



Miao ethnic group actresses perform folk dance for Thursday's show.

PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

# National ethnic games get an uplifting break

By QIU BO

One of the major events of the ninth National Ethnic Games, which run Sept 10 to 18, was a special show that ran all day, complete with banquet and at least 20,000 guests from various ethnic groups, in Guiyang, Guizhou province, Thursday morning.

The event took place on a day when there were no games, squeezed in between the pomp of the opening ceremony and the splendor of the closing ceremony. "We're aware of the contrast between the opening ceremony, which had more than 20,000 performers, and this activity, which has only around 1,000 participants, but it is exalted and refined," said Ding Xudong, one of the officials in charge of the mid-games gala.

Ding explained that it was held in Guanshanhu Park in Guiyang's Jinyang district, which is known for its combination of modern architecture and nature. The organizers invited some 15,000 athletes and visitors, including several thousand reporters, with 3,000 volunteers helping out.

"There were well-known singers for the show," said Ding, with a performance from some Olympic champions to add to the magnificence.

Among those performing for the Thursday event were celebrities such as folk singers Tang Can and Wang Zhengzheng, who sang for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

There were also four Olympic

champions on hand — Guizhou's Zou Shiming, Yang Hao, Luo Xuejuan and Wang Haibin — who came to cheer on the event.

The gala began at 8 am and lasted for at least eight hours, reaching its climax when 9,999 people from various ethnic groups sat down to dinner at an extremely long table together.

The organizers explained that the long-table event was a local tradition of the Miao ethnic group, as a way to give guests a special treat.

Any major event, such as a wedding or the first month of a newborn baby, calls for the families of a Miao village to pull out the table and get ready to toast to each other.

So, the unique banquet was a focus of the whole process and was one of the largest dinners on record.

The accompanying activities included a program where guests joined local folk singers after the banquet in a round of songs.

The gala was hosted by the Jinyang district, with the government saying it has spent more than 600 million yuan on the city's face lift.

Work on the 70,000-square-meter site in Guanshanhu Park was finished in early July.

The investment showed its real worth in the improvements to eight main streets with more than 3,000 trees added.

There were also at least 3 million potted flowers added as decorations around the city.



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1. One of the many unique carnival designs.
2. The "long-table dinner", was a local tradition of ethnic groups in Guizhou as a way to give guests a special treat.
3. Folk dance of an ethnic group.
4. Tibetan people perform traditional dance.



4.



3.

## 'It's great bringing unique culture to the outside world'

By LEE HANNON

For Gui Bin, winning a gold medal for his home province, Guizhou, at the National Ethnic Games would be the ultimate lifetime achievement.

Even more so, because his province is playing host to the ninth National Ethnic Games.

The determination is etched on the 23-year-old Gui's face as he grapples with the traditional tug-of-war line, two meters wide by nine meters long before it is looped through the opponent's legs, then up across his stomach and around his neck.

Gui faces away from his opponent, an equally determined-looking man from Hubei province, and the two assume the back-to-back starting position crouched so

among Tibetan ethnic group. It somewhat resembles the more common rope-pulling version played around the world.

It usually takes place on a hard, flat surface at a farm or a park and is just a part of daily life. Nonetheless, Gui has been training hard for it. First he assumes an uncomfortable starting position, and the silk rope is stretched across the traditional tug-of-war line, two meters wide by nine meters long before it is looped through the opponent's legs, then up across his stomach and around his neck.

Gui's gaze is fixed straight ahead to a point just a few



Eyeballs and muscles bulge as athletes try to drag each other across the line, in the Yajia contest.

low that it looks as if they're going to do some push-ups. Using the tips of their toes and hands for balance, and the upper body and neck to pull, they attempt to drag each other across a middle point in a bizarre mix of force, motion, and show that might leave a chiropractor weeping.

Gui's gaze is fixed straight ahead to a point just a few

inches above the ground, as he lets out a mighty roar that seems to transcend all languages. His look is that of one of those body builders about to pull a double-decker bus.

With the second roar, the spectators are whipped into a frenzy, as Gui slowly inches forward. The bodies shake, veins pop out, and something makes a crunching sound but

I can't tell what.

Victory comes fairly swiftly in this gladiatorial battle and the winning roar follows.

When asked how it felt, Gui beams, "I'm the best in my group. I've been training very hard for this and when I hear my teammate shouting for me it's a very special moment."

Gui is from the Manchu ethnic group and is a management student at a local university. He took up the elephant-tug-of-war two years ago and is quite proud of being able to take part in the games.

"It is great to bring the unique culture to the outside world."

Across the way from the Guizhou stadium where Gui claimed his prize, spectators at another event are being treated to a dazzling display of

ethnic diversity.

The whole thing is like a melting pot where old meets new, traditional song and dance being applied to a modern-day soap opera.

The Yao ethnic people are dressed in green and red, singing about building a new home. Another group begins a melody about a chicken fight, followed by a tale of two members of the nobility locked in a wrestling match.

The games were first held in 1953 and have evolved a great deal over the years. They now take place every four years as a showcase of traditional culture and prowess of ethnic groups. And it's clear from the shouts of the spectators that the sense of unity amongst the ethnic groups is alive and well — and competing.

## Bamboo drifting, not for everyone

By XU LIN

The 17-year-old Wu Yueming is perched there gracefully on a 7.5-meter-long bamboo trunk in the middle of the river, using a long, thin strip of bamboo as a paddle to glide along with perfect balance and poise.

No, it isn't some escape scene from a kungfu movie and she's not being pursued by knife-throwing devils. Wu, a member of the Miao ethnic group, was competing in the ninth National Ethnic Games in Guizhou province, on Sept 12.

Her exotic sport, single bamboo drifting, originated in the Chishui River area of northern Guizhou, where local people used to cross the river standing on a bamboo strip.

But, this was the first time for the action to be included in the ethnic games as a sport.

The rules of the sport say that the bamboo must be a green fiberglass contraption to give it better buoyancy and a longer service life. It is also faster than traditional bamboos and can be taken apart for transportation.



Drifting on a bamboo trunk calls for perfect balance.

And, Wu who began training for the event last November came in a winner of the 60-meter and 100-meter race.

"The sport is a big challenge and has given my life a new start. I want to tell my family that I've grown up and you don't have to worry about me any more," Wu says with tears streaming down and the medal hanging around her neck.

Hu Chaogui, 17, a sports major at Guizhou's Kaili College who took the male 60 m and 100 m titles, explains, "The most difficult part is keeping your balance. I fell in the water several times when I was practicing."

Hu trained for half a year, daily, for seven or eight hours each time. His first contact with the sport came only in 2008, when he came in third in a competition in his hometown near Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou.

"This was the first time for me to join a national game. I was nervous at first, but once the contest began, I got excited," he says enthusiastically.

He says the secret to keeping your balance is to control the bamboo with your waist while standing up straight. He often uses a big ball for practice, using one foot to keep balance.

"It's an all-round exercise that keeps you healthy, but it's taking time to promote it to the whole nation because it's a regional game in Guizhou and is done on a river. Not every place has such facilities," chimes in Chen Liyong, 36, a referee.

Chen goes on to explain that, in Zunyi, a city 144 kilometers from Guiyang, men and women in their 50s still use single bamboo trunks on the river, but few young people can do it.

Fortunately, the ethnic games have gotten more young people interested in the exotic sport.