

Chinese New Year Festival and Prayers

Courtesy, Shepparton Interfaith Network



Chinese New Year in 2018 is on Friday, the 16th of February (16/2/2018). According to the Chinese 12-year animal zodiac cycle, the Chinese year beginning in 2018 is the year of the Dog. Each Chinese zodiac year begins on Chinese New Year's Day. Dog years are believed to be the most unlucky for people born in previous years of the Dog.

Chinese New Year Festival – Cultural Background

Chinese New Year is the first day of the first lunar month of Chinese calendar year. The Chinese New Year is always between January 20 to February 20 of the Gregorian calendar. The preparation to celebrate the Chinese New Year festival begins around 8th day of 12th lunar month. The last day of the Chinese New Year festival is on the 15th day of first lunar month. That means it takes around three weeks to prepare the festival and 15 days to celebrate... Traditionally, a Chinese man works outside for living and his wife takes care everything inside home. A month is not long enough for a housewife to clean entire house, put new interior and exterior decoration, prepare new clothes and gifts for all family members, and food for many events. You can imagine that Chinese New Year festival is a combination of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year together.

To understand more about 15-day Chinese New Year festival, we need to know some Chinese culture background. Thousands of years ago, China was mainly an agriculture society. Each year, the dynasty government announced annual calendar for farmers. The calendar contained the solar, lunar and weather information for people to know when to seed, plant, harvest on their land and even when to work, rest, pray and celebrate for their activities. Obviously, farmers know they count on the sky for their living. The sky is connected to heaven and heaven is related to religion. The major activity of the religion is to pray to gods for good luck, wealth, health, wisdom, career, longevity, peace, happiness at temple or at home.

The religion for most Chinese today is mixing Buddhism and Taoism (Daoism) together. Buddhism was imported from India. Taoism is Chinese domestic. The founder of Taoism is credited to Lao-Tse (Laozi), who wrote famous Tao Te Ching, “the Classic Book of the Way and Its Virtue” around 604-531 BC. Taoism books say there are 36 heavens and 36 grounds in the universe. There are hundreds of gods and goddesses as well as saints and immortals living in the heavens and grounds. The Original Supreme God lives in the 36th heaven. The Spiritual-Treasure Supreme God lives in the 35th heaven. The Ethics-Virtues Supreme God, who had once the incarnation to Lao-Tse, lives in 34th heaven. They are top three Gods in the Taoism (Universe).



Three Purities

Three Purities were the supreme Taoist deities: the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning, the Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure, and the Celestial Worthy of the Tao and its Virtue. The rule over the highest three celestial realms of Jade Purity, Highest Purity, and Great Purity. According to Taoism, they are emanations of Tao, omnipresent and supreme.

The Jade Emperor lives in the 33rd heaven. He is the king of gods and in charge of 33 heavens. Therefore Jade Emperor is one of the important gods who are worshiped or prayed in the many Chinese family.

Begin the New Year!



Chinese New Year fireworks will open the event for the Chinese New Year festival. The sound of firecrackers tells people the New Year has arrived. People offer the New Year's greetings while they are watching TV shows, enjoying the fireworks, asking for luck at the temple or for gambling. The most popular greeting is Gong Xi Fa Chai Gong Xi Fa Chai (Cantonese pronounces **Gong Hay Fat Choy**), which means "*Congratulations and make a fortune.*"

Some Chinese families change the new clothes right after midnight or the Rat hour in the Chinese New Year Eve. Then they choose the lucky hour from Chinese Farmer's Calendar to worship spirits and commemorate ancestors with candles, fruit, rice cake, tea, long noodle and candies. The purpose of this worship to tell spirits and ancestors the New Year has arrived. At the end of the ceremony, they will open the door, select a lucky money direction to explode the firecrackers, which means to get rid of old bad stuff and welcome the new year coming in. Some Chinese family give the Red Envelope to children at this time, then the children go to bed.

After dawn, it's time to say Chinese New Year greetings to neighbours, friends, co-workers, and relatives. Before time of telephone, school teachers will go back to school to greet each other. Government employees will go back the office to say

Happy New Year. Now many people say *Gong Xi Fa Chai* by phone or send the greeting by e-mail.

On the Chinese New Year day, Chinese eat the breakfast without meat from the New Year Eve leftover. At noon, they have to worship the Spirit of The House with simple animal sacrifices, vegetables and rice. At the evening, they commemorate and worship family ancestors again with a full meal.

New Year Day Prayer

May God guard us and keep us
In safety and comfort
And in health and strength,
Sending us nothing but good.
May God send down
So many blessings
That the day is not long enough
For them all.
Amen.

The Second Day of Chinese New Year Festival – The Day of Son-In-Law

Many Chinese families worship the God of Land every 2nd and 16th lunar day. Some Chinese will eat dumpling because its shape is like ancient Chinese money – gold ingot.

The big event for this day is that a married woman can return her mother's home. Usually, the newly-wed woman's brother will come to take his sister home in the morning. The husband must escort his newly-wed wife to see parents-in-law. Certainly, the married woman needs to prepare Red Envelopes for her parents, nephews and nieces. The lunch time is their reunion dinner. The married couples will leave after 3:00 PM. A tradition from the past is that a married woman will bring back a pair of sugar canes and a pair of chickens. Sugar cane stands for the sweet marriage life. The chicken stands for more children.

Prayer for Son-in-Law

Shining Ones,
My wife has gone to pay
Respects to her birth parents
I go with her to seek their well-wishes
I pray your blessing come with me
May I know the right thing with all of Me
And do it no matter what the pain
A hard road lies before me, Shining Ones
Guide me along it,
Be at my side.

The Third Day of Chinese New Year Festival – The Red-Dog Day and Mice Wedding Day

The third lunar day of the year is Red Dog day according to Chinese Farmer's Calendar. Red Dog is the name of the God of Anger, who brings bad luck to people. So people don't like to go out on this day, otherwise they can lose the temper quickly and make arguments with others. It said that if people want to work on this day, they won't get much progress. Therefore, the Red Dog day is a good excuse for people who need a rest.

They also said that people should turn off the light and go to bed early, because the night is the Mice's Wedding Day and we shouldn't disturb them. The other saying is we want to make it dark, so mice have difficulty to making the wedding, which can slow down mice's breeding. In the old farming culture people would leave a few grains of rice or cake in the corner of a room for the Mice at night.

Prayer for Avoiding Argument

Blessed One,
Come near to me and hear my prayer.
Great is your power, and perfectly it is applied;
with rising peace and inner balance.
Help me to cool the blood that gets heated,
help me to keep respect for myself,
Respect for my brother, sister, wife, children,
Respect for my neighbour and Respect for All Nature.
Use your power in my interest; accomplish Peace for All.

The 4th Day of Chinese New Year Festival – Welcome the God of Stove Back

On the 24th of 12th lunar month (previous year with lunar calendar – this is NOT Christmas Eve), the God of Stove went back the Heaven to report his duty. The God of Stove will return the house on the 4th lunar day of Chinese New Year.

Since the Heaven is far away from the Earth, it will take almost a day for The God of Stove to travel down to Chinese family's kitchen. The God of Stove must leave the Heaven in the morning. He should arrive people house in the afternoon. Therefore, the Welcome Ceremony will be in the afternoon. This same to the Farewell day, Chinese prepare fruit, food, cake and wine to worship The God of Stove. After the Welcome Ceremony, Chinese family will explode firecracker to welcome The God of Stove back into the house.

Welcome Prayer to God of Stove

The fire from the waters is here.
The fire from the land is here.
The fire from the sky is here.
Below me, before me, above me
The fire is here for the stove.
Shining One, we give you this meat,
Shining One, we give you this food,
Shining One, we give you this cake,
Keep our stove pure with your fire.

The 5th Day of Chinese New Year Festival – Open Business Day – Welcome the God of Wealth

After a 4 day vacation, people are ready to go back to work. Most companies will open business on the 5th lunar day. Many Chinese always select an auspicious hour from Chinese Farmer's Calendar to open the company door. Company owners who have religious faith will worship the Gods of Wealth with offerings of meat before opening business. After the ceremony, they will explode a long firecracker to get people's attention. Today, some cities ban the firecrackers, people play the recording sound of firecrackers from tape or DVD players.



The lion dance team will parade on the street with the sound of drums, cymbals and firecracker. They are waiting the stores to invite them to have a lion dance for

the opening business. Then lion dance team wish the store have a prosperous business to bring in wealth and treasure all year long. So they will be rewarded a Red Envelope from the store owner after the performance.

Also, the 5th lunar day is a trash day. All trashes collected from the New Year Day Eve, finally, can get rid of it from the house. Everything should return to normal.

Prayer for Opening of Business

Shining Ones
Here I stand (sit) in your witness
I spread my tools before me
Grant your blessings on my tools
May they serve me as well
As parts of my body do.
Shining Ones, Architects of our World
Grant your blessing upon me and my work
That our work (business) might bring beauty
To all the world and all who live in it.

The 6th Day of Chinese New Year Festival – Clear-Water Master Day

This day is the death anniversary of the Clear-Water Grand Master. The Master was a monk in Sung dynasty. He prayed for rain many times to save people during the drought. He persuaded people to build many bridges and to plant trees. Many miracle events happened after his death. Once he lived at Clear-Water Rock Mountain. So people call him Clear-Water Grand Master. His temple will have a big ceremony on this day. Many people are still on holiday vacation and will go to attend the ceremony.

In the agriculture society, before the toilet age, Chinese farmers called someone to clean the manure pit every 3 to 5 days. This is the day to clean the manure pit.

The traditional Chinese opera will be invited and perform on the street for days to celebrate this special festival.

Prayer to Clear-Water Grand Master

Master of Clear-Water Rock Mountain
we honour you, we praise you, we worship you
Giver of Clear-Water in times of drought
we honour you, we praise you, we worship you
Builder of Bridges over gorge and waters
we honour you, we praise you, we worship you
Setter of trees and seedlings into the ground
we honour you, we praise you, we worship you
Deliverer of Miracles after your passing
we honour you, we praise you, we worship you!

The 7th Day of Chinese New Year Festival – The Human Day (or Birthday of Men)

The seventh day of the first lunar month is named *renri*, literally Human Day and is considered to be the birthday of ordinary, or common men. The day is also called Day of Men or Men Day.

According to Chinese creation legends, Nüwa is the goddess who created the world. Two legends refer to her creations. Nüwa and her brother Fuxi survived a devastating calamity, which had wiped out all other life. They retired to Kunlun Mountain they prayed for a sign from the Emperor of Heaven. The divine being approved their union and the siblings set about procreating the human race.

Note: in some texts or according to other legends, Nüwa is considered to be Fuxi's wife.

According to a different legend Nüwa created certain animals on different days as she was lonesome and wanted the animals as company. On the seventh day after the creation of the world, Nüwa created human beings from yellow clay. With the divine power entrusted to her, Nüwa made the clay figurines to become alive.

Renri is the day, when all common men are growing a year older and the day is celebrated with certain foods according to the origin of the people. The ingredients of the dishes have a symbolic meaning and they should enhance health.

Prayer on The Human Day (Creation of Humans)

I set my face to Kunlun Mountain
and await the dawn of animals and Man
I wait in the dark for the coming of Life
See, there, the Shining Ones rise
the darkness of Shunya is no more
The Shining Ones reach for glory
Again, I stand here to praise you
the sacred path is filled with light
things are as they should be
Again, I stand here to praise you.