



The Japan Dragon Boat Association

Introduction

In 1987, Mr. Ichizo Aoki, a former owner of a Japanese professional baseball team and general manager of a large hotel in Osaka, asked Sankei Press, one of the biggest news media companies in Japan, how they might invigorate the water front city of Osaka. In response to this request, Ms. Carol Howorth, an agent at Sankei Sport Newspaper at the time, introduced dragon boat racing which was popular in Hong Kong at that time.

In 1992, the Japan Dragon Boat Association (JDBA) was established with former Speaker of the House Representative and President of the Japan Professional and Amateur Sports Representatives Federation, Mr. Yoshio Sakurauchi, as the president, and Mr. Hajime Yuki as the first Chairman. Dragon boat racing has developed very rapidly in many areas throughout Japan through the hard work of these two top leaders, and now

dragon boat races occur in 22 of 47 Prefectures including Tokyo, Hyogo, Kyoto, Wakayama, and Shiga. As you may know, the JDBA succeeded in holding the "5th Asian Dragon Boat Championship Race" in Aioi city in Hyogo Prefecture with the understanding and great support of Mayor Taniguchi and the people in the city. The success of this event has given the JDBA the power and energy to work with the ADBF and the IDBF for further dragon boat development.

Unfortunately, our first and widely respected president, Mr. Yoshio Sakurauchi, passed away in April, 2006. He was succeeded by Ms. Kiyoko Ono, the bronze medalist in women's gymnastics at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, who has rendered great contributions to overall sports development in Japan. She was elected to the House of Councilors (HC) in 1986 and stayed in the political world for 18 years. She made many



important contributions in her roles as Minister of State, Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission, advisory capacity to the JOC, President of the Japan World Games Association, Japan Anti Doping Agency appointee, and currently as Chairwoman of the National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health. In April 2008, she was awarded the most distinguished award in Japan, "Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun" for her past endeavors and contributions to Japan. Under her unerring judgment and advice, the Japan Dragon Boat Association established Prefectural dragon boat associations in nine prefectures in Japan. These associations are now functioning as the focal points for spreading the dragon boat sport throughout Japan.

On another note, the Japan Dragon Boat Association policy places emphasis on helping out with social problems and on activities to promote world peace. For example, the JDBA has been donating to land mine victims in Cambodia in collaboration with the "Hearts of Gold," a sports NPO. This organization is headed by Ms. Yuko Arimori, marathon silver medallist in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, and bronze medallist in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. We want dragon boat athletes to realize that we need a peaceful world in order to organize and enjoy dragon boat races, and that sports can unite the people in the world for this purpose.

2009 was a big turning point year for the Japan Dragon Boat Association. The JDBA had developed under the status of "private organization" for 17 years since its establishment. With hard work under the leadership of President Kiyoko Ono, and Chairman Kenichi Sakurai, and other efficient board members, the JDBA succeeded in upgrading the organizational status to "corporation" in September, 2009. This makes the JDBA active more officially, and more importantly, helps the JDBA obtain governmental subsidies more easily.



*Ms. Kiyoko Ono
(President of the JDBA)*

The origin of boat races in Japan

There are many types of traditional boat races in Japan, from the Tohoku region in the north to the Okinawa islands in the south. It is difficult to specify when these traditional boat races originated, however, what we can observe is that, over the ages, boat racing has been performed for enjoyment and also as a part of traditional Shinto religious rituals.

It seems true that traditional boat racing in Japan was originally influenced by China. Boat racing in Japan took place mainly as a festival for fishermen for the purpose of praying to the gods for a safe voyage and good fishing, whereas boat racing in China was performed on rivers and creeks to pray to their God of Agriculture. Japan is surrounded by the sea and boats played an important role in people's lives. Boat owners and boat builders tried boat races to check the performances of their boats and show-off their boat building skills. This is how traditional boat racing developed and continued up until now.

Geographic distribution of traditional boat races

Traditional boat racing has become more common throughout the world, especially in the South East and East Asia areas, and Japan is no exception. In Japan, more of the traditional boat races have been performed in the western areas, with Hari boat races in Okinawa, Peiron boat races in Nagasaki, and Aioi City holding the more typical style of traditional boat races. There seems to be slight differences in accepting the styles of boat racing from China. Nagasaki inherited boat races closely related to the Chinese style, whereas Okinawa still maintains its own traditional Shintoism in its local style of boat racing.

These days, numerous towns and villages are trying to resurrect traditional boat racing as one of the events of summer festivals for the purpose of revitalizing its people. However, their styles are mostly different from the traditional and old ones. Recent surveys tell us that approximately 260 boat races are being performed throughout Japan under the name of Tarai Matsuri (basin festival), Minato Matsuri (port festival), Ikada Matsuri (raft festival), Dragon Canoe festival, Peiron Festa, and Tenmasen racing (barge racing).

How Hari started in Okinawa

Dragon boats in Japan date back to around 1390, the oldest date among different accounts, when they were called Hari in Okinawa, the southernmost islands in Japan. The most established account is that they were brought in from Fukien (Fujian) and Guangdong (Kwangtung), provinces in southeastern China on the East China Sea coast. Later, Hari boat races became a national event of the former Ryukyu (Okinawa) Kingdom and spread over Okinawa Islands as an oceanic god festival for abundant fishing and safety. Hari was originally a fisherman's festival, but changed a great deal to a local festival after World



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War II. Since the Okinawa Ocean Expo was held in 1975, Naha Hari has become a major tourist event there. Naha Hari, with 32 paddlers, two gongmen, two steersmen and six others including a banner holder, a total of 42 crewmen on a gigantic dragon boat, is said to be one of the three major festivals in Okinawa.



Scenes from Naha Hari

How Peiron started in Japan

Nagasaki Peiron is said to have begun in 1655 when several Chinese ships were unable to leave Nagasaki Harbor due to strong winds and to comfort the oceanic god Peiron boat races were held in the harbor. Following this, Peiron spread gradually to neighboring towns and villages from coast to coast, and they served as a prayer for a good harvest, prosperity in local industries, rain, calm seas, water safety, etc. The Peiron boat is about 14 meters long with 30 paddlers, one drummer, one gongman and one steersman, a total of 33 crewmen on board. Boats race to the drums and gongs for a round-trip of over 1150 meters.

In 1922, Peiron paddlers from a shipbuilding company in Nagasaki came to Ishikawajima-Harima Shipbuilding Company in Aioi City, Hyogo Prefecture, and raced at a company's athletic gathering. This was the beginning of Aioi Peiron Races and is now held annually as a major tourist attraction.



Scenes from Nagasaki Peiron Races

Social changes and boat races/dragon boats

Dragon boating with Chinese historical background has originally been held as part of festivities like Peiron and Hari but has been losing popularity over years. One of the reasons for

this waning popularity is that young people have continued to move to big cities, and the younger population has decreased in small towns and villages. This trend has led to diminution of local communities. JDBA is promoting dragon boating to help revitalize these communities.

Dragon Boating today

About 100,000 dragon boat paddlers, including 2,000 paddlers in 70 teams are registered with JDBA. They are forming clubs all over Japan and enjoying the sport throughout the year. These club teams are made up of private companies, youth in local communities, youth hobby groups, students, etc. These club teams are the main power behind local races and are contributing to spreading and strengthening dragon boating.

Some 60 teams participate in the Japan Dragon Boat Championships held every July in Osaka, and about 50 teams race in May at the Tokyo Dragon Boat Championship. More and more, these teams get together to socialize as well. Many teams have their own web sites which can be accessed from JDBA's own site (<http://www.idba-dragonboat.com/>). Regrettably, only Tokyo Dragon Boat provides an English version (<http://www.tokyo-dragon.jp>).



Japan Dragon Boat Championship Race (July)





Local organizations

There are local dragon boat associations under JDDBA. These organizations serve as local bases for dragon boating. The major ones of these are Osaka Dragon Boat Association and Tokyo Dragon Boat Association.



Maintenance (Tokyo Dragon Boat Association)



Experience (Boys & Girls)

In Osaka, the second largest city in Japan, the Osaka Dragon Boat Enthusiasts Group was founded in April 2004 by six local dragon boat teams, which had been independently paddling without a formal organization. It grew into ODBA four years later. Now some 400 paddlers on 14 teams belong to ODBA, and two dragon boats are on lease from JDDBA for use in minor races, community activities and training. ODBA is proud of its organizational strength and cooperative spirit, which is behind the activities mentioned below.

ODBA is involved in a wide variety of regular activities. Either independently or in association with JDDBA, the Osaka association is involved in the Japan Dragon Boat Championships, Takaishi Dragon Boat Races, Suita Dragon Boat Races, Kansai Airport Dragon Boat Races, Hokko Dragon Boat Sprint and Walaira Dragon Boat Races. And in conjunction with other Osaka community organizations, the ODBA provides dragon boating for children at the Hokko Kids Festival, offers citizen

dragon boat rides at A Tale of Three Wards, offers a Boy Scout Dragon Boat Experiences and participates in dragon boating on Osaka City Water Corridors (See DBWI November 2009 issue, Page18) <http://www.dragonboatworldinternational.com/PDF-Versions/DBI-Nov09.pdf>.

In addition, ODBA offers training in Hokko Harbor and does almost all of their own boat and paddle maintenance as Jacks (AND Masters) of all trades.

JDDBA's Prospect for Future

The year 2010 is the 19th year since JDDBA's foundation, and it has grown to the point that 100,000 paddlers are enjoying the sport. In September 2009, JDDBA made a new start after registering under corporate juridical status.

One of JDDBA's concerns which may be shared by many others globally is that it is getting harder and harder to find sponsors due to the present global recession. But paddling a dragon boat and being close to water enables people to feel for themselves how bad environmental problems have gotten, and they may feel encouraged to involve themselves in prevention of global warming. JDDBA's major policy of social and global contribution, may hopefully be echoed by private companies advocating corporate social responsibility. We at JDDBA are hoping that these companies will understand and support our dragon boat activities.

JDDBA's plans are to seek recognition and acceptance by the JOC (Japan Olympic Committee) and Japan Sports Association in order to provide a training environment that can produce teams which are competitive in Asian and international arenas. Towards this end, JDDBA is determined to strengthen its organization and train paddlers, and make its ties with ADBF and IDBF stronger. JDDBA's immediate goal is to win top places in the Asian Games in November 2010.

Through participation in this event and other competitions, JDDBA intends to promote and strengthen dragon boating in Japan. At the same time, JDDBA also plans to strengthen ties with various traditional boat racing groups within Japan as there are many such groups around the nation. These efforts will, JDDBA believes, result in increased popularity of dragon boating and growth of water sports.

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