

Uncovering the Secrets of China's 10 Traditional Festivals





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1. How Do Chinese People Celebrate the Spring Festival?

“春节(chūnjié)” Chinese New Year or Spring Festival is the most celebrated and grand festival in China. It falls on the first day of every January in the lunar calendar. “除夕(chúxī)” is Chinese New Year’s Eve, and the word means “ringing out the old year and ringing



in the new.” There are three main activities during Spring Festival: having “团圆饭(tuányuán fàn) family reunion dinner” or “年夜饭(niányè fàn)”, the dinner on New Year’s evening; “祭祀(jìsì)” offering sacrifices to ancestors; and “守夜(shǒuyè) staying up”. You can taste all kinds of food for Chinese New Year including dumplings and rice cakes, which are very popular in southern China. When staying up, children can get “压岁钱(yāsùiqián) gift money” from their “长辈(zhǎngbèi) elders”, symbolizing well wishes for a safe year. Many people will also put up “春联(chūnlián) Spring Festival” couplets and New Year paintings on their doors and walls.

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“大年初一(dànián chūyī)”, the first day of Chinese New Year, is a time when families “拜年(bàinián)” visit the oldest and most senior members of their extended family, usually their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. Celebrations for Chinese New Year vary from place to place, but most will enjoy watching “舞龙舞狮(wǔlóng wǔshī) a dragon and lion dance troupe” and “放鞭炮(fàng biānpào) set off fireworks and firecrackers” as symbolic rituals to clear away bad spirits and usher in the Lunar New Year.

There are all kinds of Chinese New Year greetings, such as “新年好(xīnnián hǎo) Happy New Year!” and “新年快乐(xīnnián kuàilè) Happy New Year!” There are also other common greetings such as “恭喜发财(gōngxǐ fācái),” which means “Wish you great prosperity!” and “新年吉祥(xīnnián jíxiáng),” which means “Good luck in the new year.” And now, WeChat message is a popular way for people to greet each other:

Huānhuānxǐxǐ yíng xīnnián, wànshìrúyì píng'ān nián,

1. 欢欢喜喜迎新年，万事如意平安年，

Welcome the New Year happily! All will be well in the safe year;

yángméitǔqì shùnxīn nián, mèngxiǎngchéngzhēn fācái nián,

扬眉吐气顺心年，梦想成真发财年，

feel proud and happy in the satisfactory year; hope your dreams come true

in the wealthy year;

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Shìyè huīhuáng chénggōng nián, zhù jūn suìsuì yǒu hǎo nián!

事业辉煌成功年，祝君岁岁有好年！

Wish you a brilliant career in the successful year. Wish you well in the years to come!

Xīnnián zhùfú nǐ, hǎoyùn péizhe nǐ,

2. 新年祝福你，好运陪着你，

Bless you in the new year with good luck accompanying you,

cáishén gēnzhe nǐ, míngchē shǔyú nǐ,

财神跟着你，名车属于你，

with wealth following you, a name brand car belonging to you,

méiyùn duǒzhe nǐ, xǐshì wéirào nǐ. Wǒ ne shíshí bànzhe nǐ.

霉运躲着你，喜事围绕你。我呢时时伴着你。

misfortune avoiding you, and happy occasions around you. And for me, I will often accompany you.



To listen to the recordings, please go to

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There are many beautiful songs for the holiday too. Some popular classic examples are “新年好(Xīnnián hǎo) Happy New Year!” “欢乐中国年(Huānlè zhōngguó nián) Happy Chinese New Year,” “过新年(Guò xīnnián) Celebrations for Chinese New Year,” and “恭喜恭喜(Gōngxǐ gōngxǐ) Good Wishes to You.” If you want to learn more songs for Chinese New Year, please sign up for a free trial!

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2. Top Three Activities for the Upcoming Chinese Lantern Festival



“元宵节(yuánxiāojié) Lantern Festival” is several days after Spring Festival. Lantern Festival, which falls on January 15th of the lunar calendar, is another important tradition in China. On the night of the holiday, the streets are decorated with lanterns and festoons, and they're filled with the sound of gongs and drums. Merry people come out into the streets carrying lanterns. There are a number of traditional activities that take place on Lantern Festival, such the lighting of lanterns, lantern riddles and the dragon-lion dance. Let's have a closer look!

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赏花灯(shǎnghuādēng)

“赏花灯(shǎnghuādēng) enjoying lanterns” during Lantern Festival is a custom which has carried on for about 2,000 years. In addition, lanterns symbolize brightness and the birth of a baby. Lighting a lantern means to illuminate the future. Lantern Festival is also a romantic festival. In ancient China, young ladies were not allowed to go out by themselves, however, they could go out to enjoy themselves with friends on festivals. For single young people, to enjoy lanterns on Lantern Festival serves as a perfect opportunity to meet new friends. And now, many public recreational places like parks and squares hold lantern-themed performances. A great variety of beautiful lanterns are put on display.

Examples

Zhāng Líng: Yuánxiāojié chéngshì guǎngchǎng huì yǒu huādēngzhǎn, wǒmen yìqǐ qù shǎng huādēng ba!

张玲：元宵节城市广场会有花灯展，我们一起去赏花灯吧！

Zhang Ling: There will be a lantern show in the City Square on Lantern Festival, let's go and have a look!

Lǐ Míng: Hǎode, nàtiān kěndìng tèbié rènao.

李明：好的，那天肯定特别热闹。

Li Ming: OK. The celebrations must be very boisterous on that day.

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猜灯谜(cāidēngmí)

“猜灯谜(cāidēngmí) guessing lantern riddles” is also called “打灯谜(dǎdēngmí)”.

It is said that this custom originates from the Southern Song Dynasty (AD1127—1279). On the evening of the festival, lantern owners would write down riddles on a piece of paper or a wooden plate and hang them beneath colorful lanterns. If a visitor is able to solve the riddle, they can then pull the paper or wooden plate out and go to the lantern owners to check their answers. Since the riddles are both entertaining and instructive, they are popular with people of all types.

Example

Zhāng Lì: Lǐ Huá, nǐ lái cāicāi zhège dēngmí.

张丽：李华，你来猜猜这个灯谜。

Zhang Li: Li Hua, come here to have a look at this riddle.

Lǐ Huá: Liǎngxiōngdì, shǒulāshǒu, yíge zhuàn, yíge liú. Dǎ yī wénjù yòngpǐn?

李 华：两兄弟，手拉手，一个转，一个留。打一文具用品？

Li Hua: Two brothers, hand in hand, one turns round and another stands still. I guess it's a kind of stationery?

Zhāng Lì: Cāidé chūlái shì shénme ma?

张 丽：猜得出来是什么吗？

Zhang Li: Do you know the answer?

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Lǐ Huá: Zhège hěn róngyì ya, shì yuánguī! Gěi nǐ cāi zhège, yìniánsìjì shì chūntiān, dǎ yī chéngshì míng.

李华：这个很容易呀，是圆规！给你猜这个，一年四季是春天，打一城市名。

Li Hua: A piece of cake! It is a compass! How about this one? It has spring for four seasons a year, guess the name of the city.

Zhāng Lì: En.....wǒ hái shì cāi bù chū lái. Dá'àn shì shénme?

张丽：嗯..... 我还是猜不出来。答案是什么？

Zhang Li: Um...I still can't find the answer, what is it?

Lǐ Huá: Shì Chángchūn.

李华：是长春。

Li Hua: It is Changchun. (The capital of Jilin Province in northeast China. In Chinese, one meaning of "长(cháng)" is "all the time" and "春(chūn)" is "spring".)



To listen to the recordings, please go to

<http://www.echineselearning.com/blog/top-3-activities-for-the-upcoming-chinese-lantern-festival>

舞龙舞狮(wǔlóng wǔshī)

"舞龙(wǔlóng), dragon dance", also called "玩龙灯(wánlóngdēng) play dragon

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lantern", is also a traditional activity during Lantern Festival. It is performed by a team of dancers who manipulate a long flexible figure of a dragon or using poles positioned at regular intervals along the length of the dragon. The dance team, led by a ball held by a dancer and in a sinuous, undulating manner, mimics the movements of the dragon. People believe that dragons can control the clouds and rain and bring them a good harvest in the coming year.

“舞狮(wǔshī)” is a similar dance in which the performers mimic a lion's movements. Lions are a kind of auspicious animals to Chinese. The lion dance shows people's hope to get rid of misfortunes and their desire for good luck and happiness.

Examples

Lín Hóng: Wáng Méi, zuótiān yuánxiāojié nǐ qù nǎ'r wán le ya?

林 红：王梅，昨天元宵节你去哪儿玩了呀？

Lin Hong: Wang Mei, how did you spend the Lantern Festival yesterday?

Wáng Méi: Wǒ hé nǎinai qù le zhōngyāng gōngyuán, hái kàndào le wǔlóng wǔshī de biáoyǎn, tèbié jīngcǎi o!

王梅：我和奶奶去了中央公园，还看到了舞龙舞狮的表演，特别精彩哦！

Wang Mei: I went to the Central Park with my Grandma and we watched the dragon-lion dance there. It was amazing!

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3. Chinese Culture: 二月二，龙抬头 Dragon Raising Its Head

In North China, there is a saying that goes "二月二，龙抬头(èr yuè èr, lóng tái tóu) The dragon raises its head on the second day of February." It signals the arrival of spring, the beginning of all life, and the start of farming season. It is also called "春龙节(Chūnlóngjié) Spring Dragon Festival."



There is a legend about the origin of this festival. Once, in ancient China, it didn't rain for a very long time. So, the Jade Emperor ordered the young dragon in the East Sea to make it rain. But the young dragon was busy playing in the water and wouldn't come out. A young man, after going through innumerable trials and hardships, eventually found a way to subdue the young dragon, and successfully got him out of the water so that he could make rain.

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That's why people have coined this day "春龙节(Chūnlóngjié) Spring Dragon Festival."

Each year on this day, a lot of traditional activities are held in North China. The most popular one is "二月二, 剃龙头(èr yuè èr, tì lóngtóu) getting a haircut." People think "剃头(tìtóu)" or "理发(lǐfà)" getting a hair cut on this day can bring them good luck. Therefore, this is the busiest day for barbers in northern China. Also, besides getting a haircut, people celebrate by eating traditional foods such as noodles, pancakes, fried cakes, popcorn and so on. Many of the foods eaten on this day are named after the "龙(lóng) dragon." For example, having pancakes is also known as "吃龙鳞(chī lónglín) having dragon scales," having noodles is also known as "扶龙须(fú lóngxū) holding dragon whiskers."

All in all, everyone wants the same thing: for everything to go smoothly in the upcoming year.

Key Learning Points:

1. 抬(tái): v. to lift/raise.

"抬(tái)" is used as a verb that means to lift/raise in Chinese. It is also used to form the frequently-used phrase "抬爱(tái'ài) favor" and "抬杠(táigàng) to argue for the sake of arguing."

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Examples:

Bié wán le, kuài lái bāng wǒ bǎ zhège tái qǐlái.

别玩了，快来帮我把这个抬起来。

Stop playing and help me lift this.

Chéng méng jīnglǐ tái'ài, wǒ yídìng huì jìxù nǚlì de.

承蒙经理抬爱，我一定会继续努力的。

Thank you, sir. I will continue to work hard.

Gēge zǒngshì xǐhuan hé wǒ tái gàng.

哥哥总是喜欢和我抬杠。

My brother likes to argue with me for the sake of arguing.

2. 理发(lǐfà): v. to get a haircut.

Example:

Jīntiān shì èr yuè èr, wǒmen qù lǐfà ba.

Dan: 今天是二月二，我们去理发吧。

Today is the 2nd of February. Let's get a haircut.

Hǎo a.

Jim: 好啊。

OK.



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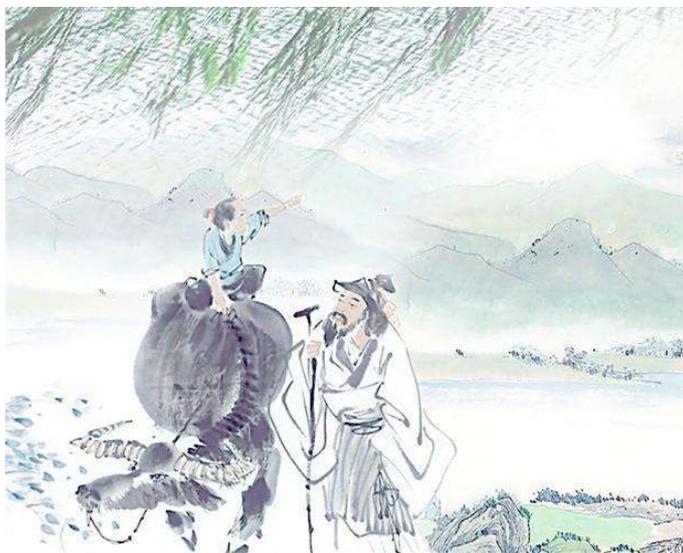
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4. Honoring the Dead on Tomb Sweeping Day

“清明节(Qīngmíngjié) Tomb Sweeping Day” is celebrated fifteen days after the Spring Equinox and is one of the few Chinese holidays that follows the solar calendar. The traditional Chinese calendar divides a year into 24 solar terms and “清明节(Qīngmíngjié) Tomb



Sweeping Day” is the fifth solar term. Originating in the Zhou Dynasty with a history of more than 2,500 years, Tomb Sweeping Day is the most important sacred festival in China.

The main activities are “祭祖(jìzǔ) ancestor worship” and “扫墓(sǎomù) sweeping tombs.” People will worship their ancestors with food and flowers. “扫墓(sǎomù) sweeping tombs” is also referred to as “上坟(shàngfén) visiting tombs.” People usually take foods and fruits to the tombs as offerings. After burning a kind of play money for spirits, tidying up the tomb and putting willow branches around the gates and doors of the tomb to ward off evil spirits, people eat the food and fruits before returning to their homes.

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This holiday is important to the national identity of Chinese people. For instance, many people are probably aware that the “Yellow Emperor” is the common ancestor of the Chinese people. So on every Tomb Sweeping Day, many Chinese delegates at home and from abroad will pay their respects to the “Yellow Emperor.”

This festival is also an important time for outdoor leisure activities. You can see many people in China “踏青(tàqīng)” going for a spring walk, “放风筝(fàng fēngzheng)” flying kites and “荡秋千(dàng qiūqiān)” swinging.” It is believed that people should fast and only eat cold food on this day. In order to prevent the bad effects from the cold food, people will take part in different outdoor activities; enjoy the spring weather and the change of seasons.

Key Learning Points:

1. 放风筝(fàng fēngzhēng): v. to fly kites.

The Chinese character “放(fàng)” means to release. “风(fēng)” means wind and “筝(zhēng)” means zither. “风筝(fēngzhēng)” means kite.

Example:

Guǎngchǎng shàng yǒu hěnduō rén zài fàng fēngzhēng.

A: 广场上有很多人在放风筝。

There are so many people flying kites on the square.

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