

Sport and the Social Construction of Reality with Bodily Fundamentality

— A Revised Ethnography of Japanese School Sports Day —

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Abstract

The main argument in this paper is to confirm theoretically that integration of nation is a domestic assimilation without people's awareness of compulsion, and that sport works as effective media for such assimilation. Sport as a festival, occasionally, provides '*experiencing that dazzling dissolution into totality* (Bataille, 1945=1992:xxxix)' for concerned people. It somehow heals them and opens a social horizon anew. It is essential for festivity. This paper focuses on the school sports day in modern Japan, and tries to set up the theoretical framework to examine that a field of sport become an ideological apparatus for establishing nationality, and tries to interpret the contemporary ethnography as the effect of both healing and assimilation into nationality. It is brought to a conclusion that modern nation-state invented festivals anew with effective usage of the field of sport.

Key words; healing, inter-bodily chain, festivity

Introduction

The "Undou-kai (field day or school sports day)" is an 'invented tradition' instituted by Meiji Period technocrats establishing the Japanese school system as an ideological apparatus for the modern nation-state. Accordingly, School Sports Day has features unique to Japan. Yoshimi (1999, 2001) described Meiji government politics for the modernization of Japan, as the "effective usage of the national festivals", e.g., the many pageants of the Emperor system in Japan. He examined School Sports Day as one of national festivals focused on physical discipline for children.

School Sports Day remain a major event for most schools in Japan. The purpose of this paper is to clarify contemporary meanings of School Sports Day, within the framework of the Emperor system as a largely reduced to an empty shell in Japan.

Most of Japanese who are liberal, don't regard them as a nationalist or a devout patriot, but they feel a groundless uneasiness while facing a damage of national symbol. For instance, they grasp the Emperor as a man, but they can not deny the Emperor system in Japan. Most of Japanese must not be free perfectly from the nationality. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to uncover the device that may

embed the nationality into our body deeply.

Yoshimi's Description of Japanese Undou-kai

To jump to Yoshimi's concluding remarks, "*Undou-kai* (field day)" was a device to coordinate between a national time-space and a local one. To surmise from Yoshimi's description, before early Meiji Period, the Japanese Archipelago was filled with many various local villages with their own native religions, native traditions, unique life styles and so on, each other. The most of people who lived there would not have a national identity. It was a main theme for Meiji government politics to establish a nationality in those people's body against their folkloric sense. According to a diary written by a rich farmer who lived during the early modern times in Japan, most of farmers did not pay any attention to national holidays, Tencho-setsu or Kigen-setsu. Their every day lives were obedient to local time-frame with native festivals. He did not attend the national holiday's ceremony at school even after he became the deputy mayor of the village. After the Japan-Russo War, however, he always attended the ceremony.

To summarize Yoshimi's description about early Japanese *Undou-kai* based on these above accounts, Japanese *Undou-kai* (field days) begin to appear in 1885. All schools in every prefecture were observing field day by the middle of the 1890's as a effect of the Elementary School Law in 1886. When the Japan-China War broke out in 1894, the field day event was promoted as being one of the major school events. During these days, field day was similar in nature to "excursion" and "marches". The venues where field days were held included sea shores, river beds, hills, and the premises of *shinto* shrines. According to a record of a field day, about a hundred pupils and their family members marched with a big flag toward their destination, a Tenjin shrine to worship the god at the *Tenjin* (Japanese god of intelligence and study). The most of people at that time didn't know exercises in general especially sports so that the word "*Undo* (exercises)" specifically meant "going for walk".

It was Arimori Mori who laid the foundation for the proliferation of field day during the Meiji Period. Mori became the Minister of Education in 1885, and he strongly pushed forward physical discipline. In fact, as Mori went around inspecting schools at various locations, he stressed that physical education and singing especially served an important role in a region where there are habits of loafing. And he proposed in 1887 that military-style exercises devoted to physical education for nuturing habits of obedience, sympathy, and a proper attitude among children. Mori needed to organize constantly the children, whose bodies had trained by military-style exercises, into the framework of the nation-states. Mori was planning to have the emperor visit various schools and institutions in order to make people feel the emperor's presence all over the country. Mori himself actively toured all over Japan as a person to supplement the presence of the emperor himself. Under the govermental inspector's looking-eye with the use of the emperor's portrait, field days were held after 1890's to influence the bodies of children to become subjects of the nation or subjects of the emperor. Such centralized Meiji politics can be discerned as 'a variant of official nationalism' (Anderson, 1991:95).

From the end of the Meiji to the Taisho Period, the venues for field day were shifted to athletic fields located on school premises. Due to this change, marching from school to the destination site disappeared. A field day turned into the school sports day. It resulted in the next effect. The physical capacity of the

children who were gathered in the divided up area called the athletic field was more readily visible and observable from the inspecting looking-eye with the symbol of the emperor. It means all activities at school sports days in Japan happened under the emperor's looking-eye.

Until the middle of the Meiji Period, the main school facility was the school building. The word "school ground" was already used at that time, but it was only an indication of the "school garden". It is true that the introduction of military-style exercise to schools by Mori prompted the development and improvement of athletic fields. These apparatuses embodied children's bodies with the national physique (nationality). The body of "mine" that exercises is for my "class" and my "school" and my "country".

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to clarify the contemporary meanings of school sport day. It is necessary to introduce the theoretical framework for our analysis of both Yoshimi's historical description and a contemporary ethnography on the same standpoint.

At first, the classic theory about festivity should be reviewed. Bataille (1973=1989) says as follows; "there does not exist any discernible difference if the object has not been posited. The animal that another animal eats is not yet given as an object.—Every animal is in the world like water in water (Bataille, 1973=1989:18-19)". "I am able to say that the animal world is that of immanence and immediacy, for that world, which is closed to us, is so to the extent that we cannot discern in it an ability to transcend itself. We must confine ourselves to regarding animality, from the outside, in the light of an absence of transcendence (Bataille, 1973=1989:24)". Merleau-Ponty (1953=1988:196) states in the same way about nature, which is on equal terms with Bataille's animality; "life is not a simple object for consciousness.—Now we must think of the human body (and not consciousness) as that which perceives nature which it also inhabits¹". To describe with Bataille's rhetoric, it can be said that human bodies are in nature like water in water. This view of body is a foundation of this study. Bataille (1973=1989:35) explains festivity with this presupposition as follows; "there is every indication that the first men were closer than we are to the animal world; they distinguished the animal from themselves perhaps, but not without a feeling of doubt mixed with terror and longing. The sense of continuity that we must attribute to animals no longer impressed itself on the mind unequivocally (the positing of distinct objects was in fact its negotiation).—This continuity, which for the animal could not be distinguished from anything else, which was in it and for it the only possible mode of being, offered man all the fascination of the sacred world, as against the poverty of the profane tool (of the discontinuous object)". In short, when the fundamental continuity between body and nature come back to one's consciousness, sacred moods go across the person's mind². Festivity is a field to restore such continuity, according to Bataille (1973=1989:54-55); "the festival is the fusion of human life. For the thing and the individual, it is the crucible where distinctions melt in the intense heat of intimate life. But its intimacy is dissolved in the real and individualized positing of the ensemble that is at stake in the rituals. For the sake of a real community, of a social fact that is given as a thing—of a common operation in view of a future time—the festival is limited: it is itself integrated as a link in the concatenation of useful works".

According to Bataille, festival is a apparatus for people to restore their inner animality, continuity,

intimacy, or immanence, which means a momentary lack of transcendence. Furthermore, such immanence turns into the real positing of the ensemble in the rituals. It means the restoration of transcendence.

This above problem concerning with "immanence/transcendence" should be clarified. Ohsawa, a Japanese sociologist, sets up a unique theory based on Luhmann's Social System Theory and Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Spencer-Brown's Calculus (Ohsawa, 1990a). Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.201) said, at one time, "it is important to stress now that the organism continues to affect each phase of man's reality-constructing activity and that the organism, in turn, is itself affected by this activity". Ohsawa's theory gives a clear solution into these problems.

According to Ohsawa (1990b:4), a body is a field, which precedes a mind, in which the working of the mind is guaranteed. For instance, the bright/gloomy moods are brought about at the level of body preceding the working of their Mind. His theory concentrates on the social construction of reality with bodily fundamentality.

To simplify the Ohsawa's theory (Ohsawa, 1990a:258-261), it is a main argument that bodies resonate each other basically. Someone's intentionality (action or indication) inevitably and evidently links to other's one. When this resonating goes on, intended content seems to be ascribed not only to this body but also to others. Such co-ascription constructs an inter-bodily chain among these bodies. If the number of bodies which are inserted into a inter-bodily chain is large, and if the strength of intentionality is sufficient, it appears to each body that an abstractive intentionality which is different from any particular bodies will be constituted. This abstractive intentionality is ascribed to the transcendental other which represents totality of an inter-bodily chain. For any body of inter-bodily chain, this transcendental other appears like an origin which opens their social horizon. Their any action occurs on that social horizon, but it is each action and the inter-bodily chain in itself what constructs the social horizon recursively³. Any entity is indicated by an observer on a social horizon. Anyone can not make an indication without drawing a distinction. It is the transcendental other constituted by this self-referential process who draws that distinction.

Now, Yoshimi's description can be examined according to Ohsawa's theory. Before modern days, local communities had their own festivals which opened a horizon of their small universe. Those horizons of local universe were a result of the direct inter-bodily chain among members in the community. Meiji Period technocrats introduced the national festivals into local universes to open a world-horizon of national universe with using the emperor's presence. The school sports day was one of those national festivals. Those festivals coordinated the local time-space with the national one. This national horizon was a result of national regulations in each inter-bodily chain took place here and there in Japan⁴. To put it in other words, a world horizon of national universe in our common sense is a virtual reality projected by our bodily fundamentality organized through national regulations.

A transcendental other appears fictitiously to each body in the inter-bodily chain at the excitement in festival. If the transcendental other converges upon the local symbols, such body-experience leads to the construction of a local universe. Meiji government politics, however, linked the transcendental other to the emperor's presence. It is expected that we can find the same national regulation, the ideological

apparatus for the social construction of reality with bodily fundamentality, in our days.

Analytic Procedures

The contemporary meanings of School Sports Day are clarified with next steps .

- 1) A contemporary ethnography of a school sports day are presented.
- 2) The effect of school sports day are examined. Transfigurations of teachers and students are interpreted in terms of Ohsawa's theory.
- 3) National regulations within the framework of the Emperor system as a largely reduced to an empty shell in Japan are examined. The successions of configuration in the field of school sports day are pointed out.

Ethnography of a School Sports Day

In April 1990, two teachers with a physical education profession, were assigned to a school for the visually-impaired. Neither of them had any experience in the education of students with disabilities and their first impressions of this school were as follows. It was generally dreary, the classrooms lacked color, including the walls, and the atmosphere of the school was too subdued. If students moved around during recess, they would not know who was near them, and they tended not to converse with each other. At lunchtime, students sat at the table that had already been laid, were told by the teacher what was on the table and there was little or no conversation during lunch. Students varied not only in terms of the nature and extent of their disabilities, weak eyesight (amblyopia), narrow visual field, or blindness. Some had been born without eyeballs and could hardly speak, and some had lost their sight recently due to accidents. Students also varied in age, from elementary school children to people in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Classes for physical education were organized according to the degree of disability. The size of a class varied from one student to 10 students. Physical education was focused on training students to walk using a white stick. The school's educational objective was to enable students to lead a normal life with minimal assistance, and to train students so that they could move around by themselves in the community was a major task.

While teaching classes with this objective, it occurred to one of the physical education teachers that they were not actually teaching physical education. As an experiment, she introduced exercise on a large mat. First, they did various stretching exercise and games. For example, students lay on a mat and rolled from one end to the other in a race, or they formed pairs to do so.

Meanwhile, a female student who became able to do the wrestler's bridge took pride in that achievement and showed what she could do to other teachers in the school. A young man, by the name of Suehisa who was 16 years old and who has had a narrow visual field since he was 10 by the traffic accident, was very good at physical exercise, and became able to roll forward, do hand springs and somersaults. Stimulated by him, several other students also strove to master difficult techniques. This mat exercise became very popular and students started to gather in the gymnasium after lunch. For them, moving from one room to another is troublesome, and they tend not to move of their own accord unless there is a strong motivation to do so. Exercise engendered an overall atmosphere in which students were eager to move about.

Following the first term, the physical education teachers planned to hold a mass calisthenics display, including mat exercises, on the school sports day in October. However, it was extremely difficult to practice for the event. It was difficult for the students to visualize the space and understand how individual movements combine to create an overall performance. One day, while the students were practicing on the athletic field, the physical education teachers were at a loss. Then other teachers specialized in the education of students with disabilities came to the athletic field. They grasped the situation and suggested that students whose degrees of disability differed form pairs so as to make it easy for them to check their positioning. Also these teachers helped the two physical education teachers to conduct the practice sessions.

On the school sports day, the mass calisthenics display started. At first, students were somewhat nervous. They moved back and forth on the athletic field. They formed a big circle and then small circles and performed well using hula hoops. Then, the music changed and the mat exercises started. On the mats that were set at two locations in the middle of the athletic field, students performed individually. Each student demonstrated what he or she could do, the basic techniques, such as the single foot balancing, rolling forward, rolling forward with opening legs, rolling backward, and doing handstands, and advanced techniques, such as the continuous rolling sideways, hand springs and somersaults. Everyone stood proudly with their heads held high at the completion of their exercises. Some students who could not do handsprings or somersaults to their own satisfaction tried again and again. *Suehisa* performed a series of advanced techniques consisting of handsprings, backward somersaults, etc. The music changed again and the mass calisthenics reached a climax. A series of performances using hula hoops provided a splendid finish for guest seats formally.

Typical comments of students on the sports day were as follows. "I felt so many people watching me, and I felt myself in front of them, and I put my best through in the world. It was a great sense of satisfaction." "It was something we accomplished together. Great pulling together filled me up." The event, as well as being a source of individual satisfaction, was also notable for what was achieved collectively through the pair work. The principal said, "I was impressed that our students achieved something that would have posed a challenge for people without disabilities. I have searched myself who had regarded my students as pitiful rather than as promising." Many people are convinced that the sports day had a very positive impact on the atmosphere of the school.

Discussion

To examine the effect of school sports day, it is notable from the above case that the gloomy moods of students at first turn to promising one through the physical activities with the mat exercise as the center. It is hard for us to feel their mind exactly, but it can safely be said that all students felt something public mood, and that their performance in the mood filled their prides. The mentioned above leads us to the possibility of the social construction of reality with bodily fundamentality. The moods of students and their living world can not be choosed by their own initiative.

The theoretical insights into this case with help of Ohsawa's theory are as follows. A transcendental other appears fictitiously to each body in the high unity or inter-bodily chain at the School Sports day, and breaks a new ground within the students' restricted lives, and heals them. To sum up, when the

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transcendental other feeds back into the each body among the individuals, this body-experience (mass calisthenics display with mat exercise) rebirths students as modern-subjects anew. A modern-subject is a person who picks out and chooses their world-horizon in which one lives on one's own responsibility. In other words, a modern-subject has a transcendental other as an inner voice of the body. It is one of the self-loathing process that the transcendental other denies oneself. It needs an excellent inter-bodily performance with others to get away from self-loathing by renewing one's transcendental other.

The principal's comments are notable. He searched himself anew. It means that a new distinction concerning his self-concept is drawn. Who draws this distinction? We can not select our self-concept by our own initiative. It is the transcendetal other constituted fictitiously who draws that distinction. It brought about his rebirth and the renewal of his social horizon that his body was inserted into a inter-bodily chain in the school sports day. It is a kind of healing as a result of improvement of transcendental other.

To examine the national regulations within the framework of the Emperor system as a largely reduced to an empty shell in Japan, well-devised apparatuses, a national flag and guest seats were observed. During early modern Japan, guest seats were for governmental inspectors, but are now for invited guests; generally Education Board members, principals of neighboring schools or important local people. Guest seats have little dignity, but even now, organize a front side in the athletic fields for school sports day. Everything is performed especially for them formally, and not for the ordinary audience. If the transcendental other converges upon the national symbols, such as a national flag or guest seats, this body-experience may lead to the construction of a social horizon in the nation-state. However, the transcendental other can not unite with the Emperor nowadays. It throws light on and picks out a social horizon of the nation-state with the Emperor inside it. That may be why most of Japanese who are liberal feel a groundless uneasiness while facing a damage of national symbol. For instance, nobody recognized the reason clearly why the guest seats are indispensable to the field of shool sports day. All Japanese forget the origin of guest seats and nationality. It retains the custom of guest seats that the lack of guest seats arouses a groundless uneasiness into the most concerned people. The field of school sports day is enclosed within the configuration framed by the national symbol in our days. We live there even now. We are not the subject of nation or the subject of emperor but modern-subject.

The excellent physical performance in School Sports Day fulfills the social construction with bodily fundamentality in accordance with the above-mentioned plural phases. It's a form of polyphony⁵.

Conclusion

The main point at issue in this paper is the social construction of reality with bodily fundamentality through the school sports day. The role of physical education extends beyond mere physical discipline. The tasks allow students to move vigorously while also uniting them on a new horizon. Slogans alone, such as "Hold on to your dreams!" , do not provide such encouragement. These well-devised physical exercises encourage them.

Furthermore, this new social horizon is combined unconsciously with nationality. Healing under the national symbols attracts them and their grounds they stand toward the national regulations. School Sports Day is thus the ideological apparatus transforming teacher's innocent efforts into instilling nationality

without teachers' and students' awareness. Healing, excitement, political power, all these about festivity might be an old story for humankind.

Notes

1. Merleau-Ponty (1953=1988:132) states in details as follows; "Nature is not simply the object. —It is an object from which we have arisen, in which our beginnings have been posited little by little until the very moment of tying themselves to an existence which they continue to sustain and aliment" .
2. Bataille, G. (1973=1989:56-57) says as follows; "Man is the being that has lost, and even rejected, that which he obscurely is, a vague intimacy. —Religion, whose essence is the search for lost intimacy, comes down to the effort of clear consciousness which wants to be a complete self-consciousness" .
3. Luhmann (1986:174) says as follows; "Social systems use communication as their particular mode of autopoietic reproduction. Their elements are communications which are recursively produced and reproduced by a network of communications and which cannot exist outside of such a network" . Luhmann's concepts, communication and its network, are equivalent to bodies' resonating and inter-bodily chain in this paper.
4. According to Anderson (1991:195), "the new nationalisms almost immediately began to imagine themselves as 'awakening from sleep' " . It can be said that "sleep" means their life in local universe, and that "awakening" means the opening of the national universe.
5. Hobsbawm (1983) describes 'sport as a invented tradition' , in terms of not only integration of nation, but also class confrontation or social stratification more than once. For example, amateur sport in Britain after late 1800s singled out academic youth as a special social group from the rest of society.

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