

THE MOON FESTIVAL

by Joshua Zhong, co-founder and President

The Moon Festival is one of the most celebrated traditional festivals in China. Like Thanksgiving in the U.S., the Moon Festival is about family reunion and celebration.

Chinese legend is that a long, long time ago there were ten suns in the sky. They created a massive drought and forced farmers to their knees begging for rain every day. A hero, Houyi, was moved by the farmers' cries and was determined to rescue them. He climbed to the highest mountain, Kunlunshan, and used his mighty bow to shoot down all the suns but one.

Later on, Houyi married a beautiful lady, Chang E (pronounced "er"). Wanting to be with her forever, Houyi asked the Mother God of Heaven for a bill of longevity. One day while Houyi was away, Chang E mistakenly took the longevity bill and was taken swiftly to the moon, unable to return to earth. Houyi fell into deep sorrow over the eternal separation and he cried to the moon, repeating Chang E's name. The Mother God of Heaven was moved by Houyi's love for his wife and cast a shadow of Chang E dancing on the moon. Houyi and the other people on earth were so pleased with Chang E's dance that they started to celebrate, asking for Chang E's blessing.

Throughout the years, people have adopted many different ways of celebrating the Moon Festival. The moon cake, a moon-shaped cake with sweet stuffing, became popular during the Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD). The moon cake baker engraves the love story of Houyi and Chang E's on each cake with elaborate decoration. The circular cake symbolizes family reunion and happiness. Today, giving moon cakes to your relatives and friends is a popular custom throughout China.

The Moon Festival is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth month according to the Chinese lunar calendar. It is therefore also called the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. It is believed that on this day the moon is the roundest and brightest of the year. As a result, the tides of the ocean and lakes are the highest and most spectacular. Tide watching has become a major festival activity of the Moon Festival. Families and friends camp by the lakes and seashore to enjoy the beauty of nature's power. Throughout Chinese history, many famous poems have been written about the Moon Festival and its high tides.

Moon watching, naturally, is another popular family activity on this day. People love to climb to the top of a mountain, take a boat ride to the middle of a lake, or stand on an ancient bridge to see the reflection of the moon upon the water. Having a picnic while watching the moon is a very romantic activity, especially for the young couples in China.

The Moon Festival also witnesses one of the busiest day of weddings in China. Couples like to choose this special day to "tie the knot," wishing for endless togetherness and love.

This year's Moon Festival falls on September 21, the day of Chinese Children Charities' Ten Year Anniversary Celebration at the Colorado Convention Center.

(Deb, it will be great to put a clip art of moon somewhere if you have extra space)