few years. This is the same as adding an extra day in leap year. That is why, according to the solar calendar, the Chinese New Year falls on a different date each year.

New Year's Day is celebrated as a family affair, a time of reunion and thanksgiving. The celebration was traditionally highlighted with a religious ceremony given in honour of Heaven and Earth, the Gods of the household and the family ancestors.

The sacrifice to the ancestors, the most vital of all the rituals, united the living members with those who had passed away. Departed relatives are remembered with great respect because they were responsible for laying the foundations for the fortune and glory of the family.

The presence of the ancestors is acknowledged on New Year's Eve with a dinner arranged for them at the family banquet table. The spirits of the ancestors, together with the living, celebrate the onset of the New Year as one great community. The feast is called "surrounding the stove" or weilu. It symbolizes family unity and honouring the past and present generations.

The following will explain the 15-day celebration of the Chinese New Year :

The first day of the Lunar New Year is the "the welcoming of the gods of the heavens and earth. On the second day, the Chinese pray to their ancestors as well as to all the gods.

The third and fourth days are for the sons-in-law to pay respect to their parents-in-law. The fifth day is called Po Woo. On that day people stay home and welcome the God of Wealth. No one visits families and friends on the fifth day because it will bring both parties bad luck. On the sixth to 10th day, the Chinese visit their relatives and friends freely. They also visit the temples to pray for good fortune and health.

The seventh day of the New Year is the day for farmers to display their produce. These farmers make a drink from seven types of vegetables to celebrate the occasion. The seventh day is also considered the birthday of human beings. Noodles are eaten to promote longevity and raw fish for success. On the eighth day the Fujian people have another family reunion dinner and at midnight they pray to Tian Gong, the God of Heaven.

The ninth day is to make offerings to the Jade Emperor.

The 10th through the 12th are days that friends and relatives should be invited for dinner. After so much rich food, on the 13th day one should have simple rice congee (porridge) and mustard greens (choi sum) to cleanse the system.

The 14th day is for preparations to celebrate the Lantern Festival which is held on the 15th night.

The traditional New Year foods :

Probably more food is consumed during the New Year celebrations than any other time of the year. Vast amounts of traditional food is prepared for family and friends as well the close ones, who have died.

On New Year's Day, the Chinese family will eat a vegetarian dish called "jai". Sounds similar to our "jau" ! The various ingredients in jai are root or fibrous vegetables. Other foods include a whole fish, to represent togetherness and abundance and a chicken for prosperity. The chicken must be presented with head, tail and feet to symbolize completeness. Noodles should be uncut, as they represent long life.

In South China, the favourite and most typical dishes are "nian gao", sweet steamed glutinous rice pudding and "zong zi" (glutinous rice wrapped up in reed leaves), another popular delicacy.

In the North, steamed wheat bread (man tou) and small meat dumplings are preferred food. The tremendous amount of food prepared at this time is meant to symbolize abundance and wealth for the household.

As we were part of the celebrations of the Chinese New Year in 2010, it was a pleasure to observe every-



thing around, eat good Chinese foods and also to learn about all the traditions and nuances of the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival. We learned so much about the traditions that are highly valued by the Chinese people. We mark that the contemporary Chinese people strive to combine modernism with traditions.

All the charming ceremonies, fireworks, cheerings and carnivals that were going on in Beijing, reminded us of our festivities of Pahela Baishakh (Bengali New Year), Eids (Muslim), Durga Puja (Hindu), Christmas (Christian), Water Spraying (Buddhist) in our country.

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