

# Mid-Autumn/Moon Festival



## A story of love and war.

A major holiday in China is the Mid-Autumn Festival which occurs on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month. This is the time when the moon is at its fullest and roundest in the whole year. Because of this, the holiday is also called Moon Festival. It is a time for families to reunite, celebrate the harvest, gaze at the large moon, and eat moon cake. It is a romantic time because of the legend of Hou Yi and his wife, Chang'e. The hero Hou Yi lived at a time when there were 10 suns in the sky. With 10 suns, it was extremely hot; crops shriveled up and animals died from heat exhaustion. It was a miserable time. Hou Yi was an expert archer and he used his skill and strength to shoot down 9 of the suns. He left one to warm the Earth. In appreciation, the Queen Mother of the West awarded Hou Yi with an elixir that would make him become an immortal. But Hou Yi did not want to drink it because he wanted to be with his wife. One day Hou Yi was going on a hunting trip so he handed the elixir to his wife Chang'e to safeguard while he was away. Unbeknownst to the couple, a student of Hou Yi

was planning to steal the elixir. After Hou Yi left, the student confronted Chang'e and demanded that she hand over the elixir. Not willing to do that she drank it instead and immediately started to fly towards the heavens. She landed on the closest celestial body which was the moon so she could remain close to Hou Yi. As the Goddess of the Moon, she lives there now with her companion, a white rabbit, which if you are lucky you can see when gazing at the moon.

The story of the moon cake tradition is a different story and happens to be based on a true life event. In 1271, Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, founded the Yuan Dynasty (aka the Mongol Dynasty). It was a cruel and oppressive time for the Chinese and many groups tried to take down the Mongols. In 1355, a rebel leader emerged, Zhu Yuan Zhang. He orchestrated a unified strike on the Yuan Dynasty. To communicate with other rebel armies, he inserted a paper message in moon cakes that said "Kill the Mongols on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month". Thus on that evening, the rebel armies converged on Beijing and overthrew the Mongol Dynasty. Pleased with his success, Zhu Yuan Zhang ordered his men to distribute moon cakes to the people at the following Mid-Autumn Festival thus starting the tradition.

