

Over the Moon

By Meadow Pike

The Lunar New Year - also known as the Spring Festival, the Chinese New Year, Tết for the Vietnamese, Seollal (설날) for the Koreans, Losar (ལོ་སྟོན་ཁྱེད་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པ་ལོ་སྟོན་ཁྱེད་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པ་) for Tibet, and Tsagaan Sar for the Mongolians - is one of the most widely celebrated East and Southeast Asian holidays. The year 2023 is the Year of the Water Rabbit in the zodiac calendar, which is known for “longevity, peace, and prosperity,” according to Cleveland’s Asiatown [website](#). Companies, families, and Asiatown Cleveland have been preparing since the Caesarian calendars beginning on January 1, 2023; however, the Lunar New Year doesn’t officially begin until January 22, 2023. Many local Asian restaurants are serving traditional and symbolic Asian cuisines. Traditional foods eaten during the New Year consist of oranges and mandarins, which represent “luck and success,” and kumquat plants, which represent “wealth and luck with harvests” in Southern Chinese regions.

For Cleveland, celebrating the Lunar New Year comes with “firecrackers, the lion dance, and the dragon dance,” which are said to scare away the evil spirits of the year and make room for good luck in the coming year. The Kwan Family Lion Dance is a family group that performs at many venues for the Lunar New Year celebrations, including the Jack Casino, John Carroll University, and several Chinese restaurants. Celebrations can last up to fifteen days, meaning that Asiatown could be in full decor until February 6th. For local Cleveland celebrations, which began January 3rd with a pop-up rabbit craft at the Cleveland Public Library Sterling Branch, many different small businesses get the chance to show off their heritage for the entire month of January. In fact, the final listed celebration takes place Saturday, March 4th, at the Cleveland

Public Library with the Kwan Lion Dance. A full list of the celebrations can be found on the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) Greater Cleveland chapter's [website](#).

Lunar New Year celebrations began around an estimated 3,500 years ago. [Historians](#) believe that the Lunar New Year originated in the Shang Dynasty, which was in power from 1600 BC - 1046 BC. During these times, the Ancient Chinese held sacrificial ceremonies to respect and honor their gods and ancestors at the beginning of every year. Furthermore, the Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC - 256 BC) established the Lunar New Year by introducing the term *Nian* ([年](#) [獸](#)), which means “year.” During the Zhou Dynasty, it was “custom to offer sacrifices... and to worship nature in order to bless harvests.” Even then, the exact day of the festival was not recorded until the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD), when traditions that still exist in the modern day began to emerge. Throughout the rest of the dynasties of China - Wei, Jin, Tang, Song, and Qing - the holiday evolved and became a celebration of the new year and coming together as families to eat and dance. Rather than being a solely religious holiday to honor the Chinese gods, the Lunar New Year became a social holiday, as most holidays tend to evolve.

On Cleveland's Asiatown [site](#), they list several ways to prepare for the New Year by listing several traditions and superstitions such as decorating with fresh flowers, purchasing new clothes, cleaning the entire house, and decorating primarily with the color red - “considered a lucky color, representing happiness, beauty, good luck, and good fortune.” Other suggestions involve cutting hair, since it is seen as bad luck to cut one's hair “during the first month of the lunar calendar.”

The basics of the Chinese zodiac originated based on the Chinese Earthly Branches in the calendar during the Han Dynasty, which assigns an animal to every year, and cycles every twelve years. Opposed to the Western culture's zodiac, the Chinese zodiac is not based on the

constellations. The twelve signs of the zodiac are, in order, the Rat, the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit, the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Goat, the Monkey, the Rooster, the Dog, and the Pig. Each zodiac also has a corresponding yin or yang force, element in nature, or trine, which is a 120 degree angle between the planets in the horoscope that represents a natural harmony. Also, trines “represent gifts that are innate,” according to LiveAbout’s [page](#) on understanding trines. For Chinese astrology, the animals represent how someone born in that respective year may respond to others or carry themselves. Not only are there yearly representations in animals, but the animal symbols are present down to the hour of birth. For example, the monthly animals are called “inner animals,” the day animals are called “true animals,” and the hourly animals are called “secret animals.” By these characteristics, from January 22, 2023, until February 9, 2024, will be the zodiac of the Water Rabbit, which is controlled by the Yin force and is connected to the element of water. Not only did the Chinese begin celebrating in the Han Dynasty, but the method of the Four Pillars of Destiny - also known as “Ba-Zi” - which are still used in feng shui astrology today. These Four Pillars are a concept that a person’s destiny can be deduced by characters and symbols assigned to their zodiacs.