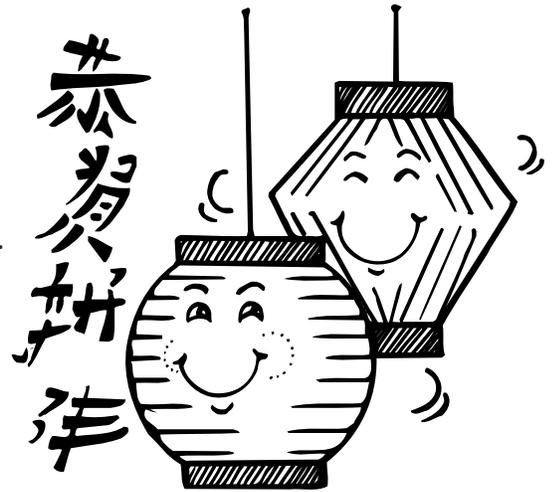


Chinese New Year!

For the Chinese, the Chinese New Year is perhaps the most colorful and joyous event of the year. It marks the beginning of a new cycle of life and symbolizes both the end of winter and the coming of spring. This holiday is celebrated for about three weeks, beginning with the new moon of the lunar calendar. The New Year may fall anywhere between the middle of January and early March.



The last days of the old year are very busy for Chinese families. All of the food for the festive celebrations must be prepared in advance. It is considered bad luck to use a knife or sharp tool during the first few days of the New Year, for fear of "cutting" the New Year's luck. All debts must be paid and accounting books brought up to date before the end of the year.

Cleaning the house is especially important during this time. Evil spirits must be dusted and swept out of the house. After all of the evil spirits are chased away, it is time to say goodbye to the Kitchen God, Tsao Chuen, whose spirit has been residing in the home during the past year. He takes notes on the family and reports his finding to the Jade Emperor. On the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, the family honors the Kitchen God with a farewell dinner. The meal usually consists of sweet foods in hopes of encouraging him to report only kind things to the Emperor. After the ceremonial feast, children light firecrackers to keep evil spirits away until Tsao Chuen's return on New Year's Eve.

On the eve of the New Year after all preparations are ready, the outer door to the house is sealed with red paper to prevent good luck from leaving the house.

New Year's Day is a time for the entire family to gather for a feast of rice pudding, vegetarian dishes and pastries. The New Year marks the birthday of every family member. Before midnight, children receive good luck money in even-numbered amounts, wrapped in small red envelopes. Everyone wears their newest clothes. Only kind words must be thought or spoken.

The Feast of the Lanterns is celebrated on the third day of the New Year. Lanterns of all shapes, sizes and colors decorate the streets and homes. Many cities hold fantastic parades led by a huge dragon, the symbol of good luck. The dragon is made of bamboo and covered with silk and paper. More than fifty people have been known to support dragon as it weaves up and down the streets. Musicians, dancers and acrobats accompany the dragon in the parade. The festive celebration ends with a great fireworks display.