

THE DRAGON BOAT RACE IN WU-LING, HUNAN

by

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translated and annotated by

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The dragon boat race is held most solemnly in Ch'ang-tê (常德), formerly called Wu-ling (武陵), Hunan. A rather detailed description of it as held there three hundred years ago was written by Yang Ssü-ch'ang (楊嗣昌), a native of Wu-ling, who lived 1588-1641, took his chin-shih degree in 1610 and became the president of the Ministry of War in 1637.

This description is contained in the *Hsü Shuo-fu* (續說郛), edited by T'ao T'ing (陶珽) in 1647, chüan 28, with the title *Wu-ling Ching-tu Lüeh* or 'A Brief Description of the Dragon Boat Race in Wu-ling' (武陵競渡略). The translator has added notes to some points to make the idea clearer and to the quotations made by the author but some recent editions of the reference books are used because they are easily available.

As to the origin of the dragon boat race the author adopted the Chinese traditional explanation of searching for Ch'ü Yüan (屈原), but at the same time he told us what the common people took it for—a ceremony for expelling evils. Most probably this is the original intention of the race, but, as far as I know, no one has mentioned that in modern books or articles dealing with the dragon boat festival. Some arguments in favour of this assumption are given in note 27.

From the point of view of Folklore Studies our description of the dragon boat race is quite interesting in various ways. First of all it is a vivid picture of the racing, reviving before our eyes all the details of it and of the participation of the rural communities as spectators. Besides informations on the presumable origin and purpose of the custom as seen through the eyes of a contemporaneous Chinese literati and on the time fixed for the performance in the calendar we learn a great deal of how the boats are built and adorned, how the crew is enlisted and the different tasks are assigned to them, how the tune is beaten and sung, how the whole contest goes on and ends.

Furthermore, our Ming dynasty author supplies us with valuable notes on charms and divination practised in connection with the race, on rules and regulations for the oarsmen, on the deities of the different boats, on the colours of the boats, of the dragons carved on them and of the dress the boatmen are wearing, on the rôle the flags on the boats are playing and on other things.

An extremely lifelike picture is given of the social side of the race, how the spectators participate on the fate of the respective boats representing their group, what facilities are supplied for them on the river-side and on special boats for lookers-on, and what reactions victory and defeat produce in the mind of the boats' crew and of the spectators.

The translator should like to insert some headings for the sake of a clear survey of the description, but, as the author himself does not stick to a clear-cut division of the different sections, the above given outline of the events, more or less arranged in the order of the occurrences, may suffice to help the reader in getting a pretty well detailed impression.

The translator.

The dragon boat race took its origin in the calling back of Ch'ü Yüan¹. It originated in the districts Yüan (沅) and Hsiang (湘). At the present time Wu-ling, north of the Tung-t'ing Lake, is Yüan; and Ch'ang-sha, south of the lake, is Hsiang. Therefore, in the whole country the boat race is held here most pompously. Probably a survival from the State Ch'u of the Chou dynasty is still existing. It is but natural that imitations in other provinces cannot attain to such solemnity.

According to old custom on the eighth day of the fourth month sails and boats are made. On the first day of the fifth month the new boats are launched. On the tenth and fifteenth day of the fifth month the boat race for the prize is held. On the eighteenth day the ceremony of 'sending away the mark'² takes place³. Then the boats are beached. Nowadays

1) Ch'ü Yüan lived 332-295 B. C. and was a native of the State Ch'u (楚). Under the reign of Huai-wang (懷王) he was Privy Councillor and introducer of ambassadors to the Court. Though he had the full confidence of the prince he was impeached by a jealous rival and cast into exile. Cf. Ssü-ma Ch'ien (司馬遷), Shih Chi (史記), chüan 84. As to his connection with the dragon boat race see the reference to the Ti-li Chih of the Sui Shu on p. 7 of the present article. Probably it is only a myth.

2) The ceremony of sending away the mark (送標) is described on page 9.

3) According to the Hsi-man Ts'ung-hsiao (溪蠻叢笑), a sketch of the customs of the aborigines in Wu-ling by Chu Fu (朱輔) of the Sung period, the boats were launched on water on the 8th day of the 4th month, the aborigines came to see the

the time of the beginning and ending is not kept so regularly. Some make boats on the seventeenth or eighteenth day of the fifth month and hold the mark-sending on the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth day. Perhaps it is because that sometimes the governmental prohibition is rigorous at the beginning but lax later or sometimes the people are cheerful at the beginning but tired at the end. A proverb about a man who is often late says, "When the boat is made, the fifth day of the fifth month has passed". Now it is no longer ridiculous to be so late.

The boats are all made of fir wood; it is chosen because it is light and easy to row. It is still better if dry wood can be obtained to construct the 'dragon bone'. The fate of the whole boat depends on the stiffness of the dragon bone. If the oars are flexible and the boat does not advance, it is the defect of the dragon bone. Of next importance is the rope that is tied tightly around the stem and stern for many rounds and then interlaced as in weaving. This rope is made by twisting together strands of hemp and splits of bamboo. It is the muscle of the boat. It is good to make the stem and stern as tight as the two ends of a bow, so that, when advancing, the boat cannot sway; otherwise a defeat on the water would be likely.

The length of a standard dragon boat is 95 feet⁴. The longest boats come up to 115 feet and the shortest are only 75 feet long. Within these measures the boats in Wu-ling are built. "Long boats but short horses", it is customary to say; the meaning is that the more oars a boat has the better is it for rowing [but short horses are better than long ones]. In fact that does not always hold true, as there are also long boats mastered only with difficulty and moving slowly; such boats are worse than the short but swift ones. Everywhere on the lakes and small rivers there are dragon boats not coming up to the standard size or ordinary boats only disguised as dragon boats that can only move around on the water without taking part in the race.

Most important for a boat taking part in the racing is to choose good oarsmen. The oarsmen all come from the fisher families south of the Yüan River (沅水). Famous families are the Tuan (段) and the

boat racing from the 5th day of the 5th month for three days and they came to see it once more after the 15th day of the same month. Hence we know that the time of the beginning and ending of the boat race mentioned in this article goes back to ancient times. Cf. Hsi-man Ts'ung-hsiao, pp. 11 and 12, Hsüeh-hai Lei-pien (學海類編) edition.

4) In the translation the word 'foot' always means the Chinese 'ch'ih' (尺), i. e. 14.1 inches.

Jui (莠); famous places are Tê-shan (德山) and Tê-shan-kang (德山港). The people are called 'water crows' (水老鴉); who are as well accustomed to the high waves as to their pillows and mat-beddings. The strong men are enlisted beforehand for money and rice and are picked up to be used during the racing. Those who are afraid of incidents or whose wives have pity for them and do not allow to enlist them can be made willing by giving them a piece of red cloth about three or five feet long⁵. The rowers of small boats who do not earn their living by fishing but by cultivating vegetables do not race. Their oars, being small and feeble, are called vegetable oars.

Good oarsmen are selected in this way: First on the same boat they let one man row forward and another backward to put their strength to the test. This is called 'to be busy at two ends' (兩頭忙). After that of about ten or more men, two wings are formed, one on the left and one on the right side of the boat, each wing rowing quickly but each in the opposite direction so that the boat begins to turn around like a plate. In this way it should become clear whether the men can row harmoniously or not. This is called 'whirling' (渦兒). As a rule the oars on the left side are more difficult to row than those on the right side. It is just the same as in shooting: it is easier to draw the bow with the right hand than with the left.

A rope of very thinly split bamboo is spanned over the middle line of the whole boat. At both ends of the rope a man is standing, the one the 'headman' (頭), the other the 'endman' (梢). At the middle part of it are standing three men, the flagman, the drummer and the clapper. The number of the men singing to the movement of the oars⁶, standing at the middle part also, is not limited, at most three or four, or less to none at all. Under the bamboo rope are cross-bars, about two feet long, like those of a ladder. On the right and left side of these the oarsmen are sitting. A boat longer than 110 feet has seats for 80 rowers; a boat of 90 feet for 60 or more; a boat of 70 feet for 40 or more. The boat moves in accordance with the flag signals. The oars row in harmony with the sound of the drum up and down uniformly. Those who row disorderly would be dismissed. They are called 'chiao Chiang shou' (攪槳手) or men who disturb the oars. Most pleasant is the sound of the boards clapping in time with the rowing just as if the sound were produced by the oars. Only in Wu-ling clapping boards are used; in some other

5) This is to make them willing by putting them to shame. It means that they are as cowardly as the women who wear red clothes.

6) See next paragraph.

districts their rôle is played by a gong, but this was not so from the beginning in earlier times.

Ho-sê (和簫), also called ho-jao (和橈), means to sing to the oars. Liu Yü-hsi's commentary to his *Boat Race Song*⁷ has: "The boat race originated in Wu-ling. Even nowadays the rowers, lifting up their 'chi' (楫) and singing together, are shouting, 'Who is here?' They are calling Ch'ü Yüan". [Chi means oars also]. This note makes it probable that ho-sê is a corruption of ho-chi (和楫), i. e. to sing to the oars. At present we are too far away from that old time (T'ang) and we no longer hear the call 'Who is here?' The rowers but call one another 'na-jao' (拏橈). In the *Chuang Tzū*⁸ we read, "The Old Fisherman drew in his boat with his 'na' or staff". In Lu Yu's *Lao-hsüeh-an Pi-chi*⁹ it is said that in the districts Ting and Li¹⁰ the oar is called na-tzū (拏子). Then the expression 'na-jao' comprises both 'staff' and 'oar'.

The boat race is held at the center of the district. The most distant places from where boats are still coming are Yü-chia-kang (漁家港), fifteen li along the river down-stream, and Pai-sha-tu (白沙渡), thirty-five li up-stream. On the day of the festival within about fifty li a deafening noise is made by flags and drums on boats to and fro. The race course runs for about ten li of distance along the southern shore from Tuan-chia-tzui (段家嘴) to Ch'ing-ts'ao-tzui (青草嘴) and along the northern shore from Shang-shih-kui (上石碓) to Hsia-shih-kui (下石碓). The surface of the river is wide here and well suited for a race course. The southern shore is covered with green grass, thick forests and snowy white sands. On the northern shore are high buildings with beautifully painted balustrades and old city-walls with numerous battlements. The spectators are crowded there. They are just like what Liu Yü-hsi says in his song¹¹:

7) Liu Yü-hsi (劉禹錫) was a poet of the T'ang dynasty. He was the magistrate of Wu-ling for about ten years. His Boat Race Song (競渡曲) is in his *Liu Mêng-tê Wen-chi* (劉夢得文集), chüan 8, p. 4, Ssü-pu Ts'ung-k'an (四部叢刊) edition.

8) *Chuang Tzū* (莊子), The Old Fisherman (漁父). Cf. A. Giles' translation p. 415, Shanghai, 1926.

9) *Lao-hsüeh-an Pi-chi* (老學菴筆記), by Lu Yu (陸游), chüan 1, p. 2, *Hsüeh-chün T'ao-yüan* (學津討原) edition.

10) In the Sung period Wu-ling was called Ting-chow (鼎州) and Li-hsien (澧縣) was Li-chow (澧州).

11) Note 7.

According to the custom this time is considered most important.
A cloud of people look afar on the shore.

Though there are such names of racing as 'with and against the long river' (上下長江) and 'to divide the river into south and north' (南北分江), in fact such races cannot be taken for the standard of making a final decision. Victory or defeat is finally decided when two boats are made to row across the river simultaneously from north to south. The one that reaches first the southern bank is the victor. To this Fan Tsao probably hints in his *Boat Race Poem*¹²:

The boats start from the northern bank;
Their destination is far on the southern one.

In the fifth month the water-level of the Yüan River rises and sinks irregularly, so that the distance of the two river banks differs from one moment to the other. Nevertheless those experienced in boating are well aware of this and can direct their boat precisely on the right way. First of all each boat does its best to overtake the rival and then the rowers begin to strike at the opponents; otherwise a boat would be defeated by unnecessary fighting. The distance is measured by drum strokes. On rising water about 380 strokes are needed to cross the river, on falling water about 360 strokes. At different places of the bank, of course, the distances differ slightly.

While racing one boat tries to overcome the other by various stratagems. Sometimes one goes first to the mid-stream to wait for the rival. Sometimes one advances secretly with flags folded and drum-beating stopped to contend to get the first arrival. Sometimes one suddenly advances and suddenly stops to tire the rival out by frequent struggles. Sometimes two boats, one lying in a right angle to the other, hold each other. Sometimes, in order to bring boat A into a competition with boat B, boat C first incites them and when the first two boats are engaged with one another boat C returns. This is known as 'to send off the boats' (送船). Sometimes, that is in the case that boat A is stronger than boat B, B may go away first and A follows it. This is called 'to pursue a boat' (趕船). The distance that the two departing boats are keeping from one another is measured by the length of the boat. Boat A starts when B has rowed for a half or a whole boat length, sometimes for even five or ten boat lengths. The distance that one boat is ahead of the

12) Fan Tsao (范譔) was a poet of the T'ang period. His poem can be found in the *Wen-yüan Ying-hua* (文苑英華), chüan 82.

other at the end of the racing is also counted by boat lengths. It can often be heard that one boat surpasses the other for half a boat length, for one boat length or even for five or ten boat lengths. Boats considering themselves possessing no power to contend and fleeing when meeting with rivals are called 'coward boats' (怯船). The boats that have no intention of fighting with others but merely move around for the whole day are called 'practising boats' (演船). Men with a long experience in boating, being shrewd and cunning, are called 'old water' (老水). Young men, ready to fight but not knowing in advance whether victory or defeat is ahead of them, are called 'new water' (新水). A boat without 'old water' can only win by luck.

In the 'hill songs' (山歌) of Wu-ling traces of those old folk-songs that were known as *chu-chih tz'u*¹³ are still preserved. *Pai Chü-i's* poem¹⁴ reads, "Who is singing the *chu-chih* on the river? The first sentence is sung in a vibrating voice and with prolonged vowels and interrupted abruptly but the second sentence is sung slowly". Now only the people of Wu-ling sing in this way. Some new songs, fresh and pleasant, often come out of the mouth of old fishermen and horse drivers. The 'dragon boat songs' (龍船歌) are not of this kind. They consist of four sentences, the first and third sentence ending with the sounds 'yeh yeh' (野耶) and the second and fourth sentence with 'ah oh' (阿婀). This traditional form remained unchanged from generation to generation. There are also some conventional introductory phrases as 'shih-liu hua' (石榴花 the pomegranate flowers), 'yeh-êrh ch'ing' (葉兒青 the leaves are green), etc. The oarsmen often use such cushion words as a start of the song and compose the four sentences off-hand to ridicule one another. However, at sunset when the boats disperse, they all sing, "We are going home no matter whether we have found him or not. Don't wait until the cold wind blows over the river". This sentence originated very far in the past. According to the *Ti-li chih* in the *Sui Shu*¹⁵, on the fifteenth day of the fifth month Ch'ü Yüan went to the Mi-lo River (汨羅江). The natives pursued him to the Tung-t'ing Lake but in vain. The lake was vast, the

13) *Chu-chih tz'u* (竹枝詞) is originally the name for the folk-songs of Pa-yü (巴渝), Ssüchuan. *Liu Yü-hsi* and *Pai Chü-i* (白居易), both poets of the T'ang period, imitated their style and introduced it into Chinese poetry. Cf. *Liu Mêng-tê Wen-chi*, chüan 9, p. 8. *Pai-shih Wen-chi* (白氏文集), chüan 18, p. 11. *Ssü-pu Ts'ung-k'an* edition.

14) *Pai-shih Wen-chi*, chüan 18, p. 11.

15) *Ti-li chih* (地理志), *Sui Shu* (隋書), chüan 31, p. 22-23. *Wu-chou Tung-wen* (五洲同文) edition.

boats small and no one could cross it. They all sang, "How can we cross the lake?" Then on the way back they started racing to gather together at a pavilion. From that it comes that the people sing, "We come back no matter whether we have found him or not". It is a sentence several thousand years old.

Outside the East Gate of the Wu-ling city there was formerly a pavilion named Chao-ch'ü T'ing or 'Pavilion for Calling Back Ch'ü Yüan' (招屈亭). Liu Yü-hsi's poem¹⁶ says, "Formerly I lived near Chao-ch'ü T'ing". His *Boat Race Song*¹⁷ says also, "When the song is over and men have scattered, only a sad evening remains. The water flows to the east in front of Chao-ch'ü T'ing". These are evidences of what the *Ti-li Chih* says. The place was originally called Ch'ü Yüan Lane (屈原巷). Near by is a small river called San-lu River (三閭河)¹⁸. Probably Ch'ü Yüan often walked there and enjoyed himself during his life-time.

It is customarily said that the boat race is held to expel evils. The *Fêng-su T'ung*¹⁹ says, "On the fifth day of the fifth month coloured threads are tied on the arms to ward off soldiers and demons and they also protect people against infectious diseases". The *Ching-ch'u Sui-shih-chi*²⁰ says, "On the fifth day of the fifth month the people step on grasses to gather mugwort leaves, out of which human figures are made to hang them over gates and doors to avert evil vapours". In the same book it is also said that Ch'ü Yüan died on this day in the water and that the people took their boats to save him. These two events have been combined in one²¹.

16) Liu Méng-tê *Wen-chi*, chüan 4, p. 15.

17) Note 7.

18) Ch'ü Yüan was the San-lu tai-fu (三閭大夫) of the state Ch'u, the official taking charge of the pedigree of the royal family and of the guidance of its promising boys, therefore sometimes he is called by this title.

19) *Fêng-su T'ung-i* (風俗通義), commonly called only *Fêng-su T'ung*, by Ying Shao (應劭) of Han dynasty. The quotation is not found in the existing editions of this book but in the *T'ai-p'ing Yü-lan* (太平御覽), an encyclopaedia compiled in the Sung period, chüan 31.

20) *Ching-ch'u Sui-shih-chi* (荆楚歲時記) by Tsung Lin (宗懔), p. 12, *Han-wei Ts'ung-shu* (漢魏叢書) edition.

21) It is one of the excellent ideas of the author that the expelling of evils and the calling back of Ch'ü Yüan are considered as two things but combined. I am of the opinion that the dragon boat race was originally held only for the former purpose (see next paragraph and note 27) and the latter was only a later addition to or an explanation of it.

Mei Yao-ch'en²² blamed Ch'ü Yüan that because of his liking for it boat racing was made a custom of the people, some were wounded and drowned in fighting, and if it was not held for one year plagues would be sent down. Liu Ch'ang wrote the *Ch'ü Yüan Chia-tz'u*²³ to reply to him, saying that the boat race was not Ch'ü Yüan's idea. Hence, some controversial discussions arose. In my opinion it is the custom of Ch'u to venerate spirits and ghosts. When he was banished to Yüan and Hsiang, Ch'ü Yüan personally saw the improper worship of the people. The 'Spirit of Hills' and 'Those Who Died for the Nation'²⁴ had nothing to do with human affairs, but he composed songs for them; probably it was because the custom could not be changed. Furthermore, Ch'ü Yüan was loyal and honest but he drowned himself in the flood out of vexation. The good-natured people had seen him thin and haggard and heard his discontented talking. What harm does it do if in later days the people row their small boats to go to mourn for him? In South China the land is low and wet and the weather is hot. The boat race is held here as the purification in Shan-yin²⁵ and the wearing of dogwood sprays in Ju-nan²⁶. If it could be stopped, it would not have had to wait until to-day for being stopped.

Now it is customarily said that the boat race is held to avert calamities. At the end of the racing the boats carry sacrificial animals, wine and paper coins, rowing straightly down-stream, where the animals and wine are cast into the water, the paper coins are burnt and spells are cited, so that pestilence and premature death would go away with the

22) Mei Yao-ch'en (梅堯臣), a poet of Sung.

23) Liu Ch'ang (劉敞) was a scholar of Sung period. Ch'ü Yüan Chia-tz'u (屈原辭) in *Kung-shih chi* (公是集), chüan 3, p. 2. *Wu-ying-tien Chü-chin pan Ts'ung-shu* (武英殿聚珍版叢書) edition.

24) The Spirit of Hills (山鬼) and Those Who Died for the Nation (國殇) are two of the Nine Songs (九歌) that were composed by Ch'ü Yüan for the sorceresses to sing when sacrificing to the spirits. Ch'u Tz'u (楚辭), collection of Ch'ü Yüan's works, chüan 2, pp. 16-19, *Shan-tai-ko Chu Ch'u Tz'u* (山帶閣注楚辭).

25) On the 3rd day of the 3rd month the people go to water sides to perform a ceremony of purification. Some men of letters held it in the 9th year of Yung-ho (353 A. D.), Chin, in Shan-yin (山陰), Chêkiang. Cf. Wang Hsi-chih's (王羲之) *Lan-t'ing Hsü* (蘭亭序) in *Ch'uan Chin Wen* (全晉文), chüan 26, p. 19.

26) On the ninth day of the ninth month the people wear the dogwood sprays (茱萸) to avert evils. According to the *Hsü Ch'i-hsieh-chi* (續齊諧記), this custom was created by Huan Ching (桓景) of Ju-nan (汝南), Honan.

flowing water. This is called 'to send away the mark'²⁷. Then the boats row back stealthily without flag and drum-beating. They will be pulled on land and housed in huts on the shore till the next year. The racing

27) It seems to me that the end and aim of the boat race is 'to send away the mark' but it is not clear why this ceremony is so called. As the ceremony itself indicates, it is a ceremony to send away evils. In some other districts it is also said that the boat race is held to expel evils. For example, in Yao-chow (岳州), Hunan, the people believe so. (Cf. Fan Chih-ming 范致明, *Yao-yang Fêng-t'u-chi* 岳陽風土記, p. 23; Ku-chin I-shih 古文逸史 edition.) The dragon boat is generally considered as a thing to send away evils. In Yao-chow also the houses in which somebody is sick make a sacrifice on a water side, prepare food and wine for the boatmen and make a straw boat to float on the river (ibid.). In Hêng-shan (衡山), Hunan, on the dragon boat festival the Taoist priests and sorcerers make a dragon boat of paper, which is carried on a wooden frame by two men; on the frame are hung a drum and a gong; the men sing and beat them from door to door along the street. This is said to arrest the plague. (Cf. Hunan Ko-hsien Fêng-su Tiao-ch'a Pi-chi 湖南各縣風俗調查筆記, by Tsêng Chi-wu 曾繼梧, 1931, p. 136.) In Yu-hsien (攸縣) on the same day a wooden dragon boat about five feet long is made, on which are standing some paper figures with oars in their hand, and are carried through the streets (ibid. p. 126). In Ch'ang-sha (長沙) at any time when one is ill a boat is made according to the advice of the sorcerer (ibid. p. 120). Even the Mu-lao Miao (牯佬苗) of Kueichow during some festivals construct dragon boats of straw on which are flown flags of five colours. They dance and sing around them and make sacrifice to ghosts. (Li Tsung-fang 李宗昉, *Chien Chi* 黔記, chüan 3, p. 4, in *Wen-ying-lou Ts'ung-shu* 問影樓叢書.)

What evils are sent away or expelled? Some points of the present article suggest the answer that it is the deceased souls.

(a) According to the legend on page 11 quoted from the *Hsü Ch'i-hsieh-chi* a five-coloured thread is tied up on the bamboo tube or the *tsung-tzū* that is thrown into the water on the 5th day of the 5th month. This kind of thread is closely connected with the soul of the dead, probably a symbol of it. To illustrate this point we had better take some evidences from the Miao tribe, who formerly lived in South Hunan. When a *Hei-miao* (黑苗) has died, a coloured thread is tied up on the top of a bamboo stick which is erected in front of the tomb; men and women made offerings to it (Li Tsung-fang, *Ch'ien Chi*, chüan 3, p. 2). When a *Kuo-ch'uan Ch'i-lao* (銅圈狢佬) is sick, a five-coloured thread is bound up on a tiger's bone, which is put in a winnowing fan, and a sorcerer is invited to pray for him (ibid. chüan 3, p. 3). In Sung Yü's *Calling Back the Soul* (cf. note 33) it is also said that a bamboo basket and a thread was used to call back the soul. According to Kiang Chi's (蔣驥) commentary on the *Ch'u Tz'u*, the thread is in five colours. (*Shan-tai-ko Chu Ch'u Tz'u* chüan 6, p. 5).

of this year is finished. About this time the people have masses said for preventing conflagration. If some are ill, they make paper boats in the same colour as the dragon boat to which they belong and burn them at the shore.

It is not to pray for victory that the boatmen throw the 'peach charms' (桃符) and 'soldier jars' (兵罐)²⁸ into the water. The peach charms that can kill demons are tokens to avert evils. In the jars are contained rice and beans. According to the *Hsü Ch'i-hsieh-chi*²⁹, on the fifth day of the fifth month the people of Ch'u put rice into bamboo tubes, which they released on the waters as offerings to Ch'ü Yüan. In the Chien-wu (建武) period of the Han Dynasty Oh Hui (歐回) of Ch'ang-sha one day suddenly saw a man, who called himself San-lu Tai-fu³⁰. He told Oh Hui to close the mouths of these tubes with melia leaves and to wind around them a five-coloured thread, lest the scaly dragon would steal them. Hence, we have the tsung-tzū³¹ of melia leaves with a five-coloured thread. The jar with rice is a substitute for the bamboo tube, a relic of the custom before the use of the tsung-tzū.

The boat race is not only held to avert calamities but also to foretell the harvest of the year. The people traditionally say, "If the flower boat

(b) The dragon boat songs have the sound 'suo' at the end of the sentences (see p. 12). In Yung-chow, Hunan, the songs sung during the boat race are so also (Liu Kung-ch'en 劉拱辰, *Yung-chow Fêng-t'u-chi* 永州風土記 in the *Ching-hu T'u-ching San-shih-Ssü-chung* 荆湖圖經三十四種, p. 17). It is pointed out by the author of the present article that this is the style of Calling Back the Soul. According to Shen Ts'un-chung (沈存中), the Liao tribe (獠人) in Ssüchuan and Hunan has their spells ending with the sound 'suo' at every sentence (*Shan-tai-ko Chu Ch'u Tz'u chüan* 6. p. 2).

(c) The two flags on the boats, as it has been pointed out by the author, are used to lead the spirits (see p. 16 and note 42) and the peach charm to be thrown into the water can kill the demons (see p. 11).

28) Also in Hang-chow (杭州), Chêkiang, some earthen jars (土罐) but empty ones are thrown into the water during the boat race. Cf. Ku Lu (顧祿), *Ch'ing-chia Lu* (清嘉錄), chüan 5, p. 13 (*Hsiao-yüan Ts'ung-shu* 嘯園叢書). However, we do not know why the jars are called soldier jars in Wu-ling.

29) *Hsü Ch'i-hsieh-chi*, by Wu Chün (吳均) of the Liang period; p. 6-7. *Ku-chin I-shih* edition.

30) Note 18.

31) Tsung-tzū (糰子) are the triangular masses of rice or glutinous millet, wrapped now in reed leaves, which are especially made for the dragon boat festival.

wins a good crop will be harvested". There is merely one sentence, no other words before or after, nor do we know its origin. But it often proves right. Ch'u Kuang-hsi's poem³² reads, "[The boat race] can provide a good crop in the autumn. Drums and flutes hasten from afar". Hence, the tradition is very old. Probably because in years of good crops the boat race is held with enthusiasm,

The dragon boat songs only in Wu-ling end with 'yeh yeh' and 'ah oh' at the end of the sentences. Some say that the ending sound is 'suo suo' (些些), which, being a survival of the style of *Calling Back the Soul*³³ in the *Ch'u Tz'u*, is used to mourn for Ch'ü Yüan. In Sung Yü's *Calling Back the Soul* the Emperor tells Sorcerer Yang (巫陽), "A man is below. I wish to help him. His soul goes away. You divine for it". Probably these words were spoken when Ch'ü Yüan was dead. Some say that Sung Yü, according to the Ch'u custom, held this ceremony when he was living. I don't think so. That now during the racing a sorcerer is employed goes back to this.

Sorcerers are employed during the boat racing in order to suppress evil influences. Some go to the mountains to invite famous sorcerers, who are called 'old mountain masters' (山老師). Their sorcery is especially efficacious. In the night before the racing the headman provides sacrificial animals and wine and asks the sorcerer to perform his magic. He jumps head over heels from the bow to the stern. Buckwheat is scattered and fire is lighted. This is called 'to brighten the boat' (亮船). Drums are beaten throughout the night to ward off the magical performances of inimical sorcerers. If such one be caught, he would be beaten even to death. On the racing day the sorcerer makes an oil fire to start the boat. He can foresee the victory or defeat of the boat from the red or black and high or low burning of the flame and he never fails. His god is named Hsi-ho Sa-chen-jen (西河薩真人). He has spells such as 'the furious fire of the violent thunder burns the heaven' (蠻雷猛火燒天), etc. He has finger-charms such as 'to arrest the front dragons' (收前龍), 'to stop the devil soldiers' (息陰兵), 'to remove the mountains and to turn over the seas' (移山倒海), etc. With folded legs of trousers and bare feet, he jumps seven steps and then he throws water into the fire. When the fire rises, the boat starts. Some sentences of his spell are: "The heaven fire burns the sun. The earth fire burns the five quarters. The thundering

32) Ch'u Kuang-hsi (儲光羲), a poet of the T'ang period. His poem on Boat Race is in the *Ch'uan T'ang Shih* (全唐詩), chüan 5.

33) 'Calling Back the Soul' (招魂) in the *Ch'u Tz'u*, chüan 6, pp. 1-14 is traditionally ascribed to Sung Yü (宋玉), a pupil of Ch'ü Yüan. Its style is different from the other works of the book. The sound 'suo' occurs at the end of each second sentence.

fire, executing the law, burns to death the various inauspiciousness. The dragon boat taking to the water will float at will in the five lakes and four seas." The outer side of the bottom of the boat is swept with a bundle of the pai mao (白茅 Imperata arundinacea, Cyr.) from stem to stern, lest something be hung on the boat by an enemy. The other performances are secret and absurd. We cannot know them.

The man who is chosen to be the headman of a racing boat must be brave and have a family. Several days before, he distributes a piece of paper and some steamed cakes to those who belong to the boat and he is repaid with money. On the upper part of this paper a dragon boat is printed and on the lower part some sentences are written. Relatives or rich men are appointed to supply food and wine during the racing. Those who contribute good and ample food are honourable. Some supply food because they have made such a vow. On the racing day there are small boats in the river on which are standing two trees of paper money and coloured silks hanging and where musicians are also playing; it is these that bring food.

The boatmen, though satiated, must force in the food and wine supplied until nothing is left. If there is something left, it has to be thrown into the water together with the dishes and chopsticks. In the evening when the boats return, the people take the water in the boats, which, mixed-up with various grasses, is used to wash their bodies. It is said to be able to avert the malicious. This is also a kind of purification.

The boatmen are all expert swimmers, but the headman, the flagman, the drummer and the clapper need not to be able to swim. The oarsmen are charged with their fates. On the day all wear the charm furnished by the sorcerer on their heads and stick small reddish yellow flags with the feathers of the eastern egret in the hair of their temples. These things all suppress evils. The spectators hang red or green pieces of silk, on some of which are written some sentences, and give them to the dragon boats as presents, when the boats pass by. As a boat passes by the place to which it belongs, the people fire fire-crackers and 'yellow smokes', wave their fans and applaud. If the boat does not belong to the place, they shout together noisily to ridicule it. Some people get angry and throw even tiles at it. The boatmen hold their oars or wave their arms as if they would fight with them.

The god of the flower boat (花船) is named Liang Wang (梁王). The image wears a crown and official dress and is attended by

awful guards with weapons. He is Liang Sung³⁴ of the Eastern Han dynasty, who supervised the army dispatched to subdue the Wu-hsi Man³⁵ after Ma Yüan. This god is worshipped in Yang-shan³⁶ by the natives. One of Liu Yü-hsi's poem³⁷ reads, "A son-in-law of the Han family formerly subdued the barbarians. Together with the Mountain God he enjoyed bloody sacrifices until now". Another poem³⁸ reads, "The majesty and morality of the three sons of the king of the Liang State was honourable". It is he who is mentioned in these poems. A temple is dedicated to him in the south of the river. When the fruits are ripe in spring and the chrysanthemum blooms in autumn the people often go there to pray for sons or only to amuse themselves. When the flower boat rows, sacrifice is made in the temple. The head of the dragon of the flower boat is carved as the figure of this god. The scales and the tail of the dragon are painted in five colours. The two flags of the boat are white; on them are embroidered or painted dragons each in five colours. The dress of the headman, endman, drummer, flagman and clapper is yellow and white. To this boat belong the regions around the three city gates, Shen-ting (神鼎), Ch'ing-p'ing (清平) and Ch'ang-wu (常武), and Ch'i-li-ch'iao (七里橋). The sai-hua-ch'uan (賽花船) or 'the fellow of the flower boat' has its dragon, flags and uniform of the five men mostly like those of the flower boat. Its god is known as Ling Kuan³⁹. The regions belonging to it are Yü-chia-kang, Chu-cha-wan (竹筴灣), and others. The purple boat has its dragon with purple scales and tail and drawings on flags also in purple but the uniform of the five men is in yellow and white. Its god is known as 'General Li-ts'ai' (李才將軍), who holds a red club and a piece of bamboo as proof of his competency to govern the ships and boats in the rivers and lakes. The origin of this god is unknown. To this boat belong the regions Huai-hua-ti (槐花堤) and

34) Liang Sung (梁松) was the son of Liang T'ung (梁統) who was granted the rank of marquis by Emperor Kuang-wu (光武) of the Later Han dynasty. His wife was Princess Wu Yin (舞陰公主), daughter of the Emperor. In 48 A. D. an army was dispatched by the Han government to subdue the aborigines in Wu-ling under the leadership of Ma Yüan (馬援) but in the next year he was replaced by Liang Sung. Cf. *Hou Han Shu* (後漢書), chüan 54 and 64.

35) There are five streams in Wu-ling, along which formerly the aborigines lived. They were called Wu-hsi Man (五溪蠻). Cf. *Shui-ching Chu* (水經注), chüan 37, p. 18, Yüan River, Ssü-pu Ts'ung-k'an edition.

36) Yang-shan (陽山) is about 30 li to the north of the Wu-ling city. *Ch'ang-tê-fu Chih* (常德府志), chüan 4, p. 1, 1813.

37) *Yang-shan-miao Kuan Sai-shen* (陽山廟觀賽神), *Liu Mêng-tê Wen-chi*, chüan 4, p. 2.

38) *Liang-kuo Tz'u* (梁國祠), *Liu Mêng-tê Wen-chi*, wai-chi, chüan 8, p. 12.

39) *Ling Kuan* (靈官) is a Taoist god.

Ch'ing-ni-wan (清泥灣). The white boat has its dragon scales and tail, flags and uniform in pure white. Its gods are Lao Kuan (老官), Yang-t'ou San-lang (羊頭三郎) and Chu-ma San-lang (竹馬三郎), each holding an oar in one hand and the other fist being clenched or playing with a coloured ball. In ancient time there was a god called Chu Lang⁴⁰. We do not know whether Chu-ma San-lang and Chu Lang are the same or not. To the white boat belong the regions around the two city gates, Kung-ch'en (拱辰) and Yung-an (永安), and Shan-tê-shan (善德山). The scales and tail of the dragon of the black boat are black and those of the red boat in red. They both have red flags and their crew a black uniform. The oarsmen of the other boats are dressed in various colours, but those of these two boats all wear a black dress. The gods of these two boats are Huang-kung Ta-po (黃公大伯), Erh-po (二伯) and San-po (三伯), each having a black face and holding an oar in their hands. It is traditionally said that they were brothers of indigo-sellers who were drowned in the water and then deified. To these boats belong the regions Lin-yüan Men (臨沅門), Ta-ho Chieh (大河街) Tê-shan-kang, Su-chia-tu and Pai-sha Ts'un (白沙村). All these gods are very strange but they come from old time and they cannot be changed.

The regions of the boats have their respective boundaries. The people of this region quarrel with those of the other about the victory or defeat. Even the children and women do not give in with a single word. Most of the men, whose ancestors lived in the region of boat A but who have removed to that of boat B, still belong to boat A. Some have moved to the region of a certain boat but do not fight for any boat. In such a case, they are hated by their old fellows and blamed for being coward. The people don't say anything but 'victory', while playing chess, guessing fingers and even when contending in drinking. Sometimes they shout 'tung, tung' to imitate the sound of the drums; sometimes they wave their leaves to accompany the rowing and cry 'victory! victory!' Customarily the people take such great interest in the racing as described above. The officials of various grades, though they are also within the territories of the different boats, of course, should not be divided into the contending groups, but in fact they are also divided according to the mind of the common people.

40) The legend of Chu Lang (竹郎) is as follows: In the old times a woman washed clothes by a stream. A bamboo of three joints floated to her feet and did not go away. She broke it and found a child. The child in later days became the chief of some tribes and after death he was worshipped as a god under the name Chu Wang (竹王). Cf. Hua Yang Kuo Chih (華陽國志), chüan 4, p. 1 (Ssü-pu Ts'ung-k'an edition). His son was worshipped by the Miao under the name Chu Lang. Cf. T'ung Chin-tsao (董振藻), *The Worship of Chu Wang by the Miao in Kueichow* (黔苗對於竹王之信仰), *Min-tsu Tsa-chih* (民族雜誌), vol. III, No. 11, Nov. 1935.

The two flags on the boat are made of cloth of one foot and five inches square. One song⁴¹ in the *Ch'u Tz'u* says, "[The spirit] takes advantage of the returning wind and rides on the cloud flags". Han Yü's *Luo- h'ih-miao Pei*⁴² says also, "The [spirit of the] marquis comes in a boat with two flags. When going across the central current he is stopped by the wind". The flags are things to lead the gods or spirits.

To call back Ch'ü Yüan by boat rowing surely has a deep significance, not only that of mourning for his death in the Mi-lo River. In the *Ch'u Tz'u*⁴³ Ch'ü Yüan says:

"I go on board of a house boat up to the Yüan River.
In regular measures the oars beat the waves.
The boat seesaws and does not advance.
It is stopped by the back water and stays".

This is what happened to him in his life-time — oppression and dejection. Therefore, the people of later generations purge it by quick drum strokes and swift rowing. The poet continues again:

"In the morning I start from the Wang-chu (枉渚).
And in the evening I lodge in Ch'en-yang (辰陽)".

Both the Yüan River and the Wang-chu are in Wu-ling.

The dragon boats do not have dragon heads fixed on them. Some boats arrange them on only for a moment and take them off at once. Merely a wooden neck about three feet long with scales, called 'goose neck' (鵝項), stands on the stem of the boat. By the wooden neck stands the headman. It is said that formerly a yellow boat was made by the people of Ho-fu-lung (河汭龍), which had the dragon head, horns, paws and scales, and its body was made like that of a real dragon. It sank in the water with all the men on it. Therefore, no boat dares to have a head any more. Some say that it sank in the water because its oars came from Lung-ching or 'dragon well'⁴⁴ in Tê-shan. Anyhow, the yellow boat was no longer used on account of this.

The green boat formerly belonged to the people outside of Ch'ing-p'ing Men (清平門). It was called Ch'ing-chu piao (青竹標). We

41) Shao Ssü-ming (少司命), one of the Nine Songs, *Ch'u Tz'u*, chüan 2, p. 12.

42) Han Yü's (韓愈) *Luo-chih-miao Pei* (羅池廟碑). According to the commentary of Chu T'ing-yü (朱廷玉), the people of Liu-chou (柳州), Kuangsi, invited a god by a boat on which are standing two flags. *Hsin-k'an wu-pai-chia-chu Yin-pien Ch'ang-li Hsien-sheng Wen-chi* (新刊五百家註音辨昌黎先生文集) chüan 31, p. 11, reprint of a Sung edition by the Commercial Press, Shanghai.

43) Shê Kiang (涉江), *Ch'u Tz'u*, chüan 4, p. 7.

44) Lung-ching or 'Dragon Well' (龍井) may be the name of a well in which a dragon is supposed to live or that of a place.

do not know from what time it ceased to be used. Now only a small temple of its god exists.

The people look at the boat racing from the shore. Along the northern shore from Ch'ing-p'ing Men to Shih-kui (石磯), about five or six li, are high buildings of three or four stories. One must pay the rent in advance at the highest to several hundred coins, otherwise the rooms will be occupied by others. On the racing day the people, carrying wine jars and food boxes, ride on carts and horses or go on foot along the roads. About ssü (巳) time, i. e. 9-11 a. m., they all assemble. Fruits and food are served on tables. The best fruits are the 'plums from the Han family' (韓家李) and the 'wheat-yellow peaches' (麥黃桃). The food consists in shad and shun-ts'ai (蓴菜 *Brasenia peltata*, Pursh). While talking and laughing, if the start of racing is heard, they all stop to drink and change their countenances, leaning against the balustrades to look afar attentively. "Is that our boat or not?", "victory or defeat?", such questions struggle in their hearts. In a little while victory or defeat is decided. Then some are so proud as if their air could break the roof of the room and some have faces pale as dead and do not know how to go downstairs.

The people can only rent the buildings within their respective boundaries. Those of the flower or the white boat do not enter the region of the black boat; those of the black or the red boat do not enter that of the flower boat. If someone enters, he does it absent-minded, otherwise he would not do it; or he is a good fighter, otherwise he dares not. Even for a good fighter terrible consequences are often met at the end. The spectators are numerous and the buildings are not enough. Hence, there are numerous food shelters on the southern shore and house boats in the river. The men on the southern shore can see quite clearly the boats crossing the river coming from the northern to the southern bank. When a boat is near to the bank, if it does not belong to this region, the people fling stones at it. The men on the boat wave their oars as if fighting. The spectators' boats in the river often obstruct the way of the racing boats. If one is just in front of a racing boat and cannot escape, it would be beaten to pieces at once. On the southern shore plenty of fruits, food and wine are sold; in the river drums and gongs are beaten at sunset, small boats pass to and fro and men are singing and dancing on the boats. The scenery is beautiful both on the southern shore and in the river.

Formerly the officials generally looked at the racing from the buildings called Yü-hsien-ko (寓賢閣), Shen-ting-lou (神鼎樓), Hsien-li-ch'iao (縣麗譙), Lin-yüan-lou (臨沅樓), etc. The buildings were beautifully decorated and feasts were prepared in them. When the boats came, they had first to go to pay a visit to the officials. The boats rowed as quickly as possible to contend in reaching the bank. On the boats

drums were quickly beaten; the headmen turned their faces to the goose neck and knelt and bowed to the officials. When the boats arrived at the bank, the headmen went upstairs again to pay respect to all the officials. Prizes were granted to them and those who came late were blamed. Now Yü-hsien-ko has fallen down a long time ago. It was the building where Hsieh Hsüan (薛瑄), censor of the present dynasty, had lodged when he supervised the silver mine in Yüan-chow (沅州), and Wang Shou-jên (王守仁) had also lodged there when he was on the way to be banished to Lung-ch'ang (龍場).

The victorious boat rows with stern on. The men hold their oars vertically, dance and beat gongs on the boat. When it passes by the boat to be defeated the men on it threaten them. Those to be defeated try to do the same but less vigorously or, if a little farther, they remain silent and acknowledge to be defeated. At sunset the boats disperse. At the home of the headmen feasts are prepared. The boatmen all gather there to dine. At the home of the victor food and wine are especially abundant. His neighbours, relatives and friends come to congratulate him. On the next day, the door of his house will be beautifully decorated with coloured silk and a feast and a dramatic performance will be held. Some write sentences or short poems on the city gates to ridicule the defeated; some tie up a dog or hang up a tortoise and some grass and fruits there for the same purpose. When the men of the defeated boats occasionally pass below, they bow down their heads and go away. Their relatives or friends sometimes send such things to them to ridicule them. From the fourth month the people begin to talk about the boats with much interest; in the fifth month the race is held and victory and defeat are decided; but until the eighth or ninth month they are still not yet tired of talking of it.

About the boat race Mei Sheng-yü says, "Fighting and drowning are inevitable". My reply to him is: to sink a dragon boat is not easier than to sink an ordinary boat. If a dragon boat sinks, this is caused by the fighting. It is not difficult for a chief of police to forbid fighting, hiding bamboo sticks and goose-egg stones⁴⁵ in the boats and flinging tiles and bricks. Moreover, originally the length of the boats was always within the limit of fifteen feet and they had only 30 oars. For the cost of one large boat two or three of such small boats can be made. They can race at will but they have no fighting strength. If there is no fighting, they would not sink. I have said above, if the custom of boat racing could be stopped, it would not have had to wait until today to be ended. If it is impossible to exterminate this custom it is better to act as I have said here.

45) Stones as big as the eggs of a goose.