

Those magnificent veterans and their crafty flying inventions



A kite flying team at Xuhang Town in Jiading District enjoy their hobby at an open field. Established in 1996, the team comprises many seniors, ranging from 57 to 85 years old.

Lu Xiaofeng and Fei Lai

Kite flying has enjoyed a long history in China. Playing outdoors in fresh air, it gets people to look up into the sky and see its awesome beauty.

There is a kite flying team at Xuhang Town in Jiading District. Established on October 29, 1996, the team is formed by the seniors, ranging from 57 to 85 years old.

The team is headed by Xu Bailong, a 72-year-old retired worker. Kite flying has been Xu's hobby since childhood.

After retirement, he witnessed how boring life could be for some old people at communities. In many cases, they were obsessed in playing mahjong to kill time.

In view of this, Xu gave up

his own leisure time, knocking on neighbors' homes door by door to encourage them to join the kite flying team. Out of a love for kites and kite flying, the team came into being.

Starting from scratch, the number of team members has increased from seven to 38.

During the past 13 years, the members made several hundred kites of different shapes and sizes.

"At first, we had to follow some diagrams to make kites. But now, we can make whatever design is in our minds," Xu said in a proud voice.

Four years ago, to make a huge kite of 87 meters, the team members gathered each noon after lunch and worked till midnight. Two weeks later, they finally completed the kite.

"We celebrated it by clapping

hands in wild joy," said Wu Guangyao, one of the members. "At that time, all in my mind was to finish the kite as soon as possible."

To make kites more beautiful, the members go to different place to find materials.

Qian Shaoxing is 72 years old. However, he is extremely passionate about it. He has been to Fuqiao Town in Taicang, Jiangsu Province, many times to collect chicken feathers. Being willing to help, he is always ready to teach others how to make a kite.

The biggest change to the seniors after joining in the team is that they feel healthier than before.

Zhang Yingjia in his 70s is one of them. When he joined in the team in 2004, he walked with crutches. Six months later,

he became much more flexible than before and was no longer in need of the crutch.

Zhang said many old people were even relieved from the pain of spondylosis.

Nowadays, the team members are invited to schools such as Tongji University and Xuhang High School to teach the skills.

"Kite flying is a Chinese tradition. However, many kids don't even have access to it," said the team leader Xu. "We hope to devote ourselves to make the sport survive generation after generation."

A member of the kite flying team in Jiading District controls a lengthy dragon kite during an outing activity.



Fond memories of 'stone barbell'

Chen Jinfa

Recently, I saw an old photo of me taking part 30 years ago in the first "Nanxiang Farmer Sports Meeting." My partner Chen Guanghua and I were playing "stone barbell," with many people standing around watching and it really reminded me of my youthful enthusiasm.

Stone dumbbell and stone barbell is a traditional sports event of Nanxiang Town, and it's often played and performed at various grand activities. The players make stone dumbbells from concrete, which weigh from 20-100 kilograms for each dumbbell.

Then they play with the heavy dumbbells in different ways, such as single-hand holding, two-man throwing and human pyramid. It's a sport that originated from farm works. About 30 years ago, it used to be a very popular event in the whole town, especially in our farm group. At that time, since the whole society was not as well-off as today, we had few entertainments. So when we felt tired during farm work, playing



Chen Jinfa and his partner Chen Guanghua perform a stone barbell lifting at a farmer sports event in Nanxiang 30 years ago.

stone dumbbells together could be our biggest fun.

In our group, boys began to play it when they were just 15 or 16. Because we youths were full of energy, we usually played it during a break between work. Apart from traditional forms like two-man and four-man throwing, we also invented some new styles through

our daily labor. Gradually, we all became strong and healthy.

Thirty years ago, Nanxiang was not a town and was called Nanxiang Commune. When the first Nanxiang Farmer Sports Meeting was to be held, organizers decided to add stone dumbbell and stone barbell as an event.

Over 20 youths in our group, including me, were invited to participate. It was our first time to take part in the sports meeting and were very excited so we practiced harder and harder.

The sports meeting was held in summer. I remember it was rainy on the day we performed, but there were still many people in the audience. After performing the traditional forms such as throwing, shoulder-holding and finger-holding, the last one would be feet-holding, which meant I needed to lie down and hold my partner Chen Guanghua and a 100-kilogram stone barbell with only my feet.

As the ground was wet, the organizers put some gunny bags on the ground to prevent me from

getting dirty. Chen and I finished our performance perfectly and won great applause, and that's what this photo is about.

Stone dumbbell and stone barbell became a permanent event at the sports meeting, which inspired our continuing passion. We even used to visit the home of Dong Shangwan, a famous stone dumbbell player in Shanghai, and talk with over 30 other stone dumbbell lovers there. It was one of the most unforgettable periods in our life.

With the economy improving, there's less and less labor in farms, and the number of stone dumbbell players has decreased.

We old participants also live apart. But we still gather to play it when we're free and, nowadays, that's at least once a month.

By now, 40 years have passed, and I have a lot of memories of stone dumbbell. Every time when I see my children and grandchildren play video games, I really hope that someone could carry on this sport, preventing it from being lost.

(Compiled by Yu Junli, translated by Pan Zheng)



Chen Jinfa practices stone barbell lifting as a daily exercise.