

1-a Dragon-Boat day

Main Reading text

We have all heard of dragon-boat day, and we all have a holiday at that time, but do you know the origins of this special day?

Well, in Chinese tradition, dragons are believed to be the rulers of rivers, lakes and seas and to **dominate** the clouds, mists and rains. There are earth dragons, mountain dragons and sky dragons. It is also worth mentioning that **mythical** dragons and serpents are found widely in many cultures around the world.

Dragon-boat racing has its roots in an ancient folk **ritual** of competition between villages, and has been held over the past 2,500 years throughout southern China.

The exact time of Dragon-boat day varies from year to year as it is traditionally held on the 5th day of the 5th Chinese lunar month (and so varies from late May to June in the modern calendar). The **Summer Solstice** occurs around 21 June, and at this time the sun and the dragon, which are both considered to be male, are at their most powerful.

It is believed that, originally, **sacrifices** through drowning may have been involved in the earliest boat racing rituals. During these ancient times, violent **clashes** between the crew members of the competing boats involved throwing stones and hitting each other with bamboo sticks. If a team member, or even an entire team, fell into the water they would receive no help from the onlookers, as their misfortune was considered to be the will of the Dragon **Deity**, which could not be interfered with. Those people who drowned were thought to have been sacrificed.

Worshiping the Dragon Deity is meant to prevent misfortune and encourage rainfall which is needed for the crops to grow, and thus is important for the prosperity of a farmer's way of life. **Celestial** dragons were the controllers of the rain, the winds and the clouds. The Emperor was 'The Dragon' or the 'Son of Heaven', and Chinese people used to refer to themselves as 'dragons' because of its spirit of strength and vitality.

Unlike the dragons in European mythology which are considered to be evil, Asian dragons are regarded as **wholesome** and **beneficial**, and thus worthy of veneration, not **slaying**.

The other main legend concerns the touching **saga** of a Chinese court official named Qu Yuan (Ch'u Yuen). It is said that he lived in the pre-imperial

Warring States period (475-221 BC). During this time the region today known as central China was divided into seven main kingdoms, who were constantly battling among themselves for supremacy.

Qu Yuan is popularly regarded as a minister in one of the Warring State governments, the southern state of Chu (present day Hunan and Hubei provinces), a champion of political loyalty and **integrity**, and eager to maintain the Chu state's independence and authority. Formerly, it was believed that the Chu monarch fell under the influence of other corrupt, jealous ministers who **slandered** Qu Yuan as 'a sting in flesh', and therefore the fooled king banished Qu, his most loyal counselor.

In Qu's exile, so goes the legend, he supposedly produced some of the greatest early poetry in Chinese literature expressing his fervent love for his state and his deepest concern for its future. The collection of odes are known as the Chuci or 'Songs of the South (Chu)'. His most well known verses are the 'lament' Li Sao, and the fantastic Tien Wen or 'Heavenly Questions'.

In the year 278 B.C. Qu Yuan heard about the **imminent** devastation of his state by a neighboring Warring State (Qin in particular). Qu is said to have walked into the Miluo river holding a great rock in order to commit ritual suicide as a form of protest against the corruption of the era.

That Qu Yuan sacrificed himself in protest by drowning reminds us of the early rituals.

The common people, upon learning of Qu Yuan's suicide, rushed out on the water in their fishing boats to the middle of the river and tried **desperately** to save Qu Yuan. They beat drums and splashed the water with their paddles in order to keep the fish and evil spirits away from his body. Later on, they scattered rice into the water to prevent him suffering from hunger. Another belief is that the people scattered rice to feed the fish, in order to prevent the fishes from **devouring** the poet's body.

However, late one night, the spirit of Qu Yuan appeared before his friends and told them that the rice meant for him was being eaten by a huge river dragon. He asked his friends to wrap their rice into three-cornered silk packages to keep the dragon away.

This has been a traditional food ever since, and is known as 'zongzi' or sticky rice, but nowadays it is wrapped in leaves instead of silk.

In commemoration of Qu Yuan, people hold dragon boat races annually on the day of his death.

Today, dragon boat festivals continue to be celebrated around the world with dragon boat racing, although such events are still culturally associated with the traditional Chinese Duan Wu festival in south central China.

Vocabulary

1. DOMINATE (v.) 統治；支配

a. To have the highest determining or guiding influence.

His ambition to become president dominated his life.

b. To overlook from a high position.

A hill that dominates the town

2. MYTHICAL (adj.) 神話的；虛構的

a. Of an idea or story (myth) that is believed by many people but that is not true.

Do you believe the myths about this ancient forest?

b. Of a story that was told in an ancient culture to explain a practice, belief, or natural occurrence.

Contrary to popular myth, no dragons lives in that volcano.

3. RITUAL (n.) 儀式

a. A series of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony.

She objects to the rituals of organized religion.

b. Something that is done regularly and always in the same way.

Sunday lunch with the in-laws has become something of a ritual.

4. SUMMER SOLSTICE (n.) 夏至

The time of year when the sun is highest in the sky, and so the longest day. The opposite is the Winter Solstice, and the shortest day.

5. SACRIFICE (n.) 犧牲；祭品

a. The act of giving up something that you want to keep, especially in order to get or do something else or to help someone.

He made many personal sacrifices to provide help to the city's homeless people

b. an act of killing a person or animal in a religious ceremony as an offering to please a god.

The villagers hoped the gods would accept their sacrifice.

6. CLASH (n.) 衝突

a. To be in a situation in which you are fighting or disagreeing.

Police and protesters clashed yesterday.

b. To look bad or ugly together.

Those curtains and the carpet really clash.

7. DEITY (n.) 神

A god or goddess.

In ancient Greek, Zeus was the deity who ruled over the sky and weather, and Poseidon was the god of the sea.

8. CELESTIAL (adj.) 神聖的

a. Of or relating the sky, including the planets and stars, or of heaven.

Sailors use celestial navigation, that is they navigate by using the positions of the sun and stars in the sky.

b. *Angels are celestial beings.*

9. WHOLESOME (adj.) 有益的；健康的

a. Of something that helps to keep your body healthy. Something that is good for your health.

A wholesome meal made with fruit and vegetables

b. Of something or someone suggesting good health or behavior.

The young singer was well known for his wholesome good looks

10. BENEFICIAL (adj.) 有利的；有益的

a. Having benefits. Helpful to personal or social well-being.

He hopes the new drug will prove beneficial to many people.

Some insects are harmful but others are beneficial.

11. SLAY (n.) 殺害

a. To kill someone or something, especially in a battle or war.

The knight left his castle to find and slay the dragon.

b. Mainly US, informal + old-fashioned: to delight or amuse (someone) very much

That guy slays me. = that guy kills me; I think he's very funny

12. SAGA(n.) 傳說、英雄事蹟

a. A long and complicated story with many details

Her first novel was a family saga set in China.

b. A long and complicated series of events.

Getting our car back from the garage turned into quite a saga.

13. INTEGRITY (n.) 正直；廉正

a. The quality of being honest and fair

He's a man of the highest integrity.

I admire her artistic integrity.

b. The state of being complete or whole.

They are trying to preserve the cultural integrity of the community.

The earthquake may have damaged the building's structural integrity.

14. SLANDER (v.) 毀謗

Making a false spoken statement that causes people to have a bad opinion of someone.

We've heard countless unsupported slanders about her.

15. IMMINENT (adj.) 逼近的〈危險等〉

Of something ready to take happen now. Of a dangerous situation that is going to occur very soon

We are awaiting the imminent arrival of the new students.

He was in imminent danger of being hit by a bus.

16. DESPERATE (adv.) 絕望地

a. Being very sad or upset because of having little or no hope (feeling or showing despair).

As the supply of food ran out, people became desperate.

We could hear their desperate cries for help.

b. Something done with all of your strength or energy and with little hope of succeeding.

They made one last desperate attempt to fight their way out.

17. DEVOUR (v.) 吃光；吞沒

a. To eat up greedily

He devoured everything on his plate in a few moments.

b. To use up or destroy as if by eating.

We are devouring the world's resources

Review exercise

Vocab Questions

Choose the best word or phrase to complete the following sentences taken from the text.

1. Dragon-boat racing has its _____ in an ancient folk ritual.

(A. roots B. base C. branches D. original)

2 The exact time of Dragon-boat day _____ from year to year.

(A. is not B. varies C. contrasts D. is at midday)

3. During these ancient times there were violent _____ between the crew members of the competing boats.

(A. clashes B. rowing C. drowning D. bamboo sticks)

4. Worshiping the Dragon Deity is meant to prevent _____ and encourage rainfall.

(A. happiness B. misfortune C. the others D. luck)

5. Celestial dragons were the _____ of the rain, the winds and the clouds.

(A. leaders B. kings C. controllers D. fighters)

6. Dragons in European mythology are _____ to be evil.

(A. considered B. not C. painted D. fantastic)

7. During the period from 475-221 BC, China was _____into seven main kingdoms.

(A. shared B. given C. to be D. divided)

8. Qu Yuan was as a _____ in the southern state of Chu, in central China.

(A. worker B. king C. president D. minister)

9. Qu Yuan heard about the _____ devastation of his state by a neighboring Warring State.

(A. previous B. imminent C. total D. soon)

10. Qu Yuan sacrificed himself in _____ by drowning.

(A. protest B. complaint C. contrast D. anger)

True or False

1. Worshipping the Dragon Deity is meant to prevent rainfall. T/F

2. Mythical dragons and serpents are only found in Chinese culture. T/F

3. In Chinese tradition, dragons are believed to be the rulers of rivers, lakes and seas. T/F

4. The exact time of Dragon-boat day never varies from year to year. T/F

5. Chinese people never used to refer to themselves as 'dragons'. T/F

6. During 475-221 BC, the region today known as central China was divided into seven main kingdoms. T/F

7. Qu's wrote some of the greatest early poetry in Chinese literature before he went into exile. T/F

8. Qu is said to have jumped into the Miluo river holding a great rock in order to commit ritual suicide. T/F

9. People beat drums and splashed the water to keep the fish and evil spirits away from Qu's body. T/F

10The spirit of Qu Yuan appeared and told his friends that the rice meant for him was being eaten by a huge river fish. T/F