The changing path of Chinese New Year

BA-Thesis in English

Linda Zhang

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Kt.: 220179-2229

Leiðbeinandi: Magnús Björnsson

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Abstract

When speaking of the Chinese Spring Festival (also known as the Chinese New Year), people are often reminded of their childhoods. Looking back, the middle age and older generations in the past, many people’s experience of the Chinese Spring Festival was much richer than it is now. Today, most people think of the Spring Festival as free time from work or school, an opportunity for just eating and drinking. They observe the holiday period because it's a tradition they learned from their parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, the Spring Festival has lost some of its cultural base, In any case, the meaning of the Spring Festival is gradually disappearing (Tang, 2017)

In this thesis I am addressing myself to the scrutiny of the customs and traditions of the Chinese Spring Festival. As a celebration it can be viewed as the nation’s traditional culture in action. Examining it helps us to understand the ordinary Chinese people who celebrate the New Year festival with their families, carrying out its customs and activites. Through close study it is also possible to discover what part of this heritage is important to them still in the modern world. My study also aims to explain the changees, and different stages of improvement, in the living standards of Chinese people as those have formed and developed with the passing of time. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to focus on what the main customs are in the celebration of the Chinese Spring festival, and what has been partly lost in the carrying out of these traditions in recent times.

This paper is arranged as follows. First, the analyzing of the Spring Festival’s meaning. There are eight main customs which most Chinese people know and follow. Second, focus on what customs are changing as time goes by. And the third, what are the main causes of Chinese people being less and less interested in the own traditional customs like the Chinese New Year.
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Introduction
The Spring Festival is the oldest and most traditional festival in China. The festival is an important part of Chinese culture and is the most participated in cultural event in the entire world.

The Spring Festival, commonly known as Chinese New Year, occurs on the first day of the first lunar month in what is referred to as the Chinese lunar calendar. This calendar dates back to the 14th century Shang Dynasty (Hinsbergh, 2016). It is the most lively and meaningful traditional festival in China.

Chinese New Year is usually between late January and early February. The Chinese Lunar calendar is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements therefore the dates of the Spring Festival are very seldom the same. The festival usually lasts about 15 days and ends on the Lantern Festival (Hinsbergh, 2016).

In September 1949, on the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, at the Chinese People's Political consultative conference, the goverment adopted the use of the world’s Gregorian Calendar (阳历). Also known as the western calendar (Helmer Aslaksen, 1995).

In most Chinese people’s minds, the New Year is a time for the family to gather and spend time together. People travel from faraway cities to go home to their families in rural country areas. The event is locally known as “chunyun” and it involves the largest human migration in the world, as hundreds of millions of people head home during the holiday. There are almost three billion trips expected to be made in 2017 which is a 2.2% increase from 2016. (Wang, 2017).

China has 56 ethnic groups with unique languages and cultures (Guo & Bulag & Crang & Michael, 2015). Urban and rural people also differ greatly in how they conduct traditional Spring festival celebrations. Chinese traditional culture generally has either a direct or an indirect connection to the religios philosophy of Confucianism.

The objective of this thesis is to shed some light on how Chinese people celebrate their Spring Festivals and to examine their unique customs. Furthermore we will examine if these cultural heritages are being passed on and will this unique culture of China continue with the future generations?

Thousands of years of ancient history is silently disappearing and its disappearance is having a knock-on effect on Chinese traditional virtues and values. Is this cultural heritage being passed on, will this unique culture of China continue with the new generation?
Chapter 1 Overview of the Spring Festival

1.1.1 Spring festival legendary Nian

Another name for the Spring Festival is (Nian). In the past there was a legend about a monster named “Nian” that brought bad luck to people and ate children and villagers alike. The monster always arrived on New Years Eve and did its evil deeds. After the monster had left the village, trees and flowers all started growing. There was an old man who found out that the monster was afraid of the colour red and was also afraid of sounds from fireworks and loud firecrackers. From then on, Chinese New Year is also referred to as “guo nian“. People use firecrackers and wear the colour red as well as decorating their homes and workplaces in red. It is part of tradition, and is actually also a lively way for people to celebrate the biggest festival of the whole year (Ye & Chen & Chen, 2016).

The concept and meaning of the Spring Festival originally comes from agriculture. As far as we know, in ancient times, China was a great agricultural land (Williams, C.A.S, 1976). The Spring Festival signifies that old year has come to an end, and spring is closer. Trees, flowers and vegetables are starting to come up from the soil after their winter sleep. This means a new round of planting followed by the harvest season is going to begin soon. People are full of joy, singing, dancing and eating tasty food, meeting families and good friends, and enjoying the endless flavours of the divine Chinese cuisine.

1.1.2 Cleaning and Purchasing

Gradually through the years Chinese people have made the celebration of this festival richer and more colourful. Every year from the 23rd of December (the last month of the lunar calendar) to the 30th of December (the last month of the lunar calendar), there is a day called “Spring Day“, also known as “Sweeping Day“. At this time it is traditional for Chinese people to clean their homes. It involves, for example, the washing of bed linen and curtains, cleaning the garden yard, scrubbing out the kitchen and other chores. It is also looked on as important to sweep away the dust in and around the house before the Spring Festival as this process
signifies the getting rid of all bad luck that has accumulated or collected in the previous year (Tang, 2017). Everyone in the family enjoys being a part of the “cleaning crew” doing whatever job is required in order to have a clean and warm Spring atmosphere in and around the home. This is not looked upon as as dull project but everyone who takes part is filled with joy and happiness as they welcome the New Year.

Every family does the preparation for the festival in a similar way. Usually people start about ten days or more before the holiday season. It begins with shopping items needed for the festival such as: chicken, duck, meat, flower, fruits, vegetables, teas and wines. One has to make sure of that there is enough of the above in stock. This preparation also calls for the buying of gifts for friends and relatives.

Before the holiday, one of the traditional customs for every house is to put Spring Festival couplets “chunlian” written in black or golden characters on red paper on the sides and lintel of the door. These couplets bear wishes of good luck and prosperity for the coming New Year. They also express the happy and hopeful thoughts of the people inside the household. In front of people’s doors they hang red lanterns and lucky words on paper for the God of Wealth and for the Door Gods. Wishes will bring blessing to the family (Wu, 2014).

When the Chinese Lunar calendar starts in December (the last month of the lunar calendar) people begin to celebrate and to welcome the festival. Starting with the 23rd December (the last month of the lunar calendar), most Chinese people make sacrifices to the Gods and offerings of thanks to ancestors for the previous year and praying for success and luck in the coming new year.

1.1.3 Family Reunion dinner

Chinese New Year is a happy and peaceful holiday, also known as the days of family reunion. Children or parents from far and away have to come home for the Spring Festival. The New Year´s Eve dinner is also a family reunion dinner. It is the last dinner of the old year before the New Year comes.

In the North of China there is a dish which it is customary to have on the dinner table - dumplings. This custom appeared in the late Ming Dynasty (Wu, 2016). The Chinese have a long history of eating dumplings. In the present day, almost every family eats dumplings. Everyone loves them. Chinese people have a saying, “comfortable as upside down, good food as dumpling (“舒服不如倒着，好吃不过饺子“). In the context of New Year, dumplings have become the essential food to have at festival time. There are a few reasons for this custom. It is customary for each family to prepare and eat dumplings after the traditional worship at
New Year. Chinese people pay a lot of attention to the exact moment of departure of the previous year and then welcome New Year, for them, eating dumplings means the new year will come with good luck. Dumplings are shaped like the gold ingots of ancient time. People eat dumplings as a symbol of receiving a lucky treasure. Dumplings are made with flour and include meat and vegetable stuffing inside, with them is also expectations of luck and happiness of the coming year (Wu, 2016).

According to each regional tradition, people also put sugar, peanuts, dates and chestnuts into the stuffing. Eating something sweet signifies that life the following year will be sweet like the dumplings. If you eat peanuts, it will make the new year healthy and full of longevity, dates and chestnuts mean that people might be welcomed by having a new baby, tofu means the family will be happy. In Taiwan, the dumplings come with fish, meat balls and vegetables, this is a symbol of good fortune. When you make dumpling then the first step is to make the dough "he mian“ and in Mandarin these two words sound harmonious. Dumplings can be made in many varieties. Different regions in China have different ways to cook food. Like the inhabitants of Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang, they cook the dumplings with broiled meat broth, then the dumplings are eaten with the soup. In Henan, dumplings and noodles are cooked together, and given the name of "golden line thread ingot“ (Wu, 2016).

In the south of China people eat a delicious rice cake called “Nian Gao“, a sticky cake made of rice also known as the annual rice cake. In chinese because of tone differences, sayng one word can subtly suggest another and these words sound particularly homophonic and at the same time suggest sweet life and success. They also hint that with every year the person eating the rice cake will reach a higher and higher position in life. But Nian Gao is not limited to people in the south of China. In many parts of China they also eat Nian Gao rice cake though they prepare it and cook it in different ways. Such as Beijing’s jujube rice cake and Baiguo rice cake, Ningbo shuimo rice cake, Suzhou’s guihua rice cake. In the South and North rice cakes are cooked differently. In the North rice cakes are steamed or fried. In the south of China, they are not only steamed and fried, there are additionally new techniques of cooking with both sweet and salty, hot and cold tastes (Tang, 2016).

1.1.4 Shou Sui

Shou sui, means that on the last night of the outgoing year we do not sleep, rather stay up all night to welcome the arrival of the new year. This custom comes from a story similar to the story recounted in the beginning of this paper about the monster Nian.
Nian lives in the mountains and eats everything from animals to humans. Every three hundred and sixty-five days, it comes out and eats fresh blood. From the dark night it comes out, waits and waits until the dawn next day, then it goes back to the mountains. So people have marked this day in their calendars as the terrible evil night, called “Nian guan” as the “year off”. People came up with a lot of new customs to celebrate New Year’s Eve. Every family would prepare the dinner in advance, lock the animals inside the home, and the front and back doors of the house would be sealed, then people hid from the monster inside the house and ate their dinner. Because this dinner might be their last, so it was prepared with very rich and good food. The whole family stayed together, and before starting serving dinner, people prayed to the ancestor gods, wishing for peace in the family throughout the night. After dinner, no one could go to sleep just yet, everyone would stay together, chatting and protecting each other from Nian’s coming until the following morning sunrise appeared. (Jeffery, 2017). The lighting up of candles and oil lamps also has the symbol of driving all diseases away, so parents will live a long and healthy life and look forward to the new year (Ng, 2016). So it gradually became a tradition that at New Year’s Eve shou sui one should wish longevity to parents.

1.1.5 Firecrackers

Everywhere you can hear the sound of firecrackers, this the sound of celebration that the new year has arrived, its the sound of the family thriving.

Firecrackers are a traditional custom for China during Chinese festivals of many kinds. This custom has more than two thousand years of history. According to legend the firecrackers scare the monster named “nian” away. When Nian comes out on New Year’s Eve, people light up firecrackers to shock and frighten Nian away (Ng, 2016). The Nian is most afraid of big noises, but two thousand years ago people used the burning of bamboo to scare him away, later people put gunpowder into the bamboo tubes to make firecrackers, after that they used the sort of papers to make firecrackers that we can find in today’s markets (Cohen, 2011). In today’s modern world, people hardly believe that there is a monster coming from the mountain, and there are even some that never have heard about the legend of Nian, but Chinese people still believe that the Chinese festival must have firecrackers to celebrate the holiday, wishing for success and luck in the new year, especially in rural areas. From New Years Eve to the first day of the New Year, firecrackers are continuously exploding.
1.1.6 Chun Lian

According to legendary stories, there are a lot of traditions coming from evil spirits (Wu, 2014). Chun lian, is a Chinese spring festival custom. Especially for both city and rural areas, every family starts on the 29th or 30th of December (the last month of the lunar calendar), then they will go shopping for couplets. Couplets are red coloured papers with yellow or black calligraphy (Wu, 2014). It is not every one who can write these couplets, only artists that have a special writing talent. People will put the Chun lian on the door and the decoration gives the home a new feeling. Everywhere red can be seen, it sustains the good wishes of the Chinese people for the new year, getting rid of evil spirits and possible disasters. This custom started about a thousand years ago in the Shu period, the original couplets are called “tao fu“ or peach couplets. In ancient history, there is a ghost town on a mountain and it is covered with three thousand miles of peach trees and there is a golden rooster on the tree. When the golden rooster calls every morning those ghosts will return back to the ghost town. The gate of this town is located northeast of the peach tree. There are two guardians of the doors or gods standing by the gate. Their names are Shen Tu and Yu Lei. If the ghosts do any bad things to people at night, then the guardians will catch them right away and tie them up. Then the ghosts are fed to tigers that live on the mountain. So all the ghost are scared of Shen Tu and Yu Lei (Wu, 2014). Later on, people they wrote „Shen Tu“ and „Yu Lei“´s names on paper or put their pictures on their front doors, that was done to wish that no ghosts would come to the family as well to get rid of the evil spirits. That’s why they call this “Tao Fu“ (Wu, 2014).

During the Song Dynasty people began to write the couplets on peach boards. That was one way to get rid of the evil spirits. Red couplets are also a symbol of auspiciousness. They appear both on doors and windows, decorating the home elegantly and giving a warm feeling to welcome the Chinese New Year festival, hoping for luck and happiness and praying for blessings for the coming year. One of the most popular letters on the Chun lian is “Fu“ as the character has the meaning wealth or blessing. People wishing to have a better and happier future in order to have fully reflected this blessing, put “Fu” up side down as it immediately forms another character in Mandarin meaning arrived so the message becomes “blessings have arrived“ (Wu, 2014).
1.1.7 Bai Nian / Hong Bao

On the first day of the New Year it is a traditional that people dress up in their latest and most beautiful clothes to go and visit their relatives and friends and that is called „Bai Nian“. Wishing them to have a lucky and happy new year. There are many customs for wishing one a happy new year. In rural and urban areas, ethnic people have their own special customs. The young generation wish elderly people happy wishes such as health and longevity. Elderly people will respond with happy new year greeting and some money in a red envelope or bag for the young people. It is said that receiving the red bag at chinese new year can suppress evil spirits and bring safety and peacefulness the new year (Yuan, 2017). In some places the parents secretly put a red bag under the child’s pillow as it will make evil leave and luck come instead (Tang, 2017). It is every parent’s wish that their child or children will grow up healthy and happy. Usually people do not pay alot of attention to how much money is in the red bags, it’s the wishes that follow with the bag, getting rid of bad spirits for the coming new year that count. When children receive their red bags during the spring festival they know that the coming new year will be safe.

From ancient times, there is another legend of a kind of demon with a black body and white hands, named“Sui“. Every New Year’s Eve he comes out to harm children and uses his hands to touch sleeping children´s heads three times, then child will wake up deeply scared and crying, then fever may come and the child gets sicker for many days. When the fever has finally gone, the healthy clever child has become a foolish(Chinn-Liu, 2013).

Once there was a couple had their first child, their only child when they were old, so this child was as a pearl in the family. They were very afraid that the demon would come on New Year´s Eve to harm their only child. So on that night, the family stayed together and played games with the child, asking the child to wrap eight coins with red paper then open the
1.1.8  Wu Shi/ Dragon Dance

The Spring Festival lasts until it is brought to a close with the Lantern Festival. During the festival, the whole nation celebrates not only at home, but the streets and markets are also full of fun and celebrations. The Lion dance known as “wu shi” is one of the street customs during Chinese New Year (Tang, 2017). It is the outstanding dance among Chinese people. A man holds a pole with a dragon pearl and stands in front of the dragon or lion head. He swings the pearl from side to side, teasing the dragon. But the dragon can not capture the swinging pearl. Some times two or three dragons are all chasing the pearl. The Lion/Dragon dance is performed to a drum rhythm, twelve people dressed as a lion, wearing red cloth, dance using movement to convey the lion’s actions, the objective is to drive away evil spirits (Lee, 2016). This custom originated in the period of history known as the Three Kingdoms. At that time both the Northern and Southern parts of the country began to celebrate like this. Such dance traditions stretch back in a thousand years of history (Tang, 2017).

According to legendary history, more than 1900 years ago, Iran and China had economic and trade exchange relationships. The Ambassador of Iran gave a Lion to the Chinese Emperor as
a gift. And later Chinese people put their imagination to work on the lion and gradually through the artistic process the lion dance which first started within the emperor’s palace, was created. Later during the Ming and early Qing Dynasty, it spread to the people and then became extremely popular (Tang, 2017).

Another story of its origin is this: the lion is文殊菩萨 (Manjusri)’s mounts. 文殊菩萨 (Manjusri), is one of the four Bodhisattvas in Buddhism. The other three are Guan Ying, Di Zang, Pu Xian. Manjusri is a symbol of great wisdom, with the ability to develop and improve wisdom. Parents often pray to Manjusri for children’s success in study at school (Gray, 2016).

Another folklore story from Fo Shan, Guangdong Province is that there were a few lions harming village people. When the master of martial arts of one particular village heard about this matter, he wanted to give the village people a feeling of safety and security, but after fighting three times with lions, still there had been no satisfactory outcome. So the master taught village people martial arts, and finally they defeated the lion. The people in order to mark this victory, and in accordance with martial arts and the style of a lion, created the famous lion dance as a Chinese New Year’s street dance (Lillian, 2014).

No matter which story is more close to reality, the dance has always been the same (Tang, 2017).

“Wu long“ lion dance

1.1.9 Worship Kitchen God

Worshiping the kitchen God has a great influence on the Chinese people. Especially in the old days, almost every home had a Kitchen God statue. Many people respected the kitchen god, called “Zao Jun Commander“ or “Zao Jun Gong“. According to legend he is responsible for managing each home’s kitchen fire stove or home kitchen. People respect and worship this
god as a protection for the family. Kitchen God statues are mostly located in the middle of the kitchen stove.

There is a story about the kitchen god. In a family called Zhang in ancient times, the older brother Wang was a mason, the younger brother was a painter. Wang was a famous person in the village for building kitchen stoves. Every one knew of his skill in building stoves. He also liked to give people his considered judgement and opinion if he saw for example that a daughter was disrespectful to the elderly people, almost everything he judged by being a fair judge. So people respected him as he being fair and representing their interests. When he was 70 years old, he died on the 23rd of December (last month of the lunar calendar) at night.

After Wang died, the Zhang family was in a big mess, because the older brother had been taking care of the family for all these years, every one in the family had listened to him. Although the younger brother was still alive, he had never managed family things. So the daughters-in-law asked to separate from the family. The younger brother felt helpless, and every day had a sad face. One day, he finally came up with a good idea, on the first anniversary of his brother’s death, he woke up the whole family in the night, told every one that his brother Wang had come to him in a dream and he saw that he had became a stove god. When the elder brother had learned that the family wanted to break up, he was very upset and angry, and went to tell the Emperor of the Gods to punish those people who wanted to break up the family. When the daughters-in-law heard these words, they got so scared and frightened, immediately kneeling down to pray and ask him not to inform the Emperor of the Gods, so they brought out one of Wang’s favourite desserts, sugar melon in order to beg him not to tell. Since then, the family, daughters-in-law and so on peacefully lived together until they were old. This custom passed down to the neighbours, 10 to 100, 100 to 1000 it spread, so every family stove has Wang’s painting. Time passed and gradually it became a custom that on the 23rd of December, families pray to the God Wang and give the God sugar melon as a dessert to sweeten his mouth (Columbia University, 2007).

Sugar melon also called “zao tang“. Usually people can buy Zao tang in December (lunar calendar).
One of the customs of the Spring Festival, is the Temple market, an essential ritual for family and friends during the Spring Festival. It is a religious ritual. In ancient times, praying to the gods, and worshipping ancestors was a major thing for Chinese people’s during the Spring festival. People gathered together to carry out ceremonies by playing music, singing opera, performing the dragon dance... It is also a form of trade market, and held near by the temple or in parks. People can find entertainment and shopping at the same time in the temple market. In addition, people also can find local food specialities and handicrafts (Chen, 2017).
1.2.1 CCTV New Year’s Gala

CCTV New Year’s gala, is on Chinese New Year’s Eve to celebrate the new year’s coming through a programme on the national TV channel. Since 1983, the new year’s gala has been recorded for every spring festival. It also has the highest ratings and is the most influential variety show in China. This gala has become a Chinese People’s new tradition, new culture, people must watch the TV gala on Chinese New Year’s Eve, it is from 20:00 to 2:00am. The typical gala includes: Skits, Xiangsheng, Song and Dance, Acrobatics, Magic Tricks, Chinese Opera, Countdown to the New Year and Can’t forget Tonight. Through large dance performances, ambitious scenes, beautiful songs and dance, strong festive colours bring the audience a moment of carnival, of the nation’s celebration and a holiday scene (Mack, 2017). It is the moment for family and friends to reunite, people happily stay together, in front of the TV and with the sound of new year’s clock ticking. Everyone in the deepest mood of celebration of the Spring Festival.

At the same time, the gala also emphasizes culture and art with a Spring Festival theme to promote inherited Chinese traditions and culture.

![CCTV New Year Gala](image)

1.2.2 Lantern Festival

The Spring festival ends on the fifteenth of first month (lunar calendar), it is also known as the lantern festival. People eat sticky rice balls before leaving home for work or place of education. It is a symbol of family reunion, no matter how far from each other, families always stay together physically and mentally. Most of southern Chinese families have rice balls in the morning of the Lantern festival as a good start to the new year for the family. Rice balls have a long history, too. Since the Song dynasty, there was a girl name Yuan xiao, she was a maid in the Imperial palace. She had no chance to meet her parents because of her job. Every year when spring came, she missed her parents even more. She felt down and felt she
could not express her filial piety in front of her parents. But there was a guy named Dong who heard her story, told her that he would help her to join her family reunion. One day Dong told the Imperial Palace that there would be a robbery in the city by a person named the “Fire God”. But if the whole city prayed to the Fire God and gave the god one food item namely the rice balls made by the maid Yuan xiao, the god would not rob the town. He also said the city needed to celebrate on the evening of 15th of January, by hanging lantern lights on the streets and setting off fireworks. Of course the Imperial Palace listened to Dong, because he was a very respected and knowledgeable person. So the Emperor gave the order, on the 15th January, the whole city should celebrate with lantern lights and fireworks. On that day, all the people came to the city for the celebrations. Of course the parents of the maid also came, in the middle of street under the lantern lights, they saw their daughter and finally the family reunited. So the city was saved from robbery, the emperor was very happy and decided this celebration should be a national holiday every year. That is how the lantern festival came into being. And this day people also call the Yuan xiao festival, after the maid named Yuanxiao to remember her (Staff Reporter, 2016).
Chapter 2 Tradition meets Modern times

2.1 A Changing Society

China, with more than three thousands years of history has many legendary stories, many characters and memories of the past. The track of this continues till today as Chinese new year’s customs are demonstrably colourful, numerous and rich. However traditional customs are constantly changing, in the transmission of inherited beliefs from one generation to another and in ways of doing things.

The world is under the influence of high speed technology and China is no exception. Smart phones are universal and what was once a yearly conversation at the time of the Chinese New Year between a far-off Chinese village and the urban workplace of a migrant worker can be daily or weekly or monthly for very little cost. Not only that but technology has brought software which allows people to see one another on applications such WeChat or Facetime. A young mother can show grandparents her growing child, no need to wait till the formal yearly reunion at Chinese New Year to show baby’s first steps. The urgency for a new year visit has disappeared.

Nowadays young generations are trapped in the system of working for money. When people are busy making money, money “will wear out fast, and (people) will never make enough and will never be happy” (Clifford, 2017). The disintegrating community of village life means that many people are living in isolation, becoming self-centred and selfish. They gradually lose a sense of their responsibility to one another, only know how to take from others for their own benefit, forgetting their need to contribute to the family, society or to their country, too.

In the traditional way of doing things, the world relied on the people being interactive. However interactivity is not totally in decline. Chinese people are now interactive in a different way and through computers they keep in touch by emails and with a mobile in almost everyone’s pocket or bag they can text and send photos and voice recordings from dawn till dusk.

Those who work in a city away from their home town now do not want to go home for the spring festival. In the eyes of ordinary people with traditional values, even in the eyes of their own parents, those who do not want to come home for the spring festival or are in fear of family are seen as cold-blooded. Their behaviour is even linked to a lack of filial piety.

Filial piety by definition refers to the love and respect one has for one’s parents and gratitude for their guidance. In Confucian religious philosophy, of the ten moral values, filial piety is at the top on the list. The traditional values following after filial piety are: fidelity, reliability,
respect, loyalty, kindness, affection, concern, guidance and benevolence (Randall L. Nadeau, 2014).

But for those people who are in fear of returning home there are many reasons underpinning their fear. Firstly travelling itself is a big pressure for them and the migration of population is a big challenge for both travellers and the government every year.

The Chinese railway authorities also try to do their best, but to buy a ticket during the spring festival is still hard, especially for those migrant workers who do not have computers or smart phones or have never touched publicly available computers in their lives. To get a spring festival ticket is still a headache for them.

During the spring festival in 2015, more than 3.7 billion passengers were sent across the country within 40 days (Redford, 2014). Usually the traffic starts on the 16th of December (the last month of the lunar calendar). At that time, the workers begin their holiday and are on the road to return home. There is another reason also because the shortage or even fear of not obtaining travel tickets during the spring festival creates a black market.

“Black market” refers to those who can get larger number of tickets through social relationships. They sell those tickets at ridiculously high prices compared to the market price. Because they stock up huge number of tickets, it can damage the ticket price and cause difficulties in getting tickets. Some black market sellers sell fake tickets with a high price, too. People who bought fake tickets often only find out at the counter before boarding, their trip is affected and a loss is caused (Huo & Wei, 2013).

The Chinese government has taken an interest in this behaviour and is strongly against it. However, due to the difficulty and the fact that government officers are also among these groups in the black market, so the black market has not been effectively stopped. The problem of getting back home has become a major disincentive to travel for some.

2.2 Fear relating to Hong Bao

Hongbao or red envelopes are one of the traditions during the spring festival. It was a symbol and a way for parents, grandparents, relatives and friends to wish children success and a peaceful year by offering a small amount of money, such as from 2 yuan to 20 yuan, remembering to select an even number, it means good things come in pairs (Sidek, 1997). But with the changing of time, today people look at hong bao as a headache and pressure. The money expected in the red bag is getting higher and higher. 10 yuan is very little and difficult to hand over, it will be thought very embarrassing, too (Kok, 2014).
Chinese society very much relies on human relationships and the ability to maintain those ties and enforce responsibilities. In life and work, friendships are relied on to get things done smoothly and smartly. The Spring festival is only once a year, for some people they only go home during this time. No one wants home their town people looking down on them. Finally back home from a year working in other city, they hope to show their family, relatives and friends their successful side, even if it is not the truth. Chinese people very much believe in the face, or appearance or outside of a person. They would rather be hard on themselves to show the other person how strong, successful and rich they are.

For those workers, they collect their savings for the whole year, but half of the savings are spent on the red bags. If the red bag is thick, it means the money is plentiful, that gives families, friends and relatives a sign of how rich you are, and people will pay you more attention and you will be more popular in the family. For some young children to receive red bags has a particular significance. They believe that however heavy the red bag is, this shows how much the love is from this person giving the red bag to the child. Slowly, children are influenced and begin to measure friendships in their opinion of the red bag gift-giver. If people have a big family with a lot of sisters and brothers who also have many children, the distribution of the red bags is even more pressure. For some migrant workers, they need to borrow money for red bags for families, relatives and friends. And for some young generations just finished school, starting a job from the bottom, of course those people have very little income every month or have no savings, they could not afford a bunch of red bags for going home, so they would rather not go home for the spring festival.

However this is not the whole story. While people may be reluctant to go home because of transport issues or worrying that they might lose face, technology has made a significant new contribution to the distribution of red bags. Electronic red bag-Wechat is now available on the smart phone system, it is a Tencent’s product available since 2014. It is an application to receive or give red bags, send and receive messages and voice messages to friends (Holmes & Balnaves & Wang, 2016). Right after the New Year’s reunion dinner, you can find people that are busy on their smart phones, receiving or giving red bags and sending New Year’s best wishes. Sometimes you can see at the reunion dinner table, people with one hand on their chopsticks and the other hand busy on the phone on WeChat receiving red bags and messages.
Now people are giving red bags, not only from elderly people to the younger generation, but you can also see co-workers, students doing it to each other and it seems that people feel it is necessary to use the red bag as it makes their friendship closer, or is a guarantee of future favour in the relationship.

Electronic red bags can also be seen in the form of a game. When one person gives a red bag to a bunch of friends in a group, the amount each of the friends get in the group is not the same. Some receive amounts which can be very low such as 0.01 yuan, while some others might receive very high amounts by comparison. So people don’t know how much they will get and want to prove how lucky they can be, so they eagerly check the red bags or wait for the red bags on WeChat.

Spring Festival is a time for families and for reunion. But when family people sit together once a year, people are busy on the phones for those red bags. A lot of people put reunion on the side, compared with those family feelings, the giving and receiving of electronic red bags is more important for them.

People are dependent on electronic products, they forget human communication. Many people prefer to sit together playing on their mobile phones, without any face to face communication, rather send messages through the phone (Holmes & Balnaves & Wang, 2016).

Sending New Year’s wishes through WeChat, watching the New Year’s TV show, travelling with family and friends are all new phenomena. Life efficiency has improved, but the feelings between people are not as deeply connected, being less intimate on a computer or smartphone screen.

2.3 Banned Firecrackers

Year after year, each spring festival is changing. Chinese people find yet another change, that is the traditional firecrackers. In people’s minds, to welcome the first day of a new year you
must have the sound of firecrackers. To have no firecrackers is like suggesting the new year celebration was empty, the atmosphere is noiseless and cheerless.

The latest research has shown that every year, 36 million people died of air pollution in China (Lelyveld, 2016). Of course there are many reasons causing air pollution in China. Such as large number of people using coal, burning wood, car exhausts and so on. Large scale use of firecrackers at the same time leads to serious air pollution, too. According to statistics in the year 2015, from New Year’s Eve till the next day in the early morning, Beijing urban area’s Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) had rapid growth and exceeded the danger level several times in a short period (Ye & Chen & Chen, 2016). Firecrackers are of chemical composition, such as black powder, sulfur powder, charcoal powder, iron powder, aluminum powder and coloured flames. When firecrackers are lit up, it results in carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitric oxide, nitrogen dioxide and other metal dust pollution (Ye & Chen & Chen, 2016). People breathe these into their lungs, into the body and blood, it can causes many diseases (Ye & Chen & Chen, 2016). Paper and dust are flying around, and the appearance of the city is terrible, too. It needs many days to clean up the fireworks garbage. At the same time, the explosion of firecrackers is as loud as thunder, the noise at least over 130db, it also becomes noise pollution. In addition, every spring festival, fire set off due to firecrackers and injuries to the face, hands, and eyes caused through accidents are very common (Singh, 2010). For those reasons, the government has taken action and in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, in fact in more than 130 cities firecrackers are strictly prohibited from 1st January 2016 (Vanderklippe, 2016). If people light up firecrackers without permission, the police station has the responsibility of giving a fine from 100 yuan to 500 yuan (Lo, 2017). According to a Beijing statistics report, in 2016 compared to year 2015, the use of firecrackers was reduced by 40%. On 2015, during the spring festival, the amount of fireworks garbage was 1,394 tons. In the year 2016, the number was down to 836 tons. In 2017, the number was down to 700 tons (Wang, 2017).

More and more people are aware of the negative effects of fireworks for the sake of our future environment, for our children and grandchildren. To improve air quality, for blue skies of the future, it is in the hands of the current generation.

As mentioned before, this action is banned in big cities. Rural areas are still free to explode firecrackers. But some villages also noticed the importance of air quality, they are willing not to use the traditional firecrackers. The ban on firecrackers will gradually spread to a wider area over China and it is possible it will eventually stop this tradition for good.
Business people also find opportunities during this transition away from traditional firecrackers. Electronic firecrackers replace traditional ones without polluting the air, do not cause fire accidents, are safer, and there is a big reduction in the amount of money spent because they can repeatedly be re-used. The sound is very similar to the traditional firecrackers and so is the flash (Francis, 2014). And also in stores people can find plastic firecrackers to hang on the doors and windows for decoration. Therefore, electronic firecrackers are now being accepted by Chinese people, and these may completely replace the traditional ones.

2.4 Traditions Food vs. Fast food

China has thousands of years of history. Consider food, a major part of Chinese culture. Food culture relies on the development of traditional Chinese culture, it gradually evolved into a unique food culture. Ming yi shi wei tian, food as heaven for people (Great Wall in Numbers, 2013). It shows how seriously Chinese people look at food.

Food culture can vary geographically and for reasons of economy, nationality and religious observance, levels of consumption and other aspects. The result creates numerous cuisines in every corner of China. Compared with other countries, Chinese food has many unique qualities. It has a variety of flavours, four seasons with different tastes, pays attention to the beauty of the appearance of the dish and uses food as medicine (Great Wall in Numbers, 2013). Chinese people look at spring festival food as a blessing, a wish, the achievement of a new year of good wishes for family, career, love, health, wealth and so on. So people choose the best ingredients and the most perfect cooking techniques to prepare it. Every year certain foods are always expected to show up on the dinner table during new year celebrations.

Jiaozi-dumplings are a must-eat food in North of China. Nian gao-Gluten sticky rice cake for southern Chinese people. As a symbol of luck, babao rice is people’s favourite in the south of China during the festival. Babao means eight treasures and this glutinous rice dish is called Babao in Chinese. These treasures are: Longan fruit to symbolize reunion, tangerine to represent what is auspicious, red dates to welcome a new born baby, honey cherry and honey melon to have a life as sweet as honey, barley rice to symbolize longevity elegance and purity, melon seeds to keep life safe and avoid disasters, sliced red plums as blessings and encouragement, green plums for longevity, too. At the same time, Babao rice is like a bowl to collect money and wish that the family can make money in the new year, too. To make perfect Babao rice, the production process is quite complicated. First, glutinous rice needs to stay in warm water for one hour, then steam it until medium rare, longan must be in whole pieces,
red dates need to soak in water for half hour before cooking and one should not put too many, red and green plums should be put out of range of the rice, people also choose to put red bean paste in the middle of the rice, then lower the heat and steam for half hour, turn up to high heat to steam for half an hour and then cool it down. Babao rice is always prepared a few days before the festival then when it is time to take it to the dinner table, you usually need to steam it for half hour before serving.

Today, the younger generation regard the ingredients of Babao rice as mainly rice and a few kinds of dried fruits, the time and effort needed to do it they judge to be not worth it. The materials they use now are cheap, not like those expensive delicacies. And also you need time and energy to make traditional food such as Baozi. Young people do not understand why their parents and grandparents spent so much time making such food which takes a lot of time, rather than go to the store and buy a take-out. But for older generations, preparing spring festival food is also an enjoyable community moment and they are glad as more time is spent doing each dish, as part of the celebration ceremony before the family reunites. It’s like a prayer for a happy family reunion and wishes for a successful new year. The spirit of family reunion is priceless, it is not just measured in materials or ingredients. That’s why the traditions of cooking techniques through to modern times has endured. However now people gather less, don’t have time for food preparation because of working long hours. They may even find that paying for a meal in a restaurant for a large family group is cheaper and certainly less work and less time-consuming than shopping, preparing and cooking ingredients as in the old days. Even speciality foods are no longer special as the proliferation of dumpling restaurants in city shopping malls now testifies. Everyone, if they have the cash, can eat dumplings any day of the year.

In the past, Chinese New Year was the holiday most looked forward to by everyone. People wore new clothes, lit firecrackers, families gathered together making dumplings, visited the temple market and celebrated with relatives and friends. But as time passed, many people started to find that the New Year’s celebrations featured less and less in their lives compared with when they were young. Traditions can alter for they only comply to the thoughts, wishes and actions of those who celebrate them, and they might even disappear in the hands of younger generations. In recent years, many customs are slowly fading away from the attention of people or vanishing.

People born before 1980 might remember this Jingle (Liuxue, 2017):
Twenty-third, eat sticky sugar melon
Twenty-four, write couplets
Twenty-five, grind tofu
Twenty-six, stew meat
Twenty-seven, slaughter rooster
Twenty-eight, make dough
Twenty-nine, steam bread
Thirty stay awake all night

This Jingle became part of Chinese history. On the one hand, younger generations are not willing to carry on the traditions of the Spring Festival, for them the feeling of freedom is the best feeling. Those ancient traditions and rules bother them and they have no interest in following them or even in not following, rather disinterest has taken hold of them. However on the other hand, ironically they do complain that the new year´s traditions are becoming less and less significant compared with when they were small children.

So is this cultural heritage being passed on? The reason Chinese people can no longer feel the richness of the Spring Festival, is primarily because it has lost certain characteristics. Those significant markers are: the preparation of New Year food; cleaning and decorating homes before the New Year arrives; praying to God or Buddha for another good year for the family; taking part in the family reunion dinner; visiting the market; visiting relatives and friends; enjoying the sound of firecrackers and the distribution of red envelopes. But on the other hand new ways of enjoying traditional foods and keeping in touch are developing.

2.5 Changing Times and Living Standards

Over the last thirty years, since the Chinese economic reforms of 1978, the living standards of Chinese people have rapidly improved. In 1978, the average monthly salary (per capita) was 50 yuan. In 2012, it reached 3,000.- yuan. Salaries have multiplied tenfold since 1980 (Censky, 2012). Life has changed dramatically for people. This has improved their medical care, brought free education and improved housing and pension systems.

Before the standard of living was very poor. Buying foods like dumplings very difficult to afford. There were no smart phones. One only bought one set of new clothes and that was during the spring festival.

For children they would get good extra food and sweets once a year while waiting for the New Year festival. But now, kids and grown ups can eat dumplings whenever they want. Spring festival food can be eaten every day. People can use their mobile phones to call home and reach their friends any time. It seems in today´s world that everyday is like New Year’s Eve for them.
In the past, China was an agricultural land where people started working on farms and fields at sunrise. After sunset people came home. Spring festival was the only time people would have a holiday, the family got together and there was no need to worry about going to work on the farm. Families started early to prepare for the spring festival, collecting all the best things, foods or clothes for the New Year festival. Life styles have changed, many people are not living in their hometown, so when people are not near their home, they cannot participate in the preparations for the Spring Festival. In this way sentiments regarding the celebration of new year have altered, through economic migration, ready money in their pockets and mobiles in their hands people have become estranged from the home environment and all the joy and togetherness which arose from careful and focused preparation as a family unit has eroded both the spirit and practice of those long cherished New year customs.

2.6 Rural versus Urban

To compare rural and urban areas ways of celebrating Spring Festival traditions, rural areas have still maintained the traditional customs of Spring Festival. But with the changing times, people have gradually moved from villages to city apartment buildings (Hu, 2012). Therefore, relatives, friends and neighbors are living far away from each other, people are busy with their own daily lives, the interaction between them is less and less, this is a change brought about by environmental factors. Rural areas are now under-populated. City children probably spend more free time on their smart phones and on computer games. Countryside children, play more with friends outside in nature. Although their living standards cannot be compared with the standards of city children, they may not have an Ipad, or Play Station or computer, but they follow Chinese old traditions of children playing together, they still have the naive, innocent lives a child should experience. It is worth considering that the living standards for many people in the countryside are more or less the same compared to 30 or 50 years ago. But will that mean that the environment and living standards of rural people will also change in the not so distant future?

Traditional culture reflects meaning and integrity in the nation and represents the gathering of accumulated wisdom. Without it would be like a person without character. China has more than five thousand years of cultural intelligence, foreign culture cannot replace that. However we cannot judge or avoid foreign cultures, we must ake the best side of them and learn from them, too. Chinese people have adopted western holidays, Mother’s Day and
Father’s day. You could say these are also celebrations of filial piety. The ideology is no different from Confucian philosophy, at heart the desire to respect our parents. Chinese people experience foreign festivals, celebrate their culture, it is not a bad thing, in the same way foreigners also love Chinese festivals.
Conclusion

Two major trends will continue to influence and help to perpetuate the customs and traditions of Chinese New Year. Firstly the adaptations and changes made by advanced technology and the demands of modern living and secondly the revival of Chinese influence throughout the world through travel, education and investment by China. The first trend is revealed when close examination of Chinese traditional New Year customs, (including people’s beliefs, clothes and food choices, food preparation and distribution, the manner in which people gather to celebrate and where and what form their celebrating takes) shows these to be subject to change in modern times.

The red colour with which people scared away the monster Nian in whom they once believed, is still considered lucky and worn today on the body and used to decorate homes and business premises. However the bright firecrackers once an essential element deafening everyone for hours on end and leaving its paper residue on the streets like a red river are no longer popular with environmentalists. Now, thought of as pollutants, the traditional crackers are being supplanted by electronic versions which can be reused. Red envelopes in which money is distributed as a gift, bringing good fortune, have also had a makeover as online versions grip the imagination, though the paper versions still find favour with the very young and the very old.

Traditional foods are still popular and vary in different regions but pressure of time on women now working outside the home, and the effects of the growing number of both sexes who work as migrant workers far from home has caused a decline in the numbers gathering to celebrate and prepare food and eat celebratory home-cooked dinners as a family unit in their home town or village. Many opt for restaurant meals and find they are saving both money and time. Still, vast swathes of the population do travel home, causing traffic headaches throughout China. Of course once arrived home they are more likely to watch television and indulge in hours of watching the New Year gala on television rather than visiting neighbours and friends and the use of small screens such as mobile phones prompts many to keep in touch throughout the year and obviate the need for any yearly pilgrimage to their hometown at New Year.

People’s needs are changing, traditional customs performed in the old labour-intensive way cannot meet the demands of today. Choices are becoming more colourful, people are continuing to try new things though essentially Chinese New Year still emphasizes reunion and the performance of family activities. People may gather around a restaurant table or
around a television set rather than the family work. Chinese traditional culture is still passed on as an inheritance, and so advanced technology will enhance communication between family members and between generations and face-to-face interactivity will never stop entirely either.

The second trend is revealed in the global influence of modern China. China may have had a huge influence in the past. The famous “Silk Road” brought the riches, discoveries and inventions of China to the West. Then followed a decline in the influence of China but the phenomenon now of travelling within China for Chinese people is leading to an increase in awareness and a valuing of their rich and varied inheritance. Moreover Chinese people are also travelling internationally in huge numbers as tourists as never before (China Tourism Academy, 2017).

The world is aware of Chinese people in a way it was not hitherto.

The Chinese government’s investment in the setting up of Confucius Institutes across the world promoting understanding of China and its culture is one of the factors bringing the attention of the West to the Chinese heritage and the cultural influence of China across the world is immense. You are now likely to see a Dragon Dance performed in University of Iceland or have the chance to learn Mandarin high school of Iceland. Universities in the United States as elsewhere in the world are full of Chinese students, taking their culture with them and the children of first generation immigrants can now learn locally the language of their forefathers and learn to dance and cook dumplings Chinese style for New Year without travelling to China.

Both of these major trends will hopefully ensure the survival of the traditions and customs of the wonderfully rich heritage of Chinese New Year within Chinese borders and throughout the world for generations to come.
Bibliography


