

# 恭 喜 发 财

Gong Xi Fa Cai! (Congratulations and Prosperity!)

By Jennifer Chieh Ho, Representative for Workers of Colour, BC Federation of Labour

Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year is a festive celebration that lasts for 15 days. Unlike Christmas Day which falls on December 25 annually, the Chinese New Year falls on a different day every year. This year, the first day of Chinese New Year falls on February 19 in the lunar calendar. According to Chinese astrology, every year in the Chinese calendar is associated with an animal as part of the zodiac which is based on a 12-year cycle. For example, 2015 is the year of the Goat or sometimes known as the year of the sheep or ram. Hence, the next year of the goat will be the year 2027.

According to <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/goat.asp> on the personality of people born in a year of the Goat, they are calm and gentle.

*“People born in a year of the Goat are generally believed to be **gentle** mild-mannered, shy, stable, sympathetic, amicable, and brimming with a strong sense of kind-heartedness and justice.*

*They have very **delicate thoughts**, strong creativity, and perseverance, and acquire professional skills well. Although they look gentle on the surface, they are tough on the inside, always insisting on their own opinions in their minds. They have strong inner resilience and excellent defensive instincts.*

*Though they **prefer to be in groups**, they do not want to be the center of attention. They are reserved and quiet, most likely because they like spending much time in their thoughts. Goats like to spend money on fashionable things that give them a first class appearance. Although goats enjoy spending money on the finer things in life, they are not snobbish.”*

I am happy to share with you herewith, my personal experience with the celebration of this festivity.

During Chinese New Year, my entire family gets together with friends to celebrate this festive season. Children love Chinese New Year because they receive money in beautifully designed red envelopes, from adults. The red envelopes have lucky and prosperous sayings in Chinese on them. The colour red signifies good luck. Red clothes are generally worn and homes are decorated with red and gold. There are also lots of oranges and mandarins all over the house because they bring good luck and good health. A lot of the things we do are tied to “good health, good fortune and prosperity.”

The biggest dinner is served on New Year's Eve and it is always at my parents' house. Food is a very important part of the celebration. There are always nine different dishes served. One of the key dishes is fish. My grandparents told me that the Chinese pronunciation of “fish” sounds like “surplus.” The fish dish is never eaten completely at one seating on New Year's Eve. It is with deliberation to leave part of the fish uneaten. Chinese people like to have a “surplus” at the end of the year. So, by not finishing this “fish” dish, it means that we will have surplus in everything to bring into the New Year.

On the first day, we would visit my parents and my uncles and their families to wish them good health and a prosperous New Year. The women exchange two oranges and a red envelope with money with each other. During the exchange, we offer each other good wishes accompanied by the phrase “Gong Xi Fa Cai.” When children wish the adults “Gong Xi Fa Cai,” they will receive red envelopes with money.

The seventh day of the Lunar New Year is also known as “Everyone's birthday” and the traditional dish for a birthday is fried noodles (chow mein) and red colour boiled eggs. Chow mein means longevity and red coloured eggs mean good luck. Everyone loves this day because it is another celebration day.

The fifteenth day is the last day of the festival and again, families get together and have big feasts of at least nine dishes.

Part of the celebration of Chinese New Year are firecrackers and lion dances at shops in China town. Legend has it that there is an animal called “Nian” who would come out from the jungle to eat human beings during this festive season. The presence of lion dances and the loud sounds of firecrackers are meant to scare “Nian” and all evil spirits away.

I enjoyed growing up in the tradition of celebrating and now I am happy to be passing the fun experiences I had onto my children.

If you are interested to learn more about Chinese New Year, please visit the following links:

<http://www.chinesenewyears.info/>

<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/spring-festival.htm>