

ミャンマーにはチンロンという
芸術的なチームスポーツがある。
競争ではなく協調からなる、
純粋な遊びだ。

私はものすごく幸運だと思う。30年以上ほとんど毎日、今までに見た何よりも美しい物と音と感覚に熱中し遊び続けている。

ミャンマーにはチンロンという芸術的なチームスポーツがある。競争ではなく協調からなる、純粋な遊びだ。

チンロンは基本的に6人でプレイされ、対戦相手はいない。籐（とう）で編まれた球を、つま先、足の内側、外側、甲、かかと、膝の6箇所を使った伝統的な蹴り方で受け渡す。目標は美しく球を受け、蹴ることである。古典的な200種類以上の蹴り方があり、プレイ中にそれらを美しいフォームで出すことが望まれる。

チンロンは2種類あり、ひとつはチームによる円型で行われるスタイルで、もうひとつは女性によるソロ演技である。円型では男女が共にハイレベルなゲームを繰り広げ、ソロ演技では女性プレイヤーが並外れた技術で一連の動きを披露する。

円型スタイルは6人チームでプレイされる。シンプルな蹴り方から始まり、パスが続くと1人が円の中心に出てきて“王子”または“姫”と呼ばれるソリストになる。ソリストは得意なスタイルで自由に演技をすることができる。他の5人のプレイヤーはサポート役になり、ソリストが球を落としそうになった時にそれを助ける。球が地面に落ちるとソリストは円の中心から外れ、全員がソリストを終えるまでプレイが続けられる。

チームプレイではお互いの意図、反応、状況に深く同調しながら動くため、空間に濃密な繋がりができる。プレイヤーにはそれぞれ動作範囲の円

ミスティック・ボール The Mystic Ball

text by Greg Hamilton translation by Sakurako Gibo

photo by BlackRiceProductions

があり、お互いの円と円が交わる部分には曖昧なグレイゾーンが生じる。直感的に意思疎通することが必要とされ、常にその範囲を調節し、変わり続ける状況に反応し、球を返し続けなければならない。

チンロンは様々な場所で日常的に気軽に行われているが、それとは別に仏教の祭りの中で行われるフォーマルなチンロンもある。祭りでのプレイは真剣なもので、生音楽の伴奏と実況アナウンス、そして観客と共に行われる。

音楽がつくり出す雰囲気と高揚感は素晴らしいものだ。古代ビルマの戦いの曲から来ているチンロンの音楽は、プレイヤーを鼓舞し大胆なプレイを促す。音楽家はプレイをよく観察しシンバルやドラムなどで蹴り技にアクセントをつけ、プレイヤーもそれに応えながら動く。

観客の応援はプレイのエネルギー源であり、彼らは時にプレイヤーにチップを贈ることもできる。私はこれまで出場したチンロンフェスティバルでのチップを全部使わずに貯めている。観客からの想いを感じることができるからだ。

音楽、実況アナウンス、そして大勢の観客の前でプレイしたフェスティバルでの経験は、なんとも格別で非現実的にすら感じる。その驚くべき芸術性と身体性の高さ、そして即興性には、畏怖と畏敬の念を抱かずにはいられない。そのエネルギー、美しさ、円の中での一体感は、素晴らしく濃密で心を高揚させるものである。

ミャンマーにいる時はチームでプレイするが、私の住んでいるカナダでは自分1人、もしくは数



人の仲間とプレイする。ここではミャンマーと違って誰もチンロンのことを知らないで、サッカーでもプレイしているのかと思われてしまう。

カナダでのチンロンは、私にとって毎日の瞑想になっている。プレイは常に変化し、成長し、洗練されていく。随分前から、私は様々な動物のように動く練習をしてきた。額面通りそのままの動きではなく、彼らの動きの印象かその本質のようなものだ。例えば、鳩が私の周りを飛び回り、滑空し、急降下しているのを見ると、そのエネルギーの流れや関係性を私と球の間で再現しようとする。雀が波打つ軌道で飛んでいるのも、興味深いエネルギーだ。トンボが素早く方向を変えながらホバリングをしている様子だって、とても参考になる。スズメバチが地面すれすれを精密に飛ぶ姿はフットワークの良い手本だ。

跳び回りながら球を蹴り続けていると、その球がまつ毛や鼻や唇をかすかに触っていくことがある。すごく心地が良い。しかし別の日には、誤って自分の顔に強く球を蹴りつけてしまうこともある。全く嬉しくない。チンロンの球には時々びっくりするほど痛めつけられる。

何年もずっと、私は自分のプレイを日記に書いてきた。どんな天気だったか、プレイはどうだったか、そして周りの環境に何があったか。見返してみると、「今回のプレイはこれまでで一番美しい」と何度も書いていることに気がついた。

日記の中に、ひとつ稀な体験をした時のことが書かれている。2年前のことだ。「今日、信じられないほど素晴らしいことが起こった。ネイト（友人）のパスが私の頭上を素早く通り過ぎた。それを取りにジャンプし、球に足が触れた瞬間、自分が空中に浮いている状態で全てが止まった。心臓も、血液も、周りにある全て、音さえ止まった。そして体が地面に向かってゆっくり、ゆっくりと沈みはじめた。信じられない思いで周りを見回し、そして地面に球の影を見つけた。のろのろと這いながら、球の影はゆっくりと形を変えていた。かかとか球に触れて体が地面に沈みきるまで、何時間も浮いているようだった。私は一体何が起こっ

たのか理解できずに困惑していたが、次第にそれを受け入れてそのひと時をただ堪能した。ゆっくりと静かに地面に降り立ち、顔を上げた。ネイトが球に向かって動き出していて、私は彼がそれを捕まえられることを知っていた。」

この球が描き出す物理の世界で、私は時間・空間と共に遊ぶ。遊んでいるとたびたび、その中に異次元的な隙間を感じ取ることがある。その小さな隙間をプレイに活かす事ができた時、前述の体験のような特別な感覚を味わうことができるのだ。

今まさに、私は背の高い楓の下でチンロンをしている。晴れた日でそよ風が吹いていると、枝葉の影が光と混ぜ合わさって、絶えず変化するまだら模様を地面につくり出す。1人でプレイしていると、よく影に意識がいく。時々本物の球を見ずに、球の影と自分の足の影だけでプレイする。そんな時は蹴り続ける感触、意識の流れ、影の動きが一体になるのを感じられる。

音楽も私にひらめきを与えてくれる。数十もあるチンロンのためのプレイリストを持っていて、中には雅楽が入ったジャパニーズミュージックのプレイリストもある。何度かその曲で試してみたことがあったが、雅楽のリズムを掴むのはなかなか難しかった。そんなある日、チンロンをしている公園でふとセミの鳴き声が聞こえてきた。その瞬間、そのリズムが雅楽にも含まれているではないかと気がつき、すぐに雅楽を流してみた。するとセミの声と雅楽がこの世のものと思えないほど美しく重なり合い、私はそのリズムにのせて球を蹴り続けた。

その様子が、傍目からはただ足と膝で球を蹴り続けているだけのように見えることが、実はとても気に入っている。これが至高の物理であり、自己を超越する“ミスティック・スタイル”だということ、私だけが知っているのだ。



グレッグ・ハミルトン

ミャンマーの知られざる伝統スポーツ

「チンロン」に魅せられ探求し続けるカナダ人アーティスト。外国人として初めて本格的なプレイヤーになり、ミャンマーとカナダを行き来しつつ30年以上プレイをし続けている。2007年、その軌跡を追ったドキュメンタリー映画“Mystic Ball”を製作・発表し、数々の映画祭で賞を受賞。

URL <http://www.mysticball-themovie.com>



The Mystic Ball

I feel lucky beyond measure.

Almost everyday for more than thirty years I've played intensely with one of the most beautiful objects I've ever seen, it also sounds and feels beautiful.

I play chinlone which is an artistic team sport from Myanmar (Burma) that works through cooperation rather than competition. As a team sport, chinlone is radical - there is no conflict and it is playful.

Chinlone is ideally played by a team of six, there is no opposing team. A hand woven rattan ball is kept up in the air using the feet and knees. The ball is passed back and forth between the players. The passing and receiving of the ball are done using traditional moves that use six points of contact, five on the feet (top of toes, inside edge, outside edge, sole, heel/Achille's tendon) and the knees.

The basic idea is to pass and receive the ball in beautiful ways. There are over 200 different ways to kick the ball (the same moves done with the right and left sides are considered different moves). There is an effort to use good form in the playing, this means that the position of the arms and torso should be in classical alignment as the ball is kicked. This is for good technique and aesthetics.

There are two kinds of chinlone played in Myanmar. One is the circle or team style and the other is a solo performance style done only by women. In the circle style you have

all the random ball movement and potential chaos found in any team ball sport. Both men and women play circle style together on the same teams at high levels of the game. In the solo performance style, women do choreographed routines of extraordinary ball control.

The team of six play within a circle and start the game off with a hand toss of the ball to a player across the circle who receives it using one of the basic kicks, the receiving player then passes the ball to another player. At some point as the ball is being passed around the circle, one of the players will go into the center and become the soloist, also known as the 'Prince' or 'Princess'. The soloist is free to create a solo according to their own style, depending on which moves they are able to do - as long as the ball stays up. The other five players act as supporters. If the soloist passes the ball to a supporter or loses the ball and a supporter saves it before it touches the ground - the supporter tries to pass the ball back with one touch so that the soloist can continue their solo. When the ball touches the ground it is dead and the soloist comes out of the center. The play goes on like this with all the players getting turns to solo.

Circle play is deceptively fast and extremely difficult to play well. There is a kind of etiquette inside the circle that helps players to not kick each other and to give each other enough space to spin and move. Intuitive communication is essential, one has to be deeply tuned in to the other players and the flow of the ball. Most players specialize in either supporting or soloing, although all

players do both.

There are many Buddhist festivals throughout the year in Myanmar, chinlone games are often featured and well loved. In addition to the festival play there is everyday circle play. The difference is that everyday play is informal, fun and includes fooling around. Festival play is more formal, more serious, there is live musical accompaniment, an announcer and an audience.

The music adds a whole atmosphere and feeling that is indescribable. Chinlone music comes from ancient Burmese battle music, it's purpose is to give the players fighting spirit to be daring and play well. The musicians watch the playing closely and accent the kicks with cymbals and drums, the players try to play in styles that correspond to the various parts of the music.

Chinlone audiences are very supportive and know the players and teams well. They give the players a lot of energy and can even send in tips to be pinned on the backs of the player's shirts. I've saved all the tips I've gotten in chinlone festivals over the years, they felt like love from the audience.

The experience of playing in chinlone festivals where there are big audiences - live chinlone music and an announcer - is extraordinary and often feels surreal. I am always humbled and awed by the incredible level of artistry, athleticism and improvisation. The feeling of energy, beauty and oneness in the circle is super intense and uplifting.

I play three different variations of this game.



© daigo itatsu

As a team sport, chinlone is radical – there is no conflict and it is playful.

When I am in Myanmar I play the circle style on various teams. Here in Canada where I live, I have two very good playing partners and a few other less serious players. Mostly I play alone or with one of the good players. Once in a while there are three of



Greg playing in Chinlone festival (Myanmar)

us. Playing in a team of six is very different from playing with only two. Playing alone is very different from playing with two or three. It's kind of odd playing chinlone here in Canada because no one knows what it is and thinks I'm practicing for soccer.

When you play with other players in a team or when there are just two, you are constantly sensing the other player, their intent, their readiness and their focus. You become intimately connected. There is a gray – unclear area where the radius of each player meets that of the other player. You have to continuously adjust, react, respond – often at the last moment to keep balls up that are falling in this gray area or elsewhere. You try to give passes that are easy for the

other player to receive. sometimes you might want to push or challenge them with faster, harder passes. How you pass also affects the flow of the game.

Playing chinlone has become a daily meditation for me. My playing is always changing, growing, being refined – in the last year or so I've been noticing my footwork more than ever. I enjoy and pay attention to the feeling of my feet on the ground. Sometimes my feet dance and make interesting steps by themselves. In fact, much of my playing happens almost on it's own, my feet seem to have their own eyes and intelligence.

Everything in chinlone is done on one foot or in the air, therefore the feeling of the standing foot/leg is as important as the kicking foot. There is a rhythm in the earth that comes up through my feet. Everything has a rhythm and feeling - the earth, the wind, gravity, space and of course time. As far back as I can remember, I've practiced moving like various animals. Not their literal movement, but something like an essence or feeling in their movement. In chinlone, especially when I'm playing alone this animal feeling appears in my sense of flow and in the way I respond to the ball. It's hard to explain this – I don't usually consciously decide to do a certain style, although sometimes I do. Most often as I'm playing and in the midst of action, I feel some kind of bird, animal or insect quality as I'm flying around. It feels like a kind of dreaming, it is strange and wonderful. I almost never talk with people about these things so I'm

trying to articulate this to myself right now. Actually I do often try for things, here are some examples – I see pigeons swooping, gliding and flowing around me and I try for that kind of flow and that kind of oneness between me and the ball. Sparrows zipping and bobbing in flight – another kind of flow. Dragonflies – zooming in every direction, changing direction instantly and hovering – another kind of flow. Hornets flying a centimeter above the ground with slow precision – another flow, especially for my feet.

This animal feeling I have in the playing is also about the fierce kind of agility and matching oneself to a moving target, constantly without abstract thought or ulterior motives like scoring points or winning.

I often have the sensation of flying, darting, gliding – like a bird, or swimming playfully and quickly like an otter or seal as I play. Usually after a good play I feel as if I am soaring like a hawk or seagull. This feeling will last for hours.

Sometimes as I'm flying around keeping the ball up, it brushes lightly against my eyelashes, eyebrows, nose or lips – this is a deeply delightful feeling. Sometimes, by accident, I kick the ball into my face hard – not so delightful. Chinlone balls can be surprisingly painful.

When I'm playing alone or with two, I feel like I am inside the ball. I get a sensuous feeling as the ball rises and falls. When I kick well there is a slow motion feeling to

the balls flight and almost a slight pause at the top of it's trajectory. As I watch and wait to kick it again, the feeling is sweet as if I was cuddling with someone I love.

I think chinlone is a kind of making love. The intimacy, the anticipation, the being taken care of and supported, the feeling of someone trying to make you happy, to understand what you want and need, the delight of fitting together physically in the moment.

For many years I've kept a journal of my playing that includes the weather, who played, how the playing was, and any birds, dogs or insects I may have seen. I've noticed that over and over again, I've written that "this was the most beautiful play ever for me" etc. That reminds me how making love feels that way too, like each time is always the best and most beautiful feeling I've ever felt.

Here is an unusual experience I wrote in my journal, from a couple of years ago - "Incredible thing happened today – Nate gave me a pass that flew over my head quickly, as I jumped up to get it, for some reason I used my right heel rather than my sole behind my back. I just managed to get a touch on it and then everything stopped as I was still in the air – my heart, my blood and everything around me, even sound stopped. Everything changed color as well. Then as I started floating down to the ground very, very slowly – I was looking around in disbelief wondering what was happening and I saw the shadow of the ball on the ground. The ball shadow was

moving very slowly and changing shape as it crawled along the ground. The color of the shadow was strange. I noticed that the speed of the shadow ball moving along the ground was the same speed as I was floating down. Between the time when I touched the ball with my heel until I floated down to the ground – felt like hours. I had more than enough time to wonder what was happening, not understand, let go of thinking about it and just enjoy the ride. As I landed softly in slow motion, I looked up and saw Nate moving toward the ball and knew he would get it.

Nate got the ball and we kept it up longer. I was in a very strange space/feeling for a little while. Mostly astonished, amazed and shocked by what had happened and how it looked and felt. I've never experienced anything like this before. It was a little scary actually. Seems odd that it happened on a day when I was feeling extremely stiff and not expecting much out of the play at all. Still trying to remember and make sense of what happened. When I saw the ball shadow moving along the ground, it was like a different reality or like the shadow was it's own reality or maybe the ball was a reflection of the shadow".

It's usual for me to notice shadows when I'm playing alone. Pigeons, sparrows, seagulls, starlings, butterflies, bees, hornets, dragonflies and other insects – fly overhead and cast their shadows on the ground. I notice by shape, size and speed whose shadow it is. I also see my own shadow and sometimes I try to play the shadow ball with my shadow foot and not look directly at the

real ball. The shadows mix together with the feeling of keeping the ball up and the flow. I think chinlone is a shadow of something else that makes itself visible through the play.

Right now I play beneath some tall maple trees. When it's sunny and there is a breeze, the branches and leaves cast shadows which mix with bits of sunlight and create a constantly changing dappled design on the ground. It reminds me of the shifting, pulsating patterns of live squid or cuttlefish skin.

Through the physics of this amazing ball – I play with space and time. Gravity is like a beat that I can dance to. I often sense or somehow notice little openings in space and time that are not normal, when I'm able to make use of these small openings the feeling is extraordinary like the experience I shared above.

From the basic alternating chibya kicking motion to keep the ball up – it's like I can generate my own wave and then surf it. This is a simple action of using the top of the foot to keep the ball up at a low height, sometimes very low. It is rhythmic, subtle and mesmerizing. I do this alternating chibya all the time when I'm playing alone. There are a couple of basic approaches for me – sometimes I want to work on particular moves or just do them, like spinning or kicking behind the back etc. I will start off doing chibya and then go from there to the move I want to do. Sometimes, maybe more often, I will start doing alternating chibya and then through a combination of something like intuition, feeling and flow – I

end up doing various moves. My decisions to try various moves flows from what I see and feel happening with the ball and also with my balance and movement. This is the foundation of my playing, tuning in to flow – noticing what is going on and responding in a creative way. This alternating chibya action is also what I come back to after any moves or combinations of moves. The feeling for me is something like dreaming. I think it is an expression of intuition or non-conscious mind. It feels like playing music by ear.

When I play chinlone here, I listen to a great variety of music – I have dozens of play lists specifically for playing. Music always inspires me, sometimes I try to do alternating chibya to the beat.

I have a Japanese play list which has some gagaku music on it. I've tried a few times but didn't find it easy to get the rhythm and feeling of my playing in sync. Then last week I heard some cicadas in the park where I play and suddenly realized that the sound of cicadas is in gagaku music. Then a few days ago, just as I finished playing I heard the cicadas again and quickly put on the gagaku music. The sound and feeling of hearing them together, was other worldly beautiful. I kept on playing and somehow everything came together and fit – the music, the cicadas, the rhythm, my feeling and my play.

I love that it looks like I'm just keeping a ball up with my feet and knees. What I'm really doing is ecstatic physics, what I often experience is self-transcendence – mystic style.



I think chinlone is a shadow of something else that makes itself visible through the play.



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Greg Hamilton

Greg Hamilton is the leading foreign authority on chinlone, the national sport of Myanmar, and the first foreigner to play the game at the highest level. His first film *Mystic Ball* (2007) follows Greg Hamilton himself, deep into the ancient and little-known culture of Myanmar and its traditional sport, chinlone.

URL <http://www.mysticball-themovie.com>