Introduction of Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival, also called "Chongwu Festival", "Calamus Festival" or "Daughter's Festival" takes place on the 5th day of the 5th month in the Chinese lunar calendar. It is one of the most important festivals of the year and widely celebrated by Chinese communities all over the world. There are various celebratory activities that are customary on the day of Dragon Boat Festival, the most important ones are the eating rice dumplings (zongzi) the steamed glutinous rice wrapped in river reed leaves and the wonderful craziness of Dragon Boat Racing!

The origin of the Dragon Boat Festival

There are many legends on the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival. Some people say it is to commemorate the poet Qu Yuan (屈原), while others believe it is to commemorate Wu Zixu, a famous official of the Warring States Period (475-221BC) and there are many variations of the stories. The legend of Qu Yuan remains the most widely believed, popular and well known. Qu Yuan was a romantic Chinese poet well known for his poem The Songs of the South and other Ancient Chinese verse. He is widely thought to be the character in a poem written in 174 BC about an official slandered by jealous competitors and banished from the kingdom by the Emperor Wen of the Han. In 278 BC, whilst in exile, learning of the capture of his country's capital, Ying, by General Bai Qi of the state of Qin, Qu Yuan is said to have written the lengthy poem of lamentation called "Lament for Ying" and later to have waded into the Miluo river in today's Hunan Province holding a great rock in order to commit suicide as a form of protest against the corruption of the era. Chinese people regard highly the romantic sentiments and outstanding talents of this patriotic poet made all the more poignant by his ritual drowning in protest. In the mind of most Chinese people, the tradition of eating rice dumplings and holding Dragon Boat races are all closely related to the remembrance of Qu Yuan.
The origin of zong-zi (粽子)

Zong-zi (粽子) is glutinous rice wrapped into river reed leaves. One story tells about why rice is wrapped this way. During the eastern Han Dynasty (202BC-AD220), Ou Hui lived in Changsha and one day chanced to meet a man who called himself the “Minister in Charge of the Affairs of Three Aristocratic Families” (三氏族事务主管部长). This man told Ou Hui, “It is very good of you to offer me gifts of rice, but most of them are stolen and devoured by the river dragon. In future, please wrap them up in “chinaberry” leaves and bind them tightly with colored threads. The leaves and threads will scare away the dragon and he will never touch them again.” People did as custom demanded and this is why zong-zi is made the way as it is.

Activities in Beijing on the Dragon Boat Festival

**Dragon Boat Race:** A traditional entertainment for Chinese people and one of the most popular early summer activities. The tradition derives from the Warring States period when it was purely a sacrificial activity with the rapid drumbeat the dragon-like canoes crossed the river, not only entertaining the gods but also bringing pleasure for the people. In later years the Dragon Boat Races were held to commemorate the poet Qu Yuan who drowned himself in a river. In recent times in Beijing, in the build up to the Dragon Boat Festival, many parks such as Olympic Park in Shunyi and the Beihai Park near the Forbidden City will hold the colorful races accompanied by markets with festive banners and Zongzi to enjoy the holiday season.
Eating rice dumplings: Eating rice dumplings (Zongzi 粽子) is also a traditional activity. The rice dumpling is a kind of food with various designs and styles: in Northern China, Beijing rice dumplings are always mixed with small jujube berries in the rice; while in Southern China, rice dumplings are often stuffed with various sweet or savory accompaniments, such as sweetened bean paste, fresh meat, ham and egg yolk. For thousands of years, the custom of eating rice dumplings has been popular in China and has spread throughout the region to Korea, Japan and most countries in Southeast Asia.

Wearing Scented Sachets: On the Dragon Boat Festival, it is traditional in Northern China for children to wear scented sachets to ward off evil spirits. A scented sachet is a brightly colored ornament worn on the front of the dresses. The sweet-smelling sachet contains Cinnabar, Realgar Wine (an orangey red mineral known as “ruby sulphur” flavored liquor) and aromatic herbs. It is usually wrapped in a silk cloth of bright colors, sometimes embroidered with exquisite patterns. Multicolor silk threads are attached to the sachet as tassels, making the sachet more appealing. In some regions of China, a scented sachet of this type is also used as a love token between young lovers.

Girls' Day: In ancient times, a married daughter would return to her parents' home during the Dragon Boat Festival and also, a bride-to-be would put on her Sunday best. For this reason the Dragon Boat Festival is also sometimes referred to as "Girls' Day".