

# Dragon boats spark the fire within

## NEW SPORT AT ASIAD ATTRACTS COMPETITORS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

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GUANGZHOU — Nurses, fishermen, housewives and soldiers are all getting stuck into the Guangzhou Games' colorful dragon boat racing competition, which made its Asiad debut on Tuesday and has attracted teams from all walks of life.



### DRAGON BOAT

Japan's male nurses perhaps win in terms of their novelty value, but it is the fighting spirit of a team of firemen from Macao that has captured the people's imagination.

"Firefighting demands teamwork, and dragon boat racing is just the same," said Chang Wa Ieng, captain of Macao's men's team. "We can only train after work, but we enjoy doing it together."

While many professional sportsmen and women are struggling to find their way into the medals or the limelight in Guangzhou, teams of amateurs in fantastic boats are unable to avoid the publicity.

For Macao, which has never competed at an Olympics, a medal in the water would be the icing on the cake, but most of the crew is just thrilled to have made it this far.

"Even lots of full-time athletes didn't get the chance to come here, but we made it. I really feel very lucky," said Chang, who has been involved in the sport for 10 years.

Japan's team of nurses said its passion for the sport, not its profession, is all that matters.



YANG SHIZHONG / CHINA DAILY

Indonesia's women's dragon boat team (in white) competes in the 1,000m race during the Asian Games on Thursday.

"We just love dragon boat racing very much and we work very hard. It has little to do with our jobs," said captain Takamasa Matsuno, 34, whose team has only been able to train on a real lake twice a month, on borrowed boats, for the past decade.

Matsuno said it wasn't great having to do with wooden tubs filled with water for most of their training sessions, but it was nice

receiving the support of their patients.

"This is the first time that we have competed internationally, and we hope we can have more chances in the future. We want to continue," he said.

The competition has seen athletes of all ages test their mettle on Zengcheng Dragon Boat Lake. Thirteen-year-old Xia Shiyu of

China is the youngest athlete at the Asiad, while the oldest person in the dragon boat contest is 50.

Xia, a drummer for the women's team, led the 22-person contingent to the championship in the 1,000m straight race on Sunday after Indonesia claimed its first Asiad gold medal in the sport with a victory in the men's 1,000m, also Indonesia's first title in Guangzhou.

"It was really a great surprise for us. I'm so happy," said Djamal Uddin Young Mardinal of the Indonesian team. "I hope dragon boat stays in the Asian Games and is included in the Olympic Games in the future."

The dragon boat competition is divided into six divisions, made up of men's and women's races in the 1,000m, 500m and 250m.

### Q & A >> WITH THE RACERS

**Chang Wa Ieng, Macao, 31, Firefighter**



**When did you take up dragon boat racing?**

About 10 years ago. Dragon boat racing has a long tradition in Macao and we love it very much.

**Are all the members of the team firefighters?**

Yes, we are all firefighters in Macao. Firefighting requires the team to work as a whole. Inside the dragon boat, it's the same principle, so we like to practice together after work.

**Leong Lai Sze, Macao, 40, Civil Servant**



**Do you guys have regular day jobs?**

Yes. There are civil servants, students and housewives.

**How do you manage your time?**

We always train after 6:30 pm, because a lot of people have jobs or lessons in the daytime. It is very hard to get everyone together. I'm afraid some will soon quit the team because our oldest member is already 45.

**Sajjad Gharibi, Iran, 24, Student**



**When did you first take up dragon boat racing?**

The sport first took hold in Iran about five years ago, and that's when I joined.

**Is it getting more popular in Iran?**

It is not one of our traditional sports but it has become very popular. There are more than 50 clubs and 2,000 athletes there, because Iranians love this sport.

**Takamasa Matsuno, Japan, 34, Nurse**



**Did your patients know you were coming to the Asiad?**

Yes, I told them. They were very supportive and cheered for me. My boss also supported me, so I was able to train indoors in the mornings and evenings.

**A lot of people find it hard to imagine nurses racing dragon boats. What do you say?**

We just love dragon boat racing very much and we work very hard at it. It doesn't really have anything to do with our profession.

**Chou Pi-chieh, Chinese Taipei, 29, Teacher**



**Do members of your team have regular day jobs?**

Most of us are students, some are still in college and some are in high school. I'm a kayak teacher at a high school.

**How was your team's first performance?**

We broke a paddle during the heat and didn't have a reserve in the boat, and a lot of our rowers are young and lack experience at such a high-profile event. We can do a lot better.