

= Tao Li =

Tao Li (Chinese : 李 曉 穎 ; pinyin : Tá o Lǐ ; born 10 January 1990) is a China @-@ born Singaporean competitive swimmer specializing in the backstroke and butterfly stroke .

A Singapore Sports School student , Tao has represented Singapore at the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) and Asian Games and holds several national records . She won four gold medals and a bronze at the 2005 SEA Games in the Philippines , and reached the finals of the women 's 50 metres , 100 metres and 200 metres butterfly events at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne though she did not gain any medals . In December 2006 , Tao took a gold medal at the 50 metres butterfly in Doha 's 2006 Asian Games , beating China 's multi @-@ gold medallist Xu Yanwei and breaking her own national record in the process . She became Singapore 's most medalled athlete at the 2007 SEA Games in Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat) , Thailand , winning four gold medals . Earlier in the year , she also became the first Singaporean female swimmer to reach a FINA World Aquatics Championships final , finishing seventh in the 50 metres butterfly .

Tao made her Olympic début for Singapore at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing . She qualified for the 100 metres finals , ranking fourth in the semifinals with a time of 57 @.@ 54 seconds and setting two Asian records in two days . She thus became the first Singaporean swimmer to enter an Olympic final . She emerged fifth at the women 's 100 metres butterfly finals with a time of 57 @.@ 99 seconds .

= = Early life and education = =

Tao Li was born on 10 January 1990 in Wuhan , Hubei , in the People 's Republic of China , the only child of Tao Ran and his wife Li Yan , who were both former provincial swimmers and are now swimming coaches . Her early years were spent in Wuhan , the capital of Hubei province . She started swimming at the age of five , and had started competitive swimming by the time she was ten . In her first contest she won two gold medals and broke two age records . On one occasion at a particular local meet that she was confident of winning , she had her parents attend . However , she lost and was so upset and worried about " losing face " that she asked her parents not to come for future competitions . While she has now overcome that fear , her parents still keep to the " tradition " of not attending her meets in order not to distract her . In 2002 , at the age of 13 years , Tao was brought to Singapore by her mother . It was difficult for her parents to decide to send her to Singapore , and her father was initially against the idea as at the time she was training with a provincial swimming team and earning a monthly salary of RMB500 , and there was a good chance she might do well enough to join the Chinese national team . However , they decided to do so after she was deemed too short for the national team . As her mother was not earning much , she found covering Tao 's swimming expenses difficult . In addition , because Tao 's English was not good , she had to join a Primary 5 class in Queenstown Primary School though she was three years older than her classmates and found things tough @-@ going . However , she worked hard and took extra language lessons , and now converses fluently in English .

Tao became a Singapore citizen in August 2005 . She is a Secondary 3 student at the Singapore Sports School in 2008 , and is expected to continue her education there until she graduates with a diploma in sports science under an arrangement between the school and the Auckland University of Technology . She trains under the school 's swimming coach Peter Churchill . Previously at the Aquatic Performance Swim Club under former Olympian Ang Peng Siong from 2001 , following what was reported to be a contract dispute she started training in October 2006 with another former Olympian , David Lim , at Swimfast Aquatic Club .

= = Career as national swimmer = =

Tao has represented Singapore at the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) and Asian Games . Following her success at the 1st Hong Kong Open Invitational Championships in 2005 at which she

won four gold medals and was named most outstanding female swimmer , at the 23rd SEA Games held in the Philippines later that year , she won golds for the 100 metres backstroke , 200 metres butterfly , and 4 x 100 metres medley relay with teammates Ho Shu Yong , Nicolette Teo and Joscelin Yeo .

In March the following year , she won gold in the 50 metres butterfly at the Milo Asia Swimming Championships in Singapore , the Republic 's first top award at the competition . Between 16 and 21 March 2006 she took part in the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne , reaching the finals of the 50 metres , 100 metres and 200 metres butterfly , though she did not gain any medals . In December the same year , Tao won a gold medal at the 50 metres butterfly in Doha 's 2006 Asian Games , beating China 's multi @-@ gold medallist Xu Yanwei and breaking her own national record in the process . She also won a bronze medal at the 100 metres butterfly earlier in the tournament , recording a national and Asian mark of 58 @.@ 96 seconds .

Tao became the first Singaporean female swimmer to reach a FINA World Aquatics Championships final . The 2007 World Aquatics Championships were held in Melbourne from 17 March to 1 April 2007 , and she finished seventh in the 50 metres butterfly . Later that year at the 2007 SEA Games in Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat) , Thailand , she was Singapore 's most medalled athlete at the Games , winning four gold medals in the 100 metres backstroke , 100 and 200 metres butterfly , and 4 x 100 metres medley relay . On 28 June 2008 , Tao was named Sportswoman of the Year in the Singapore Sports Awards given out by the Singapore National Olympic Council each year . She also won the award in 2007 .

In January 2008 , Tao became embroiled in controversy after the Singapore Swimming Association (SSA) introduced a 15 % levy on the cash awards given to swimmers , with about 6 % set aside for youth development . As part of the government 's Multi @-@ Million Dollar Award Programme (MAP) , she received S \$ 23 @,@ 750 for winning three individual titles and one team gold at the 2007 SEA Games . She was therefore " taxed " S \$ 3 @,@ 562 @.@ 50 , with S \$ 1 @,@ 425 going to youth development . Unhappy with this , Tao said : " If they [the SSA] want to cultivate youth , they should find their own money , not pay using our awards . It 's through our hard work that we got the money . So , I don 't see the point that we should give the money to the youths . " She also said it had been her school and not the SSA which had borne the expense of her overseas training . The SSA said it was " very disappointed " with her comments , and pointed out that the association had spent " easily in excess of \$ 20 @,@ 000 " in sending her for competitions abroad such as the World Championships , Hong Kong Open and Japan International , and a stint at the Australian Institute of Sport . SSA Vice @-@ President Oon Jin Gee told the press , " Even with the Sports School funding it , it 's our taxpayers ' dollars going into her development . It doesn 't matter which avenue it comes from , it 's still Singapore 's support for her . "

= = = 2008 Summer Olympics = = =

Tao made her Olympic début for Singapore at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing , arriving ranked 26th out of 49 butterfly swimmers . On 9 August , the second day of the swimming competition , she qualified fourth fastest for the semifinals of the 100 metres butterfly after winning her heat with a personal best time of 57 @.@ 77 seconds . The following day she made it to the finals , shaving off 0 @.@ 23 seconds for another personal best time and new Asian record of 57 @.@ 54 seconds . She came fourth behind her role model , Australian swimmer Lisbeth Trickett , and the USA 's Christine Magnuson and Australia 's Jessicah Schipper . She thus set two Asian records and the national record for the event , and became the eighth fastest butterfly swimmer in the world and first Singaporean swimmer to enter an Olympic final . On 11 August , she came fifth at the 100 metres butterfly finals with a time of 57 @.@ 99 seconds . The top three spots were taken by Trickett (56 @.@ 73 seconds) , Magnuson (57 @.@ 10 seconds) and Schipper (57 @.@ 25 seconds) . Asked by The Straits Times about her performance , Tao said , " If I have given another personal best , it would not have gotten me a medal . The top three winners were just too good . I wanted to do my best and I pushed all the way and hoped for the best . " Given Tao 's age compared to those of the medallists , there are hopes that she will be able to improve her

performance at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London .

On 12 August , Tao swam in the second heat of the 200 metres butterfly . She finished fifth (26th in a field of 34) and thus did not proceed to the semi @-@ finals , but her time of 2 minutes 12 @.@ 63 seconds was a new national record . Discussions have begun regarding plans for her future development . The Singapore Sports Council 's high performance chief Wayne Clews has said : " Money will not be a prohibitive factor in providing the support and necessary resources for Tao Li to reach her full potential ... with the 2012 Olympics as the target . " As Tao needs to gain more high @-@ level competing experience , there is also the issue of whether she should continue training in Singapore or head overseas , particularly to Australia or the US .

= = = Events between 2008 and 2012 = = =

On 1 November 2008 at the FINA / Arena Swimming World Cup in Singapore , Tao achieved gold in the 100 metres short @-@ course (25 metres) butterfly , and the following evening a bronze in the 50 metres butterfly in a personal @-@ best time of 25 @.@ 93 seconds . She repeated her feat in the 100 metres butterfly at the Stockholm leg of the competition on 11 November , and in Berlin on 15 November when she set a competition record with a time of 56 @.@ 28 seconds . Tao was named the inaugural The Straits Times Athlete of the Year 2008 , and came second in Today newspaper 's 2008 list of athletes of the year .

Tao participated in the 25th Southeast Asian Games in Vientiane , Laos . On 10 December 2009 , she took the gold in the 200 metres backstroke in a time of 2 minutes 17 @.@ 12 seconds . Three days later , she was part of the winning 4 x 100 metres medley relay team with Roanne Ho , Shana Lim and Quah Ting Wen , and on 14 December she broke her own 2005 Games record in the 200 metres butterfly in a time of 2 minutes 13 @.@ 49 seconds . As she chalked up five wins , including the 100 metres backstroke and butterfly events , these were her most successful Games to date .

On 18 November 2010 , Tao won Singapore 's first gold medal at the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou , China , in the 50 metres butterfly . Her time of 26 @.@ 10 seconds was a personal best as well as a national record . She had achieved silver in the 100 metres butterfly on 13 November .

= = = 2012 Summer Olympics = = =

Tao competed for Singapore at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London . In the women 's 100 metres butterfly she reached the semifinals held on 28 July , but with a time of 58 @.@ 18 seconds did not do well enough to join the eight swimmers who advanced to the finals with times below 58 seconds . The next day , in the women 's 100 metres backstroke , she bettered her national record with a time of 1 minute 1 @.@ 6 seconds but did not advance beyond the heats , ranking only 26th out of 45 swimmers .

= = Medals = =

= = National records = =

As of 30 July 2012 , Tao was the holder of the following Singapore records :

= = = Open = = =

Some of the above information was obtained from Singapore national records (long @-@ course metres) , Singapore Swimming Association , 8 June 2008 , archived from the original on 22 August 2008 , retrieved 11 August 2008 .

= = = Under 17 years of age = = =

The above information was obtained from Singapore national records (long @-@ course metres) , Singapore Swimming Association , 6 June 2008 , archived from the original on 2 August 2008 , retrieved 11 August 2008 .