

Tango-setsu Festival

Spring is over and summer has arrived. In summer, China celebrates one of their most important holidays. It is the "Tango-setsu Festival" which is set on May 5 of the lunar calendar each year. Along with Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, it is considered one of the three major traditional Chinese festivals. Tango-setsu Festival, also known as "Taiyo-setsu" (Danyang Festival), "Gojitsu-setsu" (Noon Day Festival), or "Ka-setsu" (Summer Festival), has been valued as a summer festival to ward off disease and evil spirits. There are many legends about Tango-setsu. The most famous one is about Kutsugen. Kutsugen was a famous poet and politician in the Chinese Warring States period (5th century B.C. - 3rd century B.C.) in a country called Chu. Despite having the support of the people, he lost his position and was exiled. He was worried about his country and threw himself into the river in despair over the future of Chu. The day he committed suicide fell on May 5 of the lunar calendar which led to the creation of the Tango-setsu to pray for a peaceful sleep for Kutsugen.

Various events are held in many places in China during Tango-setsu. Among them, a dragon boat festival and eating “Chimaki” (rice dumplings) are the important customs for Tango-setsu. Both dragon boats and “Chimaki” (dumplings) are said to have originated in Kutsugen.



According to the legend, after Kutsugen passed away, people went out to the river in a boat and beat drums and made loud noises to chase away fish to prevent them from eating Kutsugen's body. Then it evolved into the dragon boat race on May 5 from the custom of sending out boats to give thoughts to Kutsugen. The custom of eating chimaki also began when people threw rice balls into the river to feed the fish that had been scared away by the loud noises.

The dragon boat race is the most important event of Tango-setsu. The boat is a rowing boat with an elongated shape and decorated with a dragon's head and tail. The boat is generally 20 to 30 meters long and rowed by 30 to 60 people. During the competition, the team members row their boat to the beat of the drums, it is said that the winners will be lucky and live happily ever after. Nowadays, international competitions are hosted as athletic sports.



“Chimaki” (rice dumplings) is a traditional food eaten during Tango-setsu. We eat chimaki, in which glutinous rice soaked in water is wrapped in bamboo leaves and boiled or steamed.

In China, the taste of chimaki varies depending on the regions. In northern regions, using glutinous rice alone or “natsume” (Chinese dates) is the standard. When eating, they coat them with sugar. In southern regions, salty chimaki with seasoned meat, ham, eggs, and other ingredients is preferred. “Chinese chimaki” means “meat chimaki dumplings” in Japan.

According to old Japanese sources, Tango-setsu was introduced to Japan from China during the Heian period (794-1185). It was called “Tango-no-sekku”(Boy’s Festival) and was a well-established event to pray for the healthy growth of boys. It is now “Kodomo-no-hi” (Children’s Day), a national holiday on May 5 every year. Families with boys put up “Koinobori” (carp streamers) and pray that the boys will overcome difficulties and get ahead in life. There is also a carp streamer festival. The beautiful sight of many colorful carp streamers flying in the sky is a uniquely Japanese scene.



Information from Nerima City Regional Promotion Section

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【Nerima City Official HP】

<https://www.city.nerima.tokyo.jp/gaikokunohitomuke/bunka.html>

【QR】



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