



MY NEW YEAR EXPERIENCE IN TAIWAN

Usually it is said 'experience is the best teacher' and true is absolute and can't change even with the test of time. Having lived in Taiwan for about six months I count myself lucky to witness New Year (lunar) celebration in Taiwan and having first hand information about how the celebration is done. I often hear about Chinese New Year often called *lunar* New Year back home (The Gambia) but I had no idea about it all. It indeed my greatest pleasure to share my experience with other for the sake of knowledge dissemination. As it often said 'information denied is denial of human right'. I now take this opportunity to pour down my first hand experience on the celebration of lunar New Year in Taiwan for the benefit of others.

Chinese New Year, Lunar New Year, is the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays. It is commonly called "Lunar New Year", because it is based on the *lunisolar Chinese calendar*. The festival traditionally begins on the first day of the first month in the Chinese calendar. Chinese New Year is the longest and most important festivity in the Chinese Lunar Calendar. The origin of Chinese New Year is itself centuries old and gains significance because of several myths and traditions. Ancient Chinese New Year is a reflection on how the people behaved and what they believed in the most. It is a very jubilant occasion mainly because it is the time when people take a break from work to get together with family and friends.

Long before the holiday, street vendors have already begun to seek out the best sites to display their "spring couplets." Shopping for Lunar New Year's fare also begins early and is still one of the holiday's most characteristic activities in Taiwan. For instance, familiar songs and traditional music associated with Lunar New Year are broadcast through loudspeakers in department stores, many of which hold year-end

sales to attract wage earners, whose pockets are weighted down by the traditional annual bonus that is always paid at this time of year.

Thus, several days before Lunar New Year's Eve, people living far away from their families begin to prepare for their journey home. In an attempt to beat the traffic jams, many hit the road on the previous day.

On Lunar New Year's Eve, family members who are no longer living at home make a special effort to return home for reunion and share in a sumptuous meal. At that time, family members hand out *hong bao*, or "lucky money" in red envelopes, to elders and children. They also try to stay up all night to welcome the New Year, as it has long been believed that by so doing on New Year's Eve, their parents would live a longer life. Thus, lights are kept on the entire night—not just to drive away *Nian*, (an extremely cruel and ferocious beast that the ancients believed would devour people on New Year's Eve) as in ancient times, but also to make the most of the family get-together. In addition, some families even hold religious ceremonies after midnight to welcome the god of the New Year into their homes, a ritual that is often concluded with a huge barrage of firecrackers. The festival continues for about five days.

As in all such festivals, food plays an important role throughout the Lunar New Year Festival, and dinners tend to be especially lavish. Many of the dishes made at this time are served because they are regarded as symbols of good luck. For instance, fish represent "having enough to spare," garlic chives stand for "everlasting," turnips mean "good omens," and fish balls and meat balls represent "reunion." Auspicious refreshments are also prepared at this time, such as glutinous rice flour pudding, which is said to make people "advance toward higher positions and prosperity step by step." People usually have dumplings too, which look like shoe-shaped gold and are supposed to help those who eat them to amass fortunes and wealth.

In conclusion, the Chinese New Year is one of the most fascinating festivals I ever witness in my life full of myths and traditions the people uphold. What I fancy most in the festival is the reunion of family members abroad and away from home, sharing of red envelopes and the mouth-watering meals served on the tables of each family.

Long live Taiwan!

Long live National Taiwan University!

Long live Taiwan ICDF

Life is green!

I remain the same, Michael.

