

中 国 传 统 文 化 双 语 读 本

Festivals and Customs

# 节日习俗

教育部基础教育课程教材发展中心编

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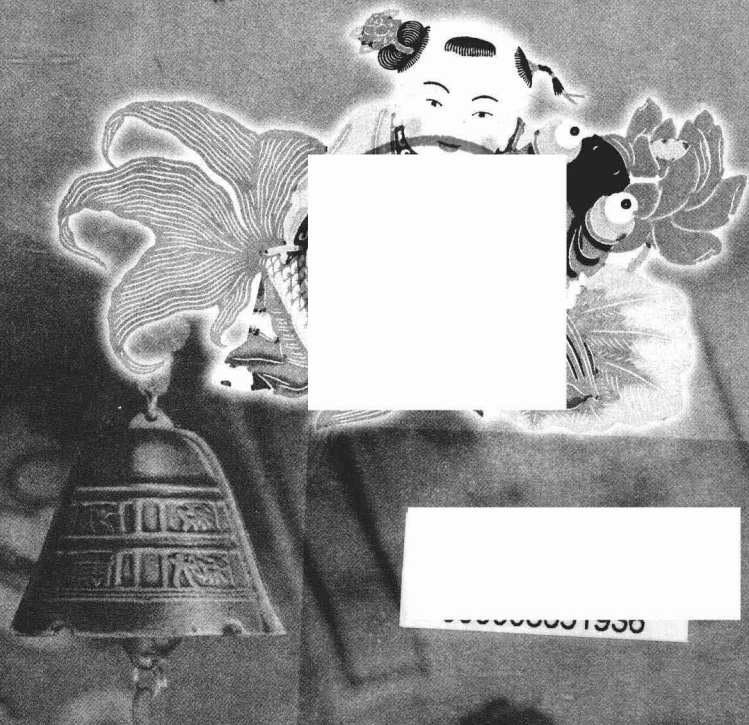
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## 节日习俗



*Festivals and Customs*



# I . Festivals and Customs

## 1. Spring Festival

Of the traditional Chinese festivals, Spring Festival is the most celebrated. But the festival was not called "Spring Festival" until the Revolution of 1911. Until the Revolution it was called "*Nian*" and celebrations for it were called "*Guo Nian*"—"Passing (or Celebrating) the *Nian*".

Why was the festival called *Nian* before? There was a story behind it. It was said that there used to be a strange fierce animal with horns on its head and the animal was called *Nian*. Every winter, on the last night of the 365 days the *Nian* would come to a village, trampling the crops, eating livestock and killing the folks.

One year the *Nian* came to the village as usual. It came past the gate of a household, the owner of which made bamboo products as a trade. The man inside the gate was heating bamboo and the bamboo, splitting up with heat, was making noises. The *Nian*, hearing the strange noises, was scared and ran.

It ran and ran and, before long, it ran into a person in scarlet clothes and the scarlet color frightened it and set it running harder and farther.

It kept running and was getting out of breath. It stopped for breath under the eaves of a household. When it looked up it saw a lantern hanging from a pole over the gate. The lantern was bright and it was dazzled by its brilliance. It had to go and run again.

The folks then discovered the weakness of the *Nian*—there were things that the *Nian* was afraid of. It was afraid of explosive noises, red color and the light from lantern or fire. And then they

# 一、春 节

## 1. 过春节为什么也叫过年

在中国的传统节日中，最隆重最热闹的就是春节了。可是你知道吗？“春节”这个名称，是一九一一年辛亥革命以后才正式叫开的，在那以前都是叫“过年”。

关于过年，民间一直流传着一个有趣的传说。据说“年”是一只头上长角的凶恶怪兽，每隔三百六十五天的一个冬末夜晚，它就跑出来祸害农田，吞食家畜，残害百姓。

有一次，“年”又出来作恶，刚好走到一个竹器匠家的门口，正碰上竹器匠在院里烘烤竹子，噼噼啪啪的竹子爆裂声吓得它魂飞魄散，于是掉头就跑。

谁知跑了不远，迎头又撞见了一个身穿大红衣服的路人，那红颜色让“年”胆战心惊，只好夺路再逃。

好不容易跑到一户人家的屋檐下，正想喘口气儿。一抬头，那家门前挂着的灯笼烛光闪耀，刺得它睁不开眼，没办法，只能接着再逃。

这样一来，人们发现了“年”的致命弱点，就是怕爆炸声、怕红颜色、怕火光，于是想出了对付



learned how to deal with the *Nian* if it came to the village again. Every year on the night between winter and spring, when the *Nian* came to kill the villagers and the folks would burn bamboo to make noises (when fireworks were invented later they used fireworks to make louder noises), put up red paper on the wall (later with words on it to exorcize evil spirits and wish for good fortunes and this was the forerunner of spring couplets), and hang red lanterns at the gate to scare it away. When they succeeded in driving away the vicious animal, every household had a feast to celebrate. Since then that day had been known as “Passing (or Celebrating) the *Nian*”.

As a matter of fact the Spring Festival we celebrate today was in ancient times a series of sacrificial activities by which people hoped to bring about good weather and good crops in the coming year. In ancient times the first day of the first lunar month was considered as the beginning of the year and it was a very important day of the year, so sacrificial activities were all arranged on that day. And soon it became a festival known as “*Yuanri*” or “*Yuandan*” meaning the first day or the first morning of the year. And the people began to call it “Passing (or Celebrating) the *Nian*” and along with it there have been many legends and stories that add a festive mood to it.

When the Revolution of 1911 put an end to the monarchy, Gregorian calendar was adopted and as the first day of the new calendar is also known as “*Yuandan*”, the first day of the first lunar month was given a different name——Spring Festival.

## 2. The Customs of Spring Festival

### A. *Laba* Porridge and *Laba* Garlic

Spring Festival consists of a series of celebrations starting from the 12th lunar month customarily called the month of *La*. The first is *Laba* (the 8th of *La*). On *Laba* day, every household will cook *Laba* porridge which is a mixture of many things : rice , millet ,



“年”的好办法。每到冬去春回,“年”要出来害人的那个晚上,家家户户就燃起爆竹(以后又制作出鞭炮,声响更大),贴上红纸(后来再写上驱邪求福的文字,逐渐演变成了春联),挂出红灯,好把“年”吓跑。“年”被赶走了,人们非常高兴,于是家家户户摆酒设宴,欢天喜地地祝福庆贺,这一天就被称作是“过年”。

其实今天的春节在远古时代,只是一个为了庆祝五谷丰收,祈(qí)盼来年风调雨顺的祭祀(jì sì) 典礼活动。古人认为农历正月一日是一年之始,非常重视,就把这个祭祀活动定在了这一天。久而久之,就形成了节日,称为“元日”或“元旦”(“元”是开始、第一,“旦”是早晨,“元旦”就是一年的第一个早晨),民间俗称“过年”,并产生了许多传说和故事,以增添过年的喜庆气氛。

到了辛亥革命推翻了帝制,开始实行公历,但总不能有两个“元旦”啊,于是决定公历一月一日称“元旦”,而农历正月一日就改称“春节”了。

## 2. 多姿多彩的春节习俗

### (1) 腊八粥与腊八蒜

照老规矩,围绕着春节的各种活动从农历腊(十二)月就陆续开始了。先是过“腊八节”。腊月八日这天,每家每户都要用各种各样的米、豆、干果(大米、小米、高粱米、糯米、黄豆、绿豆、红豆、



sorghum, glutinous rice, soybeans, mung beans, red beans, peas, apricot kernel, lotus seeds, peanuts, dried grapes, sunflower seeds, longan, walnut, etc. *Laba* porridge is served not only as a delicacy, but also as an offering in hope of good crops next year.

On *Laba* day *Laba* garlic is prepared. First class white garlic is selected and put in a pot with vinegar and the pot is sealed. On Spring Festival day when the pot is opened, you find the garlic turned into fresh green and soaked with vinegar. There is simply no substitute for it to go with *jiaozi* (Chinese dumplings) when the family sit around the table to enjoy the first meal of the year.

### B. Celebrating the Minor Festival

The 23rd of *La* is celebrated as the Minor Festival, or a rehearsal of Spring Festival. From 23rd of *La* onwards the festive mood of Spring Festival begins to pick up. There are more and more vendor's stands along the streets filled with a great variety of Spring Festival goods that catch the eye: Spring Festival couplets, New Year paintings, window decorations, paper cuts, fireworks, firecrackers, lanterns, almanacs, etc. You can hear vendors calling for business up and down the streets.

The Minor Festival, also known as the Kitchen God Day, was highlighted on the 23rd. In the past, Kitchen God, placed next above or next to the stove, was worshiped in every household. On this day, Kitchen God was to go and report to Jade Emperor in Heaven what he had witnessed on earth. As Kitchen God was believed to be able to determine fortunes or misfortunes of the household, to make it rich or poor, the household took great care to worship Kitchen God as best they could and not to offend him in any event. Among the offerings presented to Kitchen God there was the sticky malt sugar. When Kitchen God took it, his teeth and lips got stuck up and couldn't report to Jade Emperor for anything that would reflect discredit on the household. When the worshipping ritual was over, the portrait of Kitchen God was burned and people

豌豆、豇豆、杏仁、莲子、花生米、葡萄干、瓜子、桂圆肉、核桃仁……)合在一起熬“腊八粥”。腊八粥不仅是香甜可口的节日美食,也是人们对五谷丰登的祝愿与企盼。

除了熬腊八粥,这天还要泡“腊八蒜”。挑选雪白的上好蒜瓣,放入装有米醋的瓶罐中封起来。到了春节那天,蒜瓣泡得绿如翡翠,醋也溶入了蒜的香辣味,拿出来就饺子吃,色鲜味美,不由人不食欲大增。

## (2) 过小年

腊月二十三过“小年”,这可以看作是春节前的一次“预演”,家里家外过年的气氛越来越浓了。街上的摊子也多了起来,琳琅满目的都是年货,卖春联儿,卖年画,卖窗花、剪纸,卖烟花、鞭炮,卖灯笼,卖皇历……叫卖吆(yāo)喝声连成一片,到处热热闹闹。

过小年的重头戏是“祭灶王”。旧时人们迷信,做饭的锅灶旁边必定要供奉“灶神”,俗称“灶王爷”。腊月二十三晚上,是灶王爷升天的日子,因为灶王掌管着家庭的祸福财气,自然得罪不得,所以要好好拜祭。祭品中绝对少不了的是“糖瓜儿”(一种做成瓜形的麦芽糖),糖瓜入口后特别黏(nián),据说灶王爷一吃就粘住了嘴,到了天上就没办法向玉皇大帝报告家庭中的坏事了。拜祭完毕,在一片鞭炮声中把灶王的纸像烧掉,就算是把灶王送上了天。

这个传说特别好玩,你想灶王的嘴被粘住



believed he went up to Heaven while crackers were fired.

This sounds like a funny story. If Kitchen God, with his mouth stuck up, couldn't report anything bad about the household, he couldn't say anything good about it either. That means he could not carry out the mission he was entrusted with by Jade Emperor and he was sure to be dismissed. No wonder there is no Kitchen God to be found anywhere today. As people know more and more about science, old and superstitious customs like this are being forgotten or cast aside.

### C. Cleaning Up

*La* 24th is the cleaning day. The folks call it "Sweeping the *Nian*" or "Sweeping Dust". In the ancient past "Sweeping the *Nian*" was a religious ritual to exorcize epidemics and later it became a pre-Spring-Festival custom. There is a legend that is favorable to Kitchen God in a way.

It is said, apart from Kitchen God, Jade Emperor had sent another god called "Three Corpses" to watch out for anyone who showed disrespect to Jade Emperor or any of the gods in Heaven. If Three Corpses found any, he would leave a mark on the wall of his house. On the eve of Spring Festival, warriors would be sent from Heaven to look for the households with marks left by Three Corpses, and if they found any, the household would be punished. The showy Three Corpses, in order to boast of his performance, would leave marks everywhere. Kitchen God, however, sympathetic with the wronged people for this time, told the innocent people to clean their walls the day after he went up to Heaven. Since then *La* 24th became the cleaning day and actually the cleaning was meant to get ready for the Spring Festival.

### D. Staying up to See the Old Year out and the New Year in

The general practice in the past was that prior to the eve—the night of the last day of the lunar year — enough food , clothing

后,坏话说不了,好话也没法说,完不成玉皇大帝交派的任务,自然就要被罢官,要不怎么现如今灶王爷一个都没有了呢。当然了,这

不过是说笑话,实际上,随着社会的发展进步,不健康的节日习俗,已经被人们彻底地剔(ti)除了。

### (3) 扫 尘

腊月二十四,家家户户开始大扫除,民间称作“扫年”或“扫尘”。“扫年”在远古,原本是一种驱除病疫的宗教仪式,后来变成了春节前的固定习俗。关于“扫年”,也有一个和灶王相关的传说,不过这次灶王的形象要好多了。

据说玉皇大帝除了灶王还派了个“三尸神”驻在人间,密查凡人情况,谁对玉皇、天神不敬,就在谁家墙壁上做个暗记,除夕那天便派天兵下来将这户人家治罪。三尸神为了表功,于是到处乱涂暗记。灶王打算搭救百姓,可是天机又不能泄漏,于是吩咐民间,在他上天以后,必须把屋内四壁掸扫得一尘不染。从此每年腊月二十四日起,各家都要掸尘,然后高高兴兴地迎接春节。

### (4) 除夕守岁

以往除夕之前,吃的、穿的、用的全要预备充足,该切的肉啊、菜啊什么的都必须提前切好,因为春节的头五天里,绝对不能够动菜刀和剪子,否则不吉利。当然这种带有迷信色彩的旧习俗,今天早已不见了。



年画《莲年有余》





and daily necessities had to be prepared to last for five days, because during the first five days of the New Year, you were not supposed to go to the kitchen to cook or cut cloth for tailoring and, if you did, people believed, it would bring bad luck. Of course customs like these are no longer practiced today in China.

The eve of the Lunar New Year is the time for reunion of the family. Members of the family engaged in study or business away from home will come back to join the family for the reunion. They will change into new clothes and sit around the stove, intoxicated in drinking and eating, reliving the kinship.

There is usually chicken and fish in the New Year's Eve meal, because the homophonic effect of the Chinese words "chicken and fish" reminds you of "happiness and abundance". Rice mixed with millet makes the best. The yellow millet is symbolic of gold and the white rice of silver. When rice and millet fill up the bowl it means you are in possession of plenty of gold and silver. There is also New Year cake that, by the sound in Chinese, means you will get better off each year. You always keep some apples and persimmons on the table as an indication of "safety" and "success". You make sure there is some leftover of the New Year's Eve meal for the next day and that means you have enough food and to spare for the year to come.

On the New Year's Eve the family will sit up late into the night. Children will force themselves to keep awake, listening to their parents telling stories and guessing riddles. Lights are kept on throughout the night and firecrackers start cracking from evening and by midnight the deafening cracking noises rise and fall all over the neighborhood. That is the way you see off the Old Year and welcome the New year.

### E. *Bai Nian*——New Year Greetings

The day after the strange fierce animal *Nian* was driven away is called the "First Day of the New Year" or Spring Festival. When people meet they celebrate it by greeting each other. By and by it