



Mid-Autumn Festival

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Every year, on a very special date, China invites its citizens both inside and outside the country to exalt its culture, family values, and emblematic traditions that mark its history and extoll the present, with the celebration of the iconic Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋节 - Zhōngqiūjié), a moment as representative and important for the Chinese as the celebration of their New Year.

The Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Mooncake Festival or Moon Festival, is held on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar, which falls either in September or early October on the Gregorian calendar. The celebration can last up to three days and includes large festivals and celebrations around the country to worship the Moon as the most important symbol and celebrate the harvest. It also a time to promote Chinese values, highlighting the role of the family as the center of society. This festival, although very typical of China, is also celebrated in other countries around Asia including Vietnam, and is a tradition that has been preserved throughout the world by the Chinese diaspora.

History tells us that this festival originated during the Shang dynasty (1600 -1046 B.C.) to celebrate the harvest during the full moon in Fall. Offerings play an important role in this celebration, most of which are dedicated to the moon, but some deities in Chinese folklore also receive them by way of commemoration. This is the example of the epic story of Chang'e.

Although the narrative varies, the general story speaks of Chang'e and her lover Houyi, an archer who, according to legend, managed to kill nine of the ten suns that were destroying crops at that time. For his act, the gods rewarded him an elixir that would give him eternal life. However, one of Houyi's students tried to steal the elixir, and Chang'e drank it all to prevent the theft.

In consequence, Chang'e began to float without stopping until reaching the Moon, where she lived the rest of her life in the company of a white rabbit. From then on, every full moon, Houyi brought Chang'e her favorite food as an offering to remember and honor her, and, according to legend, this practice gradually became the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The festival includes different celebrations that vary according to region, and each one may even have its own forms of celebration, such as Hong Kong and its Tai Hang fire dragon dance. However, one tradition that ties the entire nation together would be the famous Moon cakes (月饼 *yuèbǐng*). This is a traditional dessert / snack throughout the region and an emblematic element of the festival, where families usually get together to prepare and share these delicious cakes. The preparation can change from region to region, and in recent decades the ingredients have evolved from pork and vegetables to ice cream or chocolate, adding new flavors to the recipe. Regardless of the changes, the formula to prepare the outer covering persists, using flour, golden syrup, alkaline water, and cooking oil.

Different traditions and customs are celebrated throughout the country. Family reunions are a central part of this holiday, and they gather to have dinner on the evening of the Mid-Autumn Festival. Grapes, hairy crab, duck, pomelos and pears, together a good liquor, play an important role in the holiday cooking. Families also tend to make open-air offerings to the moon, and this ritual dates back to the story of Chang'e. One of the most entertaining activities for children is making a lantern of different materials, colors, or shapes. These are released in the rivers or in the sky, carrying wishes or prayers or simply as a tradition to create wonderful views and great moments.

In conclusion, I believe this festival fully captures Chinese values and traditions, bringing families together for evenings filled with romantic stories and delicious food. It is a holiday that exalts the Chinese identity and promotes good values, which have been passed down from generation to generation. It is an experience I would like to experience, and to be part of the atmosphere of this holiday. However, I also think that, as an event that moves millions of people each year and as an emblem of Chinese culture, it is not as well known worldwide as I think it should be, so I hope that in future years the world can learn more about this tradition and admire it as I do.

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