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TRADITIONAL CHINESE FESTIVALS Habibe Gök168297103 Translation and Cultural Studies Institute of Social Sciences Gazi University Chinese Culture Submitted To: Assoc. Prof.

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FESTIVALS China was founded on a vastland has a long history dates back to centuries Before Christ. From the past to present, a lot of festivals have accumulated in China. Chinese festivals constitute an essential part of Chinese culture and they are rich in history and activities to do during celebrations of them. Chinese festivals have begun to be formed during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). They were mostly related to religious beliefs and legends at that time.

However, after Qin Dynasty and Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), when the most of the festivals evolved and time and the way of celebrations were determined, traditional festivals started to be independent from most of religious beliefs and myths or legends during Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) except for the rituals which are left behind as remains of religious beliefs and are observed by people as part of Chinese culture. Chinese festivals are often celebrated according to lunar calendar which is divided into 24 seasonal points. This calendar is the main determiner in deciding when the accurate time of the festivals to celebrate them. Moreover, lunar calendar indicate seasons and guide farmers for agricultural activities. This calendar was invented in Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC) (China Internet Information Centre, 2017) SPRING FESTIVAL (Chunjie) The history of this nationwide celebrated festival goes back to the Reign of Han Wudi (141-87

BC). It is accepted as the beginning of the New Year and celebrated by especially the Han and other ethnicities.

The importance of Chunjie is appreciated by all people from children to elders by doing activities before the eve and during 16 days when the festival has celebrated. The time changes every year, but it generally occurs between January 21 and February 19 which coincides with the first day of the first month in the lunar year. In Chinese zodiac, each year is connected with an animal sign.

Chinese acknowledge that a year begins and ends with this festival instead of January 1, so the year is called as Chinese New Year (Fang, H., 2015, p. 1). Before the festival, people do some activities to prepare themselves for the atmosphere of the festival and all members of a Chinese family get involved in these activities. Each activity carries a special meaning according to traditional Chinese beliefs. These activities consist of spring cleaning of buildings and homes, shopping, cooking traditional foods which are unique to the spring festival, decorating the houses, buildings and streets with special posters and red items such as red lanterns and couplets.

Since the colour of red is thought as lucky colour in Chinese culture, everywhere is decorated by hanging red lanterns and other items, even children carry red lanterns while walking on streets before and during the Spring Festival. People clean everywhere to get rid of the remains and sad memories of the past year and welcome the New Year with a fresh beginning. The contents of posters comprises of good wishes and fortune or blessings against evils and some heroic characters from Chinese legends to

protect themselves and their beloved ones. Huawen Fang gave example of “ a child carrying gold ingots or riding on the back of a big carp” for the poster wishing fortune (2015, p. 1).

For the reason that all shops are closed during the festival, as their owners and workers go to their hometowns to reunite with their family to celebrate the festival, people have to store food before the festival to cook traditional food on the first day. This “ reunion dinner” is eaten around round tables and all generations of a family gather and enjoy it. There are some foods such as dumplings, fish and spring rolls which mean lucky in Chinese language must exist in dinner.

People do not sleep until the first lights of the first day and watch the traditional New Year show on television, which is a custom. In some cities, people can enjoy traditional Chinese performances such as lion and dragon dances. Furthermore, Chinese exchange gifts are packaged by red papers, but it is commonly accepted that elder people give the red envelopes including money to children and only employers can deliver these red envelopes to their workers among adults (Fang, H., 2015, p. 2). **LANTERN FESTIVAL** On the 15th day of the first month in Chinese lunar calendar, the Lantern Festival is celebrated by Chinese, which is usually between February 5 and March 7 in Gregorian calendar. At the same time, it is the last day of Chunjie (Spring Festival).

The other name of it is “ the small new year”. Besides being the 15th day of the first month, this day is the first full moon day and symbolizes wholeness of family. Although the festival is full of activities, lanterns have the greatest

part of it. Red lanterns are hung around buildings and streets, while people carry lanterns in various shapes and designs called by traditional names like “Nezha on the Sea”, “The Monkey King”, “The Pig”, and “The Friar” (Fang, H., 2015, p.

4). Huawen Fang (2015) stated that “‘Lantern play’ on the Lantern Festival is a custom passed down from the Tang Dynasty. On this day, people will take to the streets as soon as it is dark, with all lanterns coming together to make a Milky Way on land.” (p. 4).

Since another activity of this festival, solving lantern riddles can be enjoyed by Chinese (Huawen, F., 2015, p. 5). The major food item for the Lantern Festival is yuanxiao, or tangyuan. It is made of sticky rice, in the form of balls containing fillings. Yuanxiao has few variations in the north and south, usually containing such fillings as black sesame, sugar, haw, etc. But in the south people are also fond of meat fillings.

Nowadays the contents of yuanxiao are getting richer, with a greater variety of fillings to cater for different tastes (Huawen, 2015, p. 5)

QINGMING FESTIVAL Qingming festival, or in other names as “Tomb Sweeping Day” and “Pure Brightness” generally celebrated on 4th or 5th April. The celebration time of it coincides with the second point of 24 seasonal points in Chinese calendar. It is time both to commemorate the ancestors of people by visiting and cleaning their tomb and to go outside to appreciate the coming of spring by flying kites.

Thus, it is thought as harmony of sadness and happiness. People visit graves of their ancestors and relatives to show their respect to them, serve

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cold food, and clean their tombs to honour their souls. Because of the reason that burning fire on this day and following three days, they have to cook their meals before these days or prepare cold foods to eat and serve to their ancestors. These following days are named as Hanshi (Cold Food) Festival. Flying kites is not unique to this festival, but the difference is flying them all day and night during the festival. During this festival, Chinese hang willow branches on doors to protect themselves from ghosts and bad souls (Huawen, 2015, p.

6). DRAGONBOAT FESTIVAL (DUANWU) Dragon Boat Festival also called as Duanwu which means double fifth, since it is celebrated on the fifth day of fifth month of Chinese lunar calendar. Hence, a lot of activities are related to “ five” are done during this festival such as wowing five threads and hanging them on children’s neck to protect them from evil, and five kinds of plants are placed on doors or kept in rooms against bad souls.

Additionally, five foods and drinks related with “ yellow” in Chinese name like cucumber, yellow croakers, yellow wine and yolks of salted duck eggs are consumed by people (Huawen, 2015, p. 7). The history of this festival is based on a legend. It is believed that this day is celebrated in honour of Qu Yuan (about 340BC–about 278 BC), a patriotic poet of the ancient Chu State, present-day Hunan and Hubei provinces.

Qu drowned himself in the Miluo River for being helpless in saving his state from corrupt officials. On hearing the news, the local people tried their best to find his body, but failed. The fleeting boats on the water in the search were believed to have started what later came to be known as the custom of

dragon-boat races (Huawen, 2015, p. 7). Dragon head shaped with a beard and open mouth boats are used in these races during this festival. Another act which is done during this festival is placing mugwort leaves outdoors to protect themselves from evils.

The traditional food of this festival is Zongzi which is wrapped in triangle or rectangular shapes in bamboo or reed leaves and contains rice. It is believed that zongzi was thrown away by people into the river to protect the corpse of Qu from fish which might eat his body (Huawen, 2015, p. 7). MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL (MOON FESTIVAL) In ancient times of China, people were used to worship moon.

During Tang Dynasty, moon worship began as a custom and people started to enjoy this day which is held on the 15th day of the eighth month according to Chinese lunar calendar. When the moon becomes full and bright in the sky, families come together and eat moon cakes, fruits and other offerings and watch the moon (Huawen, 2015, p. 9). Taste of moon cake might be sweet, spicy and salty changing according to a variety of ingredients that it contains, such as bean paste, fruits, sugar, vegetables, milk products and seafood (Huawen, 2015, p. 9). Moon cake has a long history. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367), a rebel leader who attempted to gather forces to overthrow the ruling Mongolians, had moon cakes sent to the common people, with each cake containing a slip of paper on which was written: "Let's kill the Mongols on the 15th day of the 8th month". Then, on that day, all the people rose in revolt and successfully overthrew the Mongolian rulers.

And it is since then that this custom has been passed down (Huawen, 2015, p. 10). REFERENCES Huawen, F. (2015). Traditional Chinese Folk Customs. (Weihua Zhang and Zhengming Du, Trans.). Lady Stephenson Library, Festival Customs (pp.

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