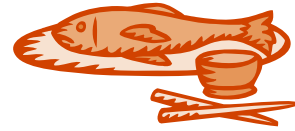


## Chinese New Year



Submitted by Maylene Qiu, January 2008

Chinese New Year is the longest and most significant celebration in the Chinese calendar. It symbolizes reunion for families and good fortune for everyone. Also called Spring Festival or the Lunar New Year, people in China may take weeks of holiday from work to prepare for and celebrate the New Year.

The most impressive memory from my childhood is that my mother used to spend several weeks to prepare for the New Year, cleaning each room, designing the menu for the new Year Eve's dinner, making a long haul for grocery shopping, and preparing gifts. Since this is the big celebration of the entire year, every one in our family had to be involved and had different tasks. It seemed to me a huge project. We were rewarded for the hard work when the real New Year arrived. I loved all the foods that my mother cooked; anticipated the after dinner moment of the fireworks which my brother used to be responsible for; was anxious for the new clothes. The happiest part for me was that I didn't have to study during the holidays, just eat and play with friends - no homework and not much housework. The only thing to do was to enjoy with family, visiting relatives and friends.

The family reunion dinner is very sumptuous containing extensive types of traditional foods whose names are habitually homophones for words meaning good things. For example, fish is included, but not eaten completely, as the Chinese phrase "may there be *surpluses* every year" sounds the same as "may there be *fish* every year." In northern China, dumplings are traditionally served as the main food for the dinner since dumplings symbolize wealth due to their shape like a Chinese gold nugget. Red is the featured color throughout the Chinese New Year because it is believed that red will scare away evil spirits and bad fortune. People wear red clothes and decorate with poems on red paper. Senior members distribute Red Packets among children on New Year's Day. The Red Packets contain cash in certain numbers that reflect good luck and honorability. By the same token, fireworks that shower the festivals frightening evil spirits begin on New Year's Eve and end with the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the month.

The lunisolar Chinese calendar determines Chinese New Year dates. Chinese New Year starts on the first day of a new year containing a new moon and continues until the fifteenth, when the moon is full. Each lunation is about 29.53 days in duration. This year, 2008, the Chinese New Year is on February 7. There is a presiding animal zodiac for each year with 12-year cycle. The presiding animals are Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig in order. According to Chinese traditional culture, people born in each animal's year would have some characters of that animal. 2008 is a Ratty year. It was said that those born in rat years tend to be leaders, pioneers, and conquerors.