

Post-colonial Dragon Boat Races: Some Preliminary Thoughts

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Abstract:

This study examines the process of traditionalization and modernization of dragon boat races in modern China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the beginning of the 20th century, indigenous body cultures were viewed as outdated culture, later dragon boat races were once diminished because of its “feudalist” and “counterrevolutionary” character in the period of Cultural Revolution in China. In Taiwan, dragon boating were officially discouraged by the Japanese colonizers, and Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) regime have revived the races to oppose to the Communist Cultural Revolution since mid-1970s. In Hong Kong, the British rulers promoted dragon boating for attracting the Western tourists since 1976 and the institutionalization of the races sportized it gradually. The boating enthusiasts have made efforts to include the dragon boating to Olympic Games, however, the modernization of the races has caused different echoes in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong and reflected the identity dynamics of each period. In sum, traditionalization and modernization of dragon boat races have raised critical debates over the power relationship involved the representations of body cultures among the different postcolonial Chinese societies.

Keywords: dragon boat race, modernization, traditionalization, postcolonial, representation

1. Introduction

This study was initiated by a press report about dragon boat races in 2007,

This is the first time that Kaohsiung Dragon Boat Festival introduced competitive style dragon boats... there were 11 boats overturned and 242 players overboard that made rescuers exhausted yesterday. It's fortunately that no one was injured. ... many players said it's their first time to operate such kind of light and narrow boats.¹

¹ “11 Dragon Boats Overturned and 242 People Overboard, Exhausting the Rescues”, *United Daily*,

The story is that since Dragon boating is one of the demonstrative items of the World Games and the Kaohsiung city won the bid to hold 2009 World Games, the city government decided to replace traditional boats with the international standardized boats in the 2007 Dragon Boat Festival for warm-up. The racing boats of standardized regulation are different from domestic popular boats thus players felt so uncomfortable that 242 people overboard when they first time playing such “modern” kind of boat.

Many authors used to view indigenous physical cultures, including dragon boating, have moved from the “traditional” to “modern sport”. In the past of a century, the eastern societies have encountered the imports of Western sports and their parallels “colonial modernity”. These processes forced Chinese societies, namely, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, to run a variety of multi-path development and “representations’ of dragon boating. The article is divided into four parts, the first part illustrates the methodology of this study and the second part shows how dragon boating transformed from heresy to the place of traditional culture. In the third part we discuss the “traditional” and the “modernization” and show how they construct and link with each other. Finally the fourth part, we pointed out the misleading dualism of “modern v.s. traditional” and the response of “Imagined Olympians” complex. By unveiling the Orientalistic representations and their social conditions, we might cast aside the ethnocentrism and make alternative reflections.

2. Methodology

Ancient literature provides us descriptions of dragon boat activities before their days. However, representations as a kind of interpretation and translation, they were involved certain ideologies and influenced by the dominants’ will of power. In ancient China, dragon boating made a living between periodic oppressions and official recognition. It is important to approach the dialectic and grasp the interactions of body cultures and social developments correctly. Historical sociology gives us a better way that treats theory and empirical data both essential. Grant Jarvie studied the development of Scottish highland games and said ‘sociology needs history, so too does theory need evidence.’² Nobert Elias suggested a continuous interweaving between theory and evidence is the best defense to avoid theoretical abuse or lack of insight (Elias, 1978). Eric Dunning and K. Sheard’ s study (2005/1979) of the development of British rugby football and G. Jarvie’ s analysis of Scottish highland games (1991) are good demonstrations that we may follow, but the transformations from folk origins to modern

2007/6/5, Page C2, Kaohsiung and Pen-hu News (in Chinese).

² Jarvie, G., 1991, *Highland Games: The Making of the Myth*, Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, p.2.

forms of rugby and highland games were intrinsic problematic for the Westerners while the process of ‘sportization’ of Asian-African body cultures were initiated by external rather than internal forces. Modernization for the Westerners is a form of cultural expression while it is a form of heterogeneity or conflict for Asia-African societies. For example the field of physical culture and education, there had roused some controversies of “indigenous v. s. foreign” sport when the Chinese traditional body cultures encounter the introducing of Western sports one hundred years ago.³ China, Taiwan and Hong Kong experienced different process of colonialism, de-colonialism and post-colonialism over the last century. As the end of the Second World War and the coming of new situation after 1989, the decolonization seemingly enters a new era of post-colonialism. The modernization of dragon boating thus has caused different reactions in Chinese societies though it seemingly characterizes the same Chinese-ness and such a romanticized expression of identity. Through an historical investigation we illustrate how the dragon boat races have been represented and the social causations of them.

3. Representation strategy I: Traditionalization

“...refuse to write the discontinuous into continuity.” (Michel Foucault)

3.1 Ancient China

There are plenty records of dragon boating in historical books. It was about the Warring States Period (403-221 B. C.) at the earliest appeared some written accounts of the ritual. There were also records of the activities in the Han Dynasty (B. C. 202 -A. D. 220) and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (A. D. 220 -589). It is said the DuanWu Jie⁴ (the fifth day of fifth agrarian month) and dragon-boating came from the southern totemism and southern-related rituals in mainland China. For many centuries, the DuanWu Jie (festival) has been associated with so called “lore of Qu Yuan” . Qu (B. C. 340-363 to B. C. 277-276) was a historical figure whose personal characteristics as a southern statesman and his literary success form a perfect mnemonic catcher, not only for the intelligentsia and folk culture to come together, but for *Middle Kingdom* to embrace southern cultures as mainstream Han’ s culture. Qu was once the minister of Chu (楚, a feudal state situated on the middle course of the Yangzi River during the Warring Sates Period [475-221 B. C.]) , the state was characterized by internal corruption. Despite reforms that Qu Yuan advocated, Chu was no match for the opponent state, the Qin (秦), in the long run. In

³ The debates of indigenous and foreign sports in China in the period of 1920s and 1930s, see Susan Brownell, 1995, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Mora Order of the People’s Republic*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, p.p.54-56.

⁴ The Chinese word “Jie” not only implies a link to the seasonal calendar but embedded in religious practices, cyclical rhythm of the earth, and the philosophy of life. Jie has much complex significance than the words “Festival” and “Day”. In addition, Jie has often been connected to another word “qi”.

his final exile, the Chu finally fell prey to the Qin that made Qu committed suicide by plunging into the Milo River on the fifth day of fifth month in the year of 277 B.C. Qu' s anger, exile, and suicide stimulated vigorous discourse but it was since late Han dynasty that written records let the three components of DuanWu Jie, Qu Yuan, and the dragon boating, came together⁵. In fact, the DuanWu Jie is complex even at its very origins. The shamanistic rituals and water rites in the form of dragon boating were carried out in many areas of southern China especially in the clans located along the Yang-zi River. The southerners were once viewed barbaric to Han (the *Middle Kingdom*) cultures. As a combination of representations of the northerners and of the oral tradition, the festival entailed ongoing negotiations and mutual embrace (conflict sometimes) of the north and south, the official and folk.

Historical texts and paintings show the Emperors and his kinsmen played their dragon boats with magnificent adornments for recreation in the lakes of the Court from Sui (A.D. 589-618) to Qing Dynasty. The meaning of court' s dragon boating, which was not staged on DuanWu Jie and not to memorialize Qu Yuan, is quite different from that of folk boating race. Comparing with the orthodoxy Confucianism, the rituals included dragon boating that practiced in DuanWu Jie conceptionally fell into the realm of Taoism⁶. Many historiographies illustrated dragon boating had been prohibited frequently in the dynastic period. This kind of folk rituals were sometimes viewed threatening by the dominant Confucians. Here the northern hegemonic is evident though most peasantry followed the Taoist rituals in their everyday practices.

Why officials occasionally prohibited dragon boating in the Emperor era? The reasons may include: (1) after the [North] Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1127) , the “dragon” symbolized the sacred Emperor and exclusively belong to the Emperor; (2) the officials felt threatened by the people gathering and illegal wealth collecting; (3) Violence and disorders happened frequently when races were brought into practice. In sum, the conflicts of the Confucian orthodoxy with the popular rituals suggest that viewing dragon boating as once and for all a “tradition” is alleged and it may be a kind of “invention of tradition”⁷ in some extent. However, the prohibitions of dragon boating couldn' t work effectively since Wen found 227 among thousands of local chronicles recorded dragon boating activities⁸. The Confucianism emphasizes the affirmation and the adaptation to this-world might tolerate the Taoist rituals and mysterism⁹ and there had no modern

⁵ Tian, Zhe-yi, 1994, *Xi-shuo-duan-wu* (in Chinese) , Taipei: Baiguanchubanshe.

⁶ Weber, Max, 1951, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, New York : Free Press, Chapter 7: “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy”.

⁷ Hobsbawn E and Ranger (ed.), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸ Wen, Chung-I, 1961, Jiugezhongdeshuishenyuhuanandelong zhousaishen (The Water Gods and the Dragon boats in the South China) (in Chinese), *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, No.11: 51-112, Taipei.

⁹ Max Weber, 1951, *The Religion of China*, Chapter 7.

police to carry out prohibitions effectively.

3.2 Modern China: fight for revolution

The modern sports have been introduced into China by the Western imperialist powers since late 19th century. The indigenous body cultures including martial art and dragon boating were seen outdated by many intellectuals who yearned for modernization with nationalist sentiments then. In the first half of 20th century, the position of dragon boating had not changed since physical educational officers seldom viewed it serious.¹⁰ Dragon boating maintained its animation in the bottom layer of Chinese society and kept its folk form as before. According to a report in the *Selective Materials of Physical Education in Guangdong Province*,

*.. there happened fights between the Shenshan villagers and Yayao villagers while dragon boating in process in Pan-yu county on the 3^d day of the fifth month in 1937. Conflicts made 36 Shenshan villagers and 19 Yayao villagers hurt. The paddles and sticks were batted back and forth that made people hurt and bleeding. Besides, there were also many fights in three counties of Nai-Pu and in Da-ling county before the year of 1936. Landlords and gangsters fostered the “sectarianism” and “medals and trophyism” (jinbiaozhuyi) among the peasants in order to satisfy their benefits.*¹¹

Comparing with the Song, Ming and Qing Dynasty, the relationship of dragon boating and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) illustrated another road of “traditionalization”. The founders of CCP including Mao Zhe-dong had participated in the “New Cultural Movement” which against everything old and traditional during the period of 1915 to 1922. Young intellectuals embraced the Western ideas of democracy and science and some of them were disciples of Marxism advocating to abandon the Confucian and Taoist ways of life. During the beginning years of the New People’s Republic, there were some records of dragon boating in Guangzhou (Canto) city in 1953 and Sichuan province in 1954. In the late 1950s, Qu Yuan became the “patriotic model” for the PRC, but dragon boating, which was associated with ancient superstition, was banned especially during the period of “Great Leap Forward” in 1958 to 1960. The DuanWu Jie was viewed as “Four Olds”, as counter-revolutionary and “feudalistic” so the dragon boats were destroyed and the festivals were generally prohibited during the Proletariat Cultural Revolution Movement

¹⁰ Under the influences of patriotism and anti-imperialism sentiments, the Ministry of Education had once advocated the dragon boating in 1933 and some P.E. educators found the potentials of its “sportiveness”. However, advocators just settled a matter by leaving it unsettled.

¹¹ Guangdongtiyuwenshibangongshi, 1984, *Guangdongshengtiyushiliao* (Historical materials of sports in Guangdong province, in Chinese), No.1.

from 1966 to 1976. People in Xinjiann county of Jiangxi province burned up 83 dragon-boats and the peasants hid some dragon heads stealthily during the Revolution period. People in Panyu county of Guangdong province destroyed most of the dragon-boats, only 2 of 83 boats were “survived by good luck”¹². There was no journalist report about dragon boat race in official newspaper “Renmin Ribao” (People’s Press) during 1963 and 1980¹³.

3.3 Taiwan : fight for tradition

3.3.1 Taiwan under the Japanese Rule (1895–1945)

Since most population of Taiwan migrated from the southern provinces of China, dozens of local chronicles show that dragon boating was once a popular folk ritual in Taiwan during the period of Qing dynasty. Taiwan was ceded to Japan after the Sino-Japan War in 1894 and 1895. Under the Japanese ruling, the colonized’ indigenous cultures became more complicated. Taking the boat “races” of aboriginal Erlung village as an example, we may find it epitomized the negotiated dynamics between ethnicities and body cultures of Taiwan. “Erlung” in Chinese language means “two dragons”. In the 18th and 19th century, the aboriginal Pin-pu clans lived in two villages of Yi-Lan county practiced their water rituals to dispel evils and bring up peace. The aboriginal clans didn’ t play in serious sense of ‘competition’ but just paddled and amused with each other in the river. One can imagine, there has no symbolism of dragon and no finished line or any other element of victory or defeat when the Pin-pu aboriginals “raced” though the Han people occasionally represented them with “dragon boat races” .

According to some journalist reports, Japanese colonizers, following the cultural policies of Japanization, didn’ t encourage such Chinese boating ritual and tried to make a balance to conduct the dragon boating. Official newspapers showed the government sometimes transformed the dragon boating not to commemorate the Chinese hero Qu Yuan but to celebrate the Dominion Day on June 17th or the Japanese Navy Day on 27th May (both dates were very close to the DuanWu Jie) since 1910s¹⁴. As to the non-Han boating, Japanese colonizers began their logging enterprise but occasionally encounter the radical resistances of the mountain and “uncultured” aboriginals in the beginning years of the 20th century. The colonizers called aboriginals “savage” and feel anxious with them. In 1920s to 1930s, the officials banned the Pin-pu boating ritual or shorten the days

¹² Guangdongshengdifangzhibianzhuanweiyuanhui, 2001, *History of Guangdong Province, Physical Education* (in Chinese) , Guangzhou: Guangdongrenminchubanshe.

¹³ Hsu, Yuan-ming,1999 ,*The Passing Down of the Culture of Taiwan Dragon Boating* (in Chinese), Report of the Project Commissioned by the Sport Affair Committee of the Executive Yuan.

¹⁴ Chen, Kuo-Min, 2005, The Study of Dragon-Boat Race in the Lan-Yan Region of Taiwan During the Ruling Period of the Showa Emperor of Japan – based on the “Taiwan Jih Jih Shin Newspaper”, paper presented in the 6th Seminar of History in Physical Education & Sports for North Eastern Asia.

of ritual from two weeks to two days¹⁵. Some materials showed the colonizers even commanded the aboriginals practice the rituals that look much similar to Han people's dragon boat races. And one can imagine, the aboriginal villages were changed their names to "Erlung", which means "two-dragons" in Chinese, by the KMT regime after the end of Japanese ruling.

3.3.2 Taiwan after Japanese rule (1945~1990s)

The KMT (Nationalist Party) started to rule Taiwan after 1945 but the corruption of the ruling mainlanders once caused the "228 event", an one-month riot led to thousands of casualty since Feb 28th in 1947. The inner-war between the Communists and KMT in mainland had extended its influence onto the island and the KMT soon put the Martial Law into practice and banned people's gathering to pacify the disorders both inside and outside the island. The defeat of inner-war forced the KMT flee to Taiwan and began an authoritarian period that stimulated the tensions between islanders and the dominant mainlanders. The mainlanders had shared traditional cultures with Taiwan's people so dragon boat races were once popular in 1950s. However, the government enforced its totalitarianism and introduced a policy of "Economizing Religious Rites Movement" that retarded unofficial gatherings and discredited the over-expenditure during the period of festivals. It was said twenty five "Erlung" villagers who rigidly obeyed the ancestral imperative to practice boating ritual were arrested by police in 1965.¹⁶ In 1962 there occurred a disaster of 22 spectators drowning to death when dragon boating was in process in Tainan city¹⁷. These all helped a decline of dragon boating in 1960s though there still had been boating activities on occasion.

Paradoxically, the confrontation between "two Chinas" under the "cold war" helped a bit to revive dragon boating in the mid-1970s. Reacting to the Communists' destroying Chinese cultures in Mainland, KMT started to carry out an oppositional movement "Renaissance of Chinese Culture" in the end of 1960s and began to view DuanWu Jie and dragon boating as a part of fighting for tradition. The nationwide dragon boat race was officially organized first time under the name of "Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Cup" in the mid-1970s. The officials had reinforced the Chinese identity onto Taiwan's people through the activity and the P.E. officials started to represent the ritual as a kind of sport. This process may be seen as "traditionalization" and the incipient modernization but there has no sufficient reason to develop standardized regulations of paddling stance and of boat design which would help the race become much more *sportized*

¹⁵ Chen, Men-chun, 1996, A Study of "Dragon boat Race Development in Erlung Village", Yilan County, Taiwan, R.O.C. 1912-1995, *Journal of Physical Education* (in Chinese), 21:83-94.

¹⁶ *United Daily*, 2001/2/21 Page18, Yi-lan News.

¹⁷ Hsu, Yuan-ming, 1999, *The Passing Down of the Culture of Taiwan Dragon Boating* (in Chinese), Report of the project commissioned by the Sport Affair Committee of the Executive Yuan.

though some intellectuals condemned the sportization of dragon boating ‘medals and trophyism’ (Jinbiaozuyi) for its overemphasis on competitiveness.

4. Representation II: Modernization

4.1 Hong Kong : the exploitation of disadvantage

Some authors have wondered why Hong Kong people as colonials without the expectation of independence or cultural resistance to the British colonizers (P. Theroux, 1997; Aihwa Ong, 1999)¹⁸. In Hong Kong, as modernization and materialism progressed, Taoist beliefs had become less important in the daily life and dragon boat races were only held in few fishers’ villages before the early 1970s (T. H. B. Sofield and Atara Sivan, 2003). Like most areas of mainland and Taiwan, the fishermen’s races had not developed standardized rules until the colonizers’ beginning to race with the colonized since late-1960s. The H. K. Tourist Association (HKTA, now the HK Tourism Board) of British regime had started to operate the ‘Chinese-ness’ of the race to promoted tourism since 1976. The commercialization of dragon boating wasn’t such a big thing since HK had become a city with a spirit based on materialism. With the help of foreigners, especially some key persons of the Hong Kong Amateur Rowing Association, the H. K. Dragon Boat Race Festival adapted to the canoeing and rowing regulations thus began to transform its face and core rapidly¹⁹. In the 1980s and 1990s, the races became much sportized and attracted foreign canoeing and rowing clubs attending to HK Dragon Boat Race Festival each year. The Westerners not only produced fiberglass boats²⁰ to ensure the mold, but also held their national races in respective countries. There were first time the national race of dragon boating held in Canada 1986, in U. S. 1989, Indonesia 1988, New Zealand 1986, Malaysia 1979, an Italia 1986²¹. These enthusiastic players now organize annual regatta or championship and join international races each year. All of these lead to the founding of International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) when the HK Dragon Boat Race Festival was processing in 1991.

As we mentioned above, the Proletariat Cultural Revolution in mainland China somehow leaded to Taiwan’s traditionalization when representing dragon boating and characterized the folk game with political symbolism. In Hong Kong also, contrary to the cultural disasters in mainland, the colonial regime operated the modernization and

¹⁸ Ong, Aihwa ,1999, *Flexible citizenship : the cultural logics of transnationality*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. ; Theroux, P., 1997, *Kowloon Tong*, Houghton Mifflin Press Co.

¹⁹ Wiekhorst, Henning ,2008 January, “Hong Kong: The Roots of Modern Dragon Boating” in *Dragon Boat World International*, No.1:16-27, p.22.

²⁰ “In 1985, ... one of the wooden boats was used as a Plug from which a Mould for producing fiberglass boats was mad,” See Wiekhorst, H., 2008 January, “Hong Kong: The Roots of Modern Dragon Boating” in *Dragon Boat World International*, No.1:16-27, p.21.

²¹ Sofield, T. H. B. and Sivan, A., 2003, “From Cultural Festival to International Sport the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Race”, *Journal of Sport Tourism*, 8(1) :9-20, p.p.16-17.

commercialization reacting to the growth of global capitalism. Combined with the Western representations of body cultures, the dragon boating has revived and become global active. In addition, HK' s teams began to join Taiwan' s C.K.S Cup Dragon Boat Festival in the end of 1970s. In 1981 C.K.S Cup race, HK' s team not only gained the first four ranks of the men group final but brought strong ideas of sportization into Taiwanese organizers²². The 1981 C.K.S Cup' s Handbook first time appeared a three-diagram drawing of regulated length, width but weight of racing boats. However, Taiwanese teams seldom went abroad to exchange ideas of racing rules during 1980s and 1990s, thus left behind it a consequence of so called "Taiwanese style" dragon boat races that being quite different from international regulations²³. Recently, some P.E. researchers and officials advocated adapt to the international regulations while some others worry about the decline of its traditional cores of ritualism²⁴.

4.2 Recent developments

After the end of Cultural Revolution and the death of the chair Mao Ze-dong, it came the Deng Xiao-pin' s "Gaige-Kaifang" (Reforms and Openness) policies which criticized the leftist ideologies and defined the Cultural Revolution as a ten-year disaster. Under the leading of Deng and of his successor Jiang Ze-Ming, Chinese people have recovered the recreations and traditional rituals since 1980s. The dragon boat races and DuanWu Jie have been seen traditional heritages since China became confident of the ancient past and sought to its own identity. Taking the Guangzhou (Canto) city as an example, statistics showed there were 175 dragon boats racing in 1980, 222 boats racing in 1981, 287 boats in 1982, 343 boats in 1983, 358 boats in 1984²⁵. The sport officials organized a national boating race in the Milo River of Hunan province (the place Qu Yuan was reputedly committed his suicide) in 1980 and 1981. The State Committee of Sport Affairs "registered" dragon boat race in 1984 and the Chinese Dragon Boat Association has come to work since 1985. Now the IDBF' s is set in Beijing and Chinese sport officials promote

²² Organizing Committee (ed.), 1981, *Report on the C. K. S. Cup Dragon boat Race of Celebrating the Foundation of R.O.C. for 70 years*(in Chinese), Taipei: The Organizing Committee.

²³ In Taiwan' s conventions and annual races, the organizers put flags as finish line markers thus each team has an additional crew position as the flag "catcher". The flag catcher rides aboard near the decorated dragon head, out of the way of the drummer. As the boat nears the finish line flag float, the flag grabber extends his or her arm outboard to grab the flag from the lane float to signal attainment of the finish line. The helmsman has to accurately steer to boat within arms reach of the flag mount, yet not crash into it. The flag grabber must not miss pulling the flags, otherwise the boat's finish is disqualified. There have still been some events judging winning or losing by the flag-grabbing in few areas of mainland China.

²⁴ Fan, Lian-zhi and Li, Qi-long, 2008, "The State and Future Development of Dragon Boating in Taiwan"(in Chinese), *University Bulletin of Physical Education*, No.96:126-133. ; Hsu, Yuan-ming, 1999, *The Passing Down of the Culture of Taiwan Dragon Boating* (in Chinese), Report of the Project commissioned by the Sport Affair Committee of the Executive Yuan.

²⁵ Zhang, Jian-shi, 1988, *Zhongguodelongzhouyujingdu* (Dragon boat and Boat racing in China) (in Chinese), Beijing: Huaxiachubanshe, p.103.

the modernized races with enthusiasm. In recent years, the governmental system helps to diminish the contrasts and varieties by embracing the traditional game with modernized regulations but some county governments banned the dragon boating organized by the non-governmental groups for the reason of “social security” as the past. For example in Zhe-jiang province, the Wen-zhou city government banned dragon boating in some concerned areas in 2005 and 2006²⁶. In Jiang-xi province, Le-ping city government even burned up 412 dragon boats to effectively eliminate people from boating in 2000 and Yingtan city government destroyed near one thousand dragon boats that aroused a great stir in 2006²⁷.

From 1990s to nowadays, China has embraces the commercialization of dragon boating and would like to play a leading role in international arena while the HK integrated into the central government of China gradually. What happened in societies also reflect in the field of body cultures. Meanwhile some of the former agents of dragon boating (peasantry and fishermen) have suffered under the dramatic socioeconomic transformation. The poverty gaps were extended in societies while the games of dragon boating undergone a sportization process that middle class people gradually replaced the subalterns’ seats in the boats. Besides, the sportization of dragon boating involved a process of Western representations of indigenous body cultures. There have been some debates about the paddling stance since IDBF’ s rule prohibited crews standing up or kneeling in racing²⁸. The IDBF make efforts to become dragon boat race an Olympic game, but the ‘Slim Policy’ of IOC made it hard to realize²⁹.

How about Taiwan’ s situation? The sportive discourses and the “Renaissance of Chinese Culture” had helped the dragon boating came back to life from mid-1970s to 1980s, but the tensions between Taiwanese and Chinese identities embodied in body cultures became also manifest in 1990s. With the process of political democratization and the termination of the Martial Law in 1987, Taiwan’ s people have been able expressing their identities freely and the Taiwanese-consciousness emerged rapidly. Many islanders started to question the Chinese-ness which hammered into them by the KMT regime, thus the “Renaissance of Chinese Culture” came to an end soundlessly in 1990s. The “Taiwanese style” of dragon boating, which could not join to the international regulation, became legacy what the “fight for tradition” left behind. The traditional manual boats and racing rules are so different from HK’ s regulations thus Taiwanese

²⁶ see *Wenzhou-ribao* (Wenzhou’s Daily), 2006/5/17 page 1, 2006/4/25 page 2, 2005/4/28.

²⁷ Le-ping’s case see *Minzhuyufazhi* (Democracy and Law), 2000/7/18, page 8; Yingtan’s case see *Chengdoushangbao* (Chengdou Commerce Press), 2006/05/27, or <http://news.163.com/06/0527/05/2I3V338J0001124J.html>, 2008/9/5.

²⁸ IDBF, 2008, “IDBF Racing Rules - Stay Seated or Stand Up?”, 8 March 2008, <http://www.idbf.org/news.php?item=../news/2008-03-A.nws>, 2008/9/5.

²⁹ A retired official of the Chinese Olympic Committee reminded me, “since IOC made efforts to control the scale of personnel amount, how can you imagine a new event of over 500 players been included into an Olympic sport by IOC ?”

paddlers felt strange when they encounters the novel fiberglass boats as the journalist descriptions cited in the beginning of this article.

5. Some reflections

By a historical sociological review, we found the representations of traditionalization and modernization have both been manipulated in different times. Dragon boating had not gained its traditional position until China was forced to join the discourses of modern nation-states. The Japanese colonizers in Taiwan, Chinese sport officials in the beginning years of 20th century, and the revolutionists all used modernity discourses to traditionalize dragon boating for building modern identities onto the people. Dragon boating and other traditional body cultures were once driven out of the center of popular life while the sports could take their place. Pierre Bourdieu (1978) and Richard Gruneau (1988) pointed out such kind of struggles referring to the legitimate uses of time and the body. Here we show that a tradition was probably not a fixed past but a construction for the recent purpose³⁰. We also show the process of traditionalization or modernization manifested the internal conflicts (the non-competitive boating of Taiwanese aboriginal Erlung villagers for example) that marked the contradictions of national narratives with modernity.

While discussing the past and future of native body cultures in Asian-African societies, Henning Eichberg (1998) and John Bale (2002)³¹ emphasized folk games shouldn't be seen as antecedents of modernity while Allen Guttmann (1978, 1994) implied that Western sports are characteristically modern/universal while folk games are typically pre-modern. The sportization of Asia-African folk games has usually involved complicated power relationships and "the world wide recognition has to be paid with the loss of the cultural context which supports cultural identity and uniqueness".³² The history of dragon boating in the Chinese societies also shows that body cultures are not innocent but always socially constructed. There existed cultural appropriations, negotiations between different ethnicities, and struggles between natives and the dominants. We should be careful not to romanticize such a "renaissance of the old days", since the processes involved harsh realities of socio-cultural exploitation. Body cultures may become something other than "sports" that force us to abandon misleading dualistic assumption of "modern v. s. traditional" since the term of traditional games

³⁰ Hobsbawn and Rangers (ed.), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*.

³¹ Eichberg, H., 1998, *Body Culture: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity*, Edited by John Bale and Chris Philo. London: Routledge.; John Bale, 2002, *Imagined Olympians: Body Culture and Colonial Representation in Rwanda*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³² Pfister, G. ,2004, "Traditional Sports and Games Proposal for a Declaration", in Pfister et.al.(ed). *Games of the Past – Sports for the Future? Globalisation, Diversification, Transformation*, Sankt Augustin: Academia, Pp.185-187, p.185.

is in itself a modern, even a colonial construction³³. This requires not just a post-modern “anything goes”, but a dialectical (or trialectical) sharpness of thinking!³⁴

Many people think dragon boating has developed successfully from Hong Kong to international arenas but, in some degree, they don't realize it would be a process of transplanting Westerners' representation of indigenous cultures. Now most of people believe sportization is the best way to keep the tradition alive though the dragon boat races came from another paradigm of value system rather than a sport emerged from another system. Such pattern of body cultures have intrinsic potentials of resistance/re-creation and this is probably why the officials have deformed it and tried to eliminates its threatening energy³⁵ with its more modernized way.

³³ Eichberg, 2005, “Traditional Games: A joker in Modern Development: some experiences from Nordic Countries and Nordic-African exchange”, paper for the International Conference Play the Game, Copenhagen, November 2005.

³⁴ Eichberg, 2008, “Nation in Movement: Turning the theory of the People down on the feet”, in Tomaz Pavlin (ed.), *Sport, Nation, Nationalism: Proceeding of the 8th ISHPES Seminar and International Conference on Social Science and Sport*, Ljubljana: Fakulteta za sport.

³⁵ The theme of the “qi” or “energy” is another important dimension that many contemporary sport studies have ignored. See H. Eichberg, 2006, “The Energy of Festivity: Atmosphere, intonation and self-orchestration in Danish Popular sport”, a paper presented in *Sporting Sound- A conference on Sport and Music*, University of Aarhus, Denmark, 27th-28th September 2006.

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