

TRADITIONAL THINGS

Significance of Chinese New Year traditions

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Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year is the festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year according to the traditional lunar calendar. In Chinese culture and East Asian countries, the festival is commonly referred to as the Spring Festival as it marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. This festival is one that's widely celebrated in Malaysia with catchy festive tunes playing in shopping malls alongside large red hampers, bright red decorations and Chinese traditional cookies all decked out. Another thing Chinese New Year is known for is the interesting traditions that people follow throughout the festivity. Here, we list down some Chinese New Year traditions and its significance that may just intrigue you:

REUNION DINNER

The reunion dinner marks a family gathering on Chinese New Year's Eve and it is considered to be the most important part of the celebration. Children are supposed to return to their families, in which married couples will go to the male's relatives home, and to the woman's home on the second day of Chinese New Year. Many dishes are typically served during reunion dinner to symbolise abundance, and chicken has to be one of the mandatory dishes as it symbolises prosperity, togetherness of the family and joy. The chicken would also usually be served whole with the head to symbolise completeness within the family.

RITUALS TO USHER IN THE NEW YEAR

After the reunion dinner, all family members will gather to stay awake all night as it is believed to delay the ageing process of the more elderly family members and hence, increase longevity. Some Chinese also perform prayers and rituals on Chinese New Year's Eve. During the ritual, a red table filled with food offerings are set out on the porch of the house while paper houses and paper money are burned as offerings past midnight (typically at 12am to 2am). During this time, all of the lights in the house will need to be turned on, to scare away evil spirits. To end the ritual, firecrackers are released before the gates of the house are closed and the family heads to bed for the night.

CLEANING

Cleaning the house is a long-observed Chinese New Year tradition. Before the arrival of the new year, Chinese families would clean the house and sometimes refurbish it with new items. Items such as bedsheets, pillows, curtains and more are replaced with new ones. Some families even replace furniture for the new year. New clothes are also typically bought for the festival and old ones are thrown away or donated. This year-end cleaning symbolises throwing bad luck from the house and making way for good luck to arrive during the new year. However, as soon as Chinese New Year arrives, cleaning the house isn't allowed as it is believed that cleaning the house on the first day of Chinese New Year means driving good luck away. The Chinese also do not wash their hair on the first day, to maintain good luck throughout the year.

GIVING RED PACKETS (ANG PAO)

One of the most anticipated traditions during Chinese New Year (for the singles) is probably receiving red packets, otherwise known as ang pao, from the elderly. Though many think of money, there's actually a heartwarming meaning behind this tradition. Red packets are also known as lucky money to the Chinese, and are given to children (or those who aren't married) during Chinese New Year. According to Chinese folk culture, when given this lucky money, children will remain safe and sound from monsters or bad spirits throughout the year. Thus, this tradition remains widely practiced by those who celebrate the festival throughout the world, especially in Asian countries.

LION DANCE

It's not uncommon to witness lion dances happening in Chinese houses during the Chinese New Year festival. In Chinese culture, the lion symbolises power, wisdom and superiority. People typically perform lion dances at Chinese festivals or big occasions in order to bring good fortune and chase away evil spirits. The lion dance is one of the most important traditions during Chinese New Year as it is performed to bring prosperity and good luck for the upcoming year. It's also a great way to entertain guests and bring happiness to those watching the performance.

FIRECRACKERS

Another common tradition during Chinese New Year is setting off firecrackers at the stroke of midnight as well as on the morning of the first day. The significance of this tradition can be traced to the legend of the Nian Monster 2,000 years ago. According to ancient Chinese legend, there was a ferocious monster named "Nian" with sharp teeth and horns (people typically associate its appearance with the lions used in lion dances). The monster secludes itself in the dark sea for a long time, and would go onshore by the end of the lunar year to hunt people and livestock. In order to drive the monster away, villagers would set firecrackers which would scare the monster off. Ever since then, the tradition of setting firecrackers remains till today, to scare away bad spirits.