

Insight into Chinese Ways™ Series

Part 3: The Big Spring Migration

Anita Y. Tang, Managing Director, Royal Roots Global Inc.

– March 10, 2017 –

The Spring Festival

远

“China is going down! No one is working, shops are not opening, people are trying to turn their money into food quickly, explosives are going off on the streets, children are running after people for money”

Mind you, this is the once-a-year Spring Festival, which is also known to many as Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year.

People are taking off so that they can spend time with their families. They are buying food to prepare for the reunion dinner and to celebrate the Spring Festival. Firecrackers are going off to celebrate the happy times, children are getting red packets (lucky money) from their seniors.

In the big Spring migration at the beginning of the Year of the Rooster, 2017, close to 3 billion person-trips were made. China’s central bank pumped RMB 1.13 trillion (~US\$ 165 billion) into domestic money markets two weeks before the holiday break. This heavy cash injection came ahead of Spring Festival – the time when Chinese consumers traditionally go on shopping sprees and hand out red packets filled with new yuan notes to friends and relatives.

The Most Important Chinese Festival Each Year

The Spring Festival marks the beginning of the lunar calendar. It is a unique festival to Chinese in China and Chinese all over the world.

This is the time for the whole family to reunite, similar with Christmas to the westerners.

I remember how excited I was as a child at the eve of the Spring Festival – the big feast with the whole family, and new things for the new year. I would at least have a new face towel, a new toothbrush, and possibly new clothes. I could eat a lot of candies and get many red pockets. My mother would line up these new things for us after we all went to sleep and

after she got everything prepared to welcome the new year. I would even secretly get up in the middle of the night just to peek at the color of my new face towel!

That was in the past when money was tight and resources were not readily available. But now, as long as you have money, every day can be Spring Festival – food, drinks, new clothes, lucky money, and more. However, there is something money cannot buy – the family reunion with everyone being there at Spring Festival.

The Big Spring Migration

Every year during the Spring Festival period, the annual massive migration in China begins – with hundreds of millions of Chinese traveling home for the Spring Festival. Over 3 billion passenger trips were made this year in total. Roads and highways shouldered most of the traffic flow, followed by railways and planes.

We in business find it very inconvenient that China is taking off for 7-10 days during Spring Festival as it is not a holiday time in the Gregorian calendar. However, did we try to find out why this happens every year?

Following the economic development in China starting in the late 1970's, China focused on manufacturing and won the title of “The World's Factory.” Manufacturing demanded a lot of young and cheap labor and it drew many young workforce from China's rural areas to the cities. Also, other people moved from their hometown to other cities to look for opportunities – business or work. It is only during the once-a-year Spring Festival that they have a longer holiday to return to their hometown to visit with family and friends.

When at home, they can unite with their parents, their siblings and their children. And, for some, this is the only time of the year that they can see their spouse as they may be working in different locations and do not have the opportunity to see each other during the year.

So, until China's urbanization is complete when more people live closer to home, until the transportation network becomes all-inclusive when people can more easily reach their destinations, the Big Spring Migration will continue.

Things To Do During the Chinese New Year

Let's look at what people usually do around Chinese New Year. Here is a little song that many Chinese people know:

- 23 (the 23rd day of the 12th month of the Lunar calendar), make candy-melon sticks

- 24, sweep the room
- 25, fry bean curd
- 26, make meat stew
- 27, kill a roaster
- 28, make some dough
- 29, steam some buds
- 30 night, stay up late
- 1 (first day of the Lunar new year), see the family
- 2, visit with relatives
- 3 and 4, give out red pockets

Not everything listed is done accordingly but the essence is that it is a time for the family to spend time together and see friends. It is the Big Spring Migration that makes it possible.