

Spring Festival in China

(The writer writes through her firsthand experience as a member of a delegation team representing Sri Lanka on a tour to China in December 2019, a few weeks before the outbreak of Covid-19)

While the Corona Virus was starting to hunt innocent souls in beautiful Wuhan, Lunar New Year was about to dawn. Despite the ordeal of combatting the deadly enemy, whole China was getting ready to welcome the New Year and celebrate the Spring Festival. The Chinese New Year is popularly known as [the Spring Festival](#) in China, because it starts at the outset of spring season in January. Thus, New Year marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Spring is the universal symbol of opulence, youth and vitality. In fact, New Year commences marking the end of winter season and lasts for a couple of weeks. It is also the vacation time for the Chinese. New Year vacation is the longest vacation enjoyed by both adults and children. As such, there is no better time in the whole year to engulf oneself in festive spirits. Traditionally, New Year is the time for people to pray for an opulent harvest. It also is a time for exhilarating celebration, family reunion and making wishes for their cherished dreams to come true.



New Year Traditions

Chinese New Year is different from the New Year we celebrate in April in Sri Lanka in many respects. In contrast, the festival doesn't fall on the same dates every year. The dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Most of the time, it commences in January and ends in February. The festive celebrations last for fifteen days and this time in 2020 it

started on 25th January and ended up on 08th February. China is also an agricultural giant in the world. Therefore, in the Spring Festival, they give priority to the traditions based on agriculture and the customs performed on behalf of their cultivation. Customarily, people make various offerings to god and they light crackers to chase away evil forces. There are various folk stories related to New Year customs. One such legend is the legend of the Huge Peach Tree. This huge tree was in the ghost world on a mountain and it was said to have stretched for more than 1500 kilometers. To the northeast of the tree, two guards named Shentu and Yulei guarded the entrance to the ghost world. They would catch the ghosts who harmed people and then sent them to tigers as food. Therefore, all ghosts were afraid of the two guards. It was believed that hanging a piece of peach wood with an inscription of the two guards' names on doors could scare evil spirits away.

2020 The Year of Rats!

Chinese get ready to welcome the New Year since December. They start to clean their houses and decorate the surrounding. Red is the color of Spring Festival and they mainly use red color to decorate their houses. During this period of time, everywhere in China, we can see one specific Chinese character. That is “福” (fú), this character symbolizes the happiness and in each and every house we can see down “福” (fú) pasted on the door symbolizing the idea that happiness has arrived. In addition to pasting this character, Chinese people hang couplets beside the door which contain good wishes for the New Year. For every year, China has a specific animal and, in 2020 it was the rat. So people do not forget to use pictures of rats along with the things they use for decorating. Throughout the New Year period, Chinese people tend to wear red color clothes.

Family Reunion

The most remarkable





practice related to New Year is the family reunion. Most people who have migrated to cities and other countries for employment are coming back to their homes for celebrating the New Year. This is known as “Spring Migration”. After coming back home, all the members of the family enjoy their New Year dinner together. Dumpling (饺子) (Jiǎozi) is one of the main items in the culinary repertoire during Spring Festival. It has a long history of over thousand years and considered a lucky food.

According to legend the more dumplings you eat during the New Year celebrations, the more money you can make in the New Year. Majority of people from North China eat dumpling while people from South eat spring rolls. In addition, they have another special meal called *Tang yuan* (汤圆). It is also a type of dumpling with a sticky and chewy texture. No new Year dinner table will be complete without *Tang yuan*.

New Year Gifts

We, Sri Lankans exchange gifts when celebrating our New Year. Similarly, Chinese people also have a custom of exchanging New Year gifts with family members and guests. Specially, Chinese children are given a red colored envelope containing money (红包) (hóngbāo) by their elders. Not only children but also relatives and friends exchange red envelopes apart from other New Year gifts.

Celebrations across the Globe

China Central Television (CCTV) annually holds a grand ceremony before the New Year dawns. In 2020 also they held the ceremony on 24th January. It was a long program telecast for more than four hours. Many items were included in the program such as dancing, singing, drama, magic and many more. This time, a special item was there and its theme was the dangerously spreading Corona Virus and the way of getting rid of it.

Currently Chinese people are spread all over the world. Consequently, not only in China but also in the other countries, Chinese New Year is celebrated. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, there were celebrations organized by students and teachers of Confucius Institute in the University of Colombo and the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Those ceremonies were full of traditional Chinese and Sri Lankan performances, food and New Year Customs.