

THE PROCESS

IBU

Psst, listen, ...
I've got an idea.



PAM

Whoa! Great!
Gonna be fun!



ME

Omigod,
bail me out!



How are we to do it in just three weeks? None of us has a degree in graphics design. Requires a color printer and a scanner. The paper and ink cartridges are not cheap. Run-proof prints will jolt up costs. "Eek, the text keeps jumping about. Can't make the pictures stay put. Pam, hurry, send me more text."
"Theresa, my PC is becoming very slooow. It hung several times." "Oh, no, mine also crashed. Can't download your attachments." After three weeks of intense researching and web surfing and e-mailing and editing and computer experimenting and hunting for supplies in the winter wonderland ...
voilà, notre premier numéro!

CHINESE NEW YEAR STICKY CAKE

No Chinese New Year is complete without the sweet and sticky brown cake called the Nian Gao. (Nian means year; Gao means cake.) Its stickiness symbolizes family members being stuck together for better or for worse. Its stickiness is also meant to seal the Kitchen God's mouth from reporting the family's behavior to the Jade Emperor in Heaven.

- ? Dissolve 2½ cups of grated golden brown sugar into 2½ cups boiling water. Set aside and allow to cool. When using the Gula Jawa, remember to sieve the liquid sugar afterwards.
- ? Place 4½ cups glutinous rice flour in a bowl. Make a well and stir in the already cold liquid sugar and ½ cup vegetable oil alternatively spoon by spoon.
- ? Knead the dough until smooth, slightly moist, and shiny.
- ? Line a heatproof round-bowl with saran wrap or thin plastic. Transfer the soft dough to the bowl, over the plastic lining.
- ? Fill a large cooking pot with water and place the bowl in the water to steam gently. Or just use the two-level steaming pot.
- ? Cover loosely with aluminum foil for about 50 minutes or more. Take care not to let the water boil over the mixture.
- ? Cake is done when it begins to pull away from the sides of the lined bowl. Remove from heat and let cool.
- ? Cut with a knife that has been wrapped with thin plastic to prevent sticking. When cake already hardened, you can coat the cake slices with egg and lightly fry till golden brown. The egg-dipped slices are best served hot, right after frying.

Pam says this is the simplest recipe she has ever come across. Indeed, what better way to start a new year than with a cake so pure and simple, yet so sweet and meaningful as this Nian Gao. Legend has it that the more the cake rises in the steamer, the more your family fortunes will rise in the coming year. So, go ahead, give it a try and see how high your fortune will be. ?

? NEXT ISSUE

Are you aware that spring is already lurking in the air despite the pile of black snow in our yard? At least, spring sales have already started. Spring is the mating season and with that comes romance, courtship, and wedding ceremonies. Much as we have adopted the simplified modern ways of the present era, traditional customs still prevail in important matters such as marriage. So, share with us what couples in your country usually do or once did at the courting stage all the way to the wedding ceremony. If you have art pictures regarding the customs which we can use as illustration, please scan and e-mail them to us. Proposed materials for the forthcoming newsletter should not arrive later than 10 (ten) days after the distribution day of the previous newsletter.

As for the "Ten Tongues" column, can each country representative please write "I Love You" to us in her native language? Knowledge of that phrase will come in handy when we go for a visit to one of the ASEAN countries and get caught by the local police for parking at the wrong site. Such lovely words spoken charmingly with a foreign lisp will usually do the trick. ?

Please e-mail your suggestions, corrections, and contributions to Pam at leo3200632@aol.com or Theresa at buthresdc@hotmail.com. Texts and pictures will be edited in order to fit into the limited, assigned spaces. All graphics whose scanned result do not come out well or cannot be electronically transferred into our lay-out will have to be replaced with friendlier graphics which we will try to obtain from the internet or the library. Please bear with our amateurism. We are still learning how to coax our computers into helping us with this enormous "high-tech" task.

EXPL



RING ASEAN

No.1 // Winter 2003

AWC // ASEAN WOMEN'S CHAT OF THE DAY

Dear Friends

Technology has become so much advanced now. Young people sit in front of their computer, reaching the farthest end of the earth, chatting and exchanging news. Strangers become soul-mates just by the click of a button. Yet, we, fellow ASEAN members, geographically close though our countries are, know rather little of one another, to be honest.

'Tis true that we meet faithfully every month, but aside from the brisk "Hey, love to see you again. Kiss. Kiss. How was your vacation?" we barely know much about the life lived by the neighbor we kiss.

As age no longer supports our stiff backs in front of the computer, the best get-to-know medium would be a lightweight "thingy" that we can bring to the convenience of our sofa and leisurely scan through while sipping our favorite tea and munching our non-cholesterol biscuits. Touching to the palate and touching to the heart. What better "thingy" could it be than a newsletter that can transport us to one another's cultures and mores through pictures and laughter.

Here's a toast to our first issue of "Exploring ASEAN: ASEAN Women's Chat of the Day". Let us make it our go-between forum. Send in your bits of news, gossips, musings, discoveries, anything fun and lighthearted. We'll be waiting right here.

The Editor

Celebrating The Chinese New Year

Have you spoken a nice word and swept your grudges inward?

Lunar New Year or the Spring Festival begins on February the first this year. It is the Year of the Water Goat and the Chinese Year 4701.

While many overseas Chinese nowadays no longer celebrate the Lunar New Year in the strict traditional sense, the surrounding festivities and social rituals are still dearly cherished. The horoscope is always first to be sought after. Topic about the do's and taboos never fails to liven up conversations. The Chinese New Year is a major cultural event that has for hundreds of years helped create and maintain the bond among Asian people, including those living in the south-east regions of the Asia continent.



"Red Lotus" by Zhang Daqian - Watercolor

Hosting ancestors

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are celebrated as a family affair, a time of reunion and thanksgiving. Most vital of all the rituals is the sacrifice to the ancestors. Traditional Chinese people hold their ancestors in high esteem because it is the ancestors who laid 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.

Prior to the New Year's Eve traditional homes are decorated with everything red: red banners with lucky wordings written on them, red ribbons, red flowers, red candles, as well as red dots on cakes. On walls and doors are poetic couplets written on red paper, wishing happiness, prosperity, and longevity in life.

BEHIND THE SCREEN // INITIATOR : Ibu Suharti Brotodiningrat (Indonesia) // TEXT RESEARCHER AND STORY HUNTER : Pamela Leo (Singapore) // LAY-OUT, GRAPHICS, AND THE REST : Theresia Sastromihardjo (Indonesia) // EDITORS-IN-WAITING : All three of the above // CONTRIBUTORS : You! Yes, you, dear fellow -ASEAN readers and friends // PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER : Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

DO'S AND TABOO'S

House cleaning

Sweeping or dusting should be done before and not on the New Year's Day itself. After New Year's Day floors may be swept, beginning at the door, to the middle of the room, then placed in the corners. At no time should the rubbish in the corners be trampled upon. On the fifth day the rubbish is carried out through the back door. Sweeping dirt over the threshold will sweep one of the family away. Sweeping it out by the front entrance is to sweep away good fortune.

Cooking ahead

Do not use knives or scissors on the New Year's Day as they may cut off your fortune. Preparation for the festive foods should therefore be done in advance as it is also considered bad luck if you accidentally break your crockery or burn your cakes. When cooking, the use of brown or golden sugar is preferred. It is unlucky to use white sugar.

Money matters

All debts had to be paid by this time. Nothing should be lent, as by doing so you will be lending all the year. You should refrain from crying too. If you cry on New Year's Day, you will cry all through the year. Appearance and attitude during New Year's Day sets the tone for the rest of the year.

Doors and windows

References to the past year are to be avoided as everything should be turned toward a new beginning. On the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve every door and window in the house has to be open to allow the old year to go out. Death and dying should not be mentioned and ghost stories are totally taboo.

What is seen or heard

The first person you meet on the New Year's Day and the first words heard are significant as to what the fortunes would be for the entire year. Everyone, even the sick, should get dressed and sit in the living room as it is unlucky to greet anyone in their disheveled state in the bedroom. Especially lucky is the person who hear or see a songbird, a red-colored bird, or a swallow on the first day of the New Year. ?

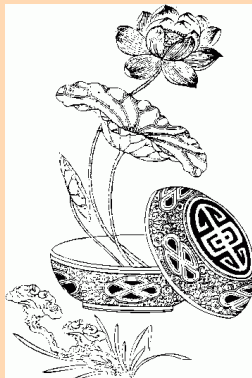
FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Repelling demons

To welcome the New Year temples and public buildings will present the Lion Dance ritual accompanied by the clanging of cymbals and drumbeats. During this performance only good words are spoken as ill words are believed to bring ill luck.

In many cities the special day is greeted in even grander style with its annual street parade of marching bands, elaborate theme floats, and the 100-foot long dancing dragons. The local Chinatown is festooned with multi-colored fairy lights. The twinkling lights and festive atmosphere bring the evening to live as Chinese families stroll and shop for festive goods.

While red is the color believed to bring good luck, loud noises coming from firecrackers (now forbidden in many countries), gongs, drums, and cymbals are believed to



Lotus - Pen drawing - Anonymous

have the power to repel demons. Or, on the contrary, bring the demon out of the sick who are prevented from their sleep.

Vacuum cleaners

Nowadays only the traditional Chinese visit temples on the New Year's Day to burn

incense, give offerings, and have their horoscope read around temple grounds. The more modern Chinese as well as the Christian Chinese no longer practice such customs. Nor do they worry about the manner of sweeping their floor prior to the New Year's Eve. Superstition has it that dust and dirt should be swept from the entrance door inwards so as



Fairies - Pen drawing - Anonymous

not to sweep good fortune away. Nothing, however, was said of the use of the present day vacuum cleaners more commonly used by modern Chinese in advanced countries.

Modern Chinese, as well as tourists, welcome the Lunar New Year more for the festive holiday spirit. They take their family out to fancy restaurants to savor the special New Year gourmet or book for a holiday travel. Nevertheless, some of the old customs--giving *ang pow* and oranges, reunion dinners, and visiting the eldest of the extended family--are still widely practiced even by modern-day Chinese, if anything to give a sense of identity and a link to the past.

As for the floor sweeping superstition, symbolically interpreted, it does in fact do a lot of good to start a new year by sweeping one's grudges inward and speak well of others for once. ?

NEW YEAR GREETINGS

Here is a list of New Year greetings said in the language of our neighbors. Our ever meticulous Pam phoned all the embassies to obtain these greetings. We welcome your corrections for the spelling mistakes.

Selamat Hari Raya Eid al Adha	-----	BRUNEI
Soursdey Chnam Thmey	-----	CAMBODIA
Selamat Tahun Baru	-----	INDONESIA
Sabhadi Pii Mai	-----	LAOS
Selamat Hari Raya	-----	MALAYSIA

Fire crackers - Pen drawing - Anonymous



THE YEAR OF THE WATER GOAT*

THIS IS THE YEAR OF DIPLOMACY, OF VERBAL PERSUASION, RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION

It is not a lucky year to start confrontation, be it physical, social, or business. Avoid deeds that will only bring out the worst in your enemy.

Three year plan

The best time to strike an opponent or competitor would be in the Year of the Dog, which is only three years away from now. It pays to exercise patience. Your perspectives may even change over time.

If confrontation is inevitable, particular steps have to be carefully observed with regard to the Chinese animal characteristic of the ensuing years.

Try diplomacy first. It's the most elegant art of winning over the enemy. Failing that, use trickery in the following Year of the Monkey in 2004. Buy or bribe in order to get insider's data. Information is power. Persons who hold the most strategic information can claim their place as the respected leader of the hen-coop in the Year of the Rooster in 2005. In the Year of the Dog in 2006 followers will pledge their support for your campaign when you come up with a noble cause with which to justify the change you want to create.

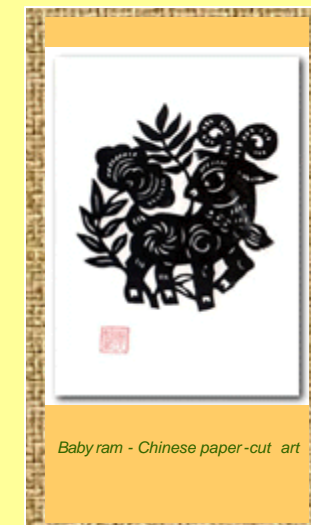
Extravagance

The Year of the Goat is also the year of the hedonists, oh, those happy-go-lucky people who seize the day at its uttermost. The urge to spend money will be harder to rein: the parties, the outings, the must-have goodies,

the gold cards. World economy may be slumping, but worldly goods become even more tempting as marketers, being in the Year of the Goat, are at their brightest in employing verbal persuasion.

It's no use trying to escape from the influence of the year you are in. Rather than feeling guilty for having spent your money, why not treat yourself to a hope that can transport you to your wildest escapades. All you need is a dollar and a dream. Sounds familiar? Right, you got it. Play the D.C. Lottery Powerball! Hey, you never can tell. You may be the next Joe Millionaire outside the TV tube. ?

* Also known as the Year of the Ram as seen in illustration



Baby ram - Chinese paper-cut art

IN TEN TONGUES



It is interesting to note that different countries follow different calendars for their new year. Traditional and religious new years are more festively celebrated than the international new year of January the first.

MYANMAR	-----	Mingala Hnit Thit Ku Ba
PHILIPPINES	-----	Manigong Ba Gong Ta On
SINGAPORE	-----	Xin Nian Kuai Le, Gong Xi Fa Cai
THAILAND	-----	Sawaddhi Pii Mai
VIETNAM	-----	Chuc Mung Nam Muey

Fire crackers - Pen drawing - Anonymous

NEW YEAR FOOD

Long noodles

Food plays a major role in Chinese New Year celebrations. According to tradition, many foods have symbolic significance. Sometimes this is based on the appearance of the food. For example, serving a whole chicken during the Chinese New Year season symbolizes family togetherness. Noodles represent a long life. Hence, it is considered bad luck to cut them. Both clams and spring rolls symbolize wealth: clams because of their resemblance to bullions (gold or silver ingots) and spring rolls because their shape is similar to gold bars.

Free oranges

Food may also have special significance because of the way the Chinese word for it sounds. For example, the Cantonese word for lettuce sounds like "rising fortune", so it is very common to serve a lettuce-wrap filled with other lucky foods. Tangerines and oranges are passed out freely during Chinese New Year as the words tangerine and orange sound like "luck" and "wealth" respectively. And let's not forget the *pamelo* fruit. This large ancestor of the grapefruit signifies abundance, as the Chinese word for *pamelo* sounds like the word for "to have".

Whole fish

Fish also play a large role in festive celebrations. The word for fish, "Yu", sounds like the words both for "wish" and "abundance". As a result, on New Year's Eve it is customary to serve a fish at the end of the evening meal, symbolizing a wish for abundance in the coming year. For added symbolism, the fish is served whole, with the head and tail attached, symbolizing a good beginning and ending for the coming year.

Sweet sticky cake

And what about the sweet, steamed cakes that are so popular during the Chinese New Year season? Cakes such as Sticky Rice Cake have symbolic significance on many levels. The sweetness symbolizes a rich, sweet life, while the layers symbolize rising abundance for the coming year. Finally, the round shape signifies family reunion. ?