

# Chinese New Year

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## Vocabulary: (underlined terms in the article)

- \*acrobatics/acrobat: skillful movements that require great balance or dexterity, like jumping/flipping through the air or balancing on a rope
- \*ancestor: a part of your family from long ago, or (figuratively) something that developed over time into what exists today (“Early calculators are the ancestors of modern computers.”)
- gala: a festive party or show that celebrates a special occasion
- homonym: a word that sounds the same as another word, but is different in meaning or origin (“Because the Mandarin language has only about 300 syllables (varied by inflection/tone), it has many homonyms.”)
- \*lunar: relating to the moon (lunar orbit, lunar calendar, lunar eclipse)
- migration: when large numbers of people or animals travel regularly from one place to another
- robust: good, strong and healthy (e.g., flavor, economy, faith, athlete)
- \*spouse: husband or wife
- \*to usher (usher in): to help sb or sth get into place; to escort sb into their rightful place (“Welcome; this usher will usher you to your seat.” “Every year, we usher in the New Year with a party.”)
- zodiac: originally, “zodiac” referred to 12 constellations (or signs) in the band of stars through which planets travel; it has come to refer to a system of belief about character or personality and the things that happen to people, based on the position of the stars and planets during the month (Western) or year (Chinese) of your birth.

## Chinese/Lunar New Year

Chinese New Year is the most important holiday in China. It is based on the lunar calendar, so it falls between late January and mid-February. The first day is called the Spring Festival, and the last is the Lantern Festival, 14 days later.

However, preparations start before the “first day.” Weeks before the Big Day, red decorations appear everywhere, as red is the color of good luck. Stores also have lots of sales, like Thanksgiving weekend in the US. New Year’s Eve is filled with food and other preparations. Your Chinese friends more than likely grew up watching the annual Chinese New Year’s Eve Gala on TV, with its variety of acts including comedy, acrobatics, dancing, and Chinese opera. With other entertainment choices these days, the show isn’t as popular as it used to be (sort of like holiday parades and TV specials in the US). On the other hand, people can now watch the show “anytime” on YouTube, YouKu and other video platforms.

## Family, feasting and good fortune

Chinese New Year is about saying goodbye to the past year and ushering in a new year of luck and prosperity. Traditionally, it has been a day for praying (to gods and ancestors) for a good harvest or good luck. Many traditions are related to this history, such as cleaning the home to rid it of bad luck from the previous year, banning the cutting or washing of hair (hair is a homonym for wealth), and eating fish which symbolizes abundance. The older generation blesses the younger generation by giving them red envelopes with cash (some employers also bless employees with red envelopes, or “digital red envelopes” now!). Gift-giving and family feasts are also important. [Chinesenewyear.net](http://Chinesenewyear.net) says that Chinese people spend twice as much on shopping and eating out than Americans spend during Thanksgiving.

Family and community, as well as feasting together, are an extremely important aspect of the holiday. People travel all over the country to be together. Traditionally, you are supposed to dine with family for five days. Many young unmarried people feel intense pressure to introduce a potential spouse during Chinese New Year. Before Covid, it was said that Spring Festival annually caused the largest human migration in the world. In 2015, statistics showed that 1000 train tickets were sold each second during the peak holiday rush.

Finally, each year is represented by one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. The year (and everyone born in it) takes on the positive characteristics of that animal: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. Throughout your life, your “animal year” is the least lucky, so people wear lots of red (whole stores are dedicated to selling red under-garments!).

Spring Festival is a robust annual celebration, filled with special decorations and entertainment, family banquets and holiday traditions, and generous expressions wishing others blessing and prosperity. The holiday provides a wonderful opportunity to spend time with Chinese friends, learn more about Asia, and enjoy the beautiful symbols of the lunar Chinese New Year.

- To find out the dates each year, visit [chinesenewyear.net](http://chinesenewyear.net) (which also has other info/resources).
- Other sources for this article include [english.hzyz.net](http://english.hzyz.net) and email from <https://everyinternational.com/>

## Discussion:

1. If you have ever celebrated a lunar new year (in your own culture or another), what is your favorite memory? What did you like best about this holiday?
2. What things does the article mention that show how important “preparation” is to the New Year celebration? Talk about “preparations” for one of your favorite holidays/celebrations.
3. In China, red is the color of “good luck”; the number “4” is associated with bad luck. In America, “13” is bad luck, and a “rabbit’s foot” is good luck. What is associated with good/bad luck in your culture? Do you believe there is such a thing as good/bad “luck”? Explain.
4. At one time, China’s New Year’s Eve Gala was the “most-watched TV show in the world.” Talk about something on TV that is/was very popular in your culture or among your friends. (Perhaps a film, sporting event, TV series...)

5. In many cultures, parents give gifts to children (e.g., Chinese New Year, at Christmas or on a birthday). Do you think it is better to give a child a toy, something practical (like clothes), or money? Explain.
6. If you know which symbol you were born under (in the western or Chinese zodiac), tell us about it, and say whether you believe there is any “truth” to this connection. Do “the stars” influence our lives?
7. The Bible (and other religious documents) also claim that God sometimes reveals the future through “holy prophets”; what do you think about this belief? Why might God want to let people know about some things “in advance,” and how does He choose who to reveal them to? What sorts of things do you think God should “reveal” in advance, and what things would you rather NOT know in advance? Explain.
8. What things does the article mention that show how important “family” is around Chinese New Year? Tell us about one of your “family traditions” (related to any occasion).
9. Which aspect of Chinese New Year would you most want to experience or “try,” and why? (E.g., dumplings, special foods, the mass migration, the TV gala, red envelopes, fireworks, New Year’s Eve celebrations, the Lantern Festival, etc.)

If you still have time, discuss this Bible passage, associated with the Jewish New Year celebration (*Rosh Hashanah*): “Who is a God like you? You forgive sin and overlook the rebellion of your faithful people. You will not be angry forever, because you would rather show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will overcome our wrongdoing. You will throw all our sins into the deep sea.” Micah 7:18-19 (GW version)

### **Chinese New Year activities, dos and don’ts**

- Try your hand at Chinese paper cutting or calligraphy, or make paper lanterns.
- Host a dumpling-making party. (Find recipes online or enlist a Chinese friend to help with the ingredients and techniques.)
- Set off firecrackers. (Fireworks were invented in China, and the most fireworks/firecrackers are set off in the world during Chinese New Year.)
- Get a library book about Chinese celebrations or myths.
- Wear new clothes. (The Chinese word “fu” is a homonym for wealth.)
- Don’t wear black or white, colors associated with mourning (and don’t mention the number “four,” which is a homonym for death).
- Eat fish (the Chinese word “yu” is a homonym for prosperity).
- Let kids stay up late New Year’s Eve. (It is believed that the later they stay up, the longer their parents will live.)

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