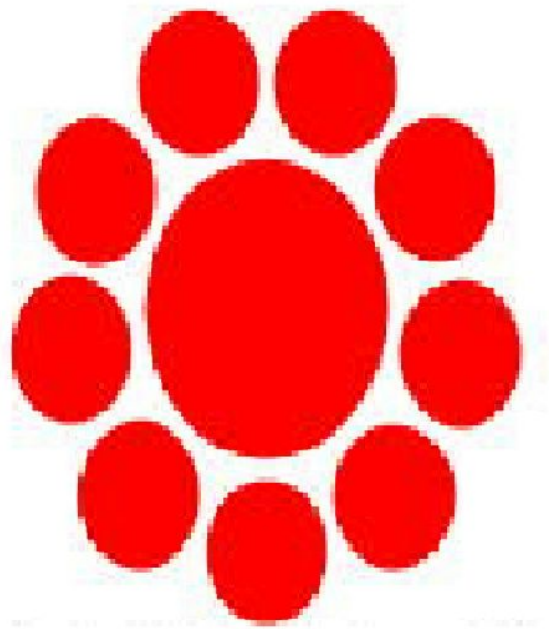


God Given: A Brief Comparison of God, Revelation, and Morality in Caodaism and Oomoto



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“Thou shalt have no gods before me.” Central among the Ten Commandments, this verse sets the tone for the exclusive monotheism common to the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam wherein devotion performed to any god other than “the one true God” is tantamount to sin. Exclusive monotheism has achieved such a cultural dominance in the modern world that, often times, the existence of alternative systems of inclusive monotheism is forgotten entirely and even the concept of inclusive monotheism is not understood. Within the scope of inclusive monotheism, there is likewise only one God, however, because there is only one God, any worship or devotion performed by anyone of any religion to any god would invariably honor “the one true God.” In this framework, the wholesome act of worship is of great importance but the way in which God is understood by worshippers is less crucial. To inclusive monotheists, everyone living an upright life through religion is “on the same team.”

The Neo-Dharmic, Neo-Daoic, and syncretic Vietnamese religion known as Caodaism (道高臺 Đạo Cao Đài) and the Neo-Shinto Japanese religion Oomoto (大本教 Ōmoto-kyō) could both be described as religions which practice inclusive monotheism. As such, there acceptance of one another is hardly surprising, however, this shared quality of inclusive monotheism aside, the degree to which the two religions are similar and different remains intriguing. The groups have met together for interfaith activities a smattering of times since first discovering one another in 1935 (Banko Dokon). At the time of this writing, the most recent meeting between Caodaism and Oomoto appears to have taken place in Ayabe, Japan when Caodaism’s Sacerdotal Council of the Tây Ninh’s Holy See (會聖座聖西寧 Hội Thánh Tòa

Thánh Tây Ninh) attended Oomoto's Grand Festival of Miroku (みろく大祭 Miroku Taisai)¹ on May 5th 2013 (T. Em). If their doctrines are found to be closely compatible rather than just vaguely compatible via the virtually all-embracing tenant of inclusive monotheism, such similarity could have profound implications for both groups.

Throughout this essay, a brief comparison will be made between Caodaism and Oomoto. The two religions will be compared and contrasted in regards to their views on God, methods of revelation, and morality as extrapolated through Caodaism's "The Collection of Divine Messages, Volumes One and Two (聖言合選 Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển)" and Oomoto's "Divine Signposts (道の槩 Michi no Shiori)." Other sources will be utilized for support where needed. This essay will explore the similarities between Caodaism and Oomoto, but it will also note differences. Naturally, the investigation of such differences is not meant to drive a wedge between the two religions. Instead these differences can serve as topics which promote intriguing new avenues for further interreligious theological inquiry.

The Founding of Oomoto

The foundress of Oomoto was Deguchi Nao (出口なお), a native of Ayabe, Kyōto. In 1892, at the age of fifty-five, the foundress came under her first possession when the God

¹ This can be written in Kanji as "弥勒大祭." "Miroku" is the future Buddha, Maitreya, however, the usage of "Miroku" in Oomoto always designates him "The Great God Maitreya (みろくの大神 Miroku No Omikami)" rather than say Maitreya Bodhisattva (弥勒菩薩 Miroku Bosatsu), Maitreya Tathāgata (Miroku Nyorai), or Maitreya Buddha (Miroku Butsu) all of which would be more suggestive of a Buddhist worldview. The Oomoto usage of Maitreya from the Buddhist pantheon may be an example of inverted "Honji Suijaku (反本地垂迹 han honji suijaku)," the idea that various Japanese Kami manifested as individuals in the Buddhist pantheon to convert non-Shinto devotees sympathetic to Buddhism (a reversal of Honji Suijaku, an earlier theory which suggested the opposite). Maitreya holds a special significance in Oomoto as the religion received a prophecy of The Age of Maitreya's Construction of a New World (みろくの世建設) had begun and the world's continuation in this age depends upon the hereditary succession of female Lineage Masters in the Deguchi family (The Second Spiritual Leader, Sumiko Deguchi).

Ushitora no Konjin (畏の金神) ordered her to act as his scribe via automatic writing which she was able to do despite being illiterate. Through divine guidance, a man named “Ueda Kisaburō (上田喜三郎)” was led to the foundress in 1989 in order to join her newly founded religion, Oomoto. A year later, he married into Deguchi Nao’s family by marrying her youngest daughter and Second Generation Lineage Master, Deguchi Sumiko (出口すみこ). As Oomoto follows a matriarchal priestesshood, Ueda Kisaburō changed his name to Deguchi Onisaburō (出口 王仁三郎) to enter into the Deguchi familyline. Deguchi Nao has the special designation of Foundress (開祖 Kaiso) whereas Deguchi Onisaburō is given the title of Seishi (聖師), Sagacious Master (Rowe 1). Others in familyline have titles as follows, the women are called “Kyōshu (教主),” Lineage Masters, whereas their husbands are called “Kyōshu Ho (教主補),” Assistant Lineage Masters and additionally change their family names to Deguchi upon marriage.²

Although Foundress Deguchi Nao was more prolific as an auto writer, Deguchi Onisaburō’s “Divine Signposts” appears to be one the most celebrated pieces of literature among Oomoto’s various collections of auto writings. Oddly, thus far, Oomoto has only produced English translations of the works written or auto written by male leaders. Other than “Divine Signposts,” the only other Deguchi family work that has been translated into English is “In Search of Meaning (生きがいの探求)” by Third Generation Assistant Lineage Master Deguchi

² In Oomoto’s English literature, almost all titles are simplified to “Spiritual Leader.” Making everyone in the familyline “Spiritual Leader So and So” does not really demonstrate the subordinate roles that the men play in assisting their priestess-wives. Thereby I have re-translated each title separately resulting in the following designations: Foundress, Sagacious Master (previously rendered as “Spiritual Leader” or “Co-Founder”), Lineage Master (previously rendered as “Spiritual Leader”), and Assistant Lineage Master (previously rendered as “Alternate Spiritual Leader”).

Hidemaru (出口日出磨三代教主補). An English language biography on Foundress Deguchi Nao is available though.

The Founding of Caodaism

In the mid 1920s, a group of Vietnamese spiritists in Saigon realized that they were receiving messages from the same supreme deity. On November 18th 1926, Caodaism marked their official founding with an impressively well-attended ceremony of some fifty thousand participants. There was in fact so much interest in the young and rapidly growing religion that it quickly met with resistance from status quo maintaining Buddhists, Catholics, and French Officials. By 1930, Caodaism likely had a surplus of half a million adherents, and later on would gain several million (Hoskins 84). Early leadership came from individuals such as Lê Văn Trung (黎文忠) the first Pope (教宗 Giáo Tông) of Caodaism and also Phạm Công Tắc (范功則) the first Protector of Laws and Justice (護法 Hộ Pháp) who later ascended to become the second Pope. After receiving detailed spirit messages, Caodaism built their main headquarters, the Holy See, in Tây Ninh and a thousand plus temples were likewise built throughout Vietnam (Ibid 84).

God

In Caodaism, God identifies Himself in two ways, as “The Jade Emperor (玉皇上帝 Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế)” and as “The Immortal Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Cao Dai (高臺仙翁大菩薩摩訶薩 Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát).” These names are used in conjunction and separately throughout Caodaism’s “Collection of Divine Messages.” The usage of Jade Emperor connects Caodaism to Daoist theology, whereas “The Immortal Bodhisattva

Mahāsattva Cao Dai” is a name for God unique to Caodaism which blends Daoist, Buddhist, and Caodaist terminology. Oomoto is somewhat more complicated in this regard as God identifies himself as various kami, but all of these kami are taken as a single God. The names of these kami link them to pre-Oomoto Shinto deities and also determine God or Goddess in accordance with the kami’s gender. In brief, the main kami in Oomoto are Ushitora no Konjin (良の金神), Kunikotachi (国之常立神), Amenominakanushi (天御中主), and Toyokumonu (豊雲野). Oomoto devotees often address their prayers to “Ōmotosumeōmikami (大天主太神)” which functions as a pragmatic catch-all since it can refer to all kami collectively or to God (Rowe 3-4).

During the Caodaist séance which took place on Christmas 1925, “The Collection of Divine Messages” records God introducing Himself through the following verse: “I have reigned supreme for millennia. Those who improve themselves spiritually will receive blessings. The miraculous way has been taught and followed throughout the world for millennia.” The Oomoto perspective can be seen in Chapter two, verse eighty-five of “Divine Signposts,” wherein Deguchi Onisaburō writes the following concerning God: “The God who created everything in the universe is one only: He is called the GOD AMENOMINAKANUSHI.”

The Goddess Aspect

Caodaism includes Goddess worship which makes use of characteristics from Vietnam’s indigenous goddess worship of Đạo Mẫu (道母) which is thought to predate contact with neighboring foreign religions (Hoskins 87). Also an influence is Daoism’s “Queen Mother of the West (西王母 Tây Vương Mẫu)” who is considered to be identical to Caodaism’s Goddess (Ninh 63). In Caodaism, the Goddess is given two rather pretty and poetic names, “Diêu Trì Kim

Mẫu (瑤池金母)” and “Phật Mẫu Diêu Trì (佛母瑤池);” meaning “Golden Mother of the Pond of Jade” and “The Jade Pond Buddha-Mother” respectively. Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu plays many important roles in Caodaism such as her role as creatrix of all material things. Everything exists within her form because she is the manifestation of Yin (Hồng 5).

Oomoto likewise features elements of Goddess devotion. In Oomoto, God and all wholesome gods/kami who are involved in the divine plan are either engendered either by the masculine Yang spirit, “Izu no Mitama (巖靈)” or the feminine Yin Spirit “Mizu no Mitama (瑞靈).” For instance, God Kunikotachi would of course have this Izu quality whereas God(dess) Toyokumono would instead exhibit the Mizu quality (Rowe 5). Although Shinto in origin, Izu and Mizu follow Daoist Yin-Yang logic quite closely as Daoist theory influenced even the earliest of Shinto scriptures such as the Kojiki (古事記). For instance, Izu is associated with sky and fire whereas Mizu is associated with earth and water (Ibid 5).

Extended Pantheon

Caodaism’s extended pantheon receives a great deal of attention from western observers. Some appraisals have applauded the multi-racial, transhistoric, and diplomatically diverse pantheon as progressive and creative, but others have been rather scathingly critical. One such critic was Graham Greene, the author of “The Quiet American,” who infamously derided Caodaism as “...a prophecy of planchette”³ and also quipped “Christ and Buddha looking down from the roof of a Cathedral on a Walt Disney fantasia of the East (Lam 2-3).”

³ “Planchette” is a tool used to facilitate automatic writing in western spiritism. A famous example is the triangular wooden or plastic piece common in Ouija Board sets.

Oomoto's collection of auto writings contain references to many Shinto kami and some Buddhist deities who are appropriated as kami. In Oomoto's English literature, some of the lower wholesome kami are referred to as "angels." The original Japanese term is somewhat nuanced in this regard as the written two character-compound appears as "angel:" "天使(かみがみ)"⁴ but the compound is given the special reading "kamigami" which would more commonly be written as "神々" meaning "the multitudes of kami."

Items for Further Interreligious Theological Inquiry:

- The extended pantheon in Caodaism contains not only a God, Goddess, various buddhas, bodhisattvas, and immortals, but also contains famous historical figures who pre-dated the founding of Caodaism. The Oomoto pantheon is mostly concerned with only Japanese Kami, and perhaps a divine status of sorts is also given to lineage holders in the Deguchi family as they are protected by kami and can also be possessed by kami to deliver divine revelations.
- An email written by Caodai translator Dr. Hùm Đắc Bùì introducing Oomoto stated that Foundress Deguchi Nao received her divine messages from Lý Thái Bạch (李太白), the Tang Dynasty poet Lǐ Bái and Caodaism's Pope of The Third Great Universal Amnesty (教宗大道三期普度 Giáo Tông Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ). Oomoto's own English literature identify the kami in question as "Ushitora no Konjin" as a spirit-inflow of Izu. No mention of Lý Thái Bạch is made.

⁴ The normal reading for this compound is "Tenshi," the Sino-Japanese word for "angel."

Methods of Revelation

In Oomoto revelation is achieved when spirit possession (神懸り kamigakari) occurs between God as either an inflow of the spirit of Izu or Mizu depending on the gender of the vessel. After possession is established, automatic writing (お筆先 ofudesaki) begins. In chapter one verse four of “Divine Signposts” the process is described as follows: “Although Onisaburo writes, it is not Onisaburo who is writing. It is God who writes, using Onisaburo’s hand.” Later in verse twenty-five it is clarified, “God does not have his own voice and body. Therefore God makes all things known possessing the body of a pure soul.”

Automatic writing (執筆 chấp bút) is also common in Caodaism and is defined as “To hold pencil for realization of a spiritistic seance (Nguyễn- Entry: chấp bút).” In Caodaisim’s “Collection of Divine Messages,” automatic writing was explained in a divine message received on January 3rd 1926. The explanation appeared as follows:

“ In the other form of spiritual contact known as automatic writing, or inspired writing, I will come to you and make your spirit unstable for a while. During that time, your spirit will be able to listen to Me. Your hand will obey and write. In this form of spiritual contact, I cooperate with you so that you can reach Universal Truths.”

Concerning the mediums themselves, the divine message further outlined some standards:

“The mediums should be chosen for their advanced spirit so that the session will be fruitful. They should practice vegetarianism, and train themselves toward being completely balanced (as good as Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas) to be able to properly achieve the purpose of the

session and transmit the teachings. They are considered My assistants in the propagation of the Way. Spiritual contact cannot be taken lightly. In the reception of vibrations from the spirit, each person has personal vibrations which may be influenced by their own emotions and personality and may interfere: subsequently these writings may not be correct. One should take caution in setting up sessions and in recognizing the authenticity of the writings. So, after each spiritism session, you have to wait for My approval before any implementation.”

Items for Further Interreligious Theological Inquiry:

- Oomoto appears to only utilize possession and automatic writing to receive divine messages. Caodaism also employs some methods from European Spiritism such as table-tipping/turning (xây bàn) and automatic writing through a billed/beaked-basket (手機 thủ cơ) (Nguyên- Entries: xây bàn & thủ cơ).
- Possession in Oomoto is quite specific in the sense that only Deguchi women can be possessed by God in His Izu aspect. Conversely, only Deguchi men (family through marriage) can be possessed by God(dess) in Her Mizu aspect. In Caodaism, this gender polarity or gender balancing is not a feature of revelations.
- In Caodaism, vegetarianism is part of what enables mediums to gain proper purity before they receive divine messages. Oomoto does not place any special emphasis on vegetarianism.

Morality

Moral codes and prohibitions are numerous in Caodaism and differ according to priests and lay devotees. Most basic among this extensive collection of moral codes is the Five Prohibitions (五戒禁 Ngũ Giới Cấm) which appear to be a slightly modified version of the Five Precepts of Buddhism. In the Caodaist context, they appear as follows: “Do not Kill (不殺生 Bất sát sanh), Do Not Steal (不偷盜 Bất du đạo), Do Not Be Obscene (不邪淫 Bất tà dâm), Do Not Be Drunk (不酒肉 Bất tửu nhục), and Do Not Sin By Words (不妄語 Bất vọng ngữ).” These items are explained one by one through divine messages recorded in 1928 in Caodaism’s “Collection of Divine Messages.”

In Omoto, morality is less proscriptive and more interpretive. Oomoto has eight items known as The Four Teachings (四大綱領 Shidai Kōryō) and The Four Principles (四大主義 Shidai Shugi). The Four Teachings are as follows: “Harmonious Alignment with Life and the Universe (祭-惟神の大道 Matsuri- Kan'nagara no Daidō), Revelation of Celestial Truth and its Lessons (教-天授の真理 Oshie- Tenju no Shinri), Innate Patterns of Behavior for Man and Society and the Cosmos (慣-天人道の常 Narawashi- Tenjindō no Tsune), and Instinctual Creative Drives (造-適宜の事務 Nariwai Tekigi no Jimu). The Four Principles are Purity: purification of mind and body (清潔主義 心身修祓の大道 Seiketsu Shugi: Shinshin Shūbatsu no Daidō), Optimism: believing in the goodness of the Divine Will (樂天主義 天地惟神の大道 Rakuten Shugi: Tenchi Kan'nagara no Daidō), Progressivism: way of social improvement (進展主義 社会改善の大道 Shinten Shugi: Shakai Kaizen no Daidō), and Unification: the reconciliation of all dichotomies (統一主義 上下一致の大道 Tōitsu Shugi: Jōge Itchi no Daidō) (Teachings and Scriptures).

Items for Further Interreligious Theological Inquiry:

- Caodaism adopts items of morality from Buddhism, Confucianism, and additionally creates their own items. Oomoto does not adopt any moral codes and presents original items only. Caodaism includes specific prohibitions, whereas prohibitions in Oomoto may be implicit.

Conclusion:

Caodaism and Oomoto share many common features, and their mutual claim of similarity holds up quite well even under critical analysis. Caodaism and Oomoto share fairly comparable beliefs regarding God manifesting both male and female attributes but ultimately transcending both in a unified wholeness. Likewise, both religions practiced similar methods of automatic writing to receive divine messages.

Strikingly different but perhaps not irreconcilable is Caodaism's prescriptive codes of morality juxtaposed against Oomoto's moral ideals which do not contain explicit prohibitions. Likewise unique is Oomoto's gender dynamics which were previously explored as it related to God, Goddess, and possession. In other ways also, Oomoto's concept of gender challenges certain Caodaist conventions. In Caodaism, neither of the two highest positions, Cardinal (掌法 Chưởng Pháp) and Pope (教宗 Giáo Tông), can be occupied by women. The reasoning for this is that it would create a system of Yin dominating Yang which would lead to apocalyptic consequences. The divine message conveying this theological glass ceiling stated, "If a day came when the YANG disappeared and the YIN reigned, the universe would fall into decay and be

destroyed!” (L, Emma) Curiously enough, Oomoto’s hierarchy seems to be precisely such a case of Yang playing a subservient role to Yin as males who marry into the Deguchi family can only act as Assistant Lineage Masters (教主補 Kyōshu Ho) whereas the women act as Lineage Masters (教主 Kyōshu). In Oomoto, rather than this arrangement causing the universe to fall into decay, the hereditary matriarchal lineage of Deguchi women are needed to sustain the universe in the present age.

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