

CHINA - A BLEND OF THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN

PASSPORT TO UNDERSTANDING
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Dancers from Little Eagle Chinese Dance Academy at Global Education Center

Traditional Chinese Festivals are the life-blood of Chinese life and culture. It seems there is always some kind of celebration happening. Chinese celebrations are rich in tradition, history, great food, dazzling lights and flashy decorations! Chinese festivals are based in the lunar calendar so the exact dates will vary from year to year in our Western Calendar.

CHINESE NEW YEAR CUSTOMS

Lion Dance

Dragon Dance

Lantern Festival

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The Lantern Festival marks the end of the Chinese New Year festivities with the first full moon of the year. On this brightly lit night, thousands of lanterns line the streets, hung from homes and storefronts, setting the stage for the processions and colorful performances to end the festivities.

Chinese New Year - Lion Dance



It is an ancient tradition to perform the Lion Dance during the Chinese New Year to scare off any evil spirits and attract good luck. Performers mimic a lion's movements in a lion costume to bring good luck and fortune. The lion dance is usually performed during the Chinese New Year and other Chinese traditional, cultural and religious festivals. It may also be performed at important occasions such as business openings, special celebrations or wedding ceremonies, or may be used to honor special guests by the Chinese communities. The lion dance is sometimes confused with the Dragon Dance, also performed at Chinese New Year and other special occasions. A lion is operated by two dancers and has a tail, while the dragon is much longer, requires many people to operate, and often involves people holding sticks to carry the dragon.

There are two main forms of the Chinese lion dance, the Northern Lion and the Southern Lion. Both forms are commonly found in China, in other parts of the world, it is primarily the South Lion that dominates. The Southern Lion consists of three styles, Hok San, Fut San and Fut Hok (Fok Hok or Fo He). Versions of the lion dance are also found in Japan, Korea, Tibet and Vietnam. Another form of lion dance exists in Indonesian culture, but it may be of a different tradition.

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Chinese New Year - Dragon Dance

The Dragon Dance is the culminating event in Chinese New Year parades. The parades start on New Year's Day and continue for the next fifteen days until the end of the festivities with the Lantern Festival. The dragon represents wisdom, power, and wealth and is the highlight of New Year festivities. Many believe that performing the dragon dance on New Year's Day scares away evil spirits and bad luck. During the dance, a dozen or so performers hold the dragon up on poles. They raise and lower the Dragon making him "dance" as they wind through the large gatherings to the sounds of horns, drums and gongs.

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The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac

The Chinese Zodiac consists of twelve signs and is determined by the Chinese Lunar Calendar. It is based on the cycles of the moon, unlike our western calendar which is based on the solar cycle. In Chinese astrology, there are 12 Chinese Zodiac signs. Because the moon's cycle repeats itself every 12 years, there are 12 animals in the Chinese Horoscope - one for each year of the lunar cycle. The origins of the Chinese Zodiac go back a few thousand years. According to myths, a long time ago, Buddha decided to call all the animals on earth, but only twelve came:

1. the Rat
2. the Ox
3. the Tiger
4. the Rabbit
5. the Dragon
6. the Snake



7. the Horse
8. the Goat or Sheep
9. the Monkey
10. the Rooster
11. the Dog
12. the Pig

He assigned each animal a year on the cycle affirming that children born in that year would acquire the personality traits of the animal assigned to that year. In order to decide their order in the Chinese Zodiac cycle, the animals held a very exciting race. The first one to cross the river would be granted the first year, the second to come in would be the second animal in the cycle, and so on. The strong, hardworking Ox was in the lead. Suddenly, the clever Rat, jumped on the Ox's back; he did not even feel the little thing getting a free ride. At the last second before reaching shore, the Rat jumped on land, winning the race! The Ox came in second, the Tiger third, and so it went... the happy-go-lucky Pig took his time and came in last... and the Chinese Zodiac and its twelve signs were born.

New Year Traditions - Chinese Firecrackers



The earliest firecrackers were created by Chinese craftsmen who actually invented gunpowder. Strings of firecrackers are lit for Chinese New Year celebrations. The decorative firecracker hangings are decorated with the Chinese character Fu, which means Good Luck, on top and many firecrackers below decorated with Chinese characters for Good Luck and Good Fortune.

New Year Red Envelopes



These decorative envelopes are used during Chinese New Year, graduations, weddings, birthdays and other special occasions for giving gifts of “lucky money.”

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Family Life in China

Chinese families have always lived very closely together. It is not uncommon to find several generations of the same family sharing a home. The grandparents typically move in with the children and grandchildren and are an invaluable asset for the younger couples in taking care of children during the pre-school years while both mother and father work. In turn, the grandparents are cared for in their old age by their children and grandchildren.

That is why, traditionally, it used to be essential for Chinese to have a male heir, as the family of the first son would be the one assuming the responsibility for taking care of the parents. This was very important due to the lack of a safety net for elderly people; there was no such thing as nursing homes or Social Security in China.

Although trends are towards the younger generations opting to move further away or to the cities in search for better jobs and careers, the strong family ties and reverence to the ancestors still remain. You can see a massive migration during the major Chinese festivals which are always celebrated as big family affairs as everyone is trying to get home during these periods.

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China's People and Ethnic Minorities

People born in China with at least one parent of Chinese descent are considered Chinese nationals. There are about fifty ethnic groups in China; however, 93 per cent of the people are from the Han Chinese group. China's ethnic minorities congregate mainly in the South, West, and North of the country. Each of these ethnic groups has its own set of customs, language, and artistic and cultural traditions.

In the South, the Zhuang is the largest minority group with over 15 million people. They live mainly in the Autonomous Region of Guangxi and are known for their colorful festivals and beautiful handicrafts.

The South-West is home to the largest number of minorities, including the Tibetans in the Tibetan Plateau and the Bai people in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Hunan Provinces.

In the North-West, minorities that inhabit this area are mostly Islamic. Their territories are mainly desert and mountains. The dominant minority here are the Uighur, also known for their horsemanship are the Kazakhs.

The North-East is home to the Mongols and the Manchus.

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Chinese Ethnic Minorities

A map of some of the larger groups in various parts of China



Uighur

Kazakh



Zhuang

Manchu

Mongolian

Tibetan



Bai



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Mandarin Dress (Qipao or Cheongsam) is a traditional style crafted in silk that is still popular for traditional dress for Chinese festivals and other festive occasions.



Mandarin dragon suit is of a traditional design, worn for both play time and night time.

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Traditional Chinese Dance

Traditional Dancing Handkerchief is used for folk dances from China, often combined with fans for specific dances.



Traditional Silk Dancing Fans are used for both the traditional Chinese fan dance as well as other folk dances.



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Chinese Traditional Music

While China has many beautiful stringed instruments, it also has a history of percussion, much of which is played at Chinese New Year time and at other festivals.



Domroo Drum or The Peddler Drum is a well-known musical instrument throughout Asia, having been used since ancient times. Stories claim that they were used to call women from their homes to see the wares of the peddler who was passing through town. Almost every culture throughout history has had some version of this fun little drum. When spun from side to side, the beads hit the drumhead to make it resound.



Chinese Traditional Drum is a small version of many different drums played throughout China, often painted red or intricately designed with colorful images, such as dragons.

www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/arts/chinese-music

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Chinese Peking Opera

Chinese opera together with Greek tragic-comedy and Indian Sanskrit Opera are the three oldest dramatic art forms in the world. During the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907), the Emperor Taizong established an opera school with the poetic name Liyuan (Pear Garden). From that time on, performers of Chinese opera were referred to as 'disciples of the pear garden'. Since the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368) it has been encouraged by court officials and emperors and has become a traditional art form. During the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911), it became fashionable among ordinary people.

One of the distinctions of Chinese Opera is the different styles of facial make-up, which is one of the highlights and requires distinctive techniques of painting. Exaggerated designs are painted on each performer's face to symbolize a character's personality, role, and fate. Audiences who are familiar with opera can know the story by observing the facial painting as well as the costumes. Generally, a red face represents loyalty and bravery; a black face, valor; yellow and white faces, duplicity; and golden and silver faces, mystery. Besides color, lines also function as symbols. For example, a figure can be painted either all white on his face, or just around the nose. The larger the white area painted, the more viperous the role.

www.chinatravelguide.com/intro/arts/chinese-opera

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Chinese Paper Making and Writing (Calligraphy)

Paper Making

The Chinese were one of the first inventors of paper, which was originally made from tree bark, hemp and rags. Bamboo pulp was added later, as was rice pulp. Traditional methods of creating paper are still used today.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy is a beautiful form of writing that is regarded highly as an art form. Before the invention of printing machines, all books and other manuscripts had to be copied by hand by writing masters, who take great pride in the beauty of their work.



Chinese Paper-Cut



Paper cutting is a very distinctive folk art form in China, dating back to the 6th century. Paper and scissors are used to cut intricate scenes of daily life with amazing realism and detail. The main supplies are simple: paper and scissors, sometimes an engraving knife, and talented craftspeople who are remarkably good at cutting themes of daily life as well as nature. Paper cutting is unique, some of them with three-dimensional scenes, and extremely difficult to master. Many paper cuttings express specific wishes and messages, often given to newlyweds or birthday celebrants. The paper cutting in this box represents the animals of the Chinese Zodiac.

www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/arts/paper_cut

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Abacus or Suanpan

The abacus, or suanpan, meaning counting tray, is a calculating tool that was used for mathematics in China and other countries centuries before the adoption of the written numeral system used today. The exact origin of the abacus is unknown, but it is believed to have been used in China as early as 2nd Century BC. Today, abaci are often constructed as a bamboo frame with beads sliding on wires, but originally they were beans or stones moved in grooves in sand or on tablets of wood, stone, or metal. Students in China and other nations are still taught to use the abacus in addition to calculators for mathematical functions from addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to more complex functions such as square root and cube root.



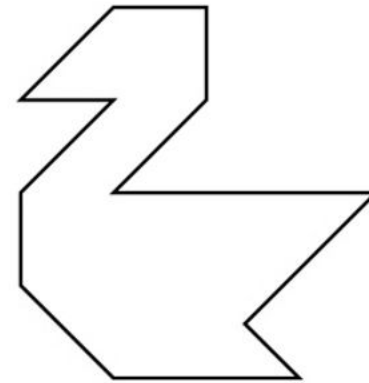
Tangram Puzzles

Tangram is China's most famous puzzle. Its Chinese name is qiqiao ban, meaning "seven ingenious pieces." It consists of seven flat pieces and a collection of simple outline diagrams or silhouettes. The pieces—which can be arranged to form a square—consist of two large triangles, one medium triangle, two small triangles, one square, and one parallelogram. They can be made of wood, ivory, metal or some other material. The diagrams can be pictures of objects, landscapes, animals, or even human figures in various positions. The objective of the puzzle is to place all seven pieces on a flat surface (without any pieces overlapping) to form the same shape as one of the diagrams.

Many Chinese scholars believe the roots of the tangram puzzle date back to the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), when Huang Bosi (1079–1118) invented a set of rectangular tables and a collection of diagrams showing how the tables could be arranged in a variety of configurations to seat guests at banquets. There were seven tables in the set, and they were made in three different lengths.

www.chinesepuzzles.com

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Far Out Facts & Chinese Inventions

Being one of the world's oldest continuous cultures, the Chinese are credited with inventing many of the items we use today, some of them over a thousand years before the items were "discovered" by the rest of the world. Many of these inventions were also created in Africa at around the same time, another part of the world with ancient, creative and inventive cultures.

Fireworks (over 700 years old)
Playing cards (over 1,000 years old)
Paper money (over 1,200 years old)
Fishing reel (over 1,700 years old)
Wheelbarrow (over 2,000 years old)
Parachute (over 2,100 years old)
Paper (over 2,200 years old)
Kite (over 2,300 years old)
Umbrella (over 2,300 years old)

Ancient Chinese Coins



Chinese Games and Toys



Jian Zi is a traditional Chinese national sport in which players try to keep a heavily weighted shuttlecock in the air without using their hands but by using their bodies. The primary source of Jian Zi is based on an ancient Chinese game called Cuju from the Han dynasty 2000 years ago. It is played both competitively on a badminton type court as well as artistically where players gather in a circle and try to keep the shuttlecock in the air, showing off their various skills in keeping it in the air.



Chinese YoYo is a bamboo "empty bell" made of two round wooden ends connected in the middle by a hollow piece of wood. It can be traced back to the Ming Dynasty (1386 and 1644 AD) and remains a popular toy today as well as an important piece of performance art, especially at street festivals, and is a reminder of Chinese traditions.

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Chinese Health Balls

Chinese health balls date back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The balls are used to activate pressure points in the hands, leading to a multitude of health benefits. Each health ball is hollow and has internal chiming plates. The chiming creates vibrations that help to activate acupressure points and reduce stress.



Chinese Tea and Rice



Tea is grown in 4 regions in southern China



China is the world's top producer and consumer of rice

