



Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year or Spring Festival is the most important cultural festival for the Chinese. Based on the Chinese lunar calendar, 2021 Chinese New Year will begin on February 12, and ends on the Full moon fifteen days later. It is traditionally a time to bring family together, sharing blessings with all loved ones. Home and family togetherness is significantly the focus of the Spring Festival celebration. Family is incredibly important in the Chinese culture.



Many rituals are performed to signify a new start. And in preparation, all Chinese will carry out a thorough cleaning of their houses to rid of any inauspicious *qi* energy of the old year. This is followed by decoration of home in red. In Chinese culture, the colour red signifies joy, celebrations, bestowing blessing of longevity, good health, peace and luck. Decorations will include red lanterns, red couplets, red banners, and other items that signify auspiciousness.

## Year of the Ox

This year is the Year of the Ox, and so Ox images will appear on Chinese New Year decorations. The Ox represent the value of diligence.

The main Chinese New Year activities include honouring ancestors as well as household and heavenly deities, reunion dinner with family on New Year's Eve, firecrackers, lion dance, giving red envelopes filled with cash and other gifts, visiting elders and friends to share joy and happiness.

In the afternoon of the Lunar New Year's Eve, the ceremony of offering sacrifices to the Heaven, the family gods and ancestors will be held. Honouring ancestors through offerings is a customary ritual to show respect and piety to ancestors.



## Festivities

The New Year's Eve feast known as the reunion dinner is an important event for all family members. Big families including several generations sit at round tables and enjoy the food together. Each food represents something they hope for in the New Year. There is symbolism in the food served. Noodles symbolises long life, dumplings for good fortune, and golden citrus fruits represent wealth.

A further custom is to eat a new year sticky rice cake called niangao after dinner as it is believed that niangao signifies an increasingly prosperous year ahead. Chinese also send pieces of niangao as auspicious gifts to relatives and friends in the coming days of the new year,

Parents usually give their children money in red envelopes after the reunion dinner, a traditional symbol of wish-



ing them health, growth, and excel in studies in the coming year. Money in red envelopes is believed to bring good luck, so it is called lucky money. All married elders also give red envelopes filled with cash to the younger generation during the period of Chinese New Year.



## Gong Xi Fa Cai

On the first day of New Year, Chinese put on new clothing with at least one colour that is red, and greet each other “*gong xi*”, literally means ‘respectful joy’, meaning wishing each other good luck and happiness in the New Year.

## Vegetarianism

Some Chinese Buddhists abstain from meat consumption on the first day of the New Year. It is believed that this will enhance longevity. In addition, vegetarian dishes help to purify and cleanse the body as well as honouring a tradition that nothing living should be killed on the first day of the New Year. A traditional vegetarian dish called “*Lo Hon Jai*” or Buddha’s delight is prepared on the first day of Chinese New Year using eighteen different ingredients as the Chinese believe that eighteen is a lucky number signifying wealth and prosperity. And each single one of the ingredients represents a certain symbolic meaning.



## Start the New Year with Good Thoughts

Chinese strongly believe that what they do and say on the first day of the lunar year will affect their luck and performance during that year. So think good, see good, speak good and do good on the first day of the New Year is an important practice associated with New Year celebration.

In many areas especially in the rural areas, it is customary to set off firecrackers for the celebration of Chinese New Year. It is believed that the louder the firecrackers, the better and luckier it will be for the upcoming year.

## Lion Dance

The lion dance is a traditional Chinese dance performed on Chinese New Year and also on other important events, for receiving good fortune and to drive away evil spirits. In Chinese culture, the lion symbolizes power, wisdom, and superiority. The lion dance also creates festive atmosphere and brings happiness.



## Family Reunion

Traditionally, married daughters visit their parents' home on the second day of Chinese New Year. They bring gifts and red envelopes to families and relatives. On this day too, people offer sacrifices to the God of Wealth, wishing for a luckier and more prosperous year.

The seventh day of Chinese New Year is called *Renri*. According to Chinese legends, *Renri* was the day human beings were created by the mother goddess *Nu Wa*. It is celebrated as the common birthday of all human beings. Many will celebrate by eating a salad known as *yusheng*, and *yusheng* is considered as a symbol of abundance, prosperity and vigor. It usually consists of shredded vegetables and a variety of sauces and condiments.

On the eighth day, many Chinese return to work, and most businesses also like to reopen on day eight of the New Year. Eight is the luckiest number in Chinese belief.

## Prayer to Lords of the Heavens

The ninth day of Chinese New Year is especially important to the Hokkiens, a major group of the Chinese community who speaks in the dialect Hokkien. The Hokkiens believe that the ninth day is the birthday of the Jade Emperor, Thien Kong, who protected the ancestors of Hokkien people from ruthless army in ancient China. This day is regarded as the day of salvation by the Hokkien community. This is why the Hokkien people offer thanksgiving prayers to the Jade Emperor on this day. In Lunar calendar, this day starts at 11pm on the 8th day of the Chinese New Year.



On this night, the Hokkiens set up tables draped in a red tablecloth, with special food to serve to the Jade Emperor. Some of the most popular items they must have are sweet cakes (*thni kueh*), red tortoise buns (*ang koo*), red-coloured buns (*mee koo*) and prosperity cakes (*huat kueh*). All these food symbolises prosperity and good fortune. The ancestors of Hokkiens were protected to safety in sugarcane plantations during the invasion by army in ancient China. As thanksgiving, a pair of sugarcane plants is usually placed, one on each side of the offering table. The pair symbolises unity, cooperation and strength. Sugarcane symbolises harmony, which



brings all good outcome. The straightness of the sugarcane stems is to ensure that the Hokkiens become a clan of honest and sincere people, and the cane stalk with multiple nodes symbolises continuous growth. The Hokkiens make piles of folded pieces of golden paper and hang them from the sugarcanes before being burnt as a thanksgiving offering to the Thien Kong. There will be fireworks and firecrackers that mark the beginning of the ninth day as well as the survival of the Hokkien people. All the light and loud bangs of the firecrackers do add an air of festivity on this day.

During the fifteen day period, new year visits will be made to family and friends to show respect, to strengthen ties and to share joy.

## Lantern Festival

The fifteenth day of the New Year is the Lantern Festival. It is the traditional end of the Spring Festival celebrations. The symbol of the circle is used frequently in Chinese culture and tradition. A circle is a sign of completeness and perfection, which is why the final day of the Chinese New Year is on the night of a full moon. Another reunion dinner is held with lanterns and oranges being a large part of the celebrations.

It is customary to eat special sweet dumplings called *Tāngyuán*, which resemble the shape of the full moon. These round balls are made of glutinous rice flour stuffed with



sugar fillings, symbolizing reunion. *Tāngyuán* literally means “round balls in soup”. This festival is associated with celebrating and cultivating positive relationship between people, families, nature and the higher beings- as they are believed to be responsible for bringing light each year.

Many of the traditions, celebrations and rituals mentioned are customarily practised throughout the fifteen days of the Chinese New Year. However there may be some differing practices based on the places of residence and the individual’s belief system. One common belief and aspiration among all Chinese is that the Spring Festival will bring a new start in one’s life, refreshing hopes for prosperity, health, wealth and happiness.

## How the SSSIO Plans to Celebrate the Chinese New Year?

Since SSSIO started celebrating the Chinese New Year in Prashanti Nilayam in 1997, the emphasis has been on promoting the core value of filial piety which is the cornerstone of Chinese culture and tradition. Sri Sathya Sai Baba had often stressed on the importance of Love and respect for parents. He had urged office bearers in the Sai organisation to actively promote this value.



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