

Chinese New Year Customs (Part I)

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It is said in *Shangshu dazhuan* (*The Great Tradition of the Book of the Elder*) from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.), that January first of the lunar calendar "is the dawn of the entire year, month, and the day, so it is called 'three dawns,' or the 'three beginnings.'" The statement reflects that the first day of the lunar calendar is the starting point of the year, the month, and the day.

January in ancient times was called Luduan (the tip of the shoe), and Yuan (first) Dan (day). After the CCP took over in 1949, it changed the name of Yuan Dan to Spring Festival, in order for people to forget national traditions and culture. Chinese people should be aware that Spring Festival is not the authentic name for Yuan Dan.

Speaking of the differences between the Western calendar and the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, the Western calendar follows the solar year - the time needed for the Earth to orbit the Sun once, or 365.2419 days. A normal year contains 365 days, and a leap year contains 366 days. Although the Western calendar conforms with the movement of the Earth circling the Sun, there is a significant difference - it does not correspond with the changes of the Moon. In the lunar calendar, the full Moon falls on the fifteenth of each month.

The Chinese traditional calendar is now called the lunar calendar. Chinese people like to call it the Xia calendar because it was established in the Xia Dynasty (2025 B.C. - 1600 B.C.).

The Xia calendar takes into account the movements of both the Sun (to represent the Yang) and the Moon (to represent the Yin). Chinese people have always emphasized harmonizing the Yin and the Yang, so the Xia calendar must conform to both the Sun and the Moon's movements. Each month is exactly one cycle of the Moon, with a Shuo Day (New Moon) as the first day, and the Wang Day (full Moon) must be the fifteenth or sixteenth. A long month contains 30 days, and that short month contains 29 days. A regular year only has 354 or 355 days and is short 11 days compared with the solar year. Therefore, there are seven leap months arranged in every 11 years, so leap years have 13 months. The combined leap years and regular years with the Xia Calendar correspond to both the Moon and the Sun.

There are 24 seasonal divisions in the Xia Calendar, which conforms to the solar year. This "miracle can be easily understood by observing the first days of Chunfen (middle of the spring), Xiazhi (summer solstice, the longest day), Qiufen (middle of the autumn), and Dongzhi (winter solstice). These four sections are time periods when the Sun directly sheds rays at the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer, or the Equator and the Tropic of Capricorn.

In order to consider the movements of both the Sun and the Moon, the Xia Calendar New Year Day can not be a fixed Day on the Western Calendar, which is not because the traditional Chinese Calendar is not scientifically correct, but because Chinese philosophy is different. Chinese philosophy emphasizes the harmony of the Yin and the Yang. The Sun carries the same weight as the Moon in the Chinese traditional calendar - the Xia Calendar.

In Chinese traditional culture, on Yuan Dan - New Years Day, families of multiple generations gather together, get up early in the

morning, wear their new clothes, light candles, and burn firecrackers. They open the doors, arrange ceremonies in the yards, offer fruits, tea, drinks to Heaven, the Earth, and their ancestors. This is called "The New Year Big Luck when opening the doors." After that, younger generations pay respects to older generations by kowtowing, bowing, etc., and in return, the older generations give the younger generation oranges (*the Chinese word for orange is pronounced the same as the Chinese word for luck*), peanuts (*sounds the same as 'colorful lives'*), or candies, etc.

Many places have the custom of eating vegetarian food at breakfast on New Years Day - mainly eating cooked rice on New Years Eve. For regular years they cook 12 liters, and for leap years they cook 13 liters, so that one liter corresponds to each month. This is called the New Year Meal, and too much cooked rice means extra food in this year. The first bowl of rice must be given to the oldest person in the family with respect while the older generation helps younger ones with some vegetables. This manifests that the family is in harmony since younger generations respect the elderly, and the older generation loves the young children. Thus, family life in the New Year will face good luck and times of plenty.

From the first day to the third day of the New Year, children can light firecrackers in the morning and the evening. Children all wear new clothes, go out with grown-ups to visit friends and family, and to Bai-nian (pay New Year greetings). Hosts of the friends and families give children hard boiled eggs that are dyed red (either two or four, must be even numbers), peanuts, or candy.

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