

Introduction who  
suggested that they  
prepare rice balls



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## **Introduction**

The Lantern festival that is also known as Shangyuan Festival. A celebration takes place on the 15th of the first month in the Chinese lunar calendar. The festival is celebrated to mark the first full moon night in the lunar year and it symbolizes the return of spring.

The festival brings together family members. During the festival the people light up fancy lanterns and eat rice balls to mark the celebrations. The celebration is very colorful as the people enjoy family reunions and the return of full moon. There are various activities during the festival however, the most important event during the Lantern festival is watching the lanterns and eating rice balls.

## **Rice balls**

The main food eaten at the Lantern festival is the rice ball.

In North China the rice balls are called Yuanxiao while in the South they are called Tangyuan. The rice balls have been eaten by the Chinese people for a long time from the time of the Han and Song dynasties. The rice balls are made from rice flour and can have other ingredients added too. For instance, sugar, nut lets, sesame, walnuts and meat are used to stuff the rice balls. The ingredients are sweetened because they symbolize happy futures for the people.

## **Significance of the rice balls**

The rice balls are shaped into round shapes or ball shapes hence their name. they are made round in the shape of the full moon. They are made from rice flour, which is stuffed with various fillings.

There are different ways of making the rice balls, which differ with regions and the fillings, used. hus, some rice balls have fillings while others do not furthermore different cooking methods are used such as frying, boiling or steaming and each of the cooking methods used gives the rice balls unique tastes. Eating rice balls is an essential part of the Lantern festival.

The rice balls are made in round shapes, which symbolize happiness, reunion and harmony. Family members gather to eat the rice balls on the night of the celebration as they appreciate the full moon (Simonds, Swartz and Children’s Museum of Boston 27). During the making of the rice balls, the women involved in the process engage in positive talk and good things. They did so to ensure that “ only good luck would go into making the balls and anyone who ate them would have prosperity” (Podhaski 107).

## **Stories associated with the lantern festival**

Moreover, the rice balls are an essential component of the Lantern festival because they are the reason why the fire goddess spared the city of Chang’an. The city had a minister called Dongfang Shuo who was an extraordinary man and could foretell the future.

His subjects admired him greatly. He predicted that the city would be destroyed on the sixteenth day of the first lunar month through a terrible

fire. Being an extra ordinary man, he devised a plan to try to save his city from destruction. On the set day, the fire goddess arrived on a donkey back to accomplish her mission as per the orders of the Jade Emperor. Dongfang had sent old men to persuade the Fire goddess to change her mind but even though she was touched by the wailings of the old men, she could not go against her Emperor. However, she gave copies of the order to the Emperor so that he could try to save the city.

The emperor consulted Dongfang who suggested that they prepare rice balls as he had heard that the fire goddess loved the sweet rice powder. He suggested that everyone prepare the rice balls, light lanterns throughout the city, and prays for the salvation of the city. Moreover, fireworks were to be lit so that they could fool the Jade Emperor that the city had been set on fire.

People made rice balls lit lanterns and fireworks as the courts maid, Yuan Xiao who was very good in making rice balls made some very sweet ones for the fire goddess. She presented the rice balls personally to the fire goddess who loved them very much. The fire goddess rewarded Yuan Xiao by reuniting her with her long lost family.

The Jade emperor saw the fireworks and he was pleased to see that his orders had been obeyed. It was a successful conclusion for the city of Chang'an as it was saved (Simonds et al 27). The other story associated with the lantern festival was that it originated from the worship of Buddha.

Buddhism flourished during the Han dynasty 206 BC and 220 BC in china, emperor Mingdi gave an order that lanterns were to be lit in order to show respect for the Buddha during the 15th day of the first month in the lunar

calendar, and hence the lantern festival was born. Moreover, Buddha was believed to have the ability to dispel darkness.

The other legend regarding the lantern festival involves Taoism. Tainguan a Taoist god is associated with good luck and has his birthday on the 15th of the first lunar month. The people would celebrate his birthday with all sorts of entertainment because he loved entertainment and during the celebrations, the people would pray to be awarded with good fortune (Lantern Festival 1).

## **Lanterns**

The lanterns have evolved over time in terms of their shape and materials used to make them. Earlier there were silk lanterns, sheepskin lanterns and orange lanterns. Today there are sophisticated lanterns with the advancement in technology. The lanterns are made into various shapes such as animal shapes such as rabbits and dragon some of the lanterns are electronically powered.

The lanterns are inscribed with messages of good will. The lanterns are also used for riddle games in which papers with riddles are hung on the lanterns and people take turns to try to solve the riddles.

## **Significance of the lanterns**

The lanterns are lit to guide the ancestors' spirits to come home and later go back to the beyond after the celebrations are over. During the festival ordinary people would be invited to come and watch the display of fireworks and lanterns. The period of the festival was also a holiday hence people

could enjoy coming together without worrying about going to work. Children who dress up and go around singing and dancing carry the lanterns.

They also take the lanterns made by their parents to school to their teachers who lights the candle inside the lanterns. Lighting the candle in the lanterns is very important as it symbolizes that the students will shine in their studies just as the lanterns shine (Roy 243).

## **Conclusion**

Finally, the lantern festival has continued to grow in leaps and bounds since its inception thousands of years ago. The festival is popular with the Chinese people living in china and those abroad. The festival displays the Chinese tradition and culture, as people get busy with festivities during the day.

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