

UNIT 2 TOPIC 3 TRADITIONAL CHINESE FESTIVALS

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 2 Topic 3 and watch some videos on Chinese festivals to gain some basic understanding of traditional Chinese festivals and their origins.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 3 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the origin, cultural background and significance of some Chinese festivals. It will also equip them with the ability to compare these festivals with some Western festivals, such as Christmas and Easter.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Have your students work in pairs to design a questionnaire that can be used to interview a Chinese about his religion and beliefs.

Activity 2

Have your students visit the website of a famous temple in China to gather information to answer these questions:

- A. How many people visit this temple each year?
- B. What kind of people go to a temple? Why do they do so?
- C. Why do those people burn incense sticks?

Then, have them describe the photo below:



Tiger@西北, commons.wikimedia.org, CC BY-SA 3.0

Activity 3

Have your students gather information on the Hungry Ghost Festival in China and prepare some notes for a discussion comparing the concept of ghosts in Chinese and Western cultures.

You may use this as reference:

1. The Hungry Ghost Festival is
 - known as the Zhongyuan Festival (中元节) to the Daoists and as Yulanpen Festival (盂兰盆会) to the Buddhists.
 - celebrated for the whole of the Seventh Lunar Month, which is usually July or August in the Western calendar, but has the main celebrations occurring on the 15th day, and on the 14th day in Southern China, where people started celebrating it a day earlier during a long period of war to avoid being attacked by their enemies on the 15th.
 - one of several traditional festivals in China during which people worship their ancestors; other such festivals are the Spring Festival, Qingming Festival and Double Ninth Festival (重阳节).
 - considered to be more important than the Qingming Festival in Jiangxi and Hunan Provinces.
2. During the Hungry Ghost Festival,
 - the Chinese perform special ceremonies (with the main one usually held at dusk) to avoid incurring the wrath of the wandering ghosts believed to have been released from Hell on the first day of the Seventh Lunar Month.
 - they put the family's ancestral tablets (usually together with their painted portraits or photographs) on a table, burn incense and make food offerings thrice a day; they will also kowtow in front of the tablets to ask their ancestors for their forgiveness for their wrongdoings or for blessings for actions they are going to undertake.
 - these offerings of food are laid out on plates as the Chinese believe these wandering ghosts would be hungry after two weeks of activity since being released and so would eat from the plates.
 - the Chinese will also feast during the night of the 15th day, and might leave a seat empty for the spirit of an ancestor.
3. Comparing the Hungry Ghost Festival and Halloween:
 - The Hungry Ghost Festival comes at a time of the year when the moon is full nearing the end of summer. In many ways, it is reminiscent of Halloween or the Night of the Dead in Western countries.
 - Cultures from Europe to China have traditional days of the dead or ghosts which are thousands of years old; these days were part of tribal folk religions before the advent of Christianity in Europe and of Buddhism in Asia.
 - In Britain, Halloween originated from the traditional holiday of the Celts who believed that the last day of October was "the day of the dead" or "the ghost day" when ghosts crossed over the boundary between the living and the dead. The Chinese belief is similar.
 - The Chinese believe that during the Seventh Lunar Month and especially on the night of the full moon, a bridge is formed between the dead and the living, such that the dead can come into the mortal world; they have to thus take precautions by performing ceremonies or traditional rites to protect themselves from attacks by the ghosts; they also have to honour and worship their ancestors or other dead people; it is believed that the ghosts of dead people can help and protect them.

Activity 4

Have your students write their own ghost stories and share them in class.

Activity 5

People around the world have been worshipping the sun for a long time. Have your students research some stories about the sun from different cultures and then present them in class.

Activity 6

Have your students compare the story *Nü Wa Mends the Sky* with the Western story of how God created human beings.

Then have them discuss these questions:

- A. What are the similarities in the stories?
- B. What are the differences in the stories? What do these differences show?
- C. What does Nü Wa represent?
- D. What does Xia Wa represent?

You may use this as reference:

According to the Bible, on Day 6 of Genesis, God created man and animals.

"And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. God came and talked to them. God told them they could eat fruit from all the trees in the garden except one. It was the tree of good and evil. If they ate from that tree, they would know good from bad and would then have to leave the garden.

One day, Satan the Devil came to the garden and told Eve she should eat the fruit from the tree of good and evil to make her wise. Eve chose to eat the fruit and asked Adam to eat it too.

Then God came to see Adam and Eve but they ran away and hid from Him as they had disobeyed Him by eating the fruit from the tree of good and evil. God told them they had to leave the Garden of Eden.

After leaving the garden, Adam and Eve worked hard to get food. They grew older. They had children. Sometimes they were happy. Sometimes they were sad. They knew they would die someday.

God gave Adam and Eve commandments. He said they should pray to him. God told Adam to make sacrifices to him. To make a sacrifice, Adam killed an animal and burnt it on an altar of stone.

An angel came to Adam. He said Jesus would sacrifice his life for human beings someday. It would be his gift to human beings. The sacrifices helped Adam and Eve think about the sacrifice of Jesus.

Activity 7

Have your students research online and read up on the story of *Long* (Chinese dragon). Then show them the images below and have them discuss these questions:

- A. How was the Chinese dragon created?
- B. What does a Chinese dragon represent?
- C. What does a Western dragon represent?
- D. Should the dragon be regarded as a national symbol for the Chinese?
- E. Why do the Chinese call themselves descendants of the dragon?



LadyofHats, commons.wikimedia.org



Tomacco/iStock/Thinkstock

Activity 8

Ask your students to find out some aspects of at least 10 Chinese festivals and list them in a table like the one below.

Name of festival	Associated stories	Food	Celebrations	Time
Spring Festival	Nian, the monster	Fish and rice cakes	Lion dance	January to February

Activity 9

There are many gods in the Chinese culture. Have your students find out more information about different gods in the Chinese culture. An example is Lu Ban, the God of Builders. You may share this story about Lu Ban and have your students answer these questions:

- A. What have you learnt from Lu Ban?
 - B. Why are there so many different Gods of Fortune in Chinese myths?
 - C. Why do most of the gods in the Chinese culture come from a real person in history?
 - D. Why do the Chinese believe in gods?
- Lu Ban (鲁班, 507-440 BC) was a famous carpenter and inventor, a legendary figure in carpentry. He was also an outstanding civil engineer and craftsman. His real name was Gongshu Ban (公输班), but was more commonly known as Lu Ban (literally a citizen of the State of Lu by the name of Ban).
 - Lu Ban was born into a renowned artisan family. He worked in many building projects with the family and received rich practical experience from a young age.
 - According to the *Book of Ancients*, Lu Ban invented many notable tools which are still used by carpenters today. They include the square (a tool for measuring right angles), ink marker (a tool for drawing straight lines), saw (to cut through material, most often wood) and chisel (to cut or shape wood, stone, metal or other hard materials).
 - Lu Ban also created the cloud ladder (a mobile counterweighted siege ladder) for the State of Chu. It could be used to attack towns fortified with tall walls, as well as for grappling hooks and ram (boat implements used in naval warfare).
 - He also invented the flying wooden bird, believed to be the earliest prototype of the aeroplane, and made a wooden horse carriage, the earliest recorded form of an automobile.

Activity 10

Have your students research online the story *Da Yu Zhi Shui* (大禹治水). Ask them to write a story based on it and prepare a PowerPoint presentation. You may refer your students back to the suggested answer for Question 14 from the Workbook for Unit 2 Topic 2.

Activity 11

Have your students research the Chinese New Year and find out how people celebrate it. Ask them to list all the events starting from the 23rd of the preceding month to the 15th of the first month in the Lunar calendar:

Date	Events
23 rd of the 12 th month	小年, 祭灶
30 th of the 12 th month	除夕

Activity 12

Have your students interview their Chinese classmates or friends and find out how Chinese New Year is celebrated in Australia and China. Ask them to present their findings to the class.

Activity 13

Show your students the images of Chinese New Year celebrations below and have them talk about what they see.



Fuse/Thinkstock



bpperry/iStock/Thinkstock

Activity 14

Have your students gather information on how Children's Day is celebrated in China and compare it with their childhood in Australia. Then have them write a short article on this for their school magazine.

You may use this as reference:

1. In China, Children's Day

- is celebrated on 1 June, the same date as the International Children's Day; the State Council designated it a half-day holiday when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 and later changed it to a full-day one in 1956.
- is considered to be equivalent to Christmas, and is a time for children to enjoy and make merry as they are considered to be the future custodians of the country.

2. On Children's Day in China, children
 - get to visit all places of entertainment such as cinemas, parks and palaces for free, and even get to watch movies for free.
 - have parties and camping trips organised for them.
 - are pampered and showered with gifts, including red packets of money, by their parents, family members and family friends.
 - of civil servants receive small valuable gifts from the government.
 - indulge in all kinds of junk food, with main treats including cookies, cakes, spicy dried fish and chicken feet.
3. Establishment type of celebrations include
 - a large gathering held in Beijing, organised by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and attended by over 100 children from China's 56 ethnic groups; the gathering aims to let the children get to know one another and establish ties for cooperation in the future for the growth and prosperity of the nation.
 - parent-children activities organised and sponsored by the government and civic organisations to strengthen the bond between parents and their children.

Activity 15

Find and play a video clip about the Moon Festival on YouTube. Then show your students the images of the Moon Festival below and have them discuss what they know about it.



chinaview/iStock/Thinkstock



iStock.com/aiaikawa

Activity 16

Show your students the images below and have them describe what they see.



Perry Svensson/iStock Editorial/Thinkstock



iStock.com/Tomwang112

Activity 17

Ask your students to do Exercise 3 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

1. Tang, Sanmu (2012), *Celebrating Chinese Festivals: A Collection of Holiday Tales, Poems and Activities*. Shanghai Press.
2. Wei, Liming (2005), *Chinese Festivals*. Cambridge University Press.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Students are required to make an oral presentation on one Chinese festival.
3. Each student is required to write an article for a local magazine, comparing one Chinese festival with a Western one.
4. Each student is required to write a personal reflection of their experience in participating in either a Chinese or Western festival.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Why is the Spring Festival the most important festival for the Chinese? How do the Chinese celebrate this festival?

Students should consider these points:

The Spring Festival is important as

- It marks the beginning of the lunar year.
- It is a time for family reunion after a year of hard work (away from one another at times).
- It is a time to offer sacrifices to gods and pray for good fortune for the new year.

During this festival, people

- Stick couplets of auspicious writings on walls and doors to signify the arrival of good luck.
- Go to temples to pray to gods and offer food.
- Set off fireworks and perform or watch dragon and lion dances.
- Gather for family reunions and visit relatives, and offer one another good wishes.

2. Pair Work

With a partner, compare the Spring Festival with Christmas. Write down the similarities and differences in the beliefs and customs associated with the two festivals in the table below.

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the Spring Festival, the Chinese go to temples to pray to god; similarly, for Christmas, the Westerners go to churches to pray to god.• Whether it is the Spring Festival or Christmas, people have family reunions and also visit their relatives and friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the Spring Festival, the Chinese eat mainly fish and meat, while for Christmas, the Westerners eat mainly seafood and pudding.• Spring Festival decorations are usually calligraphic couplets of auspicious sayings and the character 福, as well as red lanterns; Christmas decorations are usually Christmas trees.

3. What are some of the customs associated with the Qingming festival? Why do the Chinese partake in these customs? What does it tell you about the Chinese?

Students should consider these points:

During the Qingming Festival, the Chinese

- Visit and tidy up the graves of their ancestors.

- Pay their respects to their ancestors with offerings of food and flowers.
- May also fly kites to send message to their ancestors.
- May also pluck soft willow branches and place them on gates and front doors, as they believe they will ward off evil spirits.

The Chinese take part in these activities because their family is the most important thing in life to them. They treat the dead as if they were still alive. This strengthens their family relationships.

4. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find out how the Chinese view life and death. Write down some key points.

Students should consider these points:

	Life	Death
Confucianism	Natural	Natural
Taoism	Immortal	Immortal
Buddhism	Reincarnation	Heaven or hell
Folk beliefs	Fate	Hell and ghost

5. Who was Qu Yuan and how did he come to be associated with the Dragon Boat Festival? How is this festival celebrated? What do you think is its significance? Is there a similar festival in the Western world?

Students should consider these points:

- Qu Yuan was a poet from the State of Chu during the Warring States Period.
- He drowned himself in the Miluo River after he was banished by the King of Chu.
- In a desperate attempt to save him, villagers carried rice dumplings (粽子) and went to the middle of the river in boats but it was too late.
- Beating drums and beating the water with their paddles, the villagers also threw the rice dumplings into the river as an offering to Qu Yuan's spirit and to lure the fish in the river away from his body.
- This event later became an official festival. Every year, dragon boat races are held and rice dumplings eaten to commemorate Qu Yuan and the patriotism he showed.

6. We have read the story of the Cowherd and the Weaving Girl. What traditional Chinese view on marriage does it reveal? What do you think of such a view? What do you think are some of the views the young in China hold of marriage? You may watch the television programme *If You Are The One* (非诚勿扰, Fēi Chéng Wù Rǎo) for some clues.

Students should consider these points:

- Marriages were arranged by parents.
- Marriage was not only a relationship between the couple but also between both families.
- The two families had to match up in social, financial and educational statuses.
- Once a woman was married, she belonged to her husband and his family for a lifetime; she was not allowed to remarry even after her husband died.

7. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, prepare a PowerPoint presentation on comparing the different views on marriage of the Chinese and Westerners.

Assess points as presented by your students.

8. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find and watch a video clip on the Mid-Autumn Festival on YouTube or any other video sharing website. How did the Chinese from ancient times view the sun and the moon? Explain briefly who Hou Yi and Chang E were and what they did. Why do the Chinese eat mooncakes during this festival?

Suggested video: *Introduction to Chinese Moon Festival*

Published by Steven Austin on 3 November, 2013

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrbPiYOjy_s

Students should consider these points:

- The ancient Chinese believed that everything in the world had two opposite forces existing in relation with each other. Called *Yin* and *Yang*, the two forces had to exist in tandem with each other for the world to function properly and for mankind to live well.
- “Male” forces were defined as *Yang*, symbolised by the sun, while “female” forces were considered *Yin* and symbolised by the moon. To keep heaven running smoothly, the emperor in ancient China had to maintain balance between the sun and the moon.
- Once there were ten suns in the sky and Hou Yi shot down nine of them and saved the earth and mankind. He was then given a magic pill to keep him immortal and his wife Chang E took it and flew to the moon.
- Eating mooncakes signifies keeping the family together as the round shape of the mooncake symbolises family reunion.

9. Internet Search

Choose a Chinese festival and find out how its original significance had changed over time.

Students may consider this festival:

- The Chong Yang Festival (重阳节) started as a Daoist festival in late Han Dynasty and became a festival during which people climbed mountains. It is now considered as a festival for elderly people, when younger people show respect to them.

10. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find out the types of food traditionally eaten during three of the key Chinese festivals you have learnt about and the reasons for eating them. Write them down in the table below and present it to your classmates.

Festival	Types of food eaten	Reasons for eating them
Spring Festival	Fish	To signify having abundant food every year
Dragon Boat Festival	Rice dumplings	To remember Qu Yuan the poet
Mid-Autumn Festival	Moon cakes	Family union

11. Pair Work

With a partner, interview a few Chinese families living in your country. Find out how they celebrate various Chinese festivals. Write down the differences, if any, between the customs they observe and those the Chinese in China observe.

Assess points as presented by your students.

12. Pair Work

With a partner, design a brochure for tourists, introducing them to the way people celebrate three of the key festivals in Australia or in the West.

Assess the work as presented by your students.

13. Pair Work

Compare Easter with Mid-Autumn Festival and find the similarities and differences between these two festivals.

Festival	Similarities	Differences
Easter	Bunny, reborn	Jesus Christ
Mid-Autumn Festival	Rabbit, reproduction	Chang E the Moon God

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible 8 September, 2020.