

Exploring the Chinese Culture

Background

China, officially known as the People's Republic of China, is located in East Asia and is the world's second most populous country and the third largest country in the world. China possesses a rich, long history of centuries of ruling dynasties dating to early civilization. China's landscape is vast and diverse, ranging from the Gobi Desert to the Himalayan mountains to the Tibetan Plateau. China enjoys both dry seasons and wet monsoons, with strong winters in the higher latitudes and warm, moist weather in the south. Beijing is the Capital and also the cultural, economic, and communications center of China. Shanghai is the main industrial city, and Hong Kong is a leading commercial center.



Traditions and Customs

Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism, and many tend to honor Chinese tradition, which includes a strong sense of family, respect for hierarchy, and an appreciation of harmony. Filial piety and loyalty are valued, with parents sacrificing for the growth and advancement of their children. Typically, both parents work full-time, and grandparents may live with the family. There are many Chinese languages, but Mandarin is spoken by most.



Holidays and Celebrations

The Chinese enjoy several holidays throughout the year, including the Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, the Tomb Sweeping Festival, the Double Seven Festival, and Winter Solstice. The most important Chinese holiday is the Chinese New Year, also called Spring Festival, which includes dragon dances, singing, and fireworks. The Lantern Festival is traditionally the last day of the Chinese New Year with large displays of lanterns and drone displays. The Tomb Sweeping Festival is a time for Chinese families to visit graves and burial grounds to pay respect to their ancestors and enjoy a family meal together. Winter Solstice Festival is a time for families to celebrate winter and eat dumplings together.



Education and Literacy

Education is compulsory in China, having the largest primary and secondary education system in the world.



Health Disparities

Chinese Americans exhibit a high incidence of hypertension, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. Also, cancer of the lungs, breast, liver, and colon are prevalent. In addition, many Chinese Americans with diabetes are often undiagnosed.

Traditional Food Practices

The Chinese consider eating an important, enjoyable part of life, with social gatherings centered around food. They value texture, flavor, color, and aroma more than nutrition. Shopping daily for fresh food is essential for all Chinese cooking. Chinese cuisine is quite diverse, with each province having its own style of cooking. The Szechwan cuisine is quite spicy, whereas the Cantonese cuisine emphasizes fresh and tender ingredients with a rich and tasty soup.



Preparation methods include frying, steaming, roasting, deep frying, poaching, and boiling. Rice is China's staple food in the northeast and south, and wheat-based breads and noodles are served in the north. Tofu and soy products are popular and eaten rather than dairy. Pork is the most popular meat. Chinese tea is the main beverage in China, including green, Oolong, black, and flower-blended teas. Chinese banquet dinners often occur on special occasions like holidays, weddings, birthdays, and graduations. Chinese culture believes there is a positive and negative energy in the universe. Yin represents negative energy, and yang represents positive energy. Foods that are considered yin are cold, including melons, greens, soybeans, oranges, bananas, and ice cream. Yang foods are considered hot and include garlic, onion, cabbage, peanuts, mangoes, pineapple, beef, fried chicken, French fries, and pizza.



Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- When Chinese families feel sick or experience health issues, they may seek herbal remedies or special soups to replenish their energy as a first consideration.
- Pregnant Chinese are often discouraged from strenuous activities and may avoid foods considered cold, such as melons, bananas, and bean sprouts. They may also supplement with herbal drinks with the belief that they will rid their bodies of toxins and ensure a healthy baby.
- Many Chinese believe in taking care of themselves during the postpartum period, especially during the first three months.
- Many Chinese believe in eating and drinking foods considered hot during the postpartum period, such as soups, ginger, and high protein foods, and avoiding foods considered cold, like melons, bananas, and oranges.

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