

Session 1



**Shared Values of Tugging
Rituals and Games
in Asia in Community Viewpoint**





Presentation 1



Shared Values of Tugging Rituals and the ICH Community

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1. Introduction

Although tugging rituals and games are practiced around the world, they are concentrated mainly in East Asia and Southeast Asia, where they continue to be actively performed. Tug-of-war games, which consist of two sides tugging at opposite ends of a rope in a contest of strength, take on interesting characteristics by region. According to scholars, tugging games and rituals in East and Southeast Asia are usually practiced by people in rice cultivating regions as part of harvest related rituals. So far, China, Japan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have been identified as regions in which tugging rituals and games are practiced.¹ In Sakurai's study on the relationship between ecology and the distribution of tugging rituals and games, a

¹ According to Sakurai Tatsuhiko's map of Asian tugging rituals and games, although examples have been found in South and North America, Africa and the United Kingdom, these rituals and games are mostly concentrated in East and Southeast Asia. Also refer to the world map of tugging rituals and games presented in the study (Sakurai 2010). Tugging rituals and games are actively transmitted in Japan, and are most widely practiced in the Kyushu and Okinawa regions (Jeong Hyeong-ho 2007).

correlation to settlement agriculture is suggested.² It is meaningful to observe the distribution of tugging rituals and games across Asia, as well as to compare their similarities and differences between regions. The findings of existing literature indicate that tugging rituals are practiced in Asia by agrarian farmers for a variety of purposes- to celebrate the new year, before planting crops, to pray for good harvests at important periods in the farming calendar, as harvest rituals, thanksgiving rituals or rain calling rituals. Although the Asian tugging rituals and games share many common characteristics, there are also characteristics unique to each region, calling for more detailed and comprehensive studies in the field. The international symposiums hosted by the city of Dangjin have led to an expansion of studies on tugging rituals and games. Together with comparative studies on the rituals and games in China, Japan and Korea, there have also been discussions on their distribution in Asia, their relation to cultural ecology, as well as similarities and differences between the various forms.³ Recently, there has been a focus on studies comparing tugging rituals and games in states participating in the joint inscription of the element into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and this presentation is part of this movement. Thus, the scope of tugging rituals and games included in this study is limited to cases in Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea and the Philippines. It is also important to note that the data used in this presentation is secondary data already released in earlier studies, and not primary data collected by this researcher. Thus this study should be taken as preliminary essay upon which future studies will be built and completed. Despite its limitations, it constitutes an attempt to supplement existing literature by focusing on areas that have been overlooked so far. In doing so, it aims to go deeper into the consciousness, in other words, the elements that comprise communal spirit or the source of the energy of communities that perform tugging ritual and games.

2. Literature Review

² It is less prevalent in slash and burn agriculture communities (Sakurai 2010: 19). Sakurai's study on the distribution of tugging rituals and games shows higher concentration of the rituals and games in fishing villages that cultivate rice.

³ Refer to collections of studies such as Dangjin Culture Center 2009, Gijisi Juldarigi Preservation Society 2010, Dangjin 2013.

There have not yet been comparative studies on a broad scope of tugging rituals and games in the Asian region. Thus the topics of discussion have also been narrow in scope. Majority of existing studies have focused on origin theories, based on the theory of diffusion. These theories propose that tugging rituals and games originated in China, Southeast Asia or India, and that they are related to agriculture or Buddhist rituals. In Korea, the China origin theory has been accepted as conventional wisdom but recent studies have proposed origins in Southeast Asia (Kim Gwang-eon 2004, Yuan Li 1998, Pyo In-ju 2008). There has also been a study that seeks to trace their origins to esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia, rather than agrarian culture (Song Hwa-seob 2009). Others reject the diffusion theory to propose indigenous origination (Im Jang-hyuk 2009: 107). Secondly there have been attempts to classify the tugging rituals and games of Asia through comparative analysis. Sakurai has identified the following 7 points of similarity between the tugging rituals and games practiced by Asian agricultural communities which include slash and burn farmers as well as rice field cultivation farmers. They are 1) function as agrarian rituals to pray for prosperity, 2) fortune telling for the New Year, 3) symbolic reenactment of sexual intercourse 4) using the victory of the female side to predict prosperity, 5) relevance to the heavenly father and earthly mother mythology, 6) rain calling through the combination of the double ropes which bring about insemination (rain) from the sky, and 7) the identification of ropes as warriors (Sakurai 2010).

It is especially interesting to compare the various tugging rituals and games in terms of functions, symbolism, and features such as the form of the ropes. Every ritual has its own symbolism for the ropes which can represent dragons, snakes, caterpillars or reproductive organs depending on the community and is accompanied by its own legend and folklore. Thus it is necessary to develop a classification system for these symbols and myths. The methods of rope disposal after the tug-of-war can also be classified into several types. Some communities float the rope away on rivers while others tie the rope around trees or rocks. Rituals in which the rope signifies a dragon are closely related to rain calling rituals. The Thai people of Con Cuong in Nghe An Province, Vietnam perform a tug-of-war with a name that means 'pulling the dragon's tail', as a rain calling ritual. The ritual calls for rain in hopes of a full harvest. In the case of Korea, the rope is wound around the village deity rock after the tug-of-war. This is seen as a symbol for sexual intercourse and a fertility rite.

The timing of tugging rituals and games have been compared against the economic environment to point out a close relationship between these practices and rice cultivation. One evidence for this is the use of rice straw to fabricate ropes. However, materials can vary according to the natural environment of the performance community and ropes may be made of straw, rattan, bamboo, twigs or animal skin. The timing of tugging rituals and games vary but they are usually held around the New Year, rice planting season and harvest season. Although tugging rituals and games consist of a wide range of elements, their significance ultimately lies in their role as communal rituals for the entire village to pray for peace and prosperity while strengthening social solidarity.

3. Characteristics of tug-of-war communities in the 4 states

	State/regional characteristics	Timing	Participants	Communal significance
<i>Teanh Prot</i>	[Cambodia] Lakeside agricultural villages	New Year, <i>Chlong Chet</i>	Presided by elders, male and female participants	A composite event consisting of rituals to patron deities and games to pray for full harvests, seek social solidarity and give thanks
<i>Punnuk</i>	[Philippines] Riverside terrace farming areas	Harvest	Only ritual practitioners and male participants	
<i>Keo co, Keo Song, day gay</i>	[Vietnam] Agricultural villages	New Year	Presided by elders, presence of judge, only male participants	
<i>Juldarigi</i>	[Korea] Agricultural villages	Around the first full moon, <i>Chuseok, Dan-o</i>	Presided by preservation society, male and female participants	

[Table 1] Comparison of tugging rituals and games in the 4 states

The characteristics of the four states jointly applying for inscription in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanities can be summarized as follows.⁴ Tugging rituals and games are performed all across the rice cultivating regions of East and Southeast Asia. Typically, they are performed to pray for rain and good harvests, or to give thanks. The associated rituals have unique characteristics by region while sharing commonalities in meaning and functions.

1) *Teanh Prot* [Cambodia]

The villages of Chamres, Kambor Or and Thnol Trong in Siem Reap Province are located around the lake of Tonle Sap, in close proximity to the Angkor Wat. Tugging rituals and games are performed during the Chlong Chet ritual, related to the New Year celebrations to mark the transition into a new period. Village elders prepare for the ritual while young men and women participate in the tug-of-war game. This tugging ritual and games are known to serve the functions of praying for good harvests and strengthening social solidarity through games. The cambodian tug-of-war is related to the mythology- the churning of the sea of milk, which is recorded as bas relief on the walls of the Angkor Wat (built in the 12th century). The legend tells of gods and demons tugging on a rope together to find the amrita- elixir of eternal life (Sophiearith 2013).

2) *Punnuk* [Philippines]

The punnuk tug-of-war is performed in the Hapao, Baang and Nungulunan barangay units of the municipality of Hungduan. The tug-of-war game takes place on the bank of the Hapao river. Participants gather at nunhipukana where the river meets its tributary. Punnuk practiced by the Tuwalifugao tribe is a ritual to thank the gods for the year's harvests and pray for continued blessings into the next harvest. This region is famous for its terraced rice farms and tugging rituals and games are performed at the thanksgiving festival to officially announce the end of the year's farming, The entire community takes part, with elders and representatives presiding, and men gathering materials for the tug-

⁴ Data from Dangjin, 2013, Diversity and Commonalities in East Asian Tugging Rituals and Games (Sourcebook for International Symposium on East Asian Tugging Rituals and Games 2013).

of-war as well as participating in the actual game. Villagers show their support by holding a parade to the river bank wearing traditional costumes and waving dong-ah leaves. After the tug-of-war game, ritualistic bathing in the river takes place to remove all taboos. The dumupag, selected by consultation between village elders and ritual experts, oversees the entire process of the punnuk ritual (Respicio 2013).

3) *Keco, Ke Song, daygay* [Vietnam]

Tugging rituals and games are widely practiced across Vietnam in the northern provinces and cities of Lao Cai, Bac Ninh, Vinh Phuc, Ha Noi, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, as well as southern regions including Ho Chi Minh city. The characteristics, symbolism and rules of tugging rituals and games in Vietnam vary from region to region. They are usually performed at spring festivals as rituals to pray for full harvests and express reverence of natural forces. They are performed in some regions to commemorate historical events, mythology and historical figures. The role of the elders is also important. Participants in the game are selected among men based on physical strength. The games are presided by judges while village elders play an important role. They have to perform associated rituals and orally transmit the skills and ceremonies to younger generations. Tugging rituals and games are held in the New Year to pray for good harvests in the year. They are also accompanied by a variety of events such as cockfighting and wrestling (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha 2013).

4) *Juldarigi, Juldanggigi, Julddaenggigi, Julkkeutgi* [Korea]

Tugging rituals and games in Korea are widely practiced in the southern regions. The fabrication of the rope for the annual tug-of-war event requires the entire community to work together for almost a month. Before the actual tug-of-war game, an elaborate ritual is held to pay respects to village deities. Traditionally, the cost of tugging rituals and games have been borne communally by all members of the community contributing according to their financial means. This mode of participation strengthens communal spirit and encourages active participation. The Korean juldarigi is an occasion for village members to hold rituals to the village deity and other patron deities while participating in joyful

celebrations and games. While the game begins around the first full moon of the lunar year, villages that use large ropes have to begin preparations a month before. When preparing the rope or tugging at the rope, villagers are filled with excitement and anticipation for the game as this is usually accompanied by nongak (farmers' music) performances.

The tugging rituals and games described above do not constitute a large enough sample size to be representative of Asian tugging games and rituals. Thus the aim of the presentation is to analyse them as case studies, and does not extend to identifying general principles. It proposes a new framework of analysis while noting the associated similarities and differences discussed in earlier studies. Tug-of-war games are communal games in which large numbers of village members can participate. Although the game is restricted to males in some cases, women and children still participate actively as spectators who cheer them on. The role of the village elders or tribal representatives who preside over the rituals is of crucial importance. They not only transmit the ritual procedures and skills to the younger generations, they also pass down the associated mythology and folklore, ensuring the transmission of village history and culture. The fact that village folklore is transmitted together with ritual procedures and rope fabrication techniques through tugging rituals and games holds great significance. Thus this study views the mythological content of tugging rituals and games as the major factor that strengthens communal spirit. In other words, this study sees tugging rituals and games as transmission mechanisms for communal mythology, legends, historical accounts and values.

4. Perspectives on cross-cultural study on tugging rituals and games

Largely two different approaches can be taken in a comparative study on tugging rituals and games. It is possible to take either a typological approach in making comparisons as presented above or a structural approach, which is to explore the minds of the tug-of-war performer/ group/ community by analyzing the symbols and meanings of rites, myths, and legends concerning tugging rituals and games.

There are many variations in the type of tugging rituals and games as mentioned above. The differences of tugging rituals and games are highlighted by researchers through the

analysis of what constitutes each culture. It is illustrated that types of tugging rituals vary greatly in different localities in terms of rope materials and types, rope making process and methods, performing place and time, separating groups, ritual formalities and symbolism. It also turns out that there are far more differences than the similarities in view of the regions of Southeast Asia where tug of war is a game prevalent. Thus, some are critical of the view that tugging rituals and games are Asia's common intangible cultural heritage. However, their argument looks only at the aspect that tug of war is a game using a rope without considering the fact that there are varying characteristics and ritual meanings in different localities.

This paper tries to explore the cultural commonality of tugging rituals and games from the perspective of community members' awareness. To this end, structural framework for analysis has been employed. It is valuable but has its limitations to identify structural homogeneity in cross-cultural comparison from the viewpoint of isomorphism. However, it seems useful to provide isomorphic framework for comparative study on tugging rituals and games prevalent throughout Asia given that it attracts attention to the new aspects to the study while overcoming diffusionism and acculturation.⁵ Perspectives of diffusionism or acculturation pay attention to the similarities and differences of cultural phenomenon or surface structures. In contrast, structuralism pays more attention to the cultural homogeneity or variations through the deep structure of human minds.

In an attempt to analyze a language Ferdinand de Saussure posited that the sign consists of two separable elements which are a form of the sign (the signifiant) and its meaning (the signifié). It was Levi-Strauss who sought to apply the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure to mythology. In the analysis of mythology he identified auditory images of myths as the signifiant, and the value and concept as "the signifié". Taking the

⁵ In general, cross-cultural studies tend to converge into diffusionism and acculturation. The former is a theoretical framework for an attempt to understand the nature of culture in terms of the origin of culture traits and their spread from one society to another. The latter focuses on the changes in a culture brought about by another culture. The two stances are in a contrasting relationship in various levels especially in that units of cultural analysis differ from each other. A global perspective works to the advantage of diffusionism and a regional perspective, acculturation. Those approaches are in contrast with each other in actual research although it should be reciprocal in their relations due to the difference in the dimensions of analysis. The advantage of acculturation is to analyze cultural phenomenon within a region specifically in that it focuses on the dynamic processes of what happens to a whole culture. Often, the differences between the two approaches in which one endeavors to discover the origin of culture traits while another emphasizes cultural diversity caused political confrontation beyond academic interests on the subject.

subject of linguistic and auditory analysis further, Roland Barthes argued in his book “Mythologies”(1957) that visual signs are the signifiant and the connotations and implication hidden behind the images are “the signifié”.

The ritual act of tug of war can be broken down in its concept to the visual signs as the signifiant and its connotations as the signifié. In case of the tugging rituals and games, the signifiant becomes the act of entertainment by participants measuring their strength in a competition. It seems possible to draw in-depth analysis on the signifié, its connotations and implication behind the act of tug of war.

I would like to stress the importance to identify the meaning of diversity in the signifiant (the sign) of the tugging rituals that has been pointed out by existing researchers. In other words, an attempt has been made to look into the participants’ consciousness structure through the meaning of the rite, the signifié since it would be a valuable discovery to identify underlying thoughts.

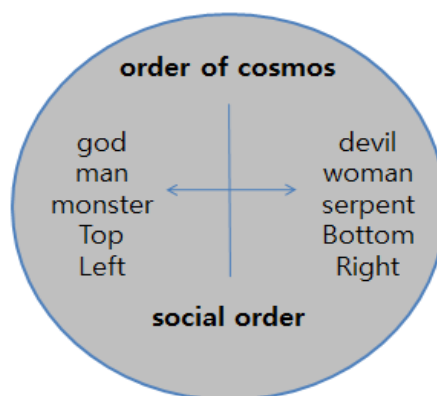
Tug of war consists of the elements of mythology and the act. The semantic structure of these two elements becomes more evident when analyzed using structural framework than when the mythology alone was under analysis. It can be known how the mythology works in human society in reality due to the additional element of the act of people in the rite. That leads to in-depth interpretation of the correlations between the structures of mythology and human minds from the dimension of semantic analysis. Existing studies have put much focus on the typological aspects of the tugging rituals – rope, materials, participants, offerings etc. - but happened to have holes in the logic of the statement that those aspects symbolizes social solidarity, pray for abundance and fecundity.

Still there is a tendency that researchers are more interested in more tangible aspects of the tugging rituals and games that are intangible cultural heritage. In other words, they fail to reach a structural analysis making the consciousness of participants’ operate due to their tendency to stick to the tangible elements of the rite such as a rope, materials, tools, time and techniques. This paper also has the limitations on the analysis because of the scarcity of mythology collections and therefore further research is necessary for richer interpretations in the future. Firstly, the paper attempts to conduct a structural analysis using quotable mythologies.

It is argued that mythology consisted of situations that are considered historical according to Levi-Strauss, which in theory is a series of infinite historical events. It would

be easy to recognize even without citing the statement of Levi-Strauss how free and unstrained the components of mythologies are. Notwithstanding the fact, each individual society/group construct mythologies upon the selection of 'distinctive' materials, in other words, appropriate event which is distinctive to its society (Levi-Strauss 2005:116). Accordingly, physically feasible materials and techniques are chosen in the act of entertainment that are suitable for its society/group. It can be assumed that those games of entertainment distinctive to individual communities have evolved through this process in different regions.

In the game and myth of tug of war, competition and solidarity appear as a theme and this theme inevitably forms variations. As can be seen in diverse variations on a theme in music, a variation on a theme can be developed endlessly. Myth is the most useful resource for inducing the union of performers and performing groups. In fact, tugging rituals embrace various myths, folk tales and history in every region. For example, in the Cambodian 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk', the god and devil co-operate in order to find treasure, and a centipede and a serpent die together after fighting in the myth of Gijisi, Chunchung Province in South Korea.



[Figure 1] The structure of tug of war

In the basic structure of confrontation between men and women; god and devil; uptown and downtown; villages in both banks of a river; potter and tiler, the unrestricted variations relate to the freedom of the community members and their creativity. Again, this confrontation is connected to the harmony between men and women; male and female; and god and devil. It is important to note that this confrontation is more holistic rather than conflictive. The community members are aware of the proposition that they

can be united through the confrontation in a mythic play. In other words, through myths and mythic actions, tug of war community can either secure their identity or internalize their communal life.

5. Conclusion

It is hard to recognize the commonalities of tugging rituals and games through the signs (the signifiant) of cultural elements. The signifiant includes a rope, materials, siding groups, space and time, proposal, and offerings. The paper has made a suggestion that the performers' mental structure should be followed through the signifié in order to understand the fact that the tugging rituals and games are truly intangible cultural heritage. Previous studies have focused on and explained from the aspect of the reason 'why' the tugging rituals create the unity in a community. The paper, however, has tried to point out 'how' performers perceive that they are a member of community through the ceremony since it is regarded that the question of 'how' rather than 'why' is more of a significant and meaningful approach to understand the intangible heritage community and the member's behavior. Also, the unconscious structure proposed by Lévi-Strauss seemed important in understanding the commonalities of tugging rituals and games. Lévi-Strauss stresses that we do not attempt to suggest how men think in mythologies but how mythologies are thought within the human minds unaware of the knowledge(Lévi-Strauss 2005:110).

In the case of intangible cultural heritage, it is possible to analyze the deep structure of the symbols, language and human behavior, which makes favorable for in-depth analysis in comparison to the analysis of mythologies. It is also possible to conduct in depth analysis of linguistic expression as well as behavioral image. Therefore, it should be noted that the tugging rituals and games present the performers the ways of thinking without their awareness as Levi-Strauss pointed out.

The paper has focused on how a series of stories and acts of the tugging rituals and games shape the consciousness of the members of a community. The members should be able to learn what and how to make contributions to their community through the ceremony. It also provides an opportunity to recognize the value of a community, the importance of communal labor and life. The tugging rituals and games, beyond the scope

of communal solidarity and praying for abundance, is the embodiment of an act which is descriptive of what it means for the members to make a meaningful contribution to their community.