

Mid-Autumn Japan

History:

The Tsukimi Festival (月見, Tsukimi), or "moon-viewing," has been celebrated in Japan for over a thousand years. It originated during the Nara period (710-794) when it was introduced from China.

It was initially a noble tradition where aristocrats of the Heian period (794-1185) gathered under the full moon to compose poetry and enjoy music.

By the Edo period (1603-1868), Tsukimi became popular among commoners, evolving into a festival that honored the autumn harvest.

Farmers would offer crops to the moon in gratitude for a bountiful season, solidifying the festival's agricultural significance.

Meaning:

The Tsukimi Festival symbolizes appreciation, gratitude, and the beauty of nature.

The round full moon represents completeness and harmony, reinforcing themes of family unity and prosperity.

The festival is also linked to Japanese folklore, particularly the tale of the Moon Rabbit (月の兎, Tsuki no Usagi), a celestial rabbit said to be pounding mochi on the moon.

Traditions:

Tsukimi Dango (月見団子): The most famous festival food, these round rice dumplings symbolize gratitude and good fortune.

They are often stacked in a pyramid shape, representing the full moon and prosperity.

Susuki (ススキ, Pampas Grass): Pampas grass is displayed during Tsukimi as it is believed to protect against evil spirits and symbolize a good harvest.

Its golden hues in autumn resemble ripened rice stalks, reinforcing the festival's agricultural roots.

Moon Gazing: Families and friends gather at home, temples, or gardens with open views of the night sky to admire the beauty of the full moon.

Traditional tea ceremonies and poetry recitations often accompany this practice, preserving Heian-era customs.

Seasonal Foods: Besides Tsukimi Dango, people enjoy chestnuts, taro, sweet potatoes, and Tsukimi-style dishes such as Tsukimi Udon and Tsukimi Soba, which include raw or poached eggs resembling the moon.

Folklore - The Moon Rabbit: Unlike the Chinese legend of Chang'e, Japanese folklore tells of a kind-hearted rabbit who was rewarded for its selflessness by being sent to the moon.

There, it eternally pounds mochi, a story deeply tied to Tsukimi, and many decorations and sweets feature the Moon Rabbit.

Tsukimi remains a cherished festival in Japan, blending ancient traditions with modern celebrations.

Whether through poetic moon-gazing gatherings or simply enjoying a bowl of Tsukimi noodles, the festival continues to foster a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the beauty of autumn.

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