

Happy Chinese New Year! Here our partners and volunteers share some resources at the start of the Year of the Rabbit.

Chinese New Year (中國新年), or the Spring Festival (春節), is the most important event in Chinese communities throughout the world, including Taiwan, where I am from. The Spring Festival begins on the first day of the first month according to the Chinese lunar calendar. The festival continues until the 15th day of the same month. The Spring Festival, just like Christmas in the Western society, is a time for family reunions and festivities. Every year, I bring my English husband and our three children back to Taiwan to join my parents and the extended family, including my 96-year-old Grandmother to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

There are lots of traditions being followed across Taiwan during the Spring Festival but perhaps the most popular and important of those is the Chinese New Year's Eve dinner (年夜飯). My grandparents have seven children and there are always four generations getting together during Chinese New Year's Eve. We always need to have five big round tables at home to accommodate the family members as well as the food.

These are some of the dishes we must have on our dinner table on Chinese New Year's Eve. All of the dishes are symbolic and traditional.

1. Mooli cake

The Taiwanese pronunciation of "mooli" in "mooli cake" (菜頭粿), "caitaogui" is a homonym with the word "luck" (彩頭).

2. Fish

The Chinese word for "fish" (魚) is a homonym with the word for "surplus" (餘), which can be found in the popular Chinese New Year phrase "having an abundance every year" (年年有餘). Therefore, the fish is usually untouched in my family, wishing for a prosperous year to come.

3. Dumplings

The shape of dumplings is similar to gold ingots (元寶) once used as currency. The more dumplings you eat, the more money you can make in the new year. (A good excuse to pile up your plate.)

4. Niangao

The pronunciation of "niangao" (年糕) -- sticky rice cakes -- sounds like "each year higher" (年高). This ties in nicely with the New Year's expression "getting higher and higher year after year" (年年高升), meaning being promoted at work.

5. Fagao

Continuing with the theme of prosperity and riches, the first character for "fagao" or "prosperity cake" (發糕) is the same as the first character in the word for "fortune" (發財). It is also a pun because it has the dual meaning of both rising wealth and rising in the sense of bread leavening.

6. Hot Pot

In the colder winter months, a steaming hot pot is a great meal. It is also a social dish, with the entire family gathering around the table, cooking, and eating from the same pot.

There are many more dishes that we have during Chinese New Year. The list can be very long.

It is The Year of Rabbit (兔) this year. The rabbit (兔) is the fourth in the twelve-year periodic sequence (cycle) of animals that appear in the Chinese zodiac. In the Chinese culture, it symbolizes mercy, elegance, and beauty. People who are born in the year of the rabbit are calm and peaceful. I wish all of us a very prosperous and successful year of Rabbit to come.