



EAST ASIAN HOLIDAYS

LESSON ONE CHINESE NEW YEAR DR. XIAOBING LI



Many traditional holidays and festivals in East Asia follow the lunar calendar rather than the official calendar, so they are celebrated on different dates each year. The traditional calendar evolved from the lunar system and is based upon the waxing and waning of the moon. The Lunar New Year (Chinese Spring Festival) is the most important and popular of all East Asian holidays, similar to Christmas in America. It is celebrated in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan.

Although everyone is given three days off from work, people take five to seven days off work to celebrate the first day of a new lunar year. It is usually in late January or early February on the official calendar.

Days before the Chinese New Year, people are busy shopping, preparing the food to cook, and inviting relatives and friends to celebrate with them.

Certain types of food are commonly served at the New Year's Eve dinner, including whole fish, roast suckling pig, pigeon, chicken cooked with lobster in red oil, and dumplings. The pronunciation of fish in Chinese, "yu", is the same as "abundance," meaning the family will have plenty of wealth in the New



Year. The serving of pigeon implies a peaceful future for the family. Chicken means phoenix, while lobster is literally called dragon in Chinese. Having lobster and chicken together at the New Year's feast indicates that harmony, and a balance of Yin and Yang elements, have been achieved.

At the New Year's feast, the most important dish for all families across the country is the dumpling (jiaozi in Chinese), a classic Chinese delicacy and a holiday must-have food with a long history. It includes steamed, pan-fried (also called pot stickers, or Guo-tie in Chinese), and deep-fried dumplings with pork, beef, or shrimp. Making dumplings is considered teamwork and it is a family effort to prepare. Everyone in the family, including the guests, gather around the table and make several hundred dumplings while catching up with news about their careers and lives and talking about the New Year.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the Chinese New Year not on January 1?
2. What are some common foods served at the New Year's feast in East Asia?
3. Do they cook "dragon" and "phoenix"? What are they?
4. What is the most important dish for all families in China?
5. If you are in a local Chinese restaurant with your Asian-American friends during the Chinese New Year, what should you order to celebrate their traditional holiday?

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