

Chris Newbold and Meng Xiang

## Introduction

It is to be expected that in a country with a five thousand year history, 56 different ethnic groups, and a population of 1.4 billion people, festivals will play a major part in both modern and traditional cultural life in China. Understandably a great many festivals have come and gone, most others have evolved and changed over the centuries, the combination of religious influences, cultural differences and political and economic changes across a vast nation has given China a huge range of festive traditions. Many of these festivals such as *Lantern Festivals*, *Dragon Boat Festivals* and *Chinese New Year* are well known and have been exported around the globe as Chinese diaspora have moved and settled. A great many festivals in China are related to their ethnic and regional origins and are hence little known in other parts of the country let alone across the world. As we shall see, an important factor in understanding festivals in contemporary China is the arrival of the Western events calendar, where *Christmas Day*, *Valentine's Day*, and *Halloween*, have come to be the significant dates in the year for the younger urban population, inevitably driven by the demands of commercialism and the media.

This chapter will discuss the extent to which what we identify as the five dominant configurations of festivals in contemporary China reflect and illustrate the tensions that exemplify modern China, that is, between tradition, Westernisation and economic growth. In examining contemporary festivals in China, five clear and distinct types emerge. First, there are the traditional festivals deeply rooted in the rural culture, Chinese historical traditions, and the Chinese Luna calendar; the *Spring Dragon Festival*, the *Ullam-bana Festival*, the *Double Nine Festival* are but a few examples. Second, there are the music festivals, the generational signifier of outward looking modern Chinese youth; the *Strawberry Festival*, the *Midi Festival* and the *Orange Isle Music Festival*. Third, as we have already mentioned above, there are the 'new' Western influenced celebrations. Fourth, there are the political festivals which are designed to reaffirm guiding political and moral principles in China; *International Labour Day*, *Women's Day*, *National Day*. Fifth, there are the economic oriented festivals and events allied to economic investment and growth plans, tourism and the MICE industries (Meetings, Incentives, Confer-