Mountain Gods and Gods of Soil who have the common function of protecting the land [Takashi Kakiyama, 2000: p. 126]. Today, the concept is extended, the founding ancestor of a family and the god who reclaimed the land are both considered as the Gods of Land. For example, gods worshiped in Kiyomizu (清水寺) in Kyoto, Jinushi Daimyōjin (地主 大明 神), Uwajima city, Ehime Prefecture, even Fujiwara no Kamatari (worshiper of the Tenji Emperor), Tanzan Jinja (談 山 神社) in Nara Prefecture are also considered as the gods protecting the land. In some places, the deceased person can become a local god after some time and be worshiped at the clan’s tomb. [Takashi Kakiyama, 2000: p. 127]

Main gods and worship rituals: In modern view, in addition to the diversification of worshiping objects, places of worship and forms of worship have also become varied. In the primitive faith, the place of worship was often on the edge of the forest, on the top of the hill, even in a certain corner. Today the Gods of Land are worshiped in small temples made of wood or stone, sometimes a straw temple. The presence of the Gods is signified by small stone statues, or natural stone blocks, *Yorishiro* manifestations, rolls of new straw, or stone towers manipulated by mankind.

Among the Gods of Land worshiped in Japan, the first to be mentioned is *Yashiki gami* (屋 敷 神 / the God of Soil), is the god who governs the land that the family build a house to live. *Yashiki gami* is found in most places of worship in Japan, from living place of a family to a local temple. *Yashiki gami* is also called by other names such as *Ujigami* (氏 神), *Uchigami* (家 神/ family’s god), *Jigami* (地 神/ god of the land) and *Jinushi gami* (地主神/ landlord god) [Naoe Hiroji, 1966]. In some cases, the god is also called by the name of the shrine where the god is worshiped, such as *Inari* (稲 荷 神社), *Shinmei* (神明 神社), *Gion* (祇 園 神社), *Hakusan* (白山 神社), *Tenjin* (天神), *Hachiman* (八 幡 神社) and *Wakamiya* (若 宮 神社) [Iwai Hiroshi, 2005a].

According to Yanagita Kunio [Yanagita Kunio, 1951] and Takami Hirotaka, the worship of *Yashiki gami* is divided into three main categories: First, the gods are worshiped in every household and the gods protect the family’s asset; Second, the gods are worshiped in the patriarchal family (*honke* / 本家) (*Zokudan*, *kazoku* / 家族); Third, the god is worshiped in the branch families, and this is the type of *Yashiki gami* who has the oldest history [Takami Hirotaka, 2006: pp. 14 -35]. Folklore researchers say that these gods functioned almost like the tutelary god of a village, who help to prevent evil or the curse against the family. *Yashiki gami* worship is usually performed twice

a year, in spring and autumn, corresponding to the conversion time of *Tano kami* (田 の 神 / rice god) and *Yama no kami* (山 の 神 / mountain god).

Yama no kami is the term used to refer to the gods worshiped in the mountains, but there is a difference between the gods worshiped in the delta and the gods worshiped in the mountain. This difference is due to the different functions of the gods worshiped in the temples [Iwai Hiroshi, 2005b]. In addition to the gods residing on mountains are commonly called mountain gods, the gods residing on high and dangerous mountains like a volcano often have another function that is protecting the land. Those gods are typically worship in the temples on the mountains of Oyama, Otaki, Fatih, Tateyama, Ishizukuyama, Hikiyama of Nara Prefecture .

The manifestations of *Yama no kami* (mountain god) are found everywhere in Japan, in some places the god is called *Sanjin* (山神 / Son Than), in other places the god is called *Jūni yama kami* (十二 山神 / the Twelveth Mountain God), *Ōsato sama* (オサトサマ), *Sagamisama* (サガミサマ) (Iwai Hiroshi, 2005b). In the ancient society, most of the Japanese lived by farming, hunting, gathering and fishing, so they worshiped *Yama no kami* and *Ta no kami*. They said that in spring and autumn, *Yama no kami* and *Ta no kami* (mountain god and rice god) will always appear together, flying across the jungle into the villages. When spring comes, *Yama no kami* gods go down the mountain, visit the field and become *Ta no kami*. This change is associated with the development cycle of rice and agricultural production. After harvest, *Ta no kami* gods return to the mountain and turn into *Yama no kami*. The point can be seen here is that the *kami* (gods) is formed on a single entity and characterized by changes over time, according to the production cycle.

For the Japanese who live in the plains, *Yama no kami* is the god presenting agricultural production who is responsible for carrying irrigating water as water-heads start from mountains. In contrast, for the mountainous ethnic groups who live by hunting, gathering, burning charcoal, doing forestry, the *Yama no kami* is the god rotating between mountain god and rice god. In some areas, it is believed that *Yama no kami* is goddess. This god gave birth to 12 children, corresponding to 12 months of a year, therefore, the god represents fertility. This conception leads to the identity of the fertility god under the names of *Ubu Sunagami* (産土 神), the god governs birth and infant. In those areas, the statue of *Yama no kami* is the image of the couple *Kijishi* and *Rokuroshi* [George Alphonse DeVos and Hiroshi Wagatsuna, 1966]. There are some noteworthy point in *Yama no kami* worship, that is in northeastern Japan, during the feast of god worship, women are forbidden to go to the mountains. As a result, in this area, *Yama no kami* is attached to an ugly old woman. *Ta no kami*, also known as rice god, is a term commonly used throughout the country.

In some parts of Yamanashi and Nagano, the gods included *Nō Gami* (農 神 / Agricultural god), *Saku gami* (作 神 / The God of Creation). In the Northern Kinki, people call *Ta no kami* as the god of production *Tsukuri gami* (作 り 神). People in the Izumo basin use other names: the god of raising *Inokami* (亥 の 神) and the god of land *Jikami* (地 神). Meanwhile, in the inland and coastal areas of Kyushu, the god of raising is called *Ushi gami* (丑 神) [Iwai Hiroshi, 2005.] In the North-east, people combine *Ta no kami* together with *Ebisu*, people in the West combine *Ta no kami* with

Daikoku, therefore, *Ta no kami* become the god governing three areas: sea, forest, and agriculture.

Rice festival honors rice god is usually held in mid-spring and fall, this is the period waiting for harvest. During these cycles, people celebrate Saori / 早 降 and Sanaburi / 早上. In the spring and fall, the celebration of rice festival is held throughout the country, and this period is the period of transfiguration of the two gods, Yama no kami and Ta no kami. This is based on the fervent belief of the ancient Japanese who said that in the spring, the gods went down the mountain to the village and became the god of rice, in the autumn, rice god leave the family to go up the mountain and again become the mountain god. In general, although there are many similar views on Ta no kami, there are some differences in worship rituals among different provinces.

Thus *Yama no kami*, *Ta no kami*, and *Yashiki gami* become the three most important worshiped gods of Japanese folk belief, and they are special deities whose function is to protect the land's holder [Norman Havens and Nobutaka Inoue; 2001: pp. 84 - 90].

There is another god who is also considered as god of land, namely *Sae no kami* (塞 の 神), also known as *Sakai no kami* (境 の 神) is the guardian of the border. The god *Sae no kami* has a similar role as a tutelary god who guards the boundaries between the villages where people live, prevents demons, diseases and natural calamities, and also prevents dead souls from entering the world of the living [Nogami Takahiro; 2007].

According to *Kojiki* (古 事 記) and *Nihongi* (日本 紀 / Japan), when the god Izanagi chased Izanami from the hell *Yomi* (黄泉 / Hell), even when he passed Yomi's door, Izanagi was stopped by a large rock. In order to be able to go further, the god prompted and threw the stone, passing through that gate. Later, according to Japanese folklore, he became the god of border *Funado no kami* (岐 の 神) and he is also known as *Sae no kami*, *Tsuki tatsu funado no kami* (衝 立 船 戸 神). *Sae no kami* not only governs the borders, mountain roads but also prevents the invasion of the devil into the village. In the scripture *Engishiki*, *Sakai no kami* is also known as *Michiae no matsuri* (道 饗 祭) and is united by three gods: *Yachi mata hiko* (八 衢 比 古), *Yachi mata hime* (八 衢 比 古), and *Kunado* (久 那 斗) [Norman Havens and Nobutaka Inoue, 2001: pp. 84-90].

In ancient times, the god *Kunado no kami* was worshiped in the corner of the village with the image of a couple of a man and a woman (god and goddess). The book by *Honcho Seiki* (本 朝 世 紀) noted in detail that in Heian period, *Sae no kami* were sculptured by wood and were attached to the image of male and female sexuality. In addition to *Funado no kami* and *Sae no kami*, the worship of border guarding gods also existed in prominent denominations such as in *Jisō* (自 葬), the image of the Bodhisattva, who always helped the followers of Buddhism on the path from one world to another and helped people when they were in trouble. This is a popular embodiment of *Sae no kami* [Kawamura Kunimitsu, 2005].

With some analysis above we have some idea s about the worship of the god of the Japanese.

2. Vietnamese's worship of god of land

Definition: The land genie of the Vietnamese is one of the “Trinity” system. In that trinity, Kitchen God governs the kitchen, Land Genie protects the home and the wife of the gods is supposed to take over women's work and garden produce “[Tran Hanh Nguyen, 2004: p. 104]. In the view of the ancient Vietnamese, the concept of worshipping land genie is to pray for the family to be happy, lucky, and wealthy and this is one of the traditional culture of the Vietnamese people. So the Vietnamese have the phrase “Land has genies, river has Sea God”, which means places with gods are protected. According to the researcher Toan Anh, the Gods of Land is the most important god of the family, more important than every other god. The Gods of Land are the guardians in a household, defining the family's faith. Thanks to the Gods of Land, evil souls cannot penetrate to disturb people in the house [Toan Anh, 2001: p. 78].

Shapes and characteristics: According to the folklore description, Land Genie is a god with full body, slightly fat, big belly, with a smiling face and holding an areca spathe fan. The image of a genie with big belly means that people always want to live a prosperous life. In fact, the Gods of Land have different shapes, sometimes as a male, a female, an old man, an animal, a tree, sometimes as a treasure or a familiar thing in people's daily life.

Worship ritual: In the worship ritual the Vietnamese people, Land Genies are often visualized as two males and one female. According to Tran Hanh Nguyen and Toan Anh, Vietnamese people use three paper hats (or one) and three tablets (or one) to represent the three gods. Every year, those symbols will be burned and be replaced by new ones on the New Year (Land Genie worshipping ceremony). Two male hats with two slightly upward wings are on two sides, and the female hat without two wings is in the middle. If you offer one hat, then it is for the God of Land. Each hat also comes with a set of clothes, a pair of shoes and paper money. Paper money usually has five colors, representing the five elements, metal, wood, water, fire, and soil [Tran Hanh Nguyen, 2014: p. 105]. In most of Vietnamese family, the Land Genie altar is often placed on the side of the ancestral altar. For families without ancestral altar, the Land Genie altar is placed in the middle, and the altar is often simpler than the ancestral altar, which includes an incense-table near the back wall of the house. On the incense-table, there is a small tray with three wine stations, incense burner, and a couple of candles. Behind is the tablets of Land Genies. On the tablet of these three gods, it writes that Kitchen God master the kitchen, Land God governs things in the household, Goddess governs shopping and the garden. If there is only one tablet, which means “Trinity”, then on the tablet there has the following Sino-Vietnamese words: “Blessing Land Genies”, or “Land Genies and Family Protector”, or “Happiness Genies of Five Directions”. It shows that, in the opinion of the Vietnamese, these gods are very respected.

People worship the Land Genies on the feast days, first day of a month, full moon day, and on the important occasion related to land such as pond digging, well digging, ground breaking, field opening, or grave digging. Worship offerings can be vegetarian or salty. Vegetarian offerings usually include golden and foil paper, betel and areca, and fruits. Salty items include wine, chicken,

spring rolls or a tray of different dishes. On the occasion of death anniversary or new year eve, the family often offers salty dishes on the altar of Gods of Land. Particularly in the occasion of the first proclamation to ancestor, family has to worship Gods of Land and this worshipping is similar to the ancestor worshipping [Toan Anh, 2001: p. 86]. When making ritual offerings to worship ancestor, family always prepares offerings to worship Gods of Land, praying for the blessings of the family. Especially for Vietnamese people, the most important ceremony is the worship ceremony on the 23rd day of the Lunar calendar. According to traditional beliefs, on this occasion Gods of Land fly to the heaven to report everything happening in the house of the owner during a year to the King of the heaven. The King of the heaven will base on the report of the gods to determine the blessing for the family. In addition to betel and areca, wine, water, incense lamps, gold and silver paper, fruits and chicken, people also offer shoes, hats, clothes and carp (some of families replaced carp by paper fish).

The worship of the Gods of Land (Tao quan) has therefore become both solemn and religious. At the same time, this belief makes people constantly remind themselves to work in accordance with moral norms and moral status, to protect the welfare of the whole family. This reflects the notion of inner thoughts and value trends of Vietnamese people.

3. Similarities and differences in the worship of the Gods of Land of the two countries

Similarities:

First, the worship of the Gods of Land of the two countries has bold folk characteristics associated with the daily life of residents.

Second, it is the respect of the people of the two countries with the worshipping. In both Japan and Vietnam, the Gods of Land are considered as important gods and worshiped all year round.

Third is the flexibility. While the Vietnamese people's worship rituals are influenced and penetrated by some Chinese cultural elements, the flexibility in Japanese's worshipping is the functional transformation of God *Tanoyama* into *Yama nokami*.

Fourth, most of the Japanese and Vietnamese considered the Gods of Land as male with the responsibility of managing the land, protecting the house as well as bringing prosperous wealth to each family or the blessing of the family. Therefore, the Gods of Land are classified as the most important gods in both countries. This is probably a similarity in the religious worship of both countries.

Differences:

First and foremost is the rich diversity of the system of worshiped Gods of both countries, but the number of deities in the system of Japan is more diversified than of Vietnam. Japan's Gods of Land include: Kitchen God, God of Land/Soil, Mountain God, Border God, and Saints - clan patriarchs or people who reclaimed the land after death are honored as Gods of Land. In the Vietnamese system, there are only three Gods of Land: Kitchen God, Land Genie and Goddess.

Second, the worship rituals of the Gods as well as the offerings on the altars in Japan are quite

simple. In contrast, the worship rituals and the offerings on the altars in Vietnam are more diversified. Although the beliefs have been imported from China, they have been localized. The number of days of worshipping the Gods of Land in Vietnam is more than in Japan, as the Japanese usually worship the gods on new year eve, festives and special occasions, and the Gods are invited as witnesses. In contrast, the Vietnamese worship the Gods more often. Even in some Vietnamese families, the Gods of Land and Fortune God are worshiped on the same altar, so people worship daily.

Third, the worshipping of the Gods of Land in Japan is mostly done by men, while in Vietnam both men and women can participate in this form of worship without distinction.

Fourth, places of the worship of the Japanese are quite simple, mostly in the temple, in the forest, on the mountain or even in some corners. In Vietnam, the Gods of Land are worshiped solemnly on separate altars in each family, and most of the houses of the Vietnamese have the altar of the Gods of Land.

Fifth is the diversity in the functions of the Gods of Land in the two countries. The Gods of Land of the Japanese are not simply the guardians of the land, but can be the guardian of the border (*Sae no kami*), the god of mountain (*Yama no kami*). For the Vietnamese, the Gods of Land (Land Genies), in addition to the function of guarding the land, they also master the kitchen and garden, because in Vietnamese's perspective land, house and kitchen tie together and are equally important.

Finally, it can be said that: whether similar or different, the worship of the Gods of Land is an important feature in the cultural life of the two countries, and has been maintained, preserved to today. At the same time, through this practice, we can also better understand the humanistic philosophy of the tradition of both Japanese and Vietnamese people. Consequently, the preservation of this traditional culture is particularly important, requiring attention from many sides, including the states and each individual.

NOTES

* Sacred objects, temporary representations of Kami, Yorishiro: 依り代・依代・憑り代・憑代: In Nihon Shoki and Kojiki, it has been recorded that, from the ancient times, substitutes of this type have been used to represent gods, such as mirrors represented God of the Sun, while beard symbolized the Gods with human origin.

* The reason is that they think that Mountain God Yamanokami is not interested in women, he views women as dirty because they have menstruation.

*Saori (welcome new rice transplant), Sanaburi (celebrate rice to harvest)

**Englishiki 延喜式 is a book about ancient Japanese rituals and rules.

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