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Lunar New Year: Fact Sheet

Updated April 11, 2024

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R46674

Introduction

The Lunar New Year is a holiday celebrated in many parts of Asia and in Asian communities around the world. It marks the beginning of the year using the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. Typically, Lunar New Year is observed in late January or early February of the Gregorian calendar. The Year of the Dragon began on February 10, 2024, and the Year of the Snake will begin on January 29, 2025. This fact sheet focuses on the Lunar New Year as celebrated by people of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese descents, including many Asian Americans.

This fact sheet assists congressional offices with work related to the Lunar New Year holiday. It contains historical information, links to legislation, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential statements, and other web resources.

Background

The Lunar New Year is a holiday in Asian societies that use variants of the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. The holiday has cultural significance for Asian American communities with ties to those countries.¹ The Lunar New Year starts on the second new moon after the winter solstice and falls between January 21 and February 19 on the Gregorian calendar used in the United States.²

The Chinese calendar uses a 60-year cycle known as the *sexagenary cycle*. The current cycle began in 1984 and ends in 2043. Each cycle consists of one each of the 10 heavenly stems and 12 earthly branches, which correspond to 12 zodiac animals. These zodiac animals are the rat, ox, tiger, hare (or rabbit), dragon, snake, horse, sheep (or goat), monkey, rooster (or chicken), dog, and pig (or boar).³ The heavenly stems are also associated with one of the five traditional Chinese elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water.

The Lunar New Year is not a federal holiday in the United States. However, some states, such as California⁴ and Colorado,⁵ have passed legislation declaring the Lunar New Year an official holiday, and the state of New York recognizes it as a public school holiday.⁶ Some cities with large Asian American populations, including San Francisco, close schools for the day.⁷ The U.S. Postal Service began issuing special stamps in 1992 to commemorate the Lunar New Year.⁸

¹ Jessica M. Kizer, “Lunar New Year,” in Mary Yu Danico and Anthony C. Ocampo, editors, *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014), pp. 650-652, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452281889>.

² “Chinese Calendar and Asian Festivals,” in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2020* (New York: Infobase, 2016), p. 351.

³ William D. Crump, “Calendar, Chinese,” in *Encyclopedia of New Year’s Holidays Worldwide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), pp. 28-29.

⁴ California Assembly Bill No. 2596, An act to amend Section 135 of the Code of Civil Procedure, and to amend Sections 6700, 19853, and 19853.1 of, and to repeal Section 6730 of, the Government Code, relating to state government, September 29, 2022, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB2596.

⁵ Colorado General Assembly Bill No. HB23-1271, Lunar New Year Day as an Observed State Holiday, June 2, 2023, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb23-1271>.

⁶ New York State Senate Bill S7573, Declares Asian Lunar New Year a school holiday, September 9, 2023, <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/S7573>.

⁷ Jill Tucker, “Lunar New Year Set to Become School Holiday,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 12, 2006.

⁸ Smithsonian, National Postal Museum, “Lunar New Year Postage Stamps”; USPS, National news, “Lunar New Year Forever Stamp Highlights Year of the Rabbit,” January 12, 2023.

Lunar New Year customs vary across countries and regions. In many places in Asia, it is a public holiday and a major time period for travel. Commonalities include cleaning the house; settling debts and disputes; gathering with family and friends; eating auspicious foods; honoring elders and ancestors; exchanging gifts of money; and watching or participating in traditional dances, games, and other cultural activities.

Chinese Traditions

The Chinese New Year, also called the Spring Festival or *Chun Jie* in Mandarin Chinese, is a 15-day festival that marks the beginning of the Chinese traditional calendar and welcomes spring.

The United States is home to an estimated 5.4 million people of Chinese descent, the single largest national group among Asian Americans, plus an additional 320,000 people of Taiwanese descent.⁹ Celebrations are held in many U.S. cities; the San Francisco Chinese New Year Festival and Parade has been described as “the largest celebration of its kind in the world.”¹⁰ Groups with varying political and cultural affiliations organize celebrations and Members of Congress who have been asked to participate in specific events may want to determine the affiliations of the organizing groups.

Korean Traditions

The Korean New Year, *Seollal* (alternative spellings *Sollal* or *Solnal*), is a three-day festival. It marks the first day of the traditional Korean calendar, which is based on the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar.¹¹ It includes the day before and the day after New Year’s Day.¹²

The United States has an estimated 2 million Korean Americans, with large populations in Los Angeles and New York.¹³ Public festivities have included a folk drumming street festival in Los Angeles’ Koreatown neighborhood.¹⁴

Vietnamese Traditions

The Vietnamese New Year, *Tết Nguyên Đán*, or *Tết*, is a three-day festival marking the beginning of the traditional Vietnamese calendar, which is a variant of the Chinese lunisolar calendar. The Vietnamese zodiac uses the buffalo, cat, and goat instead of the Chinese ox, hare, and sheep.¹⁵ The Vietnamese Year of the Dragon began on February 10, 2024, and the Year of the Snake will begin on January 29, 2025.¹⁶

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Table B02018, American Community Survey 2022 1-Year Estimates.”

¹⁰ “San Francisco Chinese New Year Festival and Parade,” in William D. Crump, *Encyclopedia of New Year’s Holidays Worldwide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), pp. 215-216.

¹¹ “Korea,” in William D. Crump, *Encyclopedia of New Year’s Holidays Worldwide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), pp. 134-136.

¹² Traci Rhoades, “What Is Korean New Year? Everything To Know About Seollal,” *Parade*, January 20, 2023.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, “Table B02018, American Community Survey 2022 1-Year Estimates”; Pew Research Center, “Koreans in the U.S. Fact Sheet,” April 29, 2021.

¹⁴ Kyung Jin Lee, “Korean Folk Drummers Ring in the Lunar New Year,” *KQED News*, February 28, 2015.

¹⁵ Thuy Vo Dang, “Tet,” in Xiaojian Zhao and Edward J.W. Park, editors, *Asian Americans: An Encyclopedia of Social, Cultural, Economic, and Political History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), pp. 1081-1083.

¹⁶ “Tết,” Wikipedia, February 19, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=T%E1%BA%BF&oldid=1208904023#Dates_in_the_Vietnamese_calendar.

The United States is home to an estimated 2.3 million Vietnamese Americans who host hundreds of *Tết* celebrations each year, including the largest in the “Little Saigon” community of Westminster, CA.¹⁷

Legislation

H.Res. 1002 (118th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2024, introduced February 7, 2024.

H.Res. 49 (118th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2023, introduced January 20, 2023.

H.Res. 890 (117th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2022, introduced January 28, 2022.

H.Res. 120 (117th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2021, introduced February 11, 2021.

H.Res. 808 (116th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2020, introduced January 24, 2020.

H.Res. 98 (116th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2019, introduced February 4, 2019.

H.Res. 744 (115th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2018, introduced February 16, 2018.

H.Res. 63 (115th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2017, introduced January 24, 2017.

S.Res. 366 (114th Congress), A resolution recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year, introduced February 8, 2016, and agreed to in Senate.

H.Res. 608 (114th Congress), Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2016, introduced February 8, 2016.

S.Res. 80 (114th Congress), A resolution recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Lunar New Year, introduced February 12, 2015, and agreed to in the Senate.

Related CRS Products

CRS Report R43977, *Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet*, by Gary Sidor.

Selected Congressional Statements and Remarks

Some Members of Congress make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, “Table B02018, American Community Survey 2022 1-Year Estimates”; Hien Duc Do, “Vietnamese Americans,” in Xiaojian Zhao and Edward J.W. Park, editors, *Asian Americans: An Encyclopedia of Social, Cultural, Economic, and Political History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), pp. 1154-1163; Vo Dang, “Tet,” pp. 1081-1083.

Representative Jan Schakowsky, “Schakowsky Statement on Lunar New Year,” press release, February 10, 2024.

Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, “Statement from Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi Celebrating the Lunar New Year,” press release, February 9, 2024.

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, “CAPAC Members and House Democratic Leader Celebrate Lunar New Year,” press release, February 9, 2024.

Representative Young Kim, “Celebrating Lunar New Year,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 170, no. 22 (February 7, 2024), p. H520.

Representative Melanie A. Stansbury, “Happy Lunar New Year,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 170, no. 22 (February 7, 2024), p. H519-H520.

Representative Young Kim, “Celebrating Lunar New Year,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 169 (January 27, 2023), p. H433-434.

Representative Jan Schakowsky, “Schakowsky Statement Commemorating Lunar New Year,” press release, January 22, 2023.

Representative Grace Meng, “Lunar New Year 2021,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167 (February 11, 2021), pp. E125-E126.

Representative Young Kim, “Celebrating Lunar New Year,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167 (February 4, 2021), p. H338.

Representative Grace Meng, “Lunar New Year 2020,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166 (January 24, 2020), p. E72.

Representative J. Luis Correa, “In Celebration of Vietnamese New Year Tet 2020,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166 (January 16, 2020), p. E45.

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Recognizing the Lunar New Year,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 162 (February 8, 2016), pp. E125-E126.

Senator Harry Reid, “Celebrating the Lunar New Year,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 161 (February 9, 2015), p. S853.

Senator Mitch McConnell, “Kentuckians Celebrating the Vietnamese Lunar New Year,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 161 (February 3, 2015), p. S734.

Selected Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation or presidential remarks is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some recent remarks and proclamations commemorating the Lunar New Year from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Presidential Proclamations—Joseph R. Biden (2021-)

Presidential Proclamations—Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)

Presidential Proclamations—Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Presidential Proclamations—George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Presidential Proclamations—William J. Clinton (1993-2001)

Presidential proclamations and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the GovInfo service on the Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including selected audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Government Resources

Library of Congress, “Chinese New Year Celebrations: Primary Sources Reflecting a Cultural Tradition.”

Nongovernment Resources

Asia Society, “Celebrating the New Year in Asia.”

Asia Society, “Seollal, Korean Lunar New Year.”

Columbia University, “The Lunar New Year: Rituals and Legends.”

National Folk Museum of Korea, “The Story of the Twelve Animals of the Korean Zodiac.”

Vietnamese Culture, “Vietnamese New Year.”

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Acknowledgments

This fact sheet was previously updated by Devon Galena, Senior Knowledge Management Librarian; Laura Deal, Law Librarian; and Ben Leubsdorf, Research Librarian.

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