

Festivals of China

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Chinese New Year

(春节 - Chūnjié)



The Origins of Chinese New Year

Originating during the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE). The festival is deeply connected to the lunar calendar, with rituals performed to honor ancestors and deities, seeking blessings for prosperity and protection. The Chinese zodiac, a 12-year cycle of animal signs, also plays a key role in the celebration, influencing traditions, personal fortunes, and cultural customs each year.





The Chinese Zodiac



Role of Animals in Chinese New Year

- **Chinese Zodiac:**

- 12 animals, each representing specific personality traits and characteristics.
- Year of each animal rotates every 12 years, influencing the year's energy.

- **Animal Symbolism:**

- Animals like the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, etc., have distinct traits.
- People born in the year of an animal are believed to inherit its characteristics (e.g., Tiger for bravery, Rabbit for gentleness).

- **Animal and Luck:**

- The animal of the year is thought to bring fortune or challenges depending on individual zodiac compatibility.

- **Festivals and Animal Significance:**

- Celebrations often include references to the animal of the year (e.g., Year of the Dragon, Year of the Monkey).
- Animal-themed decorations, performances, and parades are common.

Historical Background:

🚩 Myth of Nian – Lunar New Year Origins

- A beast named **Nian (年)** would appear every Lunar New Year to attack villages.
 - It was especially known for harming people, animals, and crops.
 - Villagers discovered Nian feared loud noises, the color red, and fire.
 - To protect themselves, they used firecrackers, red lanterns, and red decorations.
- These traditions eventually turned into celebrations of luck, safety, and a fresh start.





POPULAR PHRASES

- **新年快乐 (xīnnián kuàilè) – Happy New Year!**

The most common greeting to wish someone a joyful and prosperous new year.

- **恭喜发财 (gōngxǐ fācái) – Wishing you wealth and prosperity!**

A traditional greeting, especially common when giving red envelopes (红包 – hóngbāo).

Red Envelopes (红包 – Hóngbāo)

Giving red envelopes filled with money for good luck and prosperity.



Cleaning the House (before New Year) 🧹

Done before the new year to sweep away bad luck and make room for good fortune.

Decorating with Red 🧨

Red banners, lanterns, and couplets with wishes for happiness, health, and success are put up everywhere.

Wearing New Clothes (especially red) 👕

Symbolizes a fresh start and brings good luck for the year ahead

Dragon and Lion Dances + Fireworks and Firecrackers

- Set off at midnight and throughout the festival
- Believed to scare away the monster “Nian” and evil spirits
 - Performed in streets and parades
- Bring good fortune, chase away evil spirits, and are loved by crowds



⊘ What NOT to Do During Lunar New Year No Cleaning or Sweeping (on New Year's Day)

- It's believed you'll sweep away your good luck!

No Using Sharp Objects

- Knives or scissors may cut off fortune or relationships.

Don't Break Anything

- Breaking dishes or glass is considered bad luck—if it happens, say:
 - “岁岁平安” (suì suì píng ān) – “Peace every year”

Top 4 foods

Traditional Foods



Some dishes symbolize wealth, health, and happiness

Dumplings (饺子 – jiǎozi)
(Wealth/prosperity)

Fish (鱼 – yú) 🐟
(good fortune)

Sticky rice cake (年糕 – niángāo)
(Unity and growth)

Tangerines and oranges
(luck)



LANTERN FESTIVAL

 **Lantern Festival (元宵节 – Yuánxiāo Jié)**

When: 15th day of the 1st lunar month (end of Lunar New Year)

What It Celebrates:

- Marks the end of the Lunar New Year celebrations
- Welcomes the first full moon of the new lunar year 🌕
- Celebrates family unity, peace, and letting go of the past
- Honors ancestors and lights the path for blessings in the new year

Traditions:

- **Riddle Solving (猜灯谜) Cāi dēngmí** – People solve riddles written on the lanterns for fun and prizes.
- **Eating Tangyuan (汤圆)** – Sweet rice balls, symbolizing unity and completeness.
- **Lion & Dragon Dances, Fireworks & Firecrackers Folk Performances**
- **Visiting Temples** – Praying for good luck, health, and fortune in the new year.



Tomb-Sweeping

(清明节 – Qīngmíng Jié)





Preparations for the Celebration



The Qingming Festival, also known as Tomb-Sweeping Day, celebrated on April 4–6. It is a time when families honor their ancestors and loved ones who have passed away. The day is marked by visiting and cleaning the graves of ancestors, offering food and burning joss paper to send material wealth to the deceased.





Popular Phrases

1.) 清明节快乐 (Qīngmíng jié kuàilè)

– Happy Qingming Festival

2.) 祭祖 (jì zǔ)

– Honor ancestors



1. Grave Cleaning and Maintenance

- **Visit Ancestor's Grave:** Families clean and maintain the gravesite
- **Offerings Setup:** Place offerings such as food, flowers, and personal items to honor the deceased.



2. Joss Paper and Joss Sticks

- **Joss Paper (冥纸 – míngzhǐ):** Burned to send wealth, material goods, and comforts.
- **Joss Sticks (香 – xiāng):** Incense sticks are burned to purify the space and symbolize prayers rising to the heavens.



3. Food and Ritual Offerings

- **Prepare Special Foods:** Families often prepare specific foods like chicken, pork, and fruit to offer at the grave or during a home ritual.
- **Symbolic Offerings:** Some families will also offer tea and wine to their ancestors during rituals.

4. Enjoying Nature

- **Kite flying** – Symbolizes letting go of worries and bad luck
- **Spring outings/hiking (踏青 tàqīng)** – Literally means “treading on the green,” enjoying the fresh outdoors
- **Family picnics** – Sharing meals outside after visiting ancestors



Dragon Boat Festival

Duanwu Festival (端午节)

Duānwǔ Jié)



Background Information about Celebration



Traditional Chinese festival honoring Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet from over 2,000 years ago. Held on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month, near the summer solstice.





Popular Phrases

端午安康 (Duānwǔ ānkāng)

"Wishing you health and well-being during the Dragon Boat Festival."

(This is the most appropriate and respectful greeting for the holiday.)

端午节快乐 (Duānwǔ jié kuàilè) –

"Happy Dragon Boat Festival!"

(A casual greeting, used among friends or in informal settings.)



Historical Background:

- **Qu Yuan (屈原)** was a famous poet and government official in ancient China during the Warring States Period (around 340–278 BCE).

He served the Chu Kingdom and was known for his honesty, wisdom, and deep love for his country.

What Happened?

Qu Yuan tried to give good advice to protect his kingdom, but corrupt officials ignored him and exiled him. When he heard that his kingdom had fallen, he was so heartbroken that he drowned himself in the Miluo River.

How the Festival Began

- Locals raced out in boats to search for his body — this became the origin of the dragon boat race.
- They also threw sticky rice into the water to keep fish from eating him — leading to the tradition of eating zongzi.



🚩 Dragon Boat Races

The biggest event! Teams race in long, colorful, dragon-shaped boats.

It's all about team spirit, speed, and tradition, with crowds cheering and drums beating



🏠 Eating Zongzi (粽子)

- People eat sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves, filled with meats, beans, or sweet pastes.
- This honors the old tradition of feeding the fish to protect Qu Yuan's body.



🌿 Hanging Herbs (like mugwort and calamus)

These are believed to ward off evil spirits and disease, especially in summer.



🎁 Wearing Scented Sachets

Kids wear fragrant pouches filled with herbs to protect against bad luck and bugs.



OTHER CELEBRATIONS:

🌕 Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋节 – Zhōngqiū Jié)

- **When:** 15th day of the 8th lunar month (usually September)
- **What it celebrates:** Celebrates the harvest moon, family unity, and the legend of Chang'e, the moon goddess.
- **Traditions:**
 - Eating mooncakes, round pastries filled with sweet or savory fillings.
 - Admiring the moon and spending time with family.



🎑 Qixi Festival (七夕节 – Qīxī Jié)

- **When:** 7th day of the 7th lunar month (usually August)
- **What it celebrates:** Known as Chinese Valentine's Day, celebrating the love story between the Cowherd (Niulang) and the Weaver Girl (Zhinü).
- **Traditions:**
 - Couples exchange gifts, write love poems, and sometimes watch the stars for the annual meeting of the lovers.

🍲 Laba Festival (腊八节 – Làbā Jié)

- **When:** 8th day of the 12th lunar month (usually January)
- **What it celebrates:** Marks the beginning of preparations for the Lunar New Year and honors the Buddha's enlightenment.
- **Traditions:**
 - Eating Laba congee (a type of porridge made from grains, nuts, and dried fruit).





Chinese celebrations, rooted in the lunar calendar, emphasize family, tradition, and honoring ancestors through symbolic foods and cultural activities. In contrast, American holidays, based on the solar calendar, focus on historical events or festive themes, with a greater emphasis on social gatherings, parades, and entertainment.





Thank You!