

BULL FIGHTING FESTIVAL IN CHEONGDO, KOREA AND BUFFALO FIGHTING FESTIVAL IN DO SON, VIETNAM AS SEEN FROM CULTURAL AND TOURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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To study these two festivals will help us see some similarities and differences between South Korean and Vietnamese cultures. Accordingly, we can find proper behaviors when interacting with their traditions and customs.

1. Studying Selected Documents, We Find that Both Festivals Reflect the Sacrifice-Offering Customs, Agrarian Culture, and Martial Tradition of the Two Nations

Sacrifice-offering is an ancient custom considered to be sediment of festivals. It could be found in many primitive societies around the world. While primitive men worshipped their gods, they also wanted to communicate with them. At first, they often offered a god a human sacrifice – usually an unmarried young man or maiden, the trace of which can still be found in a game played in an area by the Black Sea, Ukraine. After having fun at the beach, people carry a good-looking young man or girl offshore and throw him/her into the sea to make him/her a sacrifice to the God Neptune. This custom is also reflected in the Vietnamese legendary story of Thanh Sanh. The story is that every year the villagers had to assign a young man to do the job of guarding a temple, which meant he was made a sacrifice to an evil spirit. Human sacrifice was later replaced by an animal of value. And the sacrifice animal is the

farmer's bull in South Korea and the farmer's buffalo in Vietnam. In fact, bull or buffalo fighting festivals are occasions when villagers gather to enjoy themselves and then kill the sacrifice animal and have the meat shared among them. It is believed that when they eat the meat from the sacrifice animal the god will bless them. According to Professor Kim Kwang-on of Inha University, Korea, bull fighting festivals are very popular in South China, Southeast Asia, South Korea, and Japanese Okinawa and Kyushu. In these areas, there is a ceremony held by the farmers to select a sacrifice animal for gods to show their gratitude for an abundant harvest. He added that even today Indonesians still have bull fights 'to select the sacrifice animal for gods.' However, the killing of the winning or losing animal to be sacrificed to gods depends on the tradition of the local area. In Korea and Madogasea Island (where many Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesians inhabit) the losing animal is sacrificed. In Do Son, the winning animal used to be slain for sacrifice, but today both animals are killed and their meat is shared among villagers. This custom is similar to Chinese Miao's in that both the winning and losing animals are slain for sacrifice, probably so as to create a fair and compromising ending.

The second cultural similarity of the bull fighting festival in Cheongdo and the buffalo fighting festival in Do Son concerns the agricultural aspect of the cultural life

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in rural areas of both countries, i.e. their agricultural culture.

This can be seen first of all in the fact that the festivals are held seasonally closely related to cultivating seasons. In both South Korea and Vietnam, these festivals take place in mid-eighth-month (the eighth month of the lunar year), i.e. the time of least work on the farms. Noticeably, Cheongdo bull fighting festival is on the Mid-fall Day (the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar). While Mid-fall Day is an event for children in Vietnam, it is a national event for both adults and children in South Korea. On this occasion, people visit their friends and relatives and have a good time together, and bull fighting festival is a special event of this time in Cheongdo.

In Do Son, Vietnam, the buffalo fighting festival officially takes place on the ninth day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar, but the after-events last till the fifteenth day of the month.

So the festival times in South Korea and Vietnam are basically the same – in mid-eighth-month of lunar Calendar, the leisure time between farming seasons.

In 'eighth month', I went to spring festival

Seeing a folk song contest I took part in

'Spring' in the above verse is not the spring season, but the young age, or young time of one's life. Young men and women of the Red River Delta – the granary of northern Vietnam – can only go to song contests during the idle time between farming seasons. Eighth month is also the "Father commemorative" time in Kiep Bac temple where people come to worship Saint Tran Hung Dao.

Back to old times, pictures of dancers with *lau* grass, which only appears in the fall, on their head could be found on bronze drums. The festival must therefore have been in the Fall. The evidence on the face of bronze drums shows us that ancient Vietnamese held Fall festivals. The buffalo fighting festival held in the fall reflects the tradition of farming people in rural areas.

The agricultural aspect of the festival is also reflected in the bulls and buffalos themselves. South Korean farmers used bulls to pull ploughs, while buffalos did – and still do! – this job in Vietnam:

Let me tell you this buffalo

Go and plough the field with me

or

*High is the dried field and low is the
flooded field*

*The husband is doing the ploughing,
the wife, the transplanting and the buffalo
is dragging the plough*

In short, for centuries bulls and buffalos have had close connection to the life and production activities of South Korean and Vietnamese farmers. It has been the dream of a lifetime that a farmer can afford the purchase of a strong bull or buffalo.

The third layer of meaning of both festivals is the appreciation of martial arts. In their everyday life, South Korean and Vietnamese farmers always dream of having great power and strength to fight against 'four-leg' as well as 'two-leg' enemies. That is why South Koreans created the imaginary King TanGun, child of an angel and mother Bear. And the imagination of the Vietnamese produced Saint Giong, a 3-year-old child becoming a strong brave cavalryman, who ate 'a large

flat basket of rice, three flat baskets of *tram* fruit, eight flat baskets of eggplants at one time and drank dry a section of a river in one gulp.' Wearing iron armor, riding on an iron horse, using an iron rod, he ran through the enemy's army as if no one were there. Suddenly, the iron rod was broken. He pulled up bamboo trees to lash the enemy to pieces. It should also be noted that tug-of-war and wrestling are part of all festivals in rural areas of South Korea and Vietnam. Besides showing off human strength and power, people entrust their dreams to the strength of animals. Bull and buffalo fighting festivals are to reflect these dreams and wishes.

2. The above Stated Layers of Cultural Meaning Show the Similarities between the Two Cultures; on the Other Hand, there are Differences between the Bull Fighting Festival in Cheongdo and the Buffalo Fighting Festival in Do Son.

First of all, in South Korea the fighters are bulls while they are buffalos in Vietnam, which reflects the raising animal ecology of the two countries. Vietnamese farmers raise more buffalos for farming work than bulls, while in South Korea the opposite is true. An explanation for this is that buffalos are better adapted to wet lands and bulls to dry lands. Vietnamese legend has it that in the West Lake (in the northwest of Hanoi) a golden buffalo kept diving to look for its mother – the brass bell priest Khong Lo threw in the lake). The Vietnamese also has the legend of Yet Kieu, a talented young general of Marshal Tran Hung Dao, who was very good at maritime fighting. This legend relates Yet Kieu to 'water buffalo', i.e. the buffalo god living in the sea. The story was told that 'One day, when he (Yet Kieu) was walking home along the seashore, he suddenly saw

two buffalos fighting in the moonlight. Carrying a bamboo pole, he rushed into them and hit them hard. To his amazement, they both dashed into the sea. He thought to himself that they must be buffalo gods, so when he found their hairs on his pole he immediately put them into his mouth and swallowed them.'

Yet Kieu became very strong after that – so strong that no one dared to challenge him. And he was able to swim and dive extremely well. He could even stay in deep water for days.

These stories have been handed down by word of mouth only, but they help show that buffalos are closely connected to water. These relationships also explain why there is a year of the buffalo in Vietnam, and a year of the bull in South Korea.

It can also be noted that the way of choosing fighting bulls in Cheongdo festival is different from the way fighting buffalos are chosen in Do Son festival. In Cheongdo, the bulls must be at least 2 years old to be eligible for participation in the fights, they are in their prime at the age of 6 or 7 years, and they often retire at the age of 10 years. They must be strong big bulls with a thick broad neck. The fighting bulls must also meet some other requirements, i.e. small eyes, small ears full of long hairs, a thick neck, wide-stretching forelegs, slim knees, and a long tail. And because horns are their most important weapon, only those with horns close to each other are considered good fighters. Their horns are further sharpened before the fighting to make them more dangerous. The most popular styles of horns are: *the hairpins* – expanding straight to the sides like hairpins, *the protruders*, and *the vertical horns*. If, at the start of the game when the

bull lowers its head, the horns point straight to the opponent, then the horns are an effective weapon.

When compared to the selection of Cheongdo bulls, fighting buffalos in Do Son festival are chosen using different criteria. Their age ranges from 8 to 12 years. They must have a carp fish-shaped body, a tail at least 1.7 meters long, a rib cage over 2 meters wide and a firm posture. Other characteristics include long thighs, a long neck but short larynx, close toe nails, black skin, and a flat forehead. Concerning the horns, the distance between their top ends should be 40 to 42 centimeters and they should be 26 to 28 centimeters long. The horns should also be big and firm. The top ends should be light pointing towards the opponent. With these properties, the horns will be a very effective weapon for the buffalo. Last but not least, the buffalos should have small red eyes with thick eyelids, which means they are brave fighters.

After the bulls or buffalos are chosen for the fights, they will be fed up and trained. Fighting bulls in Cheongdo are fed following a special regimen with barley, beans, and sesame which are supposed to make them healthier. Grass, ginseng and fish powder are also added to their meals. The training is taken seriously and these fighting bulls are considered professional athletes. Every day, they have to run up and down hillsides, drawing automobile tires behind, or wearing bags of sand around their neck, and hurl big trees over using the horns. To make hind legs stronger, they are forced to stand in *inchine* for a long time and they are also twisted to improve the strength of forelegs. Every day, each bull must walk 4 kilometers on average and must be washed twice.

Although fighting buffalos in Do Son are not as well fed or trained as Cheongdo bulls, they are also better fed than normal ones. The trainer-feeders are usually very experienced and entrusted with the training by villagers. They are responsible for properly feeding and training the fighting buffalos.

Studying the documents collected, we are convinced that both bull and buffalo fighting festivals used to consist of the worshipping ceremony and entertainment session. But as time went by, the worshipping ceremony in the bull fighting festival gradually disappeared leaving only traces behind with entertainment session prevailing. On the contrary, today's buffalo fighting festival in Do Son still remains unchanged with both worshipping and entertainment sessions. On the day before the festival, Do Son people hold a solemn worshipping ceremony for 'Sir Buffalo' at their communal house. There is also a practice of *receiving water* (bringing the water from Dragon river or a well to the Temple), which symbolizes the wet rice culture. At the end of the festival, in ceremonious music Sir Buffalo is sent back to the communal house where it will be killed for meat offered to gods.

This results in the differences in the nationalization and internationalization of each festival. In Vietnam as well as in South Korea, bull and buffalo fighting festivals are dated back to ancient times in village and commune culture. But these festivals had not been restored until the 1990s of the twentieth century. By 1995, Cheongdo bull fighting festival was among the top ten tourist and cultural festivals in Korea. In 2003, it was internationalized with the participation of Japanese fighting bulls. It follows that the process of nationalization and internationalization of

Cheongdo bull fighting festival has been much faster.

Do Son Buffalo fighting festival also attracts many people from around the country.

Wherever you do business,

Remember to come back for the buffalo fighting festival on the ninth day of the eighth month.

Whatever trade you do for a living,

Remember not to miss the buffalo fighting festival on the ninth day of the eighth month.

Besides, the buffalos to be trained for the fights can be bought from other places, such as Quang Ninh, Nam Dinh and Thanh Hoa. However, the buffalo fighting festival still remains the specialty of Do Son people; it does not become a national festival or internationalized like Cheongdo festival.

Those are the basic differences between the Cheongdo bull fighting festival in Korea, and the Do Son buffalo fighting festival in Vietnam.

3. Cheongdo Bull Fighting Festival and Do Son Buffalo Fighting Festival as Seen from Touristic Perspective

Bull fighting festival in Cheongdo has become a cultural event which attracts many tourists. In 2003, this festival attracted 300.000 tourists, generating a turnover of 200 million won.

Initially, the bull fighting festival was only an entertaining event which at the same time raised the social position of the winning bull's owner and consolidated the community unity. Today, more value is added as it is becoming a tourist attraction event which helps create income for local

people. Following Cheongdo, other areas such as SinnJin, Uryeong, Pohang are trying to promote bull fighting festivals to attract tourists. The Cheongdo people not only continue to hold bull fighting festivals but also are building a special arena. When this arena is completed, the festival will be held every weekend, instead of annually held as present.

The buffalo fighting festival in Do Son is also expanding itself beyond the villages to fight at the town's stadium which could contain thousands of people. In 1999, a seminar on cultural values and tourism potentials of buffalo fighting was held in Do Son. But since then, this cultural relic has not become a true tourism product. Every year, the buffalo fighting festival is only held one time on the ninth day of the eighth month of the lunar year. Therefore, tourists and visitors who do not come here upon the date could not see the buffalo fighting festival.

To make the buffalo fighting festival become a tourism product and bring income to the local residents, Do Son's leaders and people should distinguish between the worshipping ceremony of traditional festival and the entertainment session of modern festival. On the one hand, villages still conserve traditional values in terms of space, time, and sacred climate like its nature. On the other hand, the locality should open to change true folklore to a form of folklore. Time of the festival is not necessary on lunar August 19th, it may be held at weekends. Money for buying buffaloes and cost for the process of *buffalo* nourishment and training which are not only contributed by the local people but also are mobilized from economic organizations, including tourism companies. On their part, tourism companies should contribute to this thing

by training staff who are knowledgeable about the buffalo fighting festival. They will bridge tourism product to tourists and visitors.

At present, the exploitation of buffalo fighting festival in Do Son for the tourists and visitors is slower than bull fighting festival in Cheongdo. However, if the two countries get experience from each other, perhaps the buffalo fighting festival will be more familiar to the visitors and tourists. Accordingly, the turnover will become higher and higher. A simple reason is because Do Son is a famous tourism spot in Vietnam. Every year, tens of thousands of tourists arrive there for visiting and having sea bathes. Do Son is the only locality in Vietnam with an international casino, a dozen of hotels and restaurants of

various kinds. Therefore, if the buffalo fighting festival exploited as a festival for tourists, the local people will benefit from this business line.

Conclusion

The bull fighting festival in Cheongdo (South Korea) and the buffalo fighting festival in Do Son (Vietnam) were initially the traditional cultural festivals of the agricultural residents. These festivals have similarities as well as differences. Currently, both festivals have been expanded in scope and beneficiaries, the viewers are not only the local people but also the visitors from different areas. This trend will useful culture to tourism; and in its turn, tourism will nourish culture.

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