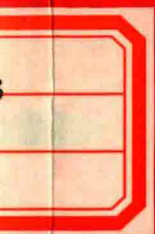


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FESTIVALS

WANG XUEWEN



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Preface

“Happy like during a festival!”

Whenever people cheer for joyful things, they sigh like this. This is the most direct feeling that festivals give to man.

The festival is a universal cultural phenomenon of human society. It is generally thought that festivals are group-based periodic special days with relatively stable contents and forms. Whether it is agricultural society, industrial society or information society, colorful festivals always run through. There are all kinds of festivals including traditional festivals with a long history and modern festivals established with the founding and development of the nation and state; political festivals, religious festivals and mundane festivals; festivals for certain professions and festivals particular to certain sex groups and age groups; festivals on the theme of sacrifice, festivals on the theme of love, festivals on the theme of gathering, festivals on the theme of entertainment and competition, etc.

The origination of festivals had the characteristic of “pure fabrication” but was not meaningless and causeless. We can always find the origins of festivals and the reasons why they can be inherited in the physical geography, history, culture, political system and economic mode of festival celebrators. Festivals revive, explain and inherit man’s past, shape, interpret and maintain man’s present, and at the same time herald, inspire and create man’s future. Try to imagine how insipid man’s life would be in the even, indistinctive and continuous absolute stream of time without the

creative and unique cultural time intervals of festivals. In man's life, they contribute to man's colorful cultural world like a string of beads connected by time and a skeleton supporting daily life. Without festivals, man would lack much spirit and interest. As scholar Liu Dong says, "Life lacking celebration of festivals is not civilized life, and a civilization having lost celebration of festivals is certainly a lost civilization."

China is a major country of festivals. In the long history, vast territory and diversified ecology, various Chinese ethnic groups created, inherited and developed the diversified culture of festivals. How many festivals does China have? There is no exact number. The saying "important festivals come every three days and common celebrations come every day" vividly reflects the numerous Chinese festivals. These festivals are stages epitomizing Chinese culture and its important components. Various elements of Chinese culture such as myths, legends, religions, rites, traditional Chinese opera, music, dancing, foods and drinks, arts and crafts are inseparable from festivals. They carry the Chinese nation's historical memories, cultural creations, social mechanisms and joys of life. In festivals, people satisfy their sensual needs, strengthen group recognition, realize multiplication of ethnic groups, and look for mental peace and spiritual solace.

In modern times, the lineage and status quo of Chinese festivals, just like the Chinese society in rapid development and drastic transformation, show unprecedented complexity and diversity. On the one hand, complaints such as "there is no festival any more" and "festivals are boring" are incessant, and on the other hand, there is an upsurge of "festivals" celebrated in the name of festivals seen everywhere. Traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-autumn Festival and some festivals of minority ethnic groups are carried forward in the context of China's development, but the spirit and content of festivals are transforming. Some traditional festivals such as the Shangsi Festival and Land God Festival are gradually shrinking for various reasons and are even reduced to records in old books or memories in hearts without any trace in real life. Though festivals such as the May 4 Youth Day, June 1 Children's Day and National Day emerged in the the modern development of the nation and state, they are deeply embedded in the Chinese people's time system. They are accustomed to looking forward to and celebrating these "new festivals." Western festivals such as Christmas and Valentine's Day are much favored by Chinese youth. Such a lineage of festivals mixing traditional and modern ones, global and regional ones, religious and mundane ones is presented to common people. In the course

of time and life, these festivals have become special moments in the Chinese people's daily life and constituted the Chinese people's life combining tension and relaxation.

Chinese Culture: Festivals is a superficial observation of current Chinese festivals. We select 21 festivals from the numerous festivals, and then proceed from the spirit of festivals to write about seven topics including Tenacious Memories, Holy Sacrifice, Mundane Revelry, Rhythm of Production, etc. While looking back at history, we focus more on the presentation of the current situation in the hope of giving a brief account of current Chinese festivals to readers. Of course, themes of festivals are usually comprehensive with compound characteristics. The themes of a certain festival include not only sacrifice, but also gathering, entertainment, etc. Therefore, this classification of themes is only a writing strategy adopted to highlight the features of a certain aspect of Chinese festivals.

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FESTIVE CHINA

Festivals are special cultural implications added in the stream of time by different ethnic groups relying on their fortunes. Every country's festival is closely related to the history and traditions of this country and group of people, reflecting unique cognitive and behavioral modes and having unique cultural value. To understand Chinese festivals, we should put them in the context of China's historical and cultural veins and development.