

英语文化背景丛书

中国文化背景

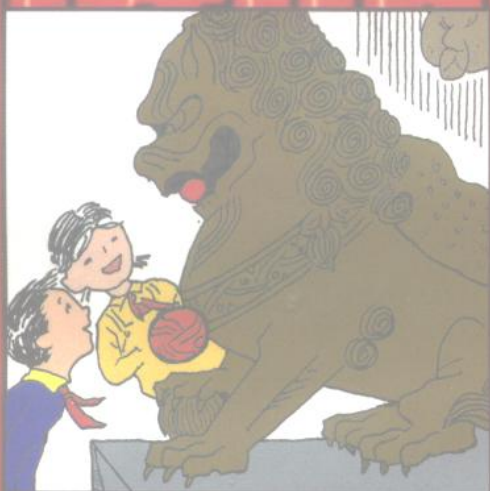
民俗风情阅读精选

Cultural Background of China

Folk Customs

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(附中文注释)

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编 者 的 话

学习英语是为了交流，这恐怕是大多数英语爱好者的共识。语言是文化的一种载体，语言的交流除传递一般的日常活动信息外，往往是文化之间的交流。所谓交流，实则是信息和文化的双向沟通。对于广大英语初学者和爱好者而言，了解西方的风土人情和文化习俗无疑是交流的必要基础。但是，仅仅如此还远远不够，熟悉我国文化的方方面面，并能运用英语准确表述，也是进行交流必不可少的条件。

一位大学英语教授曾对我讲过这样一件事，使我难以平静：一次，在学完有关圣诞节的课文之后，她要求学生用英语介绍中国的春节，学生面面相觑，想说的意思就在嘴边，却不知如何表述，甚至闹出了笑话。确实，由于学习语言的需要，现在绝大多数英语教材和阅读材料源出于英语原著，多为介绍西方世界的社会和文化背景。这种现象虽然无可非议，但似乎也同时应有更多面向我国英语初学者和爱好者的介绍中国历史、文化、经济发展的英语教材或读物，以满足提高学生表达本土文化能力的迫切需要。

事实上，学生对此是有强烈要求的。我台英语广播曾主要是对外广播，以向国外听众介绍博大精深的中国文化见长。英语广播自 80 年代中期开始同时对国内播出后，便逐渐拥有越来越多的中国听众。自此，我台英语广播不再仅仅是信息和娱乐的媒体，而且成为国内听众学习和提高英语的重要课堂，不少听众纷纷来信索要广播稿件。国内听众反应如此踊跃，这是我们始料未及的。我们亦酝酿将部分稿件整理成册，为听众提

供书面读物。

鉴此，当世界图书出版公司北京公司请我台编辑一套介绍中国文化背景的英语阅读材料时，我们认为这是非常有意义的工作，一拍即合。编者即从我台近两年播出的优秀稿件中，收集 52 篇汇编成册，以飨广大英语爱好者。在选编过程中，编者既注意保留原稿的风格，又进行了必要的补充和删改，以增强文章的可读性、知识性和趣味性。当读者学会了用简单的句子叙述春节的来历和北方元宵复杂的制作过程时，学会了用生动的语言解释为什么中国的国名和瓷器在英语中同为“china”时，学会了用流利的英语向外国友人讲述风趣幽默的中国成语故事时，定会尝到收获的喜悦。相信本书能使读者在轻松的阅读学习中，丰富中国文化知识，增强语言交流能力，领略英语语言的魅力。

本书在策划构思阶段，得到世界图书出版公司北京公司余康临副总编、中国国际广播电台英语台夏吉宣台长、中国国际广播电台乌尔都语部赵俏小姐的不吝指点和大力支持，在选题和编辑过程中，世图北京公司的孔彦小姐做了大量的联络和辅助工作，在此诚表谢意。

囿于编者本人的业务水平以及时间仓促等原因，本书无论在选编方面还是在英语表述方面，偏颇谬误恐在所难免，望广大读者指正为感。

主 编

一九九七年九月

目 次

Contents

一、传统节日/Traditional Festivals

1. 春节 (上、下)
Spring Festival (Part 1&2) 2
2. 元宵节 (上、下)
Yuanxiao Festival (Part 1&2) 11
3. 清明节 (上、下)
Qingming Festival (Part 1&2) 19
4. 端午节 (上、下)
Duanwu Festival (Part 1&2) 29
5. 七夕情人节 (上、下)
Double-Seventh Day (Part 1&2) 40
6. 中秋节 (上、下)
Mid-Autumn Festival (Part 1&2) 50
7. 重阳节
Chongyang Festival 59
8. 腊八与八宝粥
Laba and the Eight-Treasure Porridge 64
9. 冬至 (上、下)
Winter Solstice (Part 1&2) 69

二、少数民族风情/Ethnic Minorities

1. 中国少数民族的名称
Names of China's Ethnic Minorities 80

2. 白族的三杯茶	
Three Cups of Tea—A Custom of the Bai	85
3. 傣族的泼水节 (上、下)	
Water-Splashing Festival of the Dais (Part 1&2)	90
4. 回族	
The Hui Nationality	100
5. 朝鲜族	
The Koreans	105
6. 黎族	
The Li Nationality	110
7. 傈僳族的刀杆节	
Lisu's Daogan Festival	115
8. 满族 (上、下)	
The Manchu Nationality (Part 1&2)	119
9. 蒙古族	
The Mongolians	128
10. 纳西族的摩梭人	
Mosuo People of the Naxi Nationality	133
11. 畲族	
The She Nationality	139
12. 今日西藏	
Tibet Today	143
13. 维吾尔族	
The Uygurs	148
14. 壮族	
The Zhuang Nationality	153
三、文化集锦/Cultural Gallery	
1. 中国人的姓名	
Chinese Names	160

2. 纸的发明	
Invention of Paper	166
3. 中国邮票史话	
A Review of Chinese Stamps	171
4. 华表	
The Huabiao	176
5. 中国古塔	
Chinese Pagodas	180
6. 中国瓷器	
A World of China	185
7. 中国的扇子	
Chinese Fans	190
8. 旗袍	
The Cheongsam	195
9. 红旗轿车再度奔驰	
“Red Flag” Speeds on Again	199
10. 民间艺术中的龙和虎	
Dragon and Tiger in Folk Art	204
11. 狮子——权力的象征	
The Lion—A Symbol of Power	210
12. 大熊猫的小花招	
Panda's Tricks	216
13. 十二生肖趣谈	
The 12 Animals Representing Years	220
14. 斗蟋蟀	
Cricket Fighting	225
15. 烹饪掌故	
Dishes and Their Stories	231
四、成语故事/Idioms and Their Stories	

1. 拔苗助长	
To Pull up the Seedlings to Help Them Grow	236
2. 杯弓蛇影	
Snake-like Reflection of a Bow in the Cup	239
3. 得过且过	
To Muddle Along While Circumstances Permit	242
4. 画蛇添足	
Draw a Snake and Add Feet to It	245
5. 刻舟求剑	
Trying to Find the Lost Sword by Marking the Boat	247
6. 口蜜腹剑	
Honey on One's Lips, Murder in One's Heart	250
7. 滥竽充数	
An Unqualified Yu Player Acting as a Stopgap	253
8. 两败俱伤	
Neither Side Wins and Both Sides Suffer	256
9. 请君入瓮	
To Pay Someone Back in His Own Coin	259
10. 守株待兔	
To Sit by a Tree Waiting for a Hare to Come	262
11. 熟能生巧	
Practice Makes Perfect	265
12. 贪小失大	
To Covet Small Gains Only to Incur Great Losses	268
13. 螳螂捕蝉，黄雀在后	
A Mantis Aiming at a Cicada Oblivious to an Oriole Behind Him	271
14. 自相矛盾	
Self-Contradictory	274

第 1 部分：传统节日

Part 1: Traditional Festivals

春 节 (上)

Spring Festival (Part 1)

I. 课文 Text

China's traditional festivals have evolved through the centuries from past major events. For instance, long ago when people had a bountiful harvest, they gathered and celebrated their good fortune with gala performances. When natural disasters struck, they offered sacrifices to the gods and their ancestors, hoping for a blessing. The change of the seasons, flowers in spring, and the bright moon in autumn could all arouse their longing for a more beautiful life. Thus, creative activities were held to signify these events. Gradually these activities developed into festivals.

The most important festival in China is the Spring Festival. It is said that the Spring Festival evolved from an activity known as the Winter Sacrifice. It was a custom practiced by the people of primitive society.

As the cold winter began to recede and the warm spring was about to begin, the people of an entire clan gathered together. They brought out their bounty from hunting, fishing and the field. They thanked the gods for the blessings of nature, including the mountains, rivers, the sun, moon and stars. They thanked their ancestors. Then they shared and enjoyed the sumptuous bounty of the land, sea, air and fields as they ate, danced and sang heartily.

In the beginning, their activity had no fixed date. But usually it

was held at the end of each winter. Gradually, through the years, it was celebrated at the end of the old year or the beginning of the new. With the changes and disintegration of primitive society, the form and content of the Winter Sacrifice also changed. Ultimately, it became a festival to bid farewell to the old year and welcome in the new year. So it came to be called the Spring Festival.

All the traditional festivals in China are based on the Chinese lunar calendar. The Spring Festival marks the beginning of the Chinese Lunar New Year. In Chinese, we also say *Guo Nian*, meaning keeping off the monster of *Nian*.

There are many legends about the origin of *Nian*. The most popular one is this. It is said that *Nian* was a fierce monster back in ancient times. It looked like a strong bull with a head like that of a lion. Usually the monster stayed deep in the mountains and caught and ate other beasts. But during the winter, it could not find enough food. So it came out of its mountain lair and entered villages to eat whatever it could catch. Villagers became very frightened and moved away to escape the ferocious monster. But later the people found that even though it was fierce, *Nian* was afraid of three things: the red color, a bright flame, and a loud noise. After learning this, they figured out how to prevent *Nian* from entering their villages.

Just before *Nian* came again, every household painted their door red and burned a fire in front of their door-ways. Besides, the people did not go to bed. Instead, they stayed up all night beating on things to make a loud noise. Ever since, *Nian* has never again come to the villages.

Thus, a tradition was established and the customs have been kept through the years. Later, the people found that bamboo could make a crackling sound when burned. In time, the noise of crackling bamboo

was replaced with bang of firecrackers. This is how the Chinese people began to set off firecrackers for the Spring Festival.

(By Dai Yirong)

II. 词汇 Vocabulary

festival	节日	fixed date	固定日期
evolve	演化, 发展	disintegration	解体
century	世纪, 百年	ultimately	最终地
a bountiful harvest	丰收	bid farewell to	道别, 告辞
fortune	好运	lunar calendar	阴历
gala performances	盛大的演出	legend	传说
	活动	origin	起源, 由来
sacrifices	祭品	fierce monster	凶残的怪物
ancestor	祖先	lair	兽穴
blessing	恩赐, 保佑	whatever	无论什么
arouse	唤起	escape	逃跑
long for	渴望	ferocious	凶猛的
signify	表明...重要性	even though	即使
primitive	原始的	figure out	领悟到
recede	退去	stay up	熬夜
be about to do sth	即将	crackling sound	劈啪暴烈声
clan	氏族, 部族	replace	替代
sumptuous bounty	丰盛的物品	firecracker	爆竹, 鞭炮

III. 练习 Exercises

A: 填空 Fill in the Blanks

lair, signify, evolved, farewell, disintegration, festivals, gala performances, lunar, firecrackers, monster, origin

1. The Spring Festival is said to have _____ from an activity known as the Winter Sacrifice.
2. People gathered and celebrated their good fortune with _____.
3. Creative activities were held to _____ all kinds of events. Gradually these activities developed into _____.
4. With the changes and _____ of primitive society, the form and content of the Winter Sacrifice also changed.
5. The Spring Festival, based on the Chinese _____ calendar, has become a festival to bid _____ to the old and welcome in the new year.
6. There are many legends about the _____ of *Nian*.
7. *Nian* was a fierce _____.
8. The monster would come out of its mountain _____ and enter villages to eat whatever it could catch.
9. In time, the noise of the crackling bamboo was replaced with the bang of _____.

B: 回答下列问题 Answer the Following Questions

1. What did the ancient people do when they had a harvest?
2. What did people do at the Winter Sacrifice?
3. Why did the Winter Sacrifice come to be called the Spring Festival?
4. Why is the Spring Festival also called *Guo Nian* in Chinese?
5. What were the three things that *Nian* was afraid of?
6. What did people do to frighten away the ferocious monster *Nian*?
7. What was the crackling sound of bamboo similar to?

春 节 (下)

Spring Festival (Part 2)

I. 课文 Text

Since the Spring Festival marks the first day of a brand new year, the first meal is rather important. People from north and south have different sayings about the food they eat on this special day.

In Northern China, people usually eat *Jiaozi* or dumplings shaped like a crescent moon. It is said that dumplings were first known in China some 1,600 years ago. Its Chinese pronunciation *Jiaozi* means midnight or the end and the beginning of time. According to historical records, people from both north and south ate dumplings on Chinese New Year's Day. Perhaps because Southern China produced more rice than any other area, gradually, southern people had many more other choices on New Year's Day.

In addition to *Jiaozi*, the most common foods for the first meal of the Spring Festival are noodles, New Year Cakes and *Tangtuan*, a kind of round sweet dumplings. Both the cakes and dumplings are made of glutinous rice flour.

In China, the noodle symbolizes longevity. The New Year Cake is called *Nian Gao* in Chinese. It conveys the hope of improvement in life year after year. The round sweet dumpling is a symbol of reunion.

To pay a New Year visit is an important event during the Spring Festival. In olden times, high-ranking officials would go to the court to

wish the emperor a Happy New Year. The entire clan would hold a ceremony. However, the most frequent visits were those between relatives and friends. This activity would continue for several days.

Beginning in the Song Dynasty in the tenth century, people began to send cards to express a New Year's greeting. At first, the sending of New Year's cards was limited to the circle of people in high positions. So it was also a way to show off one's social status. However, at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty in the 14th century, ordinary people also began to exchange cards. The practice continues today during the Spring Festival.

As for recreational activities during the Spring Festival, we can use two words to summarize: various and colorful. The Dragon Dance and Lion Dance are traditionally performed during the festival. The dances do not have to be performed by professionals. Sometimes the performers are farmers, street vendors or craftsmen.

Walking on stilts is another traditional performance-event popular in China, especially in the northern part of the country. According to the archives, our Chinese ancestors began using stilts to help them gather fruits from trees. This practical use of stilts gradually developed into a kind of folk dance. Today's skillful performers can perform truly amazing feats and extremely difficult movements on stilts. The professionals even put on dramas while walking about on stilts.

If you are not a stilt-walker yourself, or can not do a dragon or lion dance, never mind! During Spring Festival time, you can go to temple fairs and enjoy superb performances of the dances, stilt-walking and amazing acrobatic shows. You can also try and enjoy the many varieties of local snack foods.

Nowadays, most people in China's rural areas still hold to these traditional celebrations. However, as the pace of life continues to

quicken in the cities, urban residents have taken up new ways to celebrate the Chinese traditional New Year. For example, many city dwellers no longer bother to send out greeting cards. Instead, they use the telephone or pagers to convey greetings to relatives and friends. To travel during the New Year holidays is another fashionable trend. And what should be mentioned, too, is that for safety reason, firecrackers were banned in some large cities of China a few years ago, making the occasion much quieter than before.

It seems that all our traditions are facing new challenges. Maybe when the children of the next generation grow up, they can only learn about Chinese traditions from books.

(By Dai Yirong)

II. 词汇 Vocabulary

brand new	崭新的	be limited to	限于...范围之内
different sayings	不同的说法	show off	炫耀
crescent	月牙状的	social status	社会地位
historical records	历史记载	recreational	娱乐的
perhaps	大概	professional	专业人员
choice	选择	street vendor	街头小贩
New Year Cake	年糕	walking on stilts	踩高跷
sweet dumpling	元宵, 汤团	archive	档案
symbolize	象征, 代表	folk dance	民间舞蹈
longevity	长寿	truly amazing feats	实在是令人赞叹的技艺
convey	传达, 表达		
high-ranking	地位高的	put on dramas	表演, 演戏
entire	全体的	temple fair	庙会
ceremony	仪式	acrobatic show	杂技表演
frequent	频繁的	hold to	坚持