

## **A Comparison of Patriotism between Chinese Dragon Boat Festival and American Memorial Day**

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**Abstract.** The Dragon Boat Festival in China and the Memorial Day in America both promote patriotism, while differences still exist. Comparison is employed to examine the subtle differences between the two special days so as to better understand the connotations of them and facilitate cultural communication between China and America and gain insight into the spread of Chinese culture in the international arena.

### **Introduction**

With the fast advancement of globalization, cultural exchange and collision are no longer newfangled topic in our modern society. Analyzing and digging into different cultural components are so vital that we can maintain a more consolidated relationship with other countries.

Patriotism, part of spiritual culture, refers to a positive and supportive attitude of an individual or collective for motherland [1]. It is becoming increasingly momentous in our modern society since it is so tightly connected with devotions and responsibilities that it can motivate and encourage national unity, promote economic growth and social development as well as enhance common spirit.

As is known to us all, the Dragon Boat Festival is a traditional festival which commemorates the ancient patriotic poet, Qu Yuan, who committed suicide for his country and thus became the embodiment of patriotism in China. While the Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States for the sake of remembering those people who sacrificed in the country's armed forces. It is a significant festival which shows the patriotism of Americans. Research into the two festivals with similar denotations but distinct different connotations can definitely strengthen mutual understanding of the two countries

### **Origins and Features of the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day**

When referring to festivals, origins and features cannot be ignored, for they are two basic elements of them.

**Origins of the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day.** One of the most widely accepted origin of the Dragon Boat Festival is about to commemorate the patriotic poet Qu Yuan in ancient China [2]. According to *Shi Ji* records, Qu Yuan, was King Huai's secretary in the Spring and Autumn period. He advocated putting those competent people in important positions, enriching the country and increasing its military force. Meanwhile, he strongly suggested that an alliance with Qi State to resist Qin should be necessary, which was strongly opposed by the nobles. As a result, he was framed and exiled to Xiangjiang River Valley. In exile, he wrote great works to show his love for his country. In 278 BC, the capital of Chu was seized by Qin enemies. Qu Yuan was too sorrow to confront the incomplete state, he fell into despair and threw himself into the Miluo River. Since then, people have come to the Miluo River in order to mourn Qu Yuan and this was the early Dragon Boat Festival.

The Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States in memory of the people who sacrificed while serving in the countries' armed forces [3]. In 1866, shortly after the end of the Civil War, the United States was slowly recovering from the long bloody north-south war. The surviving

soldiers returned home, with a disrespectful body and a story to tell. A drugstore owner named Henry Welles in Waterloo, New York, suggested that the shops should be closed one day for the soldiers who were sacrificed in the war. In 1868, the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans founded in Decatur, Illinois, established Decoration Day after the American Civil War. Later, the two rituals were combined, and the veterans and the people, on this day, grieve the soldiers who died for their country.

**Features of the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day.** Shen Bang once said, “Sections in May, is the time to fasten the Dragon Boat rope, adorn calamus and efficacious charm. From May 1<sup>st</sup> to May 5<sup>th</sup>, little girls are dressed like flowers and those married women come back to the parental home together with their children.” [4] The Dragon Boat Festival, with great significance that is observed by all people, has rich intention and all sorts of activities, including dragon-boat racing, eating rice dumplings, drinking realgar wine and hanging calamus. Besides, the Dragon Boat Festival has special senses, it is an occasion to keep people healthy, worship the gods, have competitive entertainment and consolidate human relations [5].

The Memorial Day is not only set to salute the American army but also a festival for relaxation. Many people visit cemeteries and memorials particularly to honor those who have died for the country. People gather on the designated day and put flowers on graves and renew contacts with relatives and others. There is often a religious service and a picnic-like “dinner on the grounds”, the traditional term for a potluck meal at a church. But many Americans today regard this day as the start of the summer, thus they spend their leisure at home, on the beach or at the mountains for three days weekend. In the middle of the park, people read Gatsby’s speech, followed by General Logan’s declaring Decoration Day 11th command beside a monument dedicated to soldiers, sailors and marines. Besides, country singing groups sing patriotic songs accompanied by school children parading at night.

### **Reflection of Patriotism in the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day**

Patriotism is a sense of spiritual emotion for the motherland which plays an important role in a country’s development and advancement. Patriotism means the deepest feeling for motherland. One Chinese famous poet, Wen Tianxiang, once said, “A death befalls all men alike, I will keep a loyal heart to make a name in history.” Another famous person, Lin Zexu also said, “In line with the conviction that I will do whatever it takes to serve my country even at the cost of my own life, regardless of fortune or misfortune to myself.”

**Patriotism Reflected in the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day.** The basic themes of traditional Chinese festivals are to pray for luckiness and eliminate evil, while only the Dragon Boat Festival, which reveals national consciousness from ancient times, is connected with patriotism [2]. The Dragon Boat Festival is originated from primitive worship and ancestral beliefs. Since Qu Yuan, a kind poet, who loved his motherland so much that he committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River when he was unable to save the peril that hanged over his country, people treat him as an icon about pursuing spiritual freedom, social justice and equality. That Qu Yuan committed suicide was not for his personal sufferings and situation, but for protesting dark realities and corrupt politics which called white black, so people commemorate Qu Yuan, who was praised to have equal glory with the sun and the moon, with the hope that the political administrations are honest and capable, as well as the country becomes rich and citizens’ life stable. In addition, the creation of some customs, such as eating Zongzi and dragon boat racing, demonstrate Chinese people’s worship of patriots as well as our national everlasting patriotism. Currently, there is a tendency to put emphasis on the memorial content on certain side and deliberately exaggerate the political purpose of the Dragon Boat festival. It is not good for the coming generations to understand the patriotism in this festival. Therefore, it’s time to rescue and protect its raw cultural spirit, inherit excellent traditional culture of the Dragon Boat Festival, keep sustainable development of patriotic culture and inspire national spirit [6].

The Memorial Day is set to commemorate those armed forces, also called “fallen heroes”, who sacrificed their lives in battles to defend American right to freedom. At 3:00 pm that day, they will

pause whatever they are doing to thank those brave people who are no longer around to enjoy the day with their families. Compared with utilitarian and ethical Chinese festivals, the Memorial Day puts an emphasis on grateful feeling and spiritual pleasure [7]. Their gratitude for those who have devoted their lives to the country's freedom and peace has been transformed into the enjoyment of life and the appreciation of the present. Therefore, this festival is not only an embodiment of American patriotism, but also the beginning of the unofficial summer vacation. People have picnics in the countryside, entertain themselves on the beach and have a visit to the museums.

**Differences of Patriotism between the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day.** There are several differences in patriotism between China and the US. Firstly, one of the important parts is patterns of manifestation. Americans think highly of spirituality, while Chinese emphasize practicality. Americans are likely to take part in all sorts of activities so as to memorize human kindness, and their enthusiasm about these festivals is not due to administrative orders, political demands, or interest-driven from their inner world. As for Chinese, the practicality mainly shows on reunion, culture of eating and drinking, means of entertainment and economics, because only family members can give us the most practical help, special food and drinks can give us as rewards, and entertaining activities as well as congratulatory speeches are always held to make money. Secondly, inheriting mode is another important difference. Americans are inclined to inherit. The official festivals of it correspond with people's choice, which have strong vitality. Therefore, once a festival is determined, it will not change with the change of president. However, Chinese tend to alternate. The king's power surpass all human will in Chinese history, that is to say, alternation of dynasties is equal to eliminating any traces of the former dynasty. This explains the reason why the Dragon Boat Festival changes as the times change. Last but not least, influence on the following generations also cannot be ignored. Americans teach their children to cherish and enjoy the current life, but Chinese teach their children to memorize the past and plan the future.

### **Inspiration for Cross-Cultural Communications on Patriotism**

It goes without saying that patriotism is the first priority of a country's stability and development all over the world, thus inspirations for cross-cultural communications on patriotism are supposed to be analyzed in order to eliminate cultural stereotype and misunderstandings as well as consolidate and enhance cultural communications between China and the US.

**Improving Awareness and Comprehension of Patriotism.** In the process of quickening mutual understanding and the blend of multi-culture, patriotism as a part of culture plays a significant role. The Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day offer us a glimpse of the differences between patriotism in China and America. Thus to understand the content and differences of these two festivals, and then to extend to other patriotic performances, can be helpful to comprehend patriotism. The methods of how to improve awareness and comprehension of patriotism are as follows.

What comes first is massive media. Many American movies convey an American patriotism imperceptibly. Plenty of patriotic TV series and other educational books are also shown to Chinese citizens; Secondly, various festivals and ceremonial events matter. It's a great time to recall people's patriotism during their entertainment; besides, school teaching is also an effective method. Last but not least, other actions will remind people of their patriotism from the bottom of their heart, such as, heroes' inspiration in America and education and demonstration base of patriotism in China. Cities, streets, companies, cemeteries and schools, which are named after outstanding people in the history, inspire and encourage people forever.

**Avoiding Cultural Stereotype and Misunderstandings of Patriotism.** In activities of cross-cultural communications, the case where some individuals are likely to feel strange and curious about other cultures is normal, since the origins and development of every nation is featured by its own cultural factors, but it is not the excuse to refuse, deny or attack other nations <sup>[8]</sup>.

Take patriotism for example, it's different between China and the US when it comes to patterns of manifestation, transmittal mode and influence on following generations. Every individual in cross-cultural communications should adjust himself to cultivate strong cultural tolerance gradually,

and is not supposed to understand and judge matters by means of their own national thinking model. Therefore, more learning should be done and more respect should be given to avoid cultural stereotype and misunderstanding in the process of cross-cultural communications.

**Absorbing Each Other's Cultural Advancement.** In the globalization today, the world trend of convergence is increasingly enhanced and the boundary of the country becomes blurred due to the penetration of culture. The thought of patriotism, however, is an eternal proposition; the patriotism education is still an important part of the ideological and political education. That making a comparison of patriotism of China and the United States is an important opportunity to develop and promote theory and practice of patriotism education. Besides, the world is a collection of all sorts of colorful culture, of which so many excellent cultures exist. In a sense, a popular opinion in cultural field "what is of national is of international" is commonly accepted. Therefore, in order to make those outstanding cultures of China known and learn cultural advancement of other countries, we are supposed to absorb and digest the essence of each other's culture.

However, Chinese people need to prevent traditional culture from disappearing and keep a fresh mind to spread our national culture when absorbing western culture. Under the trend of cultural globalization, Chinese people should take the opportunity to absorb cultural advancement of other countries and combine them with our reality so as to build a moderately prosperous society in all aspects.

## Conclusion

With the rapid development of globalization, cultural communications and cultural shock are no longer novel issues in our modern society. In order to make better contact with other countries, it's vital to analyze and make researches into different cultural components. The Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day are both important in China and America regarding their patriotic nature. Nevertheless, the two festivals are sort of different, the patterns of manifestation, transmittal mode and influence on the future generations, to name just a few. Hence, in such a globalizing era, when we are implementing the policy of promoting communication with other nations, cultural communication is one of the focuses and patriotism represented by the Dragon Boat Festival and the Memorial Day should be studied, differences of which should be specially attended to in order to proceed with the cultural exchange between China and the world. At the same time, the study of the two festivals will help promote Chinese culture in the international arena.

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