



THE ORIGIN AND LEGEND OF THE DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

The dragon boat festival is an ancient traditional festival that began in China during Warring States Period 戰國. It has a history of over 2000 years. The origins and legends of Dragon Boat Festival varies. Here I will introduce one of the most popular one.



Commemorating Qu Yuan 屈原

In historical biography 《史記》, Qu Yuan 屈原 was the Minister of King Huai of Chu (楚懷王) during the Warring States Period 戰國. He advocated the concept of 富國強兵 Wealthy Country and Strong Army to rival against the state of Qin 秦. However, this was strongly opposed by other Ministers and Court Officials. Ousted and Framed, Qu Yuan 屈原 was eventually dismissed of his title and expelled from the capital and returned his hometown. King Huai of Chu (楚懷王) was eventually tricked by the Qin 秦 and kept in captivity. He eventually died in captivity.

In exile Qu Yuan wrote famous poems such as "Questions of Heaven 天問", "Nine Songs 九歌" and "Li Sao 離騷", that reflects his personal encounters and futile efforts to serve his country, his worries about his once great country and people in a unique style using Metaphors. Hence, the Dragon Boat Festival is also known as the Poets Festival.

In 278 B.C, the Qin Army conquered the capital of Chu, and the royal court was forced to relocate. Qu Yuan wanted to serve the court again to regain the lost lands. However his exile orders dictated that he was never to return to court. His frustrations grew and considering his helpless situation, on 5th, after finishing his exquisite work "Huaisha 懷沙", he threw himself into the Miluo River 汨羅江.

According to legend, after Qu Yuan disappeared into the Water, the people raced to the area where he drown with their boats to try to find Qu Yuan but it was too late.

The people beat drums and splashed water with their boat paddles to keep the fish and evil spirits away from Qu Yuan's body. They then used rice balls, eggs and other food and threw them into the river. They thought that if the fish, lobsters and crabs are full, they would not eat Qu Yuan's body. Later, in fear that the rice balls were eaten by Jialong 蛟龍 Water Beast, people came up with dumplings, wrapped with leaves with coloured silk and developed into a triangular shape.

The Dragon Boat Race is said to replicate the act of rushing to save his body on that fateful day. An elderly gentlemen poured Realgar Wine (雄黃酒) into the river to ward of the Jialong Water Beast to prevent it from harming Qu Yuan. Henceforth, every year on the fifth day of May, there was the custom of dragon boat racing, eating dumplings and drinking Realgar Wine.

