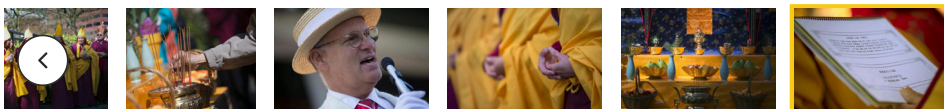
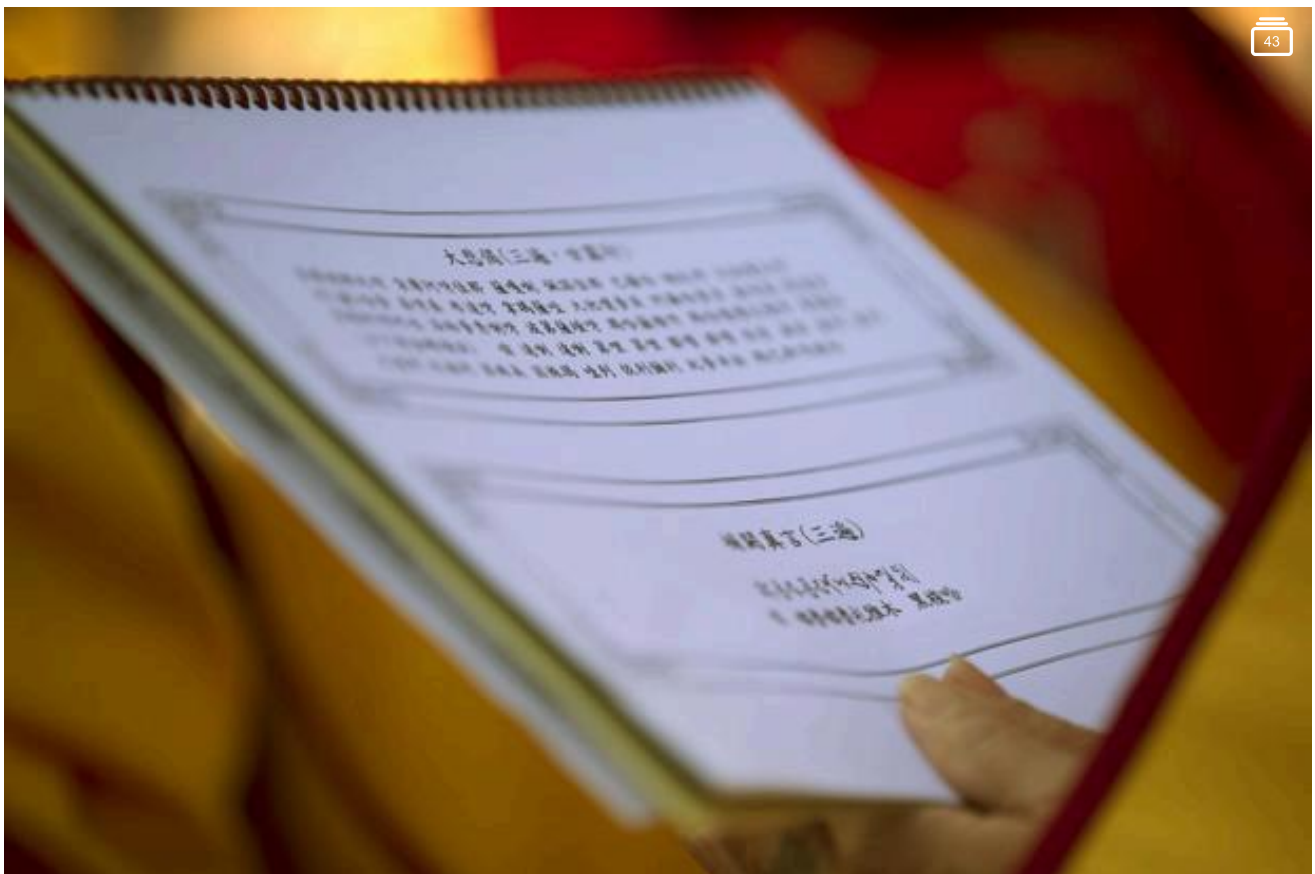


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Dragon boat 'awakening' marks beginning of race season

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Awakening of the dragon ceremony begins Dragon Boat racing season



By [Elliot Njus | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Flocks of Portlanders wearing life vests and carrying wooden paddles? It must be dragon boat season.

It began Saturday with the "awakening" of the boats, a ceremony held each year to promote safety and good luck in the coming months of practice. The season ends with the [Rose Festival dragon boat races](#), held in June. More than 65 teams are expected to compete this year.

The race is the premier event for the [Portland-Kaohsiung Sister City Association](#). Portland and the Taiwanese city have had a formal relationship since 1988, and dragon boat racing started in Portland soon after.

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But it has a long history before that, said Mike Bostwick, the organization's president.

On a goodwill mission to Kaohsiung, Bostick said he saw a painting of a dragon boat race from the 13th century.

"So we know it's been at least that long," he said.

To launch the 2016 season at the RiverPlace Marina, members of the Bhuddist Hui Lin Temple blessed the dragon boats. The celebration also included firecrackers and lion dancing by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

Dignitaries from the Rose Festival then painted red dots on the dragon boats' eyes, symbolizing their awakening.

All eight dragon boats circled a Portland fireboat, which gave a water-cannon salute.

The calm, clear conditions helped newcomers get used to paddling, said Rob Ono, a pharmacist who co-captains a team of Kaiser Permanente employees.

Ono has been racing since 2002, when he started with a Portland Community College team. But some of his teammates are new, he said.

"This was a great way for them to get some exposure to dragon boats," he said. "This is ideal. It's calm water, not too much wind or rain."

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They'll no doubt encounter less ideal weather as the season progresses. The team, like most, will practice three times a week in all weather.

-- Elliot Njus

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