



# HAPPY NEW YEAR 2007

China's Year of the Pig

人民美術出版社  
PEOPLE'S FINE ARTS PUBLISHING HOUSE

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CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS



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## China's Year of the Pig

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Writer: Writing Group of the *Happy New Year Series*

Translator: Paul White, Tingxuan Yang and Bingjie Li

Editor: Tieying Wang

Art Director: Neil Wang

Production Coordinator: Dan Zhao Baoxiu Ding

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# The Spring Festival



# The Spring Festival





**Above:** Celebration of the Spring Festival New Year painting from Yangliuqing, Tianjin during the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty (1875-1908)

The painting shows the scene of lunar New Year in a rich and influential family. The courtyard is decorated with lanterns and festoons. Women and children struck drums to celebrate the coming of spring.

**T**he Spring Festival is the most important festival in a year in China. Traditionally, people see it as the beginning of a year.

In the past, the Chinese called the first day of the first month of the lunar year “Yuan Dan” (the first sunrise), or “Yuan Ri” (the first day) or “San Zhao” (three beginnings: the beginning of the year, of the month and of the day. Zhao means beginning.). Before the reign of Hanwudi (Emperor



Wu of the Han Dynasty, comprising the years 140 to 87 BC), the time of the Spring Festival was not uniform, so while Hanwudi ordered to use the first day of the first month of the year as the beginning of the year. This has lasted to the present. After 1911, China adopted the Gregorian calendar and renamed the lunar Yuan Dan the "Spring Festival." In the Gregorian calendar January 1 is taken as Yuan Dan (the New Year's Day).

Among all festivals in the year, the Spring Festival has the merriest atmosphere. On this day, people in ancient times held morning celebrations to greet gods, worship ancestors, divine the weather, pray for good harvests and participate in a variety of recreational activities. As time passed, the length of the festivities extended both forward and backward, and the celebration became richer and richer in content. Finally, it became a traditional festival containing the innermost aspects of Chinese culture. Activities performed during the Spring Festival are as follows:

**Above: Auspicious Snow Foretells A Bumper Harvest**  
New Year painting from Yangliuqing, Tianjin  
Heavy snow during the lunar New Year is blessed by a lucky star. "Timely snow bodes well for a year of abundance." In fact, heavy snow during the Spring Festival benefits spring sowing. So this kind of painting is a favorite New Year painting among farmers.

# Offering Sacrifices to the Kitchen God

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The Kitchen God goes to the Western Heaven on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month." According to traditional custom, every household, rich or poor, posts a picture of the Kitchen God on the wall of the kitchen on this day to see the Kitchen God off. In the past, nearly every household had a shrine for the Kitchen God, who was worshiped as the protective god of the family. Legend has it that the Kitchen God was a deity empowered by

**Right: The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddess**

It was said that the Kitchen God had a wife named Gao Lanying, commonly known as the "Kitchen Goddess." There is another saying that the Kitchen God had two wives: Wang Haitang and Guo Dingxiang. These two were often jealous and locked in a fierce fight. Correspondingly, there were three kinds of the picture of the Kitchen God: the first one has a single Kitchen God enshrined usually in shops and workshops. Only males worked in these shops in the old time. The second one has the Kitchen God and Kitchen Goddess. The third one has the Kitchen God and two Kitchen Goddesses. Rich people in the old days had more than one wife and concubines. So they enshrined three Kitchen Deities.





Above: The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddesses



Above: The Kitchen God  
and the Kitchen Goddess

Right: Dingfugong (Sitting  
Kitchen God)

"Dingfugong" is another name of the Kitchen God enshrined by the people of Shanghai, Suzhou and Wuxi. In the olden days the men from these places often left home to do business. So they enshrined the single Kitchen God. In front of the Kitchen God there are five children contending for a golden cup. It symbolizes the promising future of young people.





Above: The Kitchen God and the Kitchen Goddesses

Right: The Kitchen God



the Jade Emperor to take charge of kitchen affairs of the human world. His official title is “Nine-Sky Dongchu Siming Kitchen Magistrate.” “Dongchu Siming” (fortune keeper of the eastern kitchens) is also called “Zao Shen” (Kitchen God), “Zao Jun” (Kitchen Magistrate), “Zao Ye” (Kitchen Lord) or “Lao Zao Ye” (Old Kitchen Lord). The shrine is mostly set on the northern or eastern sides of the kitchen. In the middle of the shrine is a picture of the Kitchen God. Sometimes the picture includes only the Kitchen God, but it can

also include a goddess, who is called the “Kitchen Goddess.” In most cases, a calendar is printed on the picture with such words as “Dongchu Siming Lord,” “God Supervising the Human World” and “Lord of the Family,” which indicate the status of the Kitchen God. The picture is usually flanked by couplets such as “going to Heaven to report good deeds and returning to Earth to protect the family,” “going to Heaven to report good deeds and returning to the palace with luck” or “Lord determining the fortunes of the human world, officially reporting human merits to Heaven.” These are meant to ensure safety for the whole family.

It is said that the Jade Emperor, after hearing reports from the Kitchen God, hands the fortune for the family in the New Year to the Kitchen God. The ceremony of seeing off the Kitchen God is usually held at dusk. The ceremony of welcoming back the god is usually held in the evening of the last day of the lunar year. At that time, the Kitchen God returns to Earth bringing all the fortunes and misfortunes the family merits.

# The God of the Door, New Year Painting and Spring Couplets

During the Spring Festival, every household puts up pictures of the God of the Door, spring couplets and New Year paintings. The practice is widespread in China, and has a long history. New Year painting and spring couplets, as the names suggest, are pictures and couplets put up during the New Year's Day holiday. Closely related to each other, both originated from taofu (peach wood charms against evil) in ancient times.

Folklore holds that there was a Mount Dushuo in the East Sea. On the mountain was a huge peach tree with a canopy of branches which extended 1,500 kilometers. Under the branch that stretched eastward, there was a gate through which ghosts entered and exited. Shentu and Yulei, two brothers, were capable of capturing ghosts. They stood by the gate to monitor the ghosts. All ghosts who did evil or harmed people without due cause would be arrested by the brothers, who would bind them with reed ropes and leave them in the mountains to feed tigers. Therefore, in ancient times, people took peach wood and tigers as weapons to drive away ghosts and subdue demons. Starting in the Spring and Autumn period(770-476BC), people



Below: The Gods of the Door: Shentu(right) and Yulei(left)



