

The Chinese New Year in Thailand

*By
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The atmosphere is arousing with the sound of gongs, cymbals and drums played throughout the fair. The noise of firecrackers, too, echoed everywhere. Looking around, all you see is red and gold colours. In front of you, a group of people in red costume is performing a show looking somewhat like acrobatics.



Two people are under a large lion mask; one controls the head and the other, the tail. A person wearing an over-sized mask in a form of a bald head having a hilarious smile and red cheeks on it just passes you by. Can you figure out what fair it is? Yes, it is the Chinese New Year Festival.



In celebration of the 60th anniversary of the reign of HM King Bhumibol in 2006, the Chinese

New Year at Yaowarat Road is going to be arranged on a grand scale with lanterns from China as a highlight. To mark this occasion and the 114th anniversary of the founding of the Chinatown in Thailand, which is one of the oldest Chinese communities in the world situated on Yaowarat Road, Bangkok, *Thaiways* presents to you the background of the Chinese New Year. [Click to read about Yaowarat Road.](#)



Joyful celebrations of the Chinese New Year

Background

The Chinese New Year or *Trut Chin* in Thai is a festival of thanksgiving and ancestor worship, and a time of family reunion. It was brought

into Thailand when the Chinese migrated here late in the Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767 A.D.). The festival means so much to the Chinese and the Thais of Chinese descent the same way as the Christmas means to the Westerners.



The Chinese in Thailand have been harmoniously assimilated into the Thais but they have passed on their traditions and customs up to the present time as is evidenced by the fact that one of their festivals, *Trut Chin*, has been observed continuously for a long time. It has become one of the most exciting and spectacular celebrations in Thailand.

The Chinese New Year is the first day of the Chinese lunar month which is regarded as the first day of the spring season (the *Chun* season in Chinese; roughly from February to April



which is the time to start growing plants). During these months, the weather is excellent. Thus, *Trut Chin* is called "Chun Jie" Day in Chinese. As China is an agricultural country, at the beginning of the growing season, there is a ritual to pay homage to gods and goddesses as well as ancestors to ask for a good harvest.

A few days before New Year's Eve, the Chinese will do a big cleaning. When the New Year begins, they will have days off to perform a ritual to worship gods, goddesses and ancestors. Besides, they usually take this opportunity to pay visits to their senior relatives and go on vacations. This practice is the origin of the terms "Buying day, Worshipping day and Observing day."



Buying, Worshipping and
Observing Days

"Buying day" is the day before New Year's Eve. People who have not yet finished shopping or preparing things need to finish doing it within the "Buying day" as after this day, shops will close for several days.

"Worshipping day" is the day that each house performs rituals to worship their ancestors. It is on this day that the whole family gather together and red envelopes containing money as gifts or *angpao* are given away. In the morning, they worship the gods of land and the ancestors in the afternoon.



Figures of Chinese gods

"Observing day" is Trut Chin day or New's Year's Day. On this day everybody will do and say only auspicious things. During the festival, the Thais of Chinese descent will wear red clothes which are believed to bring blessing. There is also a prohibition against sweeping the floor for they

fear that the luck and blessing will be swept away.



This "observing day" is sometimes called "going out" day. It derived from the fact that when the children and employees get angpao, they will go out to have fun.

In addition, during the festival, the Chinese have a custom to take four oranges with them when visiting their senior relatives. The orange in the Chinese language is called "kik" meaning good luck. So, an exchange of oranges means an exchange of blessing.



The Thais of Chinese descent paying homage to their gods and goddesses.

Normally, the host will keep two out of the four oranges wrapped in a large handkerchief and replace them with two new oranges from the host. Some families may prepare "khanom-ii" to serve their guests as well. Khanom-ii are sweetened Chinese rice dumplings whose colour is pink. The easy-to-chew characteristic of the dessert signifies good fortune and the convenience in doing everything.



The Thais of Chinese descent in a procession of Chinese New Year celebrations in Nakhon Sawan.

The tradition of giving Angpao

Giving *angpao* is mostly done in the well-to-do families. Employers will give *angpao* to employees. Parents will give *angpao* to their sons and daughters. When the children get a

job, or get married, they will give *angpao* to their parents

The well-to-do parents then will give back an equal amount of money or more than that to their children. This money must be from the parents' purse not the same banknotes received from their children. Brothers or sisters-in-law should give *angpao* to younger brothers or sisters of their husband's or wife's. Aunts and uncles will give *angpao* to their nieces and nephews as well.



Legend of the Chinese New Year

A legend goes like this: about 1,000 years ago, a monster called *Nian* having a tiger body and a pair of wings, went around several villages to catch humans and eat them. Villagers could not figure out how to protect themselves so they consulted a sage to find a way out. The sage had observed the monster for some time and found that it would appear on the New



Year's Eve. He, thus suggested the villagers gather together and chase the monster away. When the monster arrived at the village, it was driven away by the shouting and the sounds of drumbeat and firecrackers and never returned. After that, the villagers marked the next day as the beginning of the year which later was named after the monster "Nian" which means year.



Red colour is a symbol of Chinese New Year,

Formerly, the Chinese New Year was celebrated for a very long period of 15 days but at present it is reduced to two or three days.

Celebrations

In Thailand, the Chinese New Year is celebrated on a grand scale in Bangkok at Chinatown on [Yaowarat Road](#) and in Nakhon Sawan Province. The two boast magnificent dragon

processions and lion dances which have become the symbols of the festival.



Dragons are referred to as the divine mythical creature that brings with it prosperity and good fortune and lions are a symbol of courage, stability and all noble things. The celebrations at Nakhon Sawan are known to be larger and more magnificent than those in Bangkok with thousands of visitors flocking there every year.



Regarding Bangkok, during the festival, [Yaowarat Road](#) will be crowded with fun

seekers who are attracted by the allure of food stalls and entertainments. In recent years, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was invited to preside over the opening ceremony of the festival here.



Nakhon Sawan's Chinese New Year procession features a beautiful lady dressed as Guanyin, the goddess of mercy.

And in Nakhon Sawan, you will find a grand celebration full of excitement throughout the 11-day-period of the festival. The procession of about 1,500 participants usually comes with spectacular acrobatic performances such as climbing up an over 10-metre pole to get the money reward on the top of it.

You can also have a great time if you are in other major provinces such as Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Chon Buri, Songkhla and Phuket because the festival is celebrated boisterously nearly nationwide.

Yaowarat Road

By Rachawadi

Photos by Induang



The King's Birthday Celebration Arch

Bangkok in the past was admired as the Venice of the East because of its criss-cross canals and rivers. Bangkokians had used waterways as their main way of transportation until the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) when there was a growing trend towards commuting on land. More and more roads have been constructed since then. And stories have accumulated about the roads and buildings and people living along them.



Many events both good and bad have occurred on them. Several of them were named after their landmarks or in memory of persons. Some of the buildings have reflected the spirit of the time and the architectural style of the period.

*As time went by, both the roads and their buildings underwent renovations and reconstruction, while their stories are almost forgotten. To acquaint you with some roads in Bangkok of historical or cultural importance, Thaiways presents in this column a series of stories about them which are adapted from the *Old Roads in Bangkok* by Thawee Watngam. - Ed.*

When King Rama I (1782-1809) decided to

build his Grand Palace at its present site, he ordered Chinese communities living there to move to live in Sampheng district across the Ong-ang Canal. As most Chinese immigrants were engaged in trade, later Sampeng became a commercial area and grew more and more crowded. It was King Rama IV (1851-1868) who considered that a road to facilitate transportations should be paved to the district to allow the existing communities to expand. This was the origin of Yaowarat Road built to have a width of 20 metres and a length of 1,532 metres, beginning from the Ong-ang Canal near Saphan Han Bridge to Wat Traimit. [\(B3\) and \(C3\) in the Map of Bangkok](#). The name of the road was bestowed by the king.

Yaowarat Road is nowadays an ideal place for tourists in Bangkok to have a touch of the Chinese atmosphere. Here you can taste Chinese food in one of several Chinese restaurants and fruits imported from China, which are sold on stalls along the sidewalks. It is a center of famous quality gold shops and a good place to shop Chinese-style souvenirs and Chinese medical herbs.

Yaowarat Road also provides locations for

several banks, companies and hotels. At the end of the road is Wat Traimit which houses the world's biggest gold Buddha image, presumably 700 or 800 years old. Also at the end of the road stands a brand new magnificent Chinese-style memorial archway completed just in time to join the grand celebration of His Majesty the King's 72nd birthday anniversary in December 1999.