

Investigation and research on Hakka folk sports activities of "Pond Dragon Boat Race" in Yangchun village

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Abstract: The paper mainly focuses on a particular folk sports named “Dragon Boat Race in the Pond”. First, the origin of the Race has been introduced in details. Then, on the basis of the origin, the organization and the corresponding customs of the Race have been mentioned respectively. Finally, the values of the Race are presented.

1. Introduction

As we known, a dragon boat race is usually held in the rivers[1-4]. However, the dragon boat race held in Yangchun town, Longnan County, Jiangxi Province, are all in a big pond which is 15 acres in size and more than 100 meters long. It is likely to be the smallest dragon boat race in the world. Noting that the Race was held in a pond, the natives named it—" Dragon Boat Race in the Pond". The Race was founded in the Hongzhi years of Ming Dynasty and has lasted for over 500 years up to now. Another special custom in the race is that women are permitted to participate in the events.



Figure1 A Panorama of Dragon Boat Race in the Pond.

Yangcun town is located in southwest of Nonglan county, Ganzhou city, Jiangxi province, adjoining Lianping county, Guangdong province. It is a remote mountainous town which is 57 kilometers away from the county. Yangcun town has the land area of 144 square kilometers with 14772 acres of arable land and 219000 acres of mountainous area, the jurisdiction of 15 administrative villages with 166 village groups, the population of 51000 belonging to 9984 households. Yangcun town possesses unique folk culture, typical Hakka dwellings and little-known folk stories.

2. The origin of "the Dragon Boat Race in the pond"

The dragon boat race in Yangcun town is an unique folk customs for dragon boat festival, which

originated in the Hongzhi years of Ming dynasty and introduced by Sizhang Lai, the eighth forefather of Lai gens in Taochuan of Yangcun town. After 500 years of inheritance, the unique and traditional folk culture of the dragon boat race in the pond including worship of Dragon Lord, invitation of Dragon Lord, gathering of Dragon Boats, evil cleanup, finals, boat sightseeing, return of Dragon Lord and sending duck Boats has formed, which becomes the most popular folk activities of dragon boat festival in three counties around Nonglan from Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces.

It is said that Sizhang Lai and his nephew, Zhengxiang Lai, rafted the logs down the river to Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province. Zhengxiang Lai sold out logs soon, while nobody ever inquired about Sizhang Lai's cedar woods for several days. One day, two pieces of wood suddenly floated to Sizhang Lai, Lai impatiently push them away, but the woods drifted back soon, again and again, just like two dragons played in the river. And then Lai prayed to the woods devoutly and said "Dragon Lord, if you bless my logs can sell a good price, I will return to make golden sculpture for you and go boating every year".

On the next day, an official-liked person came to the riverside to find Sizhang Lai and said that he need cedar woods to carve pillars for royal palace, Lai donated his woods knowing the emperor need his woods. The emperor gave the order of "opening the warehouse and taking the hat" as rewards of his loyalty, which means the chosen hat symbolizes the grade of official position conferred. Nevertheless, honest Sizhang Lai just chose a cloak cap rather than official hat, the emperor awarded Lai the "elder man of the country" which entrusted him the privilege of promotion of officials. And on his way back home, many officials rushed to see him and he obtained bountiful presents. After returning back, Sizhang Lai carved two golden dragon sculptures, enshrine in the temple and excavate a pond of 15 acres in the stockaded village named carp. From that time on, people held grand dragon boats meeting annually in the pond.

3. The organization of "The Dragon Boat Race in the pond" activity

The grand dragon boats meeting always lasts for 5 days. The dragon boats are launched in May 1st of the lunar calendar, the Dragon Lord is invited simultaneously accompanying with horn and drum and clustered by flags and umbrellas. The Dragon Lord parades around the carp street in the sound of firecrackers, all shopkeepers will welcome the Dragon Lord placing altars and setting off firecrackers. When the Dragon Lord returns to the pond, the dragon boats can be launched which initiates the start of grand dragon boats meeting. The dragon boat teams sign up in May 2nd, each village will send out male team and female team separately. Nowadays, two dragon boat teams from Lianping county and Heping county in Guangdong province will participate in the race. The "gathering of Dragon Boats" is held in May 3rd to entertain guests, people gather to communicate for development and pray for peace. The activity of "evil cleanup" is held in May 4th and forenoon of 5th, a 15-person band with flags wanders about the streets following the Dragon Lord, each family welcomes baptism of the Dragon Lord aiming to expel the misfortune. The final of the dragon boat race is held in the afternoon of May 5th and the rewards of winners are given on the spot. After that is boat sightseeing, all members from guard of honor board on the boats while the boats are marching forward slowly, people on the boats discard rice and rice wine into water, and then drop the paper boats and ducks into water when returning to the riverbank. The specific contents and procedures are as follows:

Invitation of Dragon Lord: The solemn ceremony of invitation of Dragon Lord is held at 11:00 of May 1st. Firstly, a contingent composed of over thirty persons will move towards the temple of Dragon Lord accompanying with horns and drums and clustered by flags and umbrellas. After the contingent arrives at the Dragon Lord temple, the leaders of the contingent will bow to the Dragon Lord and offer the incense sticks and sacrifices like cocks. Then the two Dragon Lords are lifted by two strong men and moved to the shore of the pond where the dragon boat race took place, accompanying with clustered by flags and umbrellas. The Dragon Lord will stay for five days there and each day the villagers will offer the incense sticks and sacrifices. And the appearance of the Dragon Lord means the beginning of the five-day races.



Figure2 Dragon Lord.



Figure 3 Invitation of Dragon Lord.



Figure 4 Worship of Dragon Lord.



Figure 5 Banquet during the Race.

Gathering of Dragon Boats: also named as Thinks-giving Banquet or mass Banquet, is a treatment for the donators of various circles. In the morning in May 3rd of lunar calendar, folks and guests gather in Yangcun town, exchanging experience, talking about development, and praying for peace.

According to traditional customs, the first and second Yuan, that denotes the largest donators and second one respectively, will be welcomed gloriously to the ceremony accompanying with band and music. Then representatives of managers, the first Yuan and the second Yuan, representatives of township-government all sit on the rostrum. A ceremony of thanks is hosted by a reputable native, who introduces the origin of the gathering, the guests invited, and preparation of the contest. He also proposes that representatives of managers, the first Yuan and the second Yuan, and representatives of township-government make speeches respectively. A dragon dance begins afterwards before the banquet in 12 o'clock. There are about 80 desks, even 100 desks at most in the banquet each year. Nine kinds of Hakka dishes are mainly served, while local rice wines and liquors are served as guests' wishes in the banquet. Also the managers will toast to the guests to show their thanks.

Evil Cleanup: In the mornings of May 4th and 5th, following the statue of god dragon, a band of 30 men with flags and drums will wander about the whole streets and lanes. Each household burns incense, offers up chickens, fishes, pork and rice wines as sacrifices. They also set off firecrackers,

so as to greeting the dragon god, cleansing evil and praying for prosperity and peace.

Each household of every country has been cleaned before, with *artemisia argyi* and *acorus calamus* plugged into doors. Beside main paths, assemble temporarily with specific desk of each household for burning incense, on which container filled with rice to plug candles and incense, paper for burning of sacrifice, three bowl of wines, a bowl of water mixed with leaves ashes of orange and bamboo, a bowl of beans, and three kinds of sacrifice were all placed. The firecrackers are set off as soon as the god dragon statue arrives. Then paper for burning, candles and incense, rice, beans, wines and water are poured into delivering basket and buckets. The mixed water is then poured into pond for boat contest, and paper, candles and incense are burned behind the boats in the pond.

The main lines of cleansing up are, from Woli to Wushi, Pingshang in May 4th, and from Laopubai to Mawu, Dakeng, Shakeng, Yangtaiwan, Fupo, Hebeidun on the morning of May the fifth before 11 o'clock.



Figure 6 The evil cleansing up activities.



Figure 7 The starting point of the Race.



Figure 8 The Race.

Finals: When the dragon boat festival approaches, each household in Yangcun town is filled with relatives and friends invited. After lunch, members from every family take good seats by the pond, daubing realgar wine on and giving children some pin money. Soon the pond becomes so crowded that even on the top of some buildings and small hills is occupied by tens of thousands of people. The continuous noise of firecrackers doesn't stop for the whole afternoon until 18 o'clock.

The final races are often started at 2 O'clock in the afternoon. In the final races ceremony, the representative of sponsors, town leaders and athlete representative will give speeches respectively. And then referee group will announce the contest rules. The competition is divided into two groups:

local and outside. For each group, men or women enjoy their own games. Therefore, there are four championships each year. Besides offering some bonus, the championship teams also reward a silk banner, a green goose and a shirt for each member. During the awarding ceremony, the committee of the race will make public the next sponsors. The term of office of new sponsors is one year.



Figure 9 The final point of the Race.



Figure 10 The Women Championship of the Race.

Boat Sightseeing: A solemn ceremony of boat sightseeing will be held after the awarding ceremony. The Dragon Lord will be put on a dragon boat together with ducks by the members of honor guard. The boat with Dragon Lord will be paddled around the pond for three and half times. And then, the Dragon Lord will be pulled ashore.



Figure 11 Boat Sightseeing.

Return of Dragon Lord: After the boat sightseeing, the Dragon Lord will be sent back to the Temple in similar way that the Dragon Lord invited at the same route.

Farewell of Ducks: After the return of Dragon Lord, residents in the Yangcun town will drop those paper boats and ducks which have witnessed the boat sightseeing into the water when they back to the Pond. The implication of the behavior is to expel the misfortune and to bring the people happiness.

4. The values of "the Dragon Boat Race in the pond"

The Dragon Boat Race in the pond is not only an unique traditional fork sports in Dragon Boat Festival in the area of southern Jiangxi Province, but also a gala of the Hakka people in the adjacency of Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces. The activity has steeped in history for over 500 years and the Race is often in large scale, wide range and long duration. And more importantly, the Race not only promotes the culture and economy of local society and inherits traditional Hakka spirit, but also consolidate the friendship of the World Hakka.

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