



中国节庆文化丛书

Chinese Festival Culture Series

The Spring Festival

主 编 李 松
副主编 张 刚 彭新良

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李曦淼
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译 著



春 节

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Foreword

According to Chinese traditional way of numbering the years, a whole year could be divided into four seasons. The eleventh and twelfth lunar month was called "Dong Yue" and "La Yue" which are the coldest time of a year. While the first month of the lunar New Year, known as "Zheng Yue", means the coming of spring, which is regarded as the head of seasons.

As the head of seasons, spring watches the ice melting down, trees waking and flowers blooming. It was written in *A Song in Slow Time* in Music Conservatory of the Han Dynasty that "Bright spring diffuses virtue, Adding fresh luster to all living things"; Su Shi, a writer in the Northern Song Dynasty, wrote that "By the bamboos bloom two or three peach flowers blossom, In the pool ducks are swimming"; Ye Shaoweng of the Southern Song Dynasty depicted in his famous chapter *A Friend Unvisited* that "So full did his garden boom with spring that the door failed to close all the scenery; a twig of red apricots was seen beyond the wall". Those old famous chapters perfectly describe the

前言

在中国人的传统纪年方法中，将一年分为春、夏、秋、冬四个季节，但采用的是农历表述方式。农历的十一月和十二月分别称为“冬月”和“腊月”，为一年中最寒冷的月份。而农历的第一个月，按照习惯称为“正月”，意味着一年之首春季的到来。

春季是四季之首，此时冰雪消融、春色满园、大地复苏、百花齐放。汉代乐府古辞《长歌行》咏诵道：“阳春布德泽，万物生光辉。”北宋文学家苏轼留下了诗句：“竹外桃花三两枝，春江水暖鸭先知。”南宋诗人叶绍翁在《游园不值》中写道：“春色满园关不住，一枝红杏出墙来。”这些千古名句细致逼真地抓住了大自然中节气变化的特点，





生动形象地勾勒了春天的秀丽景色。“一年之计在于春”，中国人以最大的热情迎接春天的到来：千家万户打扫房前屋后，穿上新衣新鞋，用新面貌迎接新一年的到来；准备最精美、最丰盛的美食欢庆上一年的丰收；用最隆重的礼节祭拜先祖和上天诸神，感谢他们的眷顾，并期盼新一年里依然佑庇自己；无论身处何地都要返回家中与亲人团聚，放松劳碌了一年的身体；举行丰富多彩的娱乐活动，尽情享受民间习俗带来的愉悦。在中国传统文化中，这就是春天里的节日，中国最为隆重、节日氛围最浓厚、影响范围最大、喜庆时间最长的节日——春节。

“百节年为首”，春节的时间正好处于农历旧年与新年交替之际，因此又被形象地称为“过年”，即从腊月过渡到了正月，辞别旧岁，喜迎新年。

春节在中国不同时代有不同的名称。尧舜

changing of seasons and give readers a vivid view of spring. “The whole year’s work depends on a good start in spring”, which is well known among the folks. To offer a warm-hearted welcome to spring and to celebrate the harvest of last year, every family sweeps the house, wears new clothes. They prepare the most delicious food to worship ancestors and gods in the most solemn manners, thanking for their protection, wishing for their future and being blessed in the coming year. On such a big occasion, every family member returns home to a reunion party where he or she could relax his or her yearly toiled body. A variety of recreational activities will be held to make the festival enjoyable and colorful. This is a festival in spring. Traditionally, this festival is the longest and happiest, most important and most influential one among Chinese holidays.

It is true that “Chinese Spring Festival is ahead of all other holidays in China.” The festival happens to be on the turning point of the past year and the new year in lunar calendar. That is why it is also called as “Chinese New Year”. People indeed welcome a new year and bid a farewell to an old year when the Spring Festival goes from La Yue to Zheng Yue.

Chinese New Year had different names at different times. Back to the Yao and Shun period,





it was called “Zai”, which implied that all things would take on a new start. In the Pre-Qin Dynasty, “Shang Ri”, “Yuan Ri”, “Gai Sui” and “Xian Sui” was called. In the Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasties it was “San Zhao”, “Sui Dan”, “Zheng Dan” and “Zheng Ri”. In the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties it was entitled as “Yuan Chen”, “Yuan Ri”, “Yuan Shou” and “Sui Chao”. It was alluded to as “Yuan Dan”, “Yuan”, “Sui Ri” and “Xin Zheng” till the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. As in the Qing Dynasty, “Yuan Dan” or “Yuan Ri” was so named. Of all those appellations, “Yuan Dan” was mostly accepted for the longest time. During the period of the Republic of China, “Yuan Dan” was changed into “Spring Festival”. The People’s Republic of China has adopted international chronology. In order to differentiate the two New Years in the solar and lunar calendars, and also because of that “Li Chun” in the 24 solar terms being around the lunar New Year, people named the first day of the first lunar month “Spring Festival” and January 1st in solar calendar was declared as “Yuan Dan”.

Chinese respect nature and tend to their humane feelings in accordance with the law of the changing of seasons. Their enthusiasm and energy are evoked with the coming of the Spring Festival. And a

时期被称为“载”，有万象更新的寓意；先秦时期被称为“上日”“元日”“改岁”“献岁”等；西汉、东汉时期又被称为“三朝”“岁旦”“正旦”“正日”等；魏晋南北朝时期被称为“元辰”“元日”“元首”“岁朝”；到了唐宋元明期间，被称为“元旦”“元”“岁日”“新正”等；而在清代一直被称为“元旦”或“元日”。在这些称谓中，以“元旦”使用最为普遍、时间最长久。民国时期，将“元旦”改称为“春节”。中华人民共和国成立后，采用世界通用的公元纪年。为了区分阳历和阴历两个“年”，又因一年二十四节气的“立春”恰在农历年的前后，故把阳历（公历）一月一日称为“元旦”，农历正月初一正式改称“春节”，一直沿用到现在。

春节的出现体现了中国人以四季更替变化的规律为依托，以自然为取向，尊重自然进而由物喻





人的人文情怀。春节中所进行的一系列祭祀、娱乐活动也反映出了中国家庭和谐、邻里和睦的社会逻辑以及中华民族勤劳、朴实、热情的民族性情。春节不仅凝聚了历代中国人对美好生活的追求与向往，也是中华民族共同认同的文化记忆，维系着中华民族的情感与统一。

series of worship and recreational activities also display their eager desires for harmonious family and peaceful community. And Chinese people's industrious and optimistic temperament could be demonstrated to the full length in these traditional events. In a word, the Spring Festival is not only a holiday that could embody people's hopes and wishes for a better life, but also serves as common cultural memory for all Chinese, abroad or home, or more accurately, as a bond of love to unite them as a single people.





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The Postscript of *Chinese Festival Culture Series*



第一章

春节起源



春节，即农历岁首的第一个节日，在中国民间被习惯性地称为“过年”。

一般认为，春节起源于上古尧舜时代。当时的人们为了答谢保佑他们一年农事顺利的神灵，便在四季走完一个轮回、新的轮回即将开始时，用上一年人们所收获的最好的食品献祭给神灵，报答神灵的恩赐。同时，人们也通过各种狂欢娱乐活动来庆祝丰收。中华民族所历经的五千年历史长河中，中国新年的礼俗经历了萌芽、基本形成、裂变和转型等发展阶段，中华民族的传统文化在春节中得以延续了数千年，而且在不同时期具有时代特征的社会文化也通过春节为后人所了解。

Chapter One

The Origin of the Spring Festival



The Spring Festival is the first festival in lunar calendar. Chinese folks habitually referred to New Year as “Guo Nian (Spending the year)”.

It is generally accepted that Chinese New Year originated in the Yao and Shun period. In order to pay respect to the gods who granted people a smooth farming harvest, they offered the best of harvest to sacrifice to the gods at the time when four seasons completed a cycle and a new cycle was about to begin. At the same time, people enjoyed a variety of carnival entertainment to celebrate the harvest. These primitive practices gradually developed into a set of custom or tradition through such a long history of 5000 years. Chinese traditional culture has been handed down in the celebration of the Spring Festival. More importantly, not only are social cultural characteristics of different times revealed in the process of the Spring Festival, but also future generations could explore more from close inspection.



1

五谷皆熟为年 Harvest

Cycling is the basic meaning of the Spring Festival. Chinese ancestors understood gradually in the long-term labor that the growth of the crops in four seasons is relevant to the movement of the celestial bodies. Therefore, the Spring Festival, or New Year, is regarded as a record of time cycle.

It has been given different names in different dynasties in China. *Erh-ya* (ancient book containing commentaries on classics, names, etc.): *Shi Tian* (interpret the sky) recorded that Chinese New Year was called “Sui” in the Xia Dynasty, “Si” in the Shang Dynasty, “Nian” in the Zhou Dynasty and “Zai” in the Yao and Shun Period. In this sense, New Year as a new term has emerged since the Xia and Shang Dynasties (2070 B.C.—1046 B.C.). But the original meaning of “New Year” was not referred to as time but connected with agricultural production. In ancient times, the growth cycle of crops

春节最为本质的含义是中华民族先民在长期的生产实践中对农作物四季生长规律的认识和对天体运行变化规律的了解，因此，春节又被当作“年”的别称，作为时序循环周期的记载。

对于“年”这样一个时间节点，在中国不同朝代被赋予了不同的称谓。《尔雅·释天》中有记载：“夏曰岁，商曰祀，周曰年，唐虞曰载。”由此可见，中国文化中关于“年”的概念在夏商（公元前2070—公元前1046）时期就已经出现了。然而，“年”最初的含义并





不是时间概念，而是源自于农业生产。在古代，农作物的生长周期一般都为一年左右，所以“年”最初的含义是谷物收成的意思。“年”字是“稔”字初文，汉字里归在禾部，“稔”即是庄稼成熟丰稔的意思。而在甲骨文中，“年”字上部为“禾”，下部为“人”，就像是人们头上顶着沉甸甸的稻谷一样。在东汉许慎的《说文解字》中，对“年”的解释为：“年，谷熟也。”《尔雅·释天》中说：“年者，取禾一熟也。”而在《穀梁传·宣工十六年》中记载成：“五谷皆熟为年，五谷皆大熟为大有年。”其中，“有年”意为农业上有收成，而“大有年”则是农业上大丰收。由此不难看出，一年是根据谷物的播种和收获周期而确定的，其中也反映了“年”与农作物收成之间的密切关系。

作为一个传统的农业国，农业生产对中国社会的影响超过了其他任何方

finished in about one year, so “New Year” meant initially harvest. In Chinese characters, “Ren(Ripe Grains)” was originally written as “nian(a year & new year)” and when it comes to traditionally recognized components (or radicals) of Chinese characters, “New Year” and “Ripe Grains” belong to different categories, “Ripe Grains” is in the entry of character component of “He(Grain)”. In the ancient Chinese carapace-bone-script, “New Year” was written like a man holding ripe grains over his head. In Eastern Han Dynasty, Xu Shen had explained in his *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* that New Year stands for the harvest. The same expression was also found in *Erh-ya: Shi Tian*. The *Gu Liang Biography: The 16th Year of Duke Xuan* says that barns of grains make a new year and full barns make a great year. It is not hard to see in agricultural era grain planting and harvesting determines whether people have a good year or a bad year. The close relationship between Chinese New Year and harvest is thus revealed.

China was a traditional agricultural country. No any other industries than agriculture could have such greater influence upon social life. It can be said





that all aspects of traditional culture were closely related with farming. A full cycle of crop growth corresponds to a cycle of seasons. From the long-term agricultural farming practice our forefathers came to form a rational understanding about the change of seasons, a climate shift and the growth of the crops. Through observation they found out the fundamental relationship between alternating seasons, celestial runs and growth of crops. On this basis they summed up a set of methods measuring and calculating time. And they recorded year, month and day in use of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches Methodology till they eventually made a calendar and settled down the farming seasons.

However, ancient Chinese calendar was changing all the time with the changes of dynasties. The emperor who took the throne changed the order of the month at his will to prove the divinity of his given right. The first month changed was always known as “the first month of the Lunar Year”, and the other eleven followed in a certain sequence. In Chinese history, the Xia Dynasty used the first month of the spring (Meng) as the beginning of the year. The Shang Dynasty used the last month of winter (the twelfth lunar month) as the first month while the Qin Dynasty employed

面。可以说，中国传统文化各个方面的形成均与农事农耕相关。农作物生长的完整周期伴随着春夏秋冬的轮回，从春天播种、秋天收获的长期农事耕作规律实践中，先人们对寒来暑往的变化、气候阴晴雨雪的交替反复以及农作物的生长成熟都逐渐有了一些理性的认识。通过观察，发现了四季交替及天体运行与农作物生长之间的关系，在这个基础上逐渐总结出了一套测定和计算时间的方法，用天干、地支记录年、月、日，并通过制定历法的形式将农时以节气的形式在历法中加以明确。

然而，古代中国的历法也随着朝代的更迭、帝王的易姓而不同。每一次改朝换代，天子们为了证明他们的权力是上天所授予，都要把月份的次序更改一次，历代历法变更后都将每年的第一个月称为“正月”，剩下的十一个月依次顺延。因此，在中国历史上便出现了夏朝用春季的第一个月（孟春）





作为正月，商朝用冬季的最后一个月（腊月）作为正月，而到了秦朝则将冬季的第一个月作为正月。汉朝沿用秦朝的历法，由于感到历法与天体运行规律出入太大，汉武帝命公孙卿、司马迁、邓平等入创《太初历》。该历以夏朝历法的正月作为一年之首，并将二十四节气修订入历法之中。自汉朝以后，虽然历代都对历法进行过修订，但都以《太初历》为蓝本，以春季的第一个月为岁首。太初历一直沿用至清末，共延续了两千多年，至今中国民间都把太初历称作“夏历”。有了固定的历法，人们根据历法中的二十四节气安排农事，以年作为计时单位。春夏秋冬周而复始便是一年，冬是旧岁的末尾，春是新年的伊始，而分隔新年旧岁的日子便是“过年”。随着年历的确定，每年新旧年岁交替时的年节——“春节”也就随着一年一度固定的日子延续了下来。

the first month of the winter as the first month of the year. Han Dynasty followed Qin's calendar. As the calendar did not fit celestial laws well which governed the operation, Wu Di, the Emperor of the Han Dynasty ordered Gongsun Qing, Sima Qian, and Deng Ping to create a new calendar named *Tai Chu*. In this new calendar the first month of Chinese lunar calendar was set as the beginning month of a new year and twenty-four solar terms were included in it. Later dynasties all made some modification, but the rule that the spring was the beginning of year remained today. The *Taichu Calendar* has been used up to 2000 years till the end of the Qing Dynasty. Chinese folk regarded the *Taichu Calendar* as "traditional Chinese lunar calendar". With the calendar fixed, people could arrange their farming production in time according to 24 solar terms. Four seasons in order constitutes a year with winter as the ending and spring as the beginning. The transitional days from the old year to a new year are so-called "Chinese New Year" or "the Spring Festival". Spending the festival happily has been a traditional custom.

