

Stephen Hu

English

Lunar New Year

Early February of every year, a 23 day long celebration will start in my family. Huge 3 course meals are being served almost everyday and red pockets are being passed around. It's the only time of year where you and your whole extended family are in one room. You're filled with laughter around the dinner table eating dumplings while your parent's get hilariously drunk. Everyone is full of love as the fireworks light up the sky all weekend long. But I've never asked myself why? Why is this time of the year so heavily celebrated by the chinese people? For all my years celebrating the tradition, I never really learned the true meaning of th Chinese New Year. Many of my family members are highly educated in the history and the tradition of the holiday, so I was able to interview my mom and my grandmother to further my knowledge of tradition. The Tradition of the Chinese New Year has been around for thousands of years, but many of us don't know the origins of the festival and how much it means to the chinese people.

While the Chinese New Year has been around for thousands of years, many don't know the deep history that it originated from. Many question why the Chinese New Year isn't actually in the beginning of each year, this is because the tradition was created using the ancient Chinese lunar calendar. As far back as the 14th century BC, during the Shang Dynasty, the Lunar calendar was used to tell time based on the moon, and it would also determine the length of how long the current emperor will rule China for. Many other Chinese beliefs like the Yin and Yang also contribute to the calendar. The Yin and Yang are

two opposing principles that create the harmonious and balanced world we live in. On the other hand, the Lunar New Year is not like many other religious holidays, it does not lie on the same date every year. But it is determined by the New moon that occurs between the end of January until the end of February, and it usually lasts around 15 days. Many of you have probably seen the animals which represent the Lunar years. The Lunar Calendar is moved in a 12 year cycle, and each year is represented by an animal. This practice can be traced back to the 14th century BC. From an informative video on the official website of History, “According to Asian astrology your birth year isn’t just a bunch of numbers, it can’t say a lot about your personality, based on the animal it represents.” For example, if you are born in the year of the OX. The calendar shows that your persistence and straightforwardness might be two of your strengths. Not only can it tell you about your personality traits, it can also speak a lot about your career path and the purpose of your life. Much like the zodiac signs. How the animals became a part of the calendar remains a myth though. Legend has it that the Jade emperor announced that animals would become a part of the calendar, and that the first 12 animals that arrived first were to be chosen. Each animal in the zodiac is also linked with its own element, water, fire, metal, wood, or earth. These elements also describe the interaction and relation between the Yin and Yang.

In order for me to gain more knowledge on the topic of the Lunar festival, I interviewed my grandmother about the tradition. My grandma has lived in China all her life, and she lived in an area that was very culturally involved in the Chinese New Year celebrations. When I interviewed her, I mainly wanted to know about how important the tradition was to her and her family. And also how she personally feels about it. Different

families in different areas of China today celebrate Chinese New Year differently. I asked my grandma how she and her family had celebrated the holiday over the years, “We celebrate the holiday like most traditional Chinese families do. The goal is to bring everyone in the family together, and just have a fun time. Because I rarely get to see the whole family, the festival is a nice way to get everyone together in the same room and share our happiness and love with each other. By giving the kids some red envelopes and making some of my favorite dumplings. Being able to see everyone’s smile is definitely the best part”. During the interview, it seems like my grandma just cared about the fact that it brings everyone together, and not so much of the religious beliefs that follow the festival. She also speaks about how other families that she knows really celebrate it for its religious reasons. Like bringing luck to the family for the year and killing the bad spirits with their food and drinks. “There isn’t really a specific way to celebrate the tradition. Every way is respected”. It seems like the trends in how families celebrate the New Year is passed down from generation to generation among the family’s bloodline. It doesn’t matter how the Lunar New Year is celebrated by each family, the main goal is to bring everyone together and have a good time.

The Lunar New Year is a very complicated topic, but the traditions that come with the holiday are what makes it so interesting and fun. The weeks of the Lunar New Year are filled with many traditions including food, greetings, festivals, events and fireworks. It's truly a symbol of celebration. One of the most important traditions include giving others (mainly children) red envelopes. The giving of red envelopes is a tradition to give other luck and happiness for the year. It is a saying that it is to kill the bad spirits within the human body. Usually, the parents or older people in the family put money in these red envelopes and give

them to children. Wishing them the best luck for the year. Another tradition of the Chinese New Year are the greetings. From an article "Everything you need to know about Chinese New Year" is says, " individuals greet one another with "*gongxi*" (pronounced gong-shee), which translates to "respectful joy" or "best wishes." This greeting is used to wish good luck and happiness to others for the new year. It is also customary for younger generations to visit their elders and wish them health and longevity on this day." Greetings are also another big part of the celebration because it is the first thing you say when you see your family. It is how the people give each other respect before sitting down for a big dinner. Lastly, Lion and Dragon dances is a traditional dance performed by a team who manipulates a long, flexible dragon using poles. Chinese Dragons are a big symbolic thing to the chinese people. It is believed that these creatures bring luck and fortune to all people. Also bringing it to the community at the same time. So if you are to attend a festival, you are definitely going to see one of these things running around the streets. These Lions often line up together to perform a Dragon dance, which is meant specifically to bring good luck and good fortune to the people of China. While Chinese New Year is such an old tradition that has been going on for so many years, it's meaning has not gone. Millions come together every year to celebrate the tradition, it has become an international holiday even celebrated by American culture like NBA basketball games. The message of spreading luck and prosperity is respected throughout the globe. The traditions that were created thousands of years ago still run in many Chinese families across the world. Including mine.

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