

Chinese New Year in the U.S.

Eve Beaumont

Starting a new year

- Significant event for people around the world



Background

- also called Spring Festival or Lunar New Year
- traditionally lasts 15 days
- takes place around late January or early February



Goal

- Compare the way the holiday is celebrated in China and the United States
- Discover any generational differences in the U.S. in terms of how holiday is experienced

Methods

- Research of published works on celebrations in China
- Informal interviews
 - individuals who lived in China, or whose parents were from China
 - divided into groups of above and below 30 years old

Methods

- Participant observation
 - working in Chinese restaurant
 - babysitting in Chinese-American home
 - attending 2 Chinese New Year celebrations

Symbolism

- The color red- represent luck and happiness
- Envelopes- contain money and/or candy, given from older family members to younger





- Food- many dishes have special meaning, dumplings represent wealth, garlic brings good health for next year



Preparation

- Red paper lanterns displayed in restaurant
- part of the lantern festival celebrated at the end of the holiday in China
- No decorative changes observed around the household, or discussed in interviews



Activities

The Day Of

- Responses from subjects 30 and over:
 - fill red gift envelopes to hand out
 - prepare food
 - set up table(s) and chairs for the meal
 - call family members living in China, and get together with family here
- Responses from subjects under 30:
 - help set up tables and chairs
 - receive red envelopes
 - have large meal
 - spend time with family

Ritual



- before the meal, food set out in front of shrine with burning incense
- followed by prayer



- burn money as a way to pay tribute to ancestors



Celebrations

- House party:
 - extended family, at the home of great-grandparents
 - food served in the center of round table
 - mostly non-alcoholic beverages
 - play cards and Mahjong, pass out red envelopes, Chinese station on TV
 - younger members speaking mostly English with some Chinese, older members speaking mostly Chinese

Celebrations

- Restaurant party:
 - family, friends, coworkers, customers
 - food set up on separate table where guests serve themselves
 - beer, sake, shots of cognac or rice wine
 - make toasts, drink to new year

Comparison

- In China:

- days leading up to new year spent cleaning and decorating house
- 15 days for visiting, celebrating, worshipping in temples

- In United States:

- preparations and celebrating centered around one day
- spiritual/religious practices only in the home rather than in temples

Comparison

- 30 years and over:
 - more responsibilities of holiday, preparing & cooking food, hosting celebration, giving out money & sweets
 - more traditional in participating in spiritual practices and speaking Chinese
- Under 30:
 - experience holiday more as opportunity to enjoy food provided & gifts received
 - not involved with traditional spiritual aspects, and more English speaking

Conclusion

- Celebrations not as extensive in the U.S. as in China
- Some specific traditions practiced even less with younger generations
- But key values of holiday seem constant, occasion for celebrating end of one year and start of another by spending and enjoying time with family and friends

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