Traditional Chinese Festivals Handbook  English version

Dragon Boat Festival

Wisdom Culture & Education Organization

Global Culture Awareness Organization
The Origins of the Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival is on May 5th of the lunar calendar. It is also called “duānwǔ jié”, “chóng wǔ jié”, and “duānyáng jié”. There are two fives present in the date May 5th, therefore it is also called chóng wǔ.

There are many tales on the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival. Researches done by scholars have led to two most probable versions of the story as follows:

1. Related to a tale of a dragon

   In ancient Chinese legend, people of the south considered themselves as descendants of the dragon. On May 5th of the lunar calendar, they would worship the dragon's "totem", wishing for a year of good harvest.

   They wrapped food in leaves or bamboo (zongzi), and placed it into the river to worship the dragon. They travelled in dragon-shaped canoes to visit friends and relatives. Sometimes canoe races were held. Gradually the customs of dragon boat races and eating zongzi during the Dragon Boat Festival have been formed.

2. Based on the myth of an “evil day”

   As summer starts, mosquitoes, flies, and other insects and growth of bacteria become more common. People easily get heat stroke or sick, so the Dragon Boat Festival (May 5) is called the "evil day". All various customs are for the purpose of avoiding disaster and sickness.
1. Qu Yuan

About 2,300 years ago there was a poet named Qu Yuan. He was very patriotic and always thought of ways to protect the country, but the emperor did not listen to him. After the country fell apart and the emperor died, Qu Yuan was extremely disappointed and committed suicide by jumping into a river. Locals wanted to prevent the fish from consuming Qu Yuan’s body, so they prepared food wrapped in leaves (zongzi) to throw into the river while in canoes. This is one of the origins of the zongzi and dragon boat.

2. White Snake Legend

Once upon a time, a white snake and a green snake had transformed into two beautiful young ladies, Bai Su Zhen and Xiao Qing. To thank a man named Xu Xian for saving their lives, Bai Su Zhen and Xiao Qing pretended to borrow an umbrella from him in a rainy day, and then they became good friends. Bai Su Zhen and Xu Xian got married soon after and opened a herbal medicine store. Later a monk called Fa Hai persuaded Xu Xian to make Bai Su Zhen drink realgar wine. Bai Su Zhen then turned into her snake body, and Xu Xian was literally scared to death. Bai Su Zhen went to steal the resurrection plant and finally saved Xu Xian. And then Fa Hai imprisoned Xu Xian in Jin Shan Si. Bai Su Zhen and Xiao Qing fought with Fa Hai, but Bai Su Zhen lost and was restrained under the Lei Feng Ta. She wasn’t set free until her son grew up and became a high-ranking official. Finally the whole family lived happily ever after.
Traditions during the Dragon Boat Festival

- **Sachet (scented bag) wearing** – lucky and auspicious

- **Zongzi making** – Various shapes and flavors

- **Calamus and mugwort planting** – Avoid disaster and poisonous bugs

- **Egg balancing** – If you can stand up an egg, you will get good luck throughout the year.

- **Realgar wine drinking** – the wine is toxic, better not to drink.

- **Wudu (five poisons) paper cutting** – Lucky paper cutting to remind people of hygiene and health.

- **Noon water using** – drink or shower in this water to maintain good health.

- **Pictures of Zhong Kui posting** – blessing of peace
Hey yo! Hey yo! Dragon boat racing!

As race starts, everyone rolls hard the dragon boat forward together. The first team to reach the end and to grab the flag on the river is the victor.

The number of dragon boat players is dependent on dragon boat length. In addition to "rowers", there are also "a drummer", "a helmsman" and "a flag catcher." Here is the position of each player:
1. Fighting grass

There are two ways of playing this fun activity. The first is “Wéndòu” - to name all kinds of flowers and grasses. Girls gather different types of flowers and grasses and whoever can name the most wins. The second game is “Wǔdòu”. Children cross two pieces of grass together and pull. The winner is the one that can break the other’s piece. Children enjoy playing the game very much.

2. Gifting fans

During the Dragon Boat Festival, fans are given out to stay cool. Fanning can also signify “fanning away evil spirits”. The rich will gift silk fans and others will send feather, fan palm or straw fans.
Customs of the Dragon Boat Festival

1. Eggs are placed inside 7-color nests and worn around children’s neck to ensure peace and safety.

2. In the water place realgar powder and two coins. Use this solution to wash eyes to prevent eye disease.

3. Mothers will make shoes for their children embroidered with a pattern resembling the Wudu (five poisons) thus indicating the death of Wudu.

4. During the Dragon Boat Festival, by eating cherries and mulberry fruit, you will not have to worry about eating flies for the whole year.
What to eat during the Dragon Boat Festival?

In addition to zongzi, in some places people eat "five reds" or "five yellows" which represent the Wudu (five poisons). As such, people believe that will bring peace and avoid disaster. In different places, there are often very different foods to eat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oak package</th>
<th>Garlic and tea eggs</th>
<th>Yellow eel</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using oak leaves to wrap a package of rice, red beans, and jujube. It is a type of zongzi.</td>
<td>When boiling the egg, add garlic and mugwort plant to avoid Wudu (five poisons).</td>
<td>It is nutritious and beneficial to the body. It is one of the “five-reds” dishes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mung bean cake</th>
<th>Mian Shan Zi</th>
<th>Peach, eggplant and bean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is the best dessert to eat in the hot summer to get rid of the heat from body.</td>
<td>Fan shaped steamed dough made from flour. There are five layers, each sprinkled with pepper.</td>
<td>Legend of the Dragon Boat Festival in Taiwan says that eating them can lead to longevity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chinese in southeast Asia eat zongzi and hold dragon boat races to commemorate Qu Yuan.

Pasting “shǐ shù” images to avoid disaster.

Flying carp streamers, placing Kintaro dolls, more commonly known as “Boys’ Day”.

Using calamus plant infused water to wash hair.

Hanging calamus plant and Zhong Kui picture. Eating rice cake.

Jiangling Dragon Boat Festival

Eating mugwort cake
Children Songs and Proverbs of the Dragon Boat Festival

1. Children Songs —

Guò duānwǔ
1, 2, 3, 4, the fifth of May
Come to race dragon boats and beat the drums
Mothers busy making zongzi
Every household celebrating the Dragon Boat Festival

Duānwǔ jié
Calamus long, mugwort fragrant
People eat zongzi while wearing a scented sachet
The noon water is amazing
Happy egg balancing and dragon boat racing

2. Proverbs—
(1) Not eating May 5th zongzi yet, not storing winter clothes.
After the Dragon Boat Festival, the weather will become warmer and more stable. It is time to put away the winter clothes.

(2) Drinking one sip of the noon water is better than taking herbal medicine for 3 years.
It has been told that tea or wine made from the noon water will taste especially delicious. The noon water can also cure sicknesses.

(3) During the Dragon Boat Festival, the weather is hot, Wudu (five poisons) awake and are restless.

Snake  Centipede  Scorpion  Toad  Gecko
Review Questions

1. Please explain the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival.
2. Which legend of the Dragon Boat Festival do you like best? Please explain to everyone.
3. There are many traditions of Dragon Boat Festival. Which one is your favorite? Why?
4. What do you hang on the door during the Dragon Boat Festival?
5. What does it mean if you can stand up an egg during the Dragon Boat Festival?
6. What are the benefits of using the noon water?
7. A dragon boat race is a lot of fun. What roles of players are required for a dragon boat?
8. Which custom of the Dragon Boat Festival interests you the most?
9. The legend of the Dragon Boat Festival in Taiwan tells you what traditional foods to eat. What do you eat to live longer?
10. Please explain the traditions of the Dragon Boat Festival in Japan (Korea).
11. What is Wudu?

Answers

1. Snake, centipede, scorpion, toad and gecko.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Peach, eggplant and bean.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Drummer and helmsman.
6. One year of good luck.
7. Mugwort and calamus plant.
8. Answers will vary.
9. Answers will vary.
10. Answers will vary.
11. Answers will vary.
12. Answers will vary.
編者後記

藉由對文化的認識與了解，提高學習興趣，是學習語文最有效的方法之一。

中華節慶淵遠流長，既表現出先民異彩紛呈的生命力，也蘊蓄著一份幽邃珍貴的文化資產。本教本每年選擇一個節日主題，採用多元聚焦的方式，以淺顯易懂的語詞，為孩子介紹多彩多姿的節慶內容，並透過節慶教學，讓學生認識各國文化的不同，以增加學生之世界觀。

本教本除供老師課堂教學之外，另備有網上彩色版 PDF 電子書，是親子節慶文化學習的最佳參考資料。

電子書 (e-book) 網址：www.wceoprogram.org

中華傳統文化節慶教本之五
粽香處處過端午

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