

Lecturer's Contribution

The Origin of Dragon Boat Festival

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The Dragon Boat Festival (端午節 duanwujié) is a traditional Chinese festival held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese calendar, which usually falls in May or June of the Gregorian calendar.

It is believed that this festival commemorates the death of the poet and minister Qu Yuan (340–278 BC) of the ancient state of Chu during the Warring States period of the Zhou dynasty. Qu Yuan is a member of the Chu royal house, and served in the high offices. At that time, there was an increasingly powerful neighbouring state in the vicinity of Chu State, Qin State. Seeing that the Qin state is getting powerful, in order to avoid the Chu state being swallowed up in the future, Qu Yuan advocated the state of Chu united with other neighbouring states to fight against the state of Qin. However, the emperor of Chu decided to cooperate with the Qin state and Qu was banished for opposing the alliance and accused of treason. As a consequent, his was exiled. Twenty-eight years later, Qin control Ying, the Chu capital by force. In despair, Qu Yuan, on the fifth of the fifth month of lunar calendar, committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River.

It is said that the local people, who admired Qu Yuan, raced out in their boats to save him, or at least retrieve his body. This is said to be the origin of dragon boat racing. When the body of Qu Yuan was not found, they dropped balls of sticky rice into the river so that the fish would eat them instead of Qu Yuan's body. This is said to be the origin of sticky rice dumpling. Since then, to commemorate Qu Yuan, people would race dragon boats (赛龙舟 sai longzhou) and eat sticky rice dumpling (粽子 zongzi) on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar every year.



Sticky rice dumpling



Dragon boat racing



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