

Chinese Folk Art, Festivals, and Symbolism in Everyday Life



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Cover image: papercut, lion dance performance, 9-15927c

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CHINA

The People's Republic of China is the third largest country in the world, after Russia and Canada. It is slightly larger than the United States and includes Hong Kong and Macau. China is located in East Asia. The capital city is Beijing, which is in the northeast part of the country. China is a country of great geographical contrasts. There are grasslands in Inner Mongolia, snowy mountains in Tibet, and wide plains in the Gobi Desert.

China is the most populous nation in the world, with close to 1.3 billion people. The majority of Chinese people belong to the Han group (about 92%), but there are also 55 ethnic minority groups that live mostly in the west and along the southern border. The official language is Mandarin Chinese, though people tend to speak Cantonese in the south and in Hong Kong.

Chinese civilization is one of the oldest known cultures in the world. Chinese history extends almost 5000 years, for most of which there is a written record. Until the 20th century China was organized according to dynasties and imperial rulers. China was united for the first time during the Qin dynasty (pronounced "Chin") in the 2nd century BC. The massive Great Wall was constructed in this era to keep out enemies from the north. The Chinese writing system was also standardized during this time. The written characters that make up the Chinese language are pictographs, which were created to look like pictures of things in daily life.



Buddha, bronze sculpture. 9–14630

Other notable dynasties are the Han (206 BC–AD 220), when Buddhism began to flourish, the Tang (618–907), commonly regarded as the most glorious period of Chinese history, the Song (960–1279), during which Marco Polo visited China, and the Ming (1368–1644), when Beijing became the capital of the country.

China is a country with many religions. For thousands of years China was an agricultural society based around ancestor worship. Even today, Chinese people believe that ancestors have a close relationship with the living. The two most common religions are Buddhism and Daoism.

Many Chinese practice a combination of Buddhism, Daoism, and ancestor worship.

Throughout different time periods in China's history, many Chinese have emigrated from China to other parts of the world due to various economic or political circumstances. Today, Chinese populations exist in North America, Southeast Asia, Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, and Russia. Over 1.6 million Chinese live in the United States, making it the largest Chinese population outside of Asia.



TAIWAN

Taiwan is a subtropical island consisting of rugged mountains and flat to gently rolling plains. The island is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, located off China's southeast coast. The capital of Taiwan is Taipei. Taiwan is a democratic society and the official language is Mandarin. Until the mid 17th century only indigenous peoples lived on the island of Taiwan. Indigenous populations still exist in Taiwan; however, they only make up about two percent of the total population. Today, more than 23 million people inhabit the island; the majority of these people are Han Chinese originating from mainland China. Many traditional Chinese beliefs and customs were brought from China and are very much a part of life in Taiwan today.

The Dutch and Spanish both occupied parts of Taiwan in the 1600s. The Dutch were driven out of the country in 1662. Shortly after, the Manchus—the rulers of the Qing Dynasty—took control of Taiwan in 1683. They continued to rule over Taiwan until 1895. Next, Japan conquered Taiwan as a result of the Sino-Japanese war. At the end of World War II Taiwan was finally reunited with China. In 1949, when China became a communist nation, the Republic of China's government moved to Taiwan. Taiwan's new government considered themselves to be an independent republic separate from China. By 1951 Taiwan's economy began to grow at a rapid pace. Taiwan has a dynamic capitalist economy, and public education is widespread.



Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

SYMBOLISM

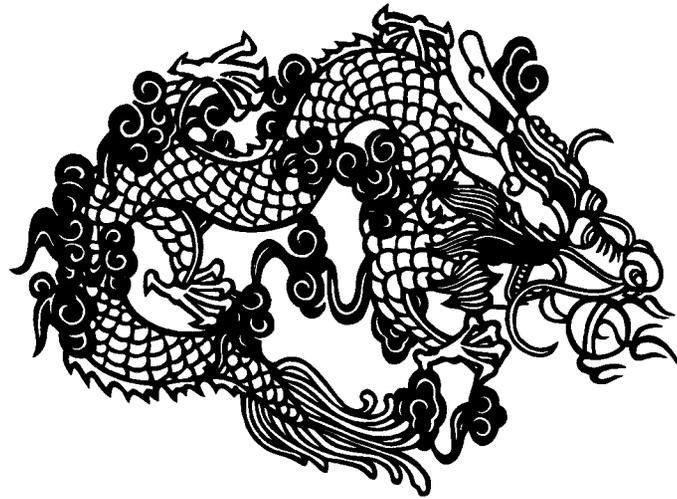
Symbolism is present throughout all cultures. Symbols may be seen in pictures, words, art, architecture, and common household items. Symbols are another way of communicating the thoughts, meanings, and hopes of a particular cultural group. Symbolism representing luck, prosperity, long life, happiness, and wealth are all important aspects in Chinese culture. Symbols representing these virtues are often seen in everyday life and appear during holidays and festivals. There are also deities that represent some of these virtues: the God of Luck, the God of Prosperity, and the God of Longevity, to name a few. Many Chinese hope to increase good fortune in their lives by surrounding themselves with items that represent these lucky signs.

The Chinese language influenced the development of symbolism. Chinese is a tonal language, therefore, depending on how a word is pronounced it could mean several different things. For example, the words for good fortune and bat are pronounced the same way although they are written with different characters. As a result, bats symbolize happiness and good luck in China. When five bats are seen together, they are said to represent the five blessings: health, long life, wealth, love of goodness, and death by natural causes.



Detail on a pewter and brass container. When five bats are pictured with the character for longevity as seen above, it combines to form a strong and potent symbol for long life and good fortune. 9-15907

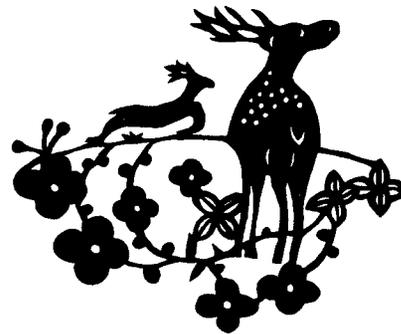
The Dragon is not a sign of terror as it appears in the Western world. On the contrary, the dragon is seen as a symbol of good fortune and protection. He has the power to make himself invisible at any time and can also reduce his size as small as a silk worm or expand in size so great that he fills up the skies.



Fish are a sign of abundance. Two fish paired together symbolize marriage.



The Phoenix is a popular symbol in Chinese culture. Known as one of the most beautiful birds, it represents good fortune, longevity, and abundance.



The deer symbolizes wealth and longevity. It is said to be the only animal that knows how to find the the sacred fungus of immortality.

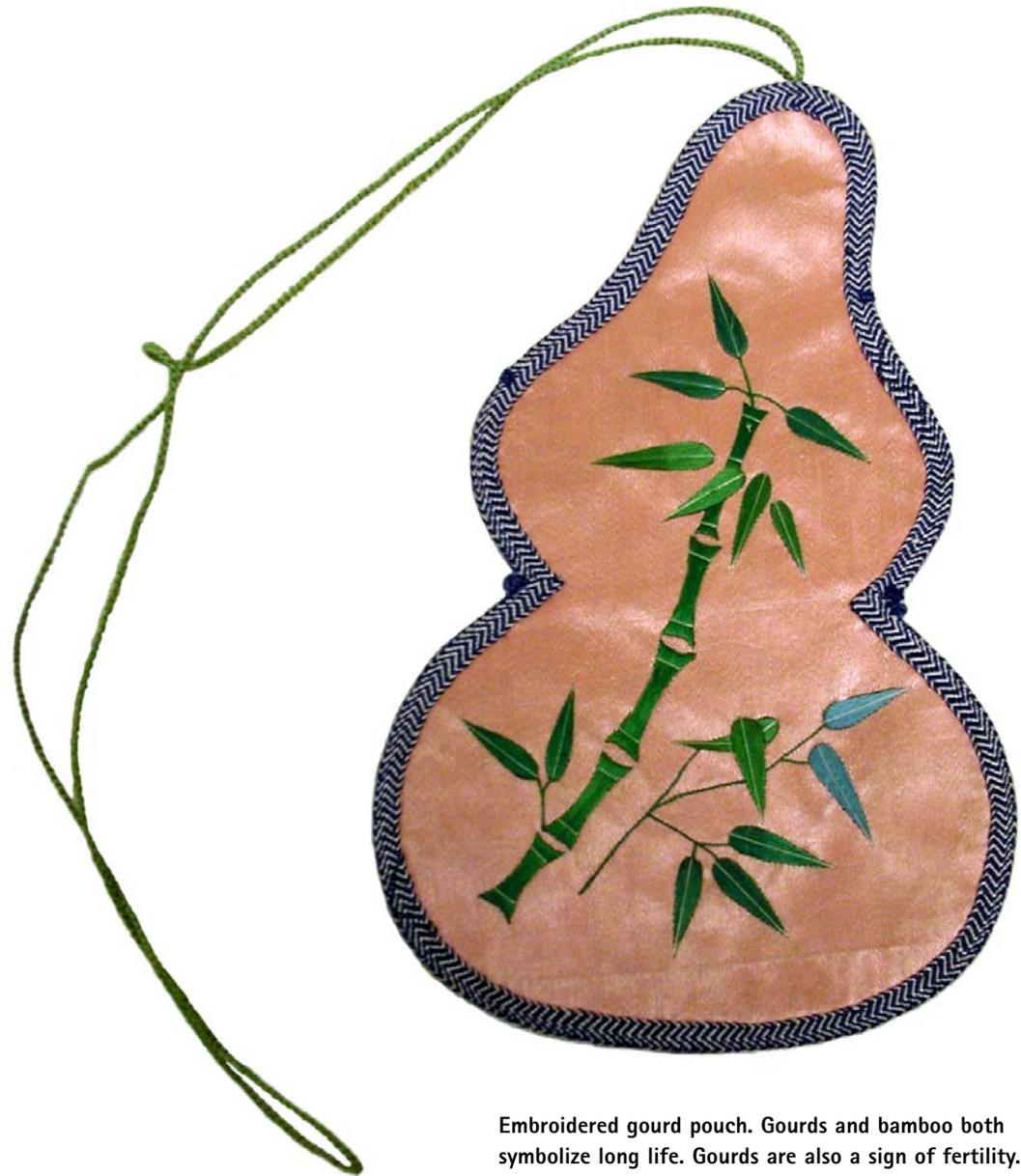
Although not native to China, the horse was imported and quickly adopted into Chinese culture. The horse represents strength, speed, and stamina.



CHINESE FOLK ARTS

Folk arts in China have developed over a thousand years. They include the arts of papercuts, wood-block prints, and embroidered textiles. These objects have been made for centuries by peasants. Paper, wood, cotton, and scissors were used to create these items. In the past, the upper classes in China laughed at such simple art, preferring calligraphy and landscape painting. They gave a name to Chinese folk arts: *diao chong xiao ji*, which means “the small skills of carving insects.” This term was used to poke fun at the folk art of the peasants. However, peasants did not have brushes on hand like the upper classes. They used scissors and knives instead—since they were household staples needed for such things as making a family’s clothing.

Chinese folk arts are not only beautiful, but also important to Chinese religion and beliefs in the countryside. Many items show pictures of gods and spirits along with heaven and earth. In China people believe that pictures have a lot of power to change events in life. Folk arts are used both to decorate homes and to wish for good fortune in all aspects of life.



Embroidered gourd pouch. Gourds and bamboo both symbolize long life. Gourds are also a sign of fertility. Collected in Beijing, China, 1944. 9-21266

PAPERCUTS



Traditional papercuts are made at home with scissors or knives from very thin sheets of colored paper. In the past, people enjoyed making designs from paper because it was quick and did not require many tools. Girls as young as six years old were taught how to cut paper by older family members. Sometimes designs are only cut once. Other times a pattern is used over and over again by placing it on

a clean sheet of paper and putting a smoking oil lamp beneath it. When the smoke has made its mark, it is removed and the outline that is left behind can be cut.

Usually paper cuts are pasted on windows or hung on doors, especially during holidays and festivals. The most important time to make and display papercuts is during the New Year Festival. Each part of China has different styles of paper cuts. However, many paper cuts share two common themes: protection from evil forces and the health and well-being of the family. Papercut designs can be pictures of anything, including lucky Chinese words, animals, children, or illustrations of popular stories. They are often made with red paper, since red is the color that represents happiness in China.

A part of China known as Shaanxi Province is well known for making some of the most beautiful paper cuts. During the winter each household in Shaanxi pastes colorful paper cuts known as “window flowers” (*chuang hua*) on each window in its home.



Top left: fish, painted; watercolor (?), 9-15722n Above: A old man tells tales to two young children as evening falls. 9-15927



Papercuts showing scenes from daily life. Clockwise: A girl performs a traditional dance, two children, boy with ox, two men playing traditional musical instruments. 9-15927k,i,g,d



Papercuts of the Eight Immortals. The Eight Immortals are famous throughout China. They were all awarded immortality by completing acts of great nobility. Each figure represents a different aspect of life; for example, wealth, youth, old age, and wisdom. 9-15925 j,a,b,i,c,d,e,f

TEXTILES AND EMBROIDERY



Textile arts in China include weaving, dyeing, and embroidery. China's most famous fabric is silk. Silk has been produced in China for thousands of years. It even found its way to India and Rome hundreds of years ago through the trade route known as the Silk Road. At one time the method of making silk was a highly protected secret. Two thousand years ago only noble families and officials were allowed to wear clothing made of silk.

Even after these rules changed, most Chinese people still wore clothes made of cotton because silk was too expensive.

The most common of all fabrics in China is cotton. People began planting and producing cotton in the mid-13th century. Soon, weaving cotton cloth and creating clothes from it became very popular all around the country. Chinese groups in the south use natural vegetable dyes on cotton cloth to form bright blue design patterns such as flowers and butterflies.

Throughout China's long textile history, embroidery has been as important as the arts of weaving and dyeing. Pieces of cloth with stitched designs have been found in China as far back as 2500 years ago. During this early time some popular embroidery designs included: plants, flowers, animals, dragons, mountains,

Table cloth (detail). Blue block-printed white cotton cloth. Peonies (good fortune), plum blossoms and butterflies (together they stand for long life and beauty). Collected in Beijing, China; 1942. 9-21253



Headband with neckguard; embroidery, satin, silk, Mongolian style. Embroidery patterns: peonies (good fortune); fish (abundance). Design motifs include cranes and peaches (long-life) between clouds. Around crown: bats (happiness) and clouds (good fortune and happiness), bamboo (long life and courage). Collected in Beijing, China, 1945. 9-21251

and the moon and stars. In the past, young women were taught to weave, dye, and embroider so that they could make pieces to add to their marriage dowry. Such pieces included pillowcases, quilt covers, and other items used in the home. Young women were often chosen for marriage based on their embroidery skills rather than their beauty. Often peasant women were hired by the upper classes to embroider their clothing and other personal items. These embroidery projects helped supplement their income.

Chinese embroidery often uses the “five colors” that are thought to represent the different natural forces in the world. Yellow stands for the earth; blue for wood; white for metal; red for fire; and black for water. When these five colors are used together in embroidery, they are known as the “threads of life on cotton cloth.” These threads are thought to protect the wearer from harm.

Some of the most popular gifts for children in China include embroidered clothing and toys made by hand. Many hats and shoes for children are made in the shape of pigs and dogs, which are thought to fool spirits and protect children. Tigers are often sewn onto children’s clothing to scare away ghosts and help children grow up to be strong and fearless.

Above: Pair of pink child’s mittens. The palm of the glove is in the shape of a cat’s face with holes at the ears for fingers to stick out; appliquéd eyes and nose, thread mustache. Collected in Beijing China, 1945. 9-21269a,b

Pair of lavender child’s slippers with tiger tip. Hunter green fringed tiger mask with “wang” sign (for king of the animals) stitched on forehead, appliquéd black and white eyes and white nose; hunter green long mustache and embroidered eyebrows. Collected in Beijing, China, 1945. 9-21293a,b





Clockwise: Little boy's headband. Heart shaped with floral design. Collected in Nanking, China, 1945. 9-21250

Pair of little boy's silk boots with chrysanthemum embroidery. The chrysanthemum symbolizes autumn and long life. Collected in Beijing, China, 1944. 9-21284a,b

Two-faced purse with flaps. Yellow satin embroidered in satin and stem stitch. Collected in Beijing, China, 1944. 9-21272



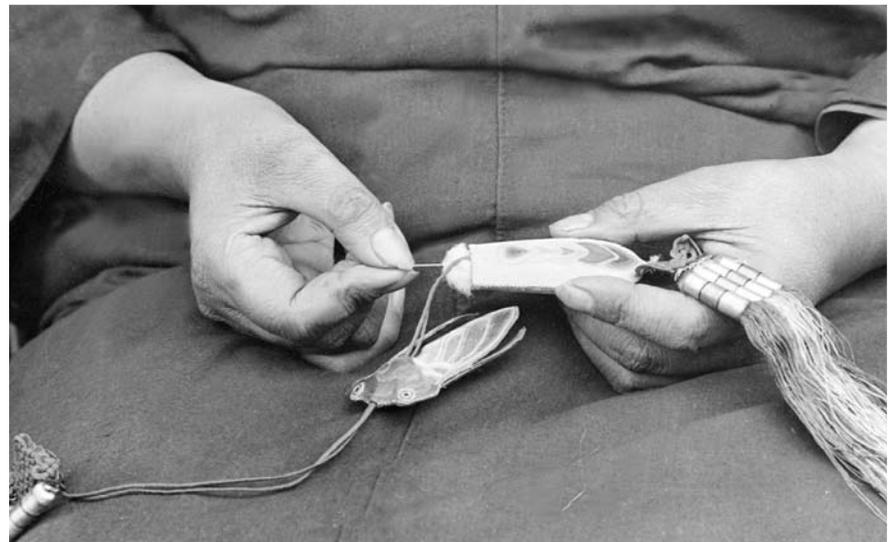


Clockwise: Fitting the sole to the upper of a child's shoe.

Filling a pipe with tobacco from an embroidered pouch.

Removing a sewing needle from a cicada-shaped needle case.

Beijing, China, 1943. Photographs by Hedda Hammer Morrison. 9-21436



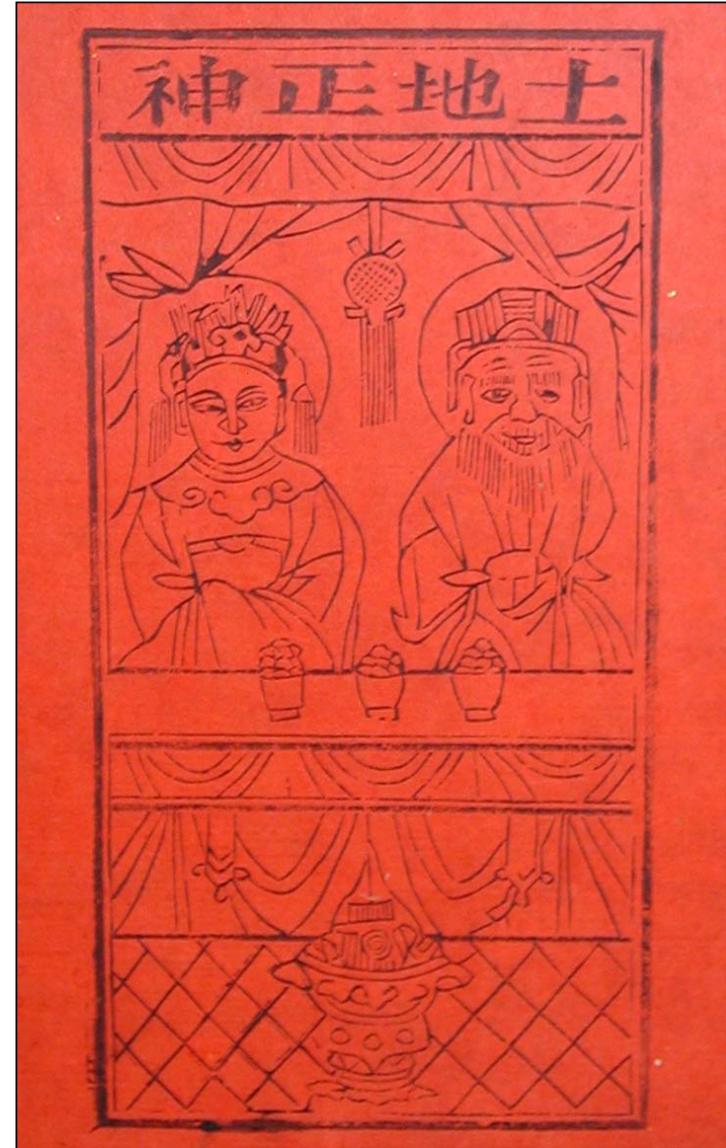
WOODBLOCK PRINTS

Perhaps the most common of all Chinese folk arts are woodblock prints. They are called *nianhua* in Chinese. This means “New Year’s pictures,” because they are always put up around the house during the New Year Festival. Woodblock prints are very bright and colorful posters, with thousands of different kinds of designs. They have been made since the 11th century. People in China use them for two reasons: to bring good luck and for decoration. Chinese people call buying *nianhua* “inviting in the gods” because pictures of gods are some of the most popular kinds of prints.

In the past woodblock prints were made by men during the winter. First an artist would draw a design; the design was then carved into a piece of wood. Next, the wood was used to stamp the design and other wood blocks were used to press different colors of ink onto pieces of paper. Now they are made in large factories and millions are sold every year.

There are two types of popular prints. One popular print has pictures of gods that people use in religious ceremonies. These are often burned at the end of the ceremony as an offering. In the past people also used woodblock printing methods to make paper money (or “spirit money”) to be offered to gods, ghosts, and ancestors.

Other woodblock prints are used to decorate homes and bring good luck. Some of the images represented include: people working, famous Chinese tales, lucky kinds of fruit, and wholesome children holding coins. They are displayed all year long until the start of the New Year when new prints are posted.



Woodblock print of the God of the Earth and his wife for family shrine at New Year's. Collected in Beijing, China, 1942. 9-21435.



Left: Woodblock print of the God of Increased Happiness and Wealth. Two acolytes hold fans behind the enthroned god. Two officials in front. Over the inscription, red imprint: Dragon Hall. Collected in Beijing, China, 1942. 9-21438



Right: Woodblock print of the Spirit of Bridges. Two fish leap up toward the spirit's belt. The acolyte helps him over a bridge. Collected in Beijing, China, 1942. 9-21440.

LUNAR NEW YEAR'S FESTIVAL



Each year Chinese people celebrate the Lunar New Year Festival (*Xinnian*). This is an exciting and cheerful time of year and everyone greatly looks forward to this celebration. It occurs annually on the first day of the

first new moon, and often lasts up to two weeks. Chinese people celebrate January 1st as the official New Year Day, but traditional New Year festivities follow the lunar calendar. It always begins on the evening before the first day of the lunar month, and ends on the 15th day with the Lantern Festival. At this time of year, people pay respects to numerous gods and spirits. Many take the time to do some “spring cleaning,” making sure their homes are cleaned spotless. They also make sure that any old debts are repaid. Lucky money is distributed to children by elders in red envelopes. The Chinese also view the holiday as an opportunity to begin anew with the hope of a fresh start in the year to come.

During the New Year Festival markets are filled with special foods, and vibrant decorations adorn windows. Fireworks are a bright and electrifying part of this holiday. People gather to watch exciting lion and dragon dances accompanied by lively music. Families decorate their doors with posters that contain lucky symbols, gods, and other popular figures. During this holiday season people wish for happiness, riches, and good health for their families and friends.



New Year decorations sold in a shop in Chinatown, San Francisco, California, 2005. Left: Dragon Dance performers at the Chinese New Year's Parade. San Francisco, California, 2005. Photographs by Nicole Mullen

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are a time for families to come together and give thanks. Many friends and relatives visit one another's homes to celebrate. There are lots of lucky foods at this time of year. Chinese people honor their ancestors at the family banquet table by having a big feast called "surrounding the stove" (*weilu*). Before the main dishes arrive, guests treat themselves to different snacks such as fruits, nuts, and seeds. The most popular snacks are put in a special tray with eight sides (because eight is a lucky number in China). Each snack represents good fortune in a different way, with items such as kumquats (gold), coconut (togetherness), and lotus seeds (children).

The most special holiday foods are prepared for banquets. During the New Year people eat chicken soup, pork, stir-fried vegetables, and whole fish along with many other delicious dishes. Fish served during the New Year symbolizes the hope for wealth and abundance year after year. Another popular food are small meat dumplings called *jiaozi*. Thin layers of dough are filled with chopped pork, cabbage, garlic, ginger, and other ingredients. *Jiaozi* are cooked in large pots of boiling water and eaten with dipping sauces made from soy sauce, vinegar, and chili oil. The most popular holiday dessert is called *niangao*, which means "New Year cake." It is a sweet, sticky pudding made from rice. *Niangao* is made differently in various parts of the country; sometimes it is fried and other times it is steamed. Tangerines and oranges, along with flowers such as plum blossoms and narcissus, are popular in markets and homes around this time of the year because they symbolize good fortune.



Dragon Dance performer at the Chinese New year Parade. San Francisco, 2005. Photograph by Nicole Mullen.

DOOR GODS

People decorate their gate posts and door panels with door gods (*menshen*) on the last day of the 12th moon. Since the second century AD, Chinese people have put up door gods during the New Year festival in order to protect their families and homes from harm. People paste pairs of door gods in the center of their door panels. In ancient times there were two gods, named Shentu and Yulu, that people carved or painted on peachwood and hung on their doors for good luck. These fierce-looking gods were guardians of the underworld who were thought to protect homes from demons. Beginning in the Song Dynasty (960–1279), people began to draw these images in ink on red paper.

Door gods are still popular today, and there are many different types of guardians. Animals like roosters and tigers, along with famous military generals from hundreds of years ago, are some of the more recently displayed door gods. In the past, door gods were always made by hand; however, today they are usually made in factories.

Door Gods of the ancestral hall of the Lin Family, Taipei City, Taiwan, February 1, 2003. Both were military marshals of Tang Dynasty (618–907), who were said to guard the Emperor Taizong against the vengeance of the Dragon King. The two marshals were courageous enough to guard the emperor voluntarily so that the Dragon King would never harm Emperor Taizong. From this story, people often paint or carve the image of the two marshals to protect their own homes. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.





Left: Like those throughout China, this commonly decorated door includes spring couplets and a pair of door gods. Pingxi in Taipei County, Taiwan, January 6, 2005. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

The spring couplets say:

*Go back and forth smoothly and have happiness every spring,
Come in and go out safely and have joy every year,
The plum blossom wafts odors, portraying the spring of the house.*

Above: Paper door gods purchased in a paper goods shop.



Relief sculptures of door gods photographed from two sides. Door god sculptures are usually made of peach-wood, which is believed to have spiritual power to expel demons and ghosts. Official City-god Temple of the Taipei Prefectural City, Taiwan, June 1, 2003. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

SPRING COUPLETS



Spring couplets (*chunlian*) are poems that are hung up in pairs on New Year's Eve, one on each side of an entryway. Each one usually has four, five, or seven Chinese characters, although some are 500 words long! These poems are hung outside homes and businesses. They

wish for wealth, good fortune, and long life to those inside. Like other New Year decorations, they tend to be written on red paper, the luckiest color. They are difficult to write. Each half of the couplet must use the same exact grammar and match the other half perfectly. People also hang a third piece of paper across the top of their doorways. This paper has four Chinese characters on it that sum up the meaning of the spring couplet.

Spring couplets are often pasted on the gates of companies or restaurants to greet customers or to make a wish. The spring couplets above say:

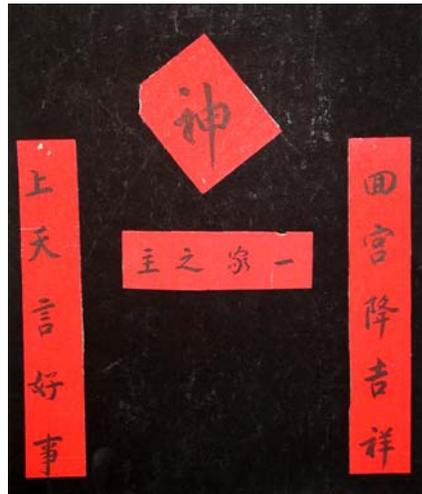
*Business is so prosperous to extend to "four oceans" (the whole world)
Profits are pouring in from all quarters to reach "three rivers" (the whole country).
Chinatown, San Francisco, California, 2004. Photograph by Elisa Ho.*

Right: Pair of spring couplets. Black ink on red paper. Collected in Beijing, China. 1942.9-21360a,b. The spring couplets say:

May a thousand good omens gather like clouds, and one hundred kinds of happiness combine here; May you smoothly enter into a new spring and everything follow your heart's desire.



STOVE GOD



For about 2000 years Chinese people have worshiped the Stove God. He is very important because he protects the home and the family from harm. A poster of the Stove God is often hung above the stove in Chinese kitchens. The Stove God watches over each family throughout the year. On the 23rd of the last month of the lunar year he reports to the Jade Emperor on each family's behavior. Families offer the Stove God many sweet foods before his departure. Often candles and incense are lit at this time; sometimes an offering of paper money is burned. Many families then seal the mouth of the Stove God's poster with honey so that he will be able to report only sweet things about them. Others believe that the honey acts as a seal, so the Stove God cannot say anything at all. The Stove God is said to return to families' homes on the first day of the New Year.

Above: Banner with Spring inscriptions for kitchen shrine. Translation top rectangle: "Stove God," Cross strip: "Lord of the whole household" Side strips: "When you ascend into heaven, tell good things! When you return to your shrine, bring down good luck!" Collected in Beijing, China, 1942. 9-21433

Right: Stove God and Wife. Modern print from original Qing dynasty (1644-1911) woodblocks; Wei county, Shantung province. "Collection of Bo Songnian; © Chinese Popular Culture Project."



DIVINATION & THE CHINESE ZODIAC

During the New Year festival, people like to have their fortunes told outside of the local temple. The diviner asks the person for the hour, day, month, and year of their birth (all according to the Chinese calendar). It is also important for the diviner to know one's zodiac sign in order to give a good prediction. The diviner then uses complex divination charts based on nature and the laws of the universe to describe what one can expect in both their work and private life.

In Chinese fortune telling, there are twelve zodiac animals used to mark each year: the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. Every year there is a new animal, and the cycle repeats after twelve years. Chinese people believe that those born during the same year have certain personality traits in common.



Papercut of the twelve zodiac animals. 2005 is the year of the rooster.



The Lantern Decoration of the Arch of Song Shan Ciyou Temple. The decoration is made in the shape of the Chinese Zodiac animals (left to right): Ox, Rat, Pig, Dog, Rooster, Monkey, Ram, Horse, Snake, Dragon, Rabbit, Tiger, Taiwan. February 2003. Photograph by Ching-Chih Lin.

THE LANTERN FESTIVAL

The Lantern Festival (*dengjie*) is celebrated on the last night of the New Year holiday, which is the 15th day of the first month. The streets are filled with people surrounded by hundreds of lanterns. Street performers abound to entertain the crowds. This holiday has taken place at the end of the New Year festival as early as the 6th century AD. Lanterns come in all shapes, materials, and sizes; some are made of paper, others of glass, gauze, or wood. In the city of Harbin, which is very far north, beautiful lanterns are made each year out of ice from the river. Some lanterns have historic scenes or Chinese characters painted on them. Others that are made in the shape of animals, like crabs or dragonflies.

During the Lantern Festival the lion dance (*shi wu*) and dragon dance (*long wu*) are performed. Men disguise themselves in huge, colorful lion heads and bodies made of papier-mâché. As drums and gongs play, one man moves the head. The other man shifts the back of the lion, making sure it is always moving. The dragon is made of bamboo rods and colorful cloth, and it stretches for at least 20 or 30 feet. Each part of the dragon is held up on poles. Many people are needed to help make the dragon move through the streets.

The most famous dragon dance takes place not in China, but in San Francisco. In the Golden Dragon Parade, begun in 1953, the dragon is 160 feet long. There are also many floats, musicians, and dancers in the parade. Every year, almost half a million people come to watch this parade.



Red lanterns in front of the Ciyou Temple. Red is an auspicious color. Red lanterns are often used in weddings and temple festivals. Taiwan, February 2003. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

During the Lantern Festival, on the last night of the New Year holiday, every household eats rice balls called *yuanxiao*. They are perfectly round, and symbolize the first full moon of the year. Usually they are sweet and filled with date or sesame paste. Sometimes they are salty and are filled with chicken, pork, and vegetables. *Yuanxiao* are only available for sale a few days a year during the holiday season.



Left: In celebration of the year of the ram, the animal lantern wishes great fortune to all. Right: Traditional lantern style, in the shape of a lotus, decorates the Ciyou temple. Taiwan, February, 2003. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.



A vivid show of acting puppets often seen during the Lantern Festival in China. In this picture, the Dragon King has accused the Monkey of killing the King's son in front of the Great Jade Emperor—the supreme ruler of the Heaven; from an episode of the famous novel *The Journey to the West*, by Xiyou ji. Guandu Temple in Taipei, Taiwan, February 2003. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

CLEAR BRIGHTNESS FESTIVAL

The Clear Brightness Festival, also known as *Qingming Jie*, or Tomb Sweeping Day, marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. It usually takes place on April 4, 5, or 6. It is a time to remember those who have passed away and visit their graves. Although it might sound sad, this is actually a cheerful holiday. It is important to keep in mind that in China the dead are still very involved with the living. Ancestors are thought to have the power to help or harm the living, so it is important not to forget them.

Ancestors are treated like living beings; this is a practice called ancestor worship. Chinese people believe that ancestors can become angry if they do not receive enough attention. Although ancestors are not as powerful as gods, they do have the power to punish their offspring if they are not happy with the way they are being treated. Ancestors must try to help the living if they are asked. If the ancestor does not help the living, the living may choose to ignore the ancestor, who will have no choice but to become a ghost wandering eternally in search of food.

On the day of Clear Brightness relatives go to sweep family graves, adorn the graves with flowers, and burn paper spirit money at the grave. People also bring food and wine to offer to the dead. Each large family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins often has its own private gravesite. Coffins are buried above ground in tombs made of mounds of earth, called burial mounds. The Chinese began building burial mounds around the 5th century BC.



Tomb. The top of the picture is the monument of a surname, indicating that the tomb buries the ancestors of the family. The two closer tombstones show the posthumous names of the husband and wife, the original hometown, the date, and the inscription of their sons. Qidu in Taipei County, Taiwan, April, 2003. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

Right: People usually offer foods, fruits, and paper money as sacrifices to their ancestors. In this picture, a "paper car" was offered on the altar. A relative may have wished for their late family member to have a convenient after-life or it may have been requested by the ancestor in the relative's dreams. Taiwan.

Below: On Tomb Sweeping Day, relatives gather to clean and weed the tomb of their common ancestors. Next, they spread some paper money on the tomb and offer sacrifices to the ancestors in front of the tombstone. After the worship, relatives share the sacrifice and have picnics, speaking with each other about the past year. Usually the elders will tell the story of their ancestors to the children to let them know the origins of the family. Taiwan.

Below right: In each tomb, there is a small stele of the Land God, who is believed to protect the ancestors. Taiwan. Photographs by Ching-chih Lin.



Once relatives have finished visiting with their ancestors, it is time for fun and games. Flying kites is a popular past-time during this holiday. Kites were invented in China 2500 years ago. Kites come in many different shapes and designs, including animals, or scenes from famous folk-tales. Kite flying is a joyous way to end this holiday, which honors the dead.

FEAST OF THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

Chinese people believe that during the seventh lunar month the underworld opens up and all ghosts come to the earth to enjoy themselves for a brief time. The Feast of the Hungry Ghosts (*Gui Jie*) is different from the Clear Brightness Festival, which celebrates one's family's ghosts and ancestors. This festival is meant to make peace with the ghosts of strangers and the dead who are not cared for by their families. When people die their families are supposed to continue to take care of them so that they remain at ease and happy. If spirits have no relatives to care for them they become gloomy wandering ghosts (*gui*). The Chinese do not want these unhappy ghosts to enter their homes, so they leave food and presents outside their doors in hopes of soothing their sad souls. On the 15th of the seventh lunar month, the community has a celebration where priests chant and perform rituals outside, offering small gifts, such as incense and spirit money, to the lingering ghosts. Next, the priest throws candy and other treats to the lost souls which many children try to catch and eat. After this ceremony the mischievous spirits are said to return the underworld.

On the 15th of the seventh lunar month, the community has a feast to offer foods to the hungry ghosts. People often offer pigs as a sacrifice during this occasion. The mouth of the pig is usually filled with orange or pineapple. Taipei City, Taiwan, 2004. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.





Worshippers offer as much as possible, in order to please or bribe the ghosts. They want the ghosts to be satisfied with the foods so that they will either leave the community or help their businesses to be prosperous. Taiwan. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

The Dragon Boat Festival (*Duanwu Jie*) started about two thousand years ago in southern China as a ceremony in honor of the Dragon God, who controlled rivers and rainfall. During the ceremony people wished for rain to feed rice plants. Today the Dragon Boat Festival is an exciting event which marks the beginning of summer. The day is celebrated across China with river parades, dragon boat races, and special foods. It occurs on the “double fifth” (fifth day of the fifth moon), usually around June 21. The Dragon Boat Festival is also a time to remember one of China’s most famous patriotic poets, Qu Yuan.

Dragon boat races are one of the liveliest parts of the festival. People bring their boats to the local lake or river to compete against their neighbors every year. The long, thin boats are very large and are made to look like dragons. These boats can carry as many as 80 rowers. Rowers paddle together while drums and gongs play in order to help keep the rhythm of the rowers steady.

The fifth day of the fifth month is considered a dangerous time. Dragon boat races are one way to guard against evil. At the end of the contest, boat crews throw offerings into the water so that all things evil can be carried downstream. On this day, many households tie together different plants like garlic, sweet-flag, and mugwort, and place them on their front door in order to protect themselves from evil. They also carry sachets called *xiangbao*, full of sweet-smelling herbs and flowers for the same purpose.



Piece of fabric for a child's garment on Dragon Boat Festival. A tiger and boy with a fire ring try to burn out the poisonous animals. Many people wear the “Five Poisons” (*wudu*) design on their clothes. The “Five Poisons” are five deadly animals: the snake, centipede, scorpion, lizard, and toad. The Chinese believed that if they wore pictures of these animals, they would not be harmed by them. During this holiday, children often wear five lucky colored threads (the threads of life) in their hair. Collected in Beijing, China, 1942. 9–21366



Zongzi is eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival. *Zongzi* is made with a ball of rice wrapped in rice, palm, or bamboo leaves and tied together with a string. Inside the rice are different kinds of fillings, some are sweet are filled with fruit and red beans. Savory *zongzi* are often filled with egg yolks, nuts, mushrooms, and meat. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.

California Dragon Boat Association 9th Annual Northern California International Dragon Boat Race. Lake Merced, San Francisco, 2004. Photographs by Paddlerpix.com.

GRANDFATHER SEVEN & GRANDFATHER EIGHT

People often dress as Grandfather Seven and Grandfather Eight during festivals and street fairs. Grandfather Eight is short and has a black face. Grandfather Seven is very tall and has a long red tongue which hangs from his mouth. A popular myth tells of their close friendship. One day they had plans to meet; however, Grandfather Eight came into a terrible rainstorm and drowned in the river on his way to meet Grandfather Seven. When Grandfather Seven discovered his body he became so distraught by his friend's death that he hung himself. This explains why Grandfather Eight has a black face and why Grandfather Seven has such a long tongue. To honor their devotion to one another they were made watchmen. The two friends watch over cities and towns reporting any misbehavior they see to the city god.



Grandfather Seven and Grandfather Eight often perform ritual dances in temple festivals and at processions for different gods. They usually walk in front of the celebrated god, expelling any demons on the street so that the god can proceed peacefully. Taiwan. Photographs by Ching-chih Lin.

MID-AUTUMN MOON FESTIVAL

The Mid-Autumn Festival (*Zhongqiu Jie*) celebrates the full moon that rises around mid-September. It also is a time to celebrate bountiful fall harvests. The moon is closer to the horizon during this time, so it appears even bigger and rounder than usual. During this festival people take time from their busy lives to relax and gather with loved ones to watch the moon.

The moon festival honors the female goddess of the moon, named Chang E. The women in the family are the ones that prepare for the holiday since the moon festival honors the female goddess of the moon. Posters made of bamboo and paper called “moon papers” (*yueguang ma'er*) are hung on doors. These posters are usually split into three parts. At the top is a picture of Chang E, the moon goddess; in the center shines a moon; and below is a picture of the Jade Rabbit, who is also said to live on the moon. Chinese people often buy sculptures and statues of rabbits to put in their homes at this time of year.

During the Mid-Autumn festival many kinds of offerings and special foods are made. The most popular holiday food of the Mid-Autumn festival is the round moon cake (*yue bing*). Moon cakes are flaky pastries with different kinds of sweet fillings. These fillings include pastes made from walnuts, dates, and mashed-up beans. Moon cakes in the south of China are very popular. They are filled with lotus seed paste, coconut, and have a round egg yolk inside to symbolize the moon. Mooncakes are about the size of a large muffin. Families eat these on the night of the moon festival.



Paper offerings (detail) burned in honor of female goddess of the moon, Chang E. Purchased in Chinatown, San Francisco, California. Photograph by Ching-chih Lin.