



CENTRAL VICTORIAN LION TEAM

中央維多利亞獅團

LION DANCE TEAM



Team Information

A brief guide to our Training & Performances,
Lion Dance History and Culture.



LION DANCE TEAM

The Central Victorian Lion Team perform Traditional Chinese Lion Dance. Great care and attention to detail is given to ensure our performances are always respectful to the art of lion dance and its traditions.

While our focus is Southern Lion (Fut San & Hok San styles), we also perform with Northern Lions.

Team Leaders:

Our Lion Team Leader has over thirty years experience in the art of Lion Dance. Two of our Senior members are Assistant Leaders.

Training:

Every Monday during School Terms - Quarry Hill Hall (Hamlet Street)

Juniors: 6.15pm - approx 7.30pm

Seniors: 6.15pm - 9.00pm

Training sessions cater for junior and senior members.

Other specialised sessions may be held at certain times, as required.

Interested persons complete a 4 week 'free trial period' prior to becoming members.

Performances:

We are able to customise our performances to suit your needs.

See following pages for more information on dance routines.

Our Lion Team Team can perform on it's own or together with the 'FuWa' & Dragon Teams.

For further enquiries, please contact us via our website.

For information on upcoming events like and follow us on facebook.





Lion Dance History & Stories

The Lion Dance dates back around 2,000 years, possibly to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) and became very popular during the Tang Dynasty (716-907 AD). There are many myths and legends about how the art form originated. Here are just a few stories about the origins of the lion dance.

The Lion & the 'Nien'

A long time ago in a village of China, a fierce creature appeared that horrified the people. It ate their crops as well as the animals and some of the men in the village. The creature was called 'nien' (or 'nian'), which sounds like the Chinese word for 'year'. The lion would return around the same time each year to wreak havoc.

Then, one year in desperation the village people asked the lion for help, as no other animals had been able to protect them. As the 'Nien' approached, the lion roared, shook his mane and attacked the monster, wounding it. The Nien was scared away this time, running away with its tail between its legs.

However, the next year the lion was busy guarding the Emperor's gate and was not able to help. Fearful of the evil creature's return the villagers decided to do the job themselves by creating an image of the lion using bamboo and cloth. Two men hopped inside the 'lion' and approached the 'Nien' aggressively. The monster fled away again.

This is the reason lion dances are performed at every Chinese New Year. The lion dance scares away evil for another year, while bringing good luck and prosperity.

The Monk & the Lion

Another story describes the lion as being the creature that was creating havoc for the village.

In this story, a monk - who is meditating in nearby mountain caves - comes across the lion and tames it. He teaches the lion to no longer eat meat, (no longer being a threat to the people).

The monk wrapped his *red sash* around the lion's horn and led it to the village to show the people that the lion would now protect them.

The lion should always have a red ribbon on its horn to signify it is tame. It reminds the lion to protect against evil and do only good deeds, therefore bringing good luck. This is also why the "Dai Tao Fut" character wears a red sash.

"Dai Tao Fut" (DTF) literally means "Big Head Buddha", although the character portrayed is of a monk, not "Buddha" himself.

His role is to play with the lion and help guide it through the performance.



The "DTF" plays with kids in the crowd.



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Lions

Within Lion dance, there are many different types of lion and performance styles.

Traditionally, lion dance teams train in martial arts (Kung Fu) and the style of the lion performance depends on the style of martial arts training.

The lion comes in two main kinds - Southern and Northern. The Southern Lion, from warm climates, is more cat like in it's appearance with sharp movements and strong stances. The Northern Lion, being from the cold north has long, shaggy hair and is more dog like, usually performed in a playful manner by people with acrobatic skills.

Southern Lion

The Southern Lion has become the most popular style of lion, used throughout the world for Chinese New year celebrations and various other occasions, such as new business blessings, weddings etc. Southern lion dance competitions are also growing in stature, with teams from around the globe frequently competing in Championship events.

Within the Southern Lion family, there are two main styles - Fut San and Hok San.

Fut San (FoShan), *meaning Buddha Mountain.*

The Fut San lion has a curved mouth, sharp horn and their tails are traditionally longer. They are generally more fierce and courageous.



Hok San (HeShan), *meaning Crane Mountain.*

The Hok San have a straighter shaped mouth, (which often gives an impression of 'smiling'), rounded horns and shorter tails.

They are generally more peaceful with a rounder/softer style of movement with an emphasis on 'expression'.

These lions have also become the most popular style of lion to be used in competitions.

There are also other 'hybrid' styles of lion made in different regions throughout Asia. A Fut-Hok Lion has a curved mouth like a Fut San lion, the rounded horn of a Hok San and often larger eyes. Most Lion manufacturers now make shorter tails for all styles of lion, to cater for 'competition' style movements and jumping tricks.



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Southern Lion colours

The Southern lion of today comes in just about every colour possible, with modern lion dance groups placing much importance on the look of the lion and its presentation. There are, however, some colours that are more traditional with a range of meanings. Three of the most common lions are based on historical figures from the 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms', and are highly regarded by Chinese communities all over the world.

The 'Three Kingdoms' period was a time of great turmoil across the land, with many corrupt officials and warlords. Three generals of the time, ranked in order of age were Liu Bei (oldest), Kuan Gong & Zhang Fei. Each held a similar desire to serve the country, while protecting the weak. These three men swore a 'brotherhood' and vowed to also protect each other.

Lions are therefore made in colours that represent the Generals and their particular virtues.



Liu Bei

Has a gold or imperial yellow face, often with many other bright colours. Usually a multi-coloured tail. This lion represents the virtues of the oldest brother Liu Bei, particularly wisdom, shown by the long white beard and is often called 'The Auspicious Lion'.



Kuan Gong (Guan Yu)

Has a red face with black fur & beard with red and black tail. Kuan Gong is widely worshipped as God of war, martial arts and literature. He represents the virtues of loyalty and righteousness.



Zhang Fei

Has a black face, often with green and white, a short black beard, battered or broken looking ears and a black and white tail. Traditionally, this lion may also have bells on its body. He is the youngest of the brothers and is often known as the fighting lion, due to Zhang Fei having a quick temper and a love for fighting.



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Lion Dance Routines

The southern Lion Dance is traditionally performed to scare away evil spirits, and bring good luck and prosperity during Chinese New Year Celebrations. The lion dance is also performed for those same purposes at various other occasions throughout the year, such as birthdays and weddings.

The dance is accompanied by music played on a large drum, gong and cymbals, that follow the movements and represents the spirit and emotions of the lion.

One of the most popular parts of the performance is the Choi Cheng (採青) or the picking of the greens.

The green refers to a green vegetable such as bok choy or lettuce, which the lion - being vegetarian - likes to eat. The 'cheng' (green) may be placed on the ground, or in a difficult position to challenge the lion.

The lion dance usually tells a story such as the lion climbing a mountain, crossing a bridge or searching for its prize. The lion first shows caution as it investigates the obstacle before trying to reach the 'cheng'. The lion then shows its bravery and skill as it approaches its goal. He then tests and eats the green. The lion shows its happiness as it chews up the green, then spits out the leaves as a symbolic act of blessing, signifying good luck. Oranges may also be used, with the Chinese word for the orange having the same sound as wealth, bringing prosperity.

A scroll with relevant calligraphy, such as a message wishing good luck and prosperity or 'double happiness' for a wedding performance, is often unrolled by the lion and presented.

Puzzles and tests

Shop owners receiving a lion dance 'blessing' will often set the lion a puzzle or test which the lion must solve in order to reach its prize (the cheng). This may be an obstacle in the lion's path, or a series of elements with which the lion must contend. These puzzles and tests challenge the lion performers physically and mentally.



The performers must demonstrate concentration and their knowledge of lion dance, (to perform the elements of the routine in the appropriate order), as well as physical attributes such as strength, balance and martial arts techniques.

Left: Fut San Lions work as a team to overcome an obstacle in a "Picking of the Greens" performance.



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Some of the more popular puzzle/test setups are:

Ground cheng - Green is placed on the ground, often surrounded by oranges representing 'stars around the moon'.

High cheng - Green is placed high above business entry door, usually requiring performers to use jumping and lifting skills. High poles may also be used to help the lion reach it's prize.

Obstacles - Tables, benches, chairs etc., are placed in the lions path to represent bridges or mountains.

'Drunken lion' - Beer or a bottle/pot of wine may be presented to the lion.



Above: A Hok San performance of "The Drunken Lion"

Lion Expression

A lion dancer's techniques and skills are tested throughout the performance in order to express the lion's emotions. One hand is required to operate the mouth, and the other to pull strings in different ways to make the eyes blink and ears move. All of this, while performing the overall head movements and footwork that is crucial to tying it all together, making the lion look as life-like as possible.

Northern Lions

The Northern Lion has a strong resemblance to Pekingese or Fu Dogs, which guard many important buildings in Chinese communities. It's hair is long and shaggy, traditionally orange, red and yellow, however, like southern lions, the modern versions are made in a variety of colours including black or white.

Northern Lions usually perform in pairs, both with a ribbon on their head, (green for the female, red for male).

A baby northern lion may also appear in performances.

Their movements are also very life-like and playful and usually chase a 'teaser', who carries a ball to play with the lions. Acrobatic tricks such as lifts and balancing on a giant ball are often performed.



Right: Northern Lions