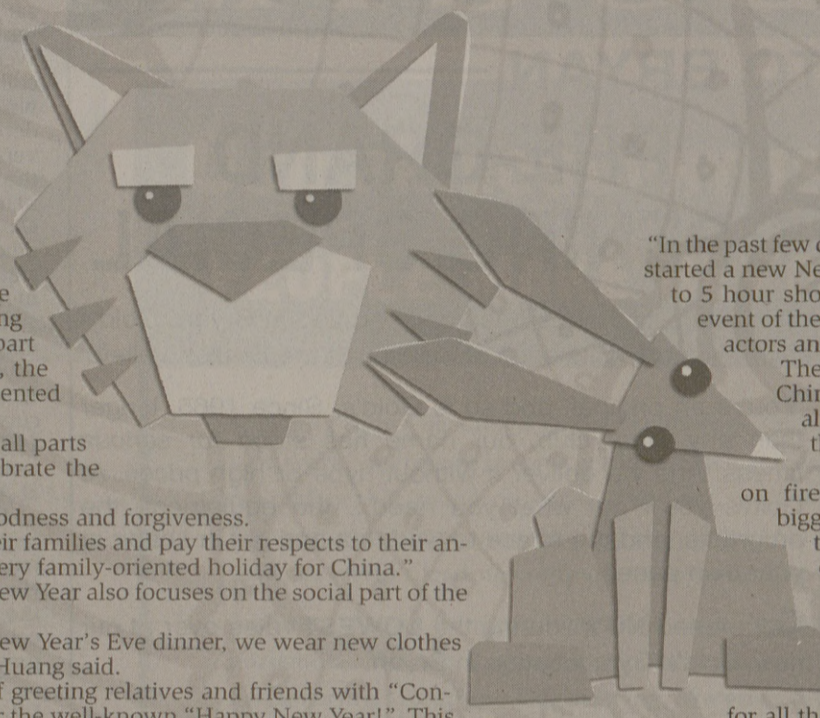


4697 The Year of the Rabbit



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"New Year's was called spring festival because it was the end of winter when people started their new crops," Wang said. "Today the agricultural part of the festival is less evident, the family union is more represented now."

In fact, people come from all parts of China and Taiwan to celebrate the holiday with their families.

Wang said it is a day of goodness and forgiveness.

"People return home to their families and pay their respects to their ancestors," Wang said. "It is a very family-oriented holiday for China."

The present day Chinese New Year also focuses on the social part of the holiday.

"My family and I have a New Year's Eve dinner, we wear new clothes and stay up until midnight," Huang said.

New Year's Day is a day of greeting relatives and friends with "Congratulations! You'll be rich" or the well-known "Happy New Year!" This practice comes about from the past when people wanted to make sure their friends all made it through the beast of the previous year.

"Early on New Year's Day, we go to the homes of family and friends to wish them a happy new year," Huang said.

Wang said modern technology has greatly shaped the holiday.

"In the past few decades, hundreds of millions of people have started a new New Year's tradition to watch a well-known 4 to 5 hour show which is the most important television event of the year," Wang said. "It is a celebration where actors and actresses perform songs and dances."

The traditional part of the festival is still alive in China. The people of China and Chinatown alike set off fireworks in order to ward off all the evil energy for the upcoming year.

"Since the cities have placed restrictions on fireworks now, the countryside has the biggest activities," Wang said. "In some cities, though, there are flower festivals, the colorful lantern festival and the infamous dragon festival."

Parents or grandparents pass out the proverbial red envelopes with money.

"Usually, in my house, my parents prepare the red envelopes with money for all the children," Huang said. "It is supposed to bring luck."

Even though there is a mix of ancient and present day tradition, the Chinese New Year brings a time of happiness and closeness.

"No matter how you celebrate it, the year of the rabbit is a new year that hopefully will be a good year," Wang said.

The fierce dragon weaves its way through the streets. The entire town glows with every color imaginable, the lanterns are hung and the houses decorated with red paper, all in preparation for the Chinese New Year.

An animal from the Chinese Zodiac sign represents and characterizes the year. The tradition began in the time of the Yellow Emperor of China, which makes 1999 the Chinese year 4697.

Wang, assistant professor of modern China, said today brings the tiger to a close and welcomes the year of the rabbit.

The Chinese year depends on the lunar year, there are 12 different animals in that cycle, for example the last rabbit year was 12 years ago.

Huang, Chinese student association president and a senior management information systems major, said the order of animals in the span of years comes from a Chinese legend.

There is a story in which all the animals had a race, and so the animal that finished first was the first year, and the next fastest was the next year so on," Huang said. "Some animals never made it like the cat who was not invited to the race."

The year of the rabbit is known to be well-mannered, unlike the past of the tiger, which was temperamental with its ups and downs. The year of the rabbit focuses on the arts and music. 1999, by Chinese custom will focus on attaining goals and having no regrets.

Huang said traditionally, Chinese New Year's Day was the first day of the year when people began planting their crop. The actual new year festivities last for 15 days.



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