

# Origins of the Dragon Boat Race



The Dragon Boat Festival or Tuan Wu, has its origins in the 4th century BC. It falls on the "Dragon fifth" – the fifth day of the fifth month in the Chinese lunar calendar. It is one of the three days in the lunar year when all debts must be settled. It is also a time to pay homage to ancestors and to appease the dragon, believed to be the Controller of the Water, ensuring adequate rain to ripen the crops. The most exciting part of this traditional festival, however, involves the Dragon Boat Race.

The race is held to commemorate the death of Chu Yuan, the legendary Chinese poet and patriot who lived during the Chou dynasty. He held a high position in the court of one of the major states of China but was eventually exiled by corrupt government officials.

Chu Yuan wrote many poems to express his great love for his country and people, lamenting his own fate. As a final protest against the government, Chu Yuan cast himself into the Milo river.

The local fisherman were so moved by his gesture that they raced in their boats to try to recover his body, beating the water with paddles to prevent the fishes from devouring him. They also threw rice dumpling into the water to appease his spirit. To prevent sea serpents from eating the rice offerings, the dumplings were wrapped in silk bound with five threads in the colour of the Emperor.

### Sabah Folklore

In Sabah native folklore, the Dragon holds a significant place as the guardian of Mount Kinabalu, the Sacred Mountain and the Summit of Borneo. Mount Kinabalu is believed to be the resting place of spirits of the dead and that somewhere deep inside the Mountain are many precious stones guarded by dragons.

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