

The History of the Red Envelopes and How they should be used in the Year of the Yin Earth Pig 2019

© Written by Michael Hanna and revised by Daniel Hanna 2019

Are you *really* prepared for 2019?



For children and unmarried adults in China and other Asian countries around the world, the red envelope evokes feelings of excitement, expectation, and happiness. The envelopes are distributed as gifts to children and single adults during special occasions such as Chinese New Year or weddings and will if you're fortunate enough, contain some money which can accumulate to a nice sum.

The money will be given in envelopes which are red and gold coloured to symbolise good luck and ward off evil spirits. Other names for the red envelope are 'ang pow', 'red packets,' lai see', 'laisee,' or 'hung-bao.'

You may have noticed that many companies have started to offer promotional ang pow's around Chinese New Year and may contain discount vouchers for their product. I'm personally unsure about this as it seems like a promotional gimmick although it's always great to see the integration of some eastern traditions into western society. Some very popular Ang Pow's in China these days have cartoon characters on the front such as Hello Kitty.

Ang Pow's will usually have a beautiful pattern or image on the front which is placed to promote blessings and wishes of a long, successful, prosperous, and healthy life for the receiver of the envelope; when selecting the Ang Pow's that we give out with orders, it is not unlikely that we will turn down around 30 - 40 designs before picking one as the image on the front has great importance to us.

Receiving an Ang Pow is a great honour, and it is customary to give and receive a red envelope with both hands. The Artists who design the graphics for red envelopes will incorporate many different images such as carps swimming amongst flowering lilies, Dragon and Pheonix intertwined with each other to encourage good luck. You will also find red envelopes that have been designed with the relevant Chinese zodiac sign for the year. Other familiar images that you will see on an Ang Pow are peonies displayed in full bloom, golden pineapples, Buddha's, children in traditional Chinese clothes, Three Immortals, and many other beautiful designs.

We love to send out red envelopes free with every order to clients as a thank you and blessing of good luck. Contained in the red envelope is a Chinese i-Ching coin for extra luck for the year of the **Yin Earth Pig 2019**.

All of these Ang Pow's bear very remarkable artwork, and over the years, we have given and received some genuinely stunning Ang Pows both from family, friends, and clients. As a company that prides itself on quality and presentation, we very carefully choose every single design for our red envelopes.

The history of the Ang Pow red envelope

You may have heard several different stories about the origin of red envelopes and some say that the history of the Ang Pow dates back as far as the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in China. The story goes that a huge demon was terrorising a village and there was nobody in the village who was able to defeat the demon; many warriors and statesmen had tried with no luck. A young orphan stepped in, armed with a magical sword that was inherited from ancestors and battled the demon, eventually killing it. Peace was finally restored to the village, and the elders all presented the brave young man with a red envelope (I imagine it was more of a red pouch) filled with money to repay the young orphan for his courage and for ridding the demon from the village.

Others say, during the Qin Dynasty, elderly people would thread coins with a red string which was called *yā suì qián* which translates to 'money to avoid old age.' The belief was that receiver would be protected from sickness and death and prevent ageing. When printing presses became more common-place, the Yasui qian (压岁钱) was replaced with red paper envelopes (ang pow's).

A typical Chinese New Year greeting that awaits any adult visiting a household with children will be "Gōng Xǐ Fā Cái, Hóng Bāo Ná Lái". This means "Best wishes for the New Year, may I have my red envelope please"? It sounds a bit cheeky asking for money, but it's traditional and acceptable.

How much money should you place inside a red envelope?

How much you receive depends on your financial situation. If you're giving Ang Pow envelopes to children for Chinese New Year, age will be a considering factor. The usual practice is that with each passing year the child can expect a little more money. A five-year-old child may, for example, receive £2 GBP (about USD 4). The amount contained has to be in even numbers.

For example:

Two pounds, eight pounds, ten pounds or twenty pounds are all auspicious amounts to gift, and you should never give money in an odd number say as £27 as this is considered unlucky.

Giving red packets to employees, as a gift or bonus, before the Chinese New Year is also prevalent. It's believed that the gesture will return good fortunes to the company.

The number of coins, or notes, placed in the envelope may take advantage of the Chinese homophones (words that sound the same but have a different meaning). For example; you can gift a favourable amount ending with eight (8) which sounds like 'fortune' in Chinese. Or, nine (9) which sounds like 'longevity.' Four (4), on the other hand, is not a good number to give as it sounds like 'death.' For more information on numbers and Feng Shui, you can click here - [Feng Shui numerology](#)

You should also make sure that the money is an even number as unlucky odd numbers are felt to be inauspicious. However, receiving a single Chinese i-Ching coin in a red envelope is considered to be very fortunate, and this is the reason we love to give these away as a gift to our customers.

Red envelopes are traditionally 'fed' into the Chinese Lion's mouth during the many Lion dances around Chinese New Year. The tradition of feeding the Lion is said to bring good luck for the year ahead to the 'feeders' and is also a nice donation to the Lion dance team who have to be super fit and healthy for this tiring role.

Ang Pow's are a delightful way to present a gift to someone, and I have a lot of clients who pay for a consultation; this is a lovely way to pay a Feng Shui Master of consultant although it is not strictly necessary.

Traditionally, you should never give money in a white envelope when giving to someone for a wedding, birthday, or event. It is believed that receiving a white envelope will result in you facing the bitterness of the receiver. However, if you lived in South Korea, the traditional envelope colour is white and not red, and written on the back of the envelope would be the receivers name.

The giving of a red envelope on a gloomy occasion such as a donation to the grieving family of the departed or for costs at a funeral is called 'Pak Kum.' So, if you ever deal with a Chinese client, please think twice before you hand their fee to them in a white envelope as this could offend. However, this is less of an issue in our western countries today and relates more to traditional times.

Different Red Envelope Designs

The rectangular shape of the red envelope is believed to represent a shield symbolising protection. The size of the envelope can vary from the typical small one, perfect for folded bank notes, to a full sized envelope which can accommodate unfolded notes and commonly used when giving more substantial amounts such as a wedding gift.

Laura's Story - *"From personal experience, I have only been celebrating Chinese New Year for the past five years which is how long I've been working for the Feng Shui Store and have been in a relationship with Sean*

(Michael and Josephine's eldest son). Before this, I had never received a red envelope. When I received my first red envelope, I thought it was such a lovely and kind gesture. I never expected to receive one. Olivia, my two-year-old daughter, received her first red envelope last year and still doesn't understand the meaning of it. But I can guarantee, when she is older, she will immediately focus on the size and thickness of the envelope as it would give her an idea of how much she may receive. I know that sounds silly, but any child would do the same thing until they are old enough to understand the true meaning."

All red envelopes will have an image or Chinese character or both on the front to express a special occasion. I have shown below some meaning and what they symbolise.

When do you give Ang Pows?

The giving and receiving red envelopes are centuries old, and it's more popular around the world now than ever before. During Chinese New Year, Ang Pow's are given by married couples to small children, teenagers, and unmarried adults. Chinese New Year falls next year on the 5th February 2019 although the date changes every year.

Ang Pow's can be given at any time and not just for special occasions; they are even used to pay fees. Considered auspicious, the Ang Pow can be gifted any time of the year. Using some of the money to pay off debt is also recommended but always remember to leave some of the money inside the red envelope and place in your purse, handbag or wallet. You should never use the full amount you receive to pay off debts as this is seen as leaving without anything for yourself.

Birthdays

It is still traditional, and customary in Eastern culture, to give a red envelope to parents when their baby celebrates their first month of life. The parents will, in return, distribute to well-wishers gifts such as red-dyed eggs (and nui), yellow rice (nasi kunyit) with curry chicken or bean cakes (an ku). Receiving an Ang Pow with some money as a birthday gift for people of all age groups is also customary. The elderly even give gifts of money to the younger generation when they celebrate events like their 70th Birthday.

Weddings

At weddings, the tradition is to give a red envelope with money that will not only be a gift for the newly-weds but also cover the cost of attending the occasion. In Southern China, the red envelopes are gifted by the unmarried (predominantly children) to the married couple. Northern China elders will give an Ang Pow to a young person who is usually under 25, regardless of their marital status. However, in some regions, red envelopes are only given to unemployed young people. Traditions can vary around different areas.

Traditionally, you should put brand new notes inside an Ang Pow, and it's considered discourteous to open the envelope in front of the relative or giver.

Feng Shui

Feng Shui enthusiasts believe that a red envelope containing a gold i-Ching coin can bring good luck to the bearer of the envelope. The recommendation is to place the envelope in their purse, wallet, accounting books or handbag. Used as a wish-list holder, you would write your dreams and aspirations on a piece of red paper and place inside the envelope. It's believed this would encourage your thoughts to actualise. Some Feng Shui practitioners, especially those that practice black hat Feng Shui, often insist on being paid with their cash fee inside a red envelope. I would never make this a condition for payment but when I receive one I appreciate the thoughtful gesture.

School Activities

Around 14 years ago, we were contacted by a local primary school wishing to give their students an Ang Pow for Chinese New Year. We were so thrilled to know that the school was teaching and introducing a variety of customs and rituals from around the world to enrich their student's learning experience. Today, we have many schools ordering large quantities of Ang Pow's every year, and if you are ordering for a school or education centre, please email us, and we will be able to arrange bulk red envelopes for you.

I don't want to make one; I just want to buy them already made

Making your own Ang Pow has turned out to be an enjoyable activity to do with friends and family. I spent five hours writing this article and a further two hours were spent watching my cousin, Hannah, cutting out and colouring her red envelope which she kindly gave to me. It was wonderful to see her so engrossed and enjoying herself in the activity. The project aroused her interest and curiosity about the origin of the red envelopes, and she continually asked questions. It was a beautiful bonding time for us as I related the history and use of the red envelopes in Chinese culture. I have to admit that in the early days of the Feng Shui Store, it seemed as though Josephine was running a 'sweatshop' as Hannah would help out by placing the i-Ching coin in the red envelopes. Hannah became one of our cherished team members during the hectic Chinese New Year buildup.

To make your own red envelope you will need

You'll find two versions below, one you can print straight from your colour printer and the other you can colour in yourself or print onto red paper. This is a delightful project for children, and if you are a school teacher, please feel free to print this out and use in your class. We would request please that you do not alter or change any of the text.

- A sheet of white paper, red paper or paints/pens for black & white version.
 - Scissors
 - Pritt stick glue or paper glue
1. Print this onto a sheet of white or red paper.
 2. Cut out the red envelope and fold it along the dotted lines as shown below.
 3. Straighten the packet out as shown below and turn over so you are looking at the side with the image; check diagram below.
 4. Fold over flap A and apply some glue along the right edge.
 5. Fold over flap B and press firmly onto the glued edge of flap A
 6. Apply a little glue to flap D and press it firmly onto flap B & A

You now have your Chinese red envelope. Flap C is the top and this is where you should place the money in before sealing.

Chinese New Year 2019

Chinese New Year (according to the lunar calendar) starts on the 5th February 2019 and will be the year of the Yin Earth Pig (Ji Hai). The event is celebrated by Chinese all over the world, by people from all walks of life and all ethnicities. Chinese New Year denotes new beginnings and an opportunity for a fresh start. This is a period of celebration, reunion, forgiveness, sharing, and thanksgiving. The 15th of February will be the date you would celebrate Chinese New Year with Ang Pows, fireworks, Dragon and Lion dances, etc. The 5th February is not the date you would place your **2019 cures and enhancers** in Feng Shui philosophy. Instead, your cures and enhancers would have been setup on the 4th February 2019.

The Lunar Chinese New Year Day differs from the Solar (Hsia) New Year Day, which will be the day before on the 4th February 2019. The lunar calendar plans the days of the month according to the cycle of the moon whereas the solar year is governed by the sun. Although the Chinese solar year starts on a different date from the western year, the theory of how the year is calculated (how long it takes the earth to go round the sun) is the same. The lunar cycle lasts approximately 29.5 days, and for the start of the Lunar New Year to not be too far removed from the Solar New Year, the Chinese insert an extra month. This tact is called an 'intercalary month' and occurs once every few years and is why the Chinese New Year Day falls on a different date on each of the two calendars.

While the Solar (Hsia) calendar starts on the New Year at the beginning of Spring and falls on the 4th February, the Lunar (Yueh) calendar marks the New Year on the second new moon after the winter solstice. In 2019, Lunar Chinese New Year, also called the 'Spring Festival', falls on 5th February 2019 which is the New Year celebrated by all ethnic Chinese. The Solar New Year (4th February 2019) is not celebrated at all and only used for Feng Shui placement.

Visit the pages below for further details on 2019 Chinese New Year etc.

**Chinese New Year 2019 ** Checklist for Chinese New Year
2019 ** How to make your own Ang Pow ** Chinese Talismans for
2019 ** Chinese animal predictions for 2019 ** Flying star Xuan
Kong 2019 ** Avoid the fury of the Grand Duke, three killing
2019 ** Chinese New Year world time converter 2019 ** 2019 Cures
and enhancers kits ** How to take a compass reading ** How to
determine your facing direction ** Feng Shui software ** Feng Shui
resource ** 2019 Tong Shu Almanac Software ** Feng Shui
Blog ** Chinese culture ****

Tell a friend
about this page 

Are you *really* prepared for 2019?

