

The History of the Red Envelopes and How you can use them during the year of the Yang Wood Dragon 甲辰 in 2024

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A red envelope ang pow brings feelings of excitement, expectation and gratitude to children and unmarried adults across China and other Asian countries around weddings, birthdays and especially Chinese New Year! When receiving an Ang Pow (red envelope), it will most likely contain money from family members or friends of the family, which is always a welcome sight to children and adults alike. The envelopes are usually beautifully decorated with red and gold colouring as this symbolises good luck and abundance and is used to ward off evil spirits.

Traditionally called an Ang Pow, they go by many names such as:

- Ang Pow
- Red envelope
- Red packet
- Lai see
- Laisee
- Hung Bao

Different designs on an Ang Pow

In recent years, some companies have introduced promotional red envelopes around Chinese New Year containing discount vouchers for their product. I'm unsure about this as it seems like a bit of a gimmick, although it is always great to see western society introducing eastern traditions. One very popular style of Ang Pow is the cartoon character "Hello Kitty".

The traditional designs that you find on the front of an Ang Pow will usually be carefully designed with different symbols of good wishes in mind to promote long life, success throughout the year, wealth, health and general luck for the receiver of the red envelope.

The Artists who design the graphics for red envelopes will incorporate many different images, such as carp swimming amongst flowering lilies, Dragon and Phoenix 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.

All of these Ang Pow's bear very remarkable artwork, and over the years, we have given and received some genuinely stunning Ang Pow's 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.

When we send an order out, we include two red envelopes with a Chinese I-Ching coin inside as a gift to send luck to our customers. When we select our red envelopes from our supplier, we will usually go through 30-40 samples before picking a single final design, as the image on the front has great importance to us.

Giving and receiving red envelopes (Ang Pow)

When you receive an Ang Pow from someone else, it should be seen as a great honour as this person consciously wishes good things for you by giving you the red envelope. When accepting a red envelope, you should accept it with both hands as this shows respect and thanks. You should not open the Ang Pow in public and should save this for when you get home.

When you give an Ang Pow to someone, you should try and find a design that appeals to you or make sure that they are coming from a trusted store. The amount you give should depend on your finances and relationship with the recipient. You should always avoid giving any denominations of money with four as this is considered bad luck!

Receiving an Ang Pow

- Accept the Ang Pow with both hands
- Open the red envelope in private
- Thank the person that gave you the envelope
- During Chinese New Year, remember to thank the giver with good wishes such as "Gong Xi Fa Cai".

Giving an Ang Pow

- Select an envelope with a design that you like
- Try to give a red, gold or orange envelope
- Avoid white Ang Pow's as this is reserved for funerals
- Try to give even money such as £20 and avoid odd numbers
- Do not give money that has a 4 in the total; if you were going to give £40, give £38 instead
- Hand over the envelope with both hands
- Try to use clean, new notes

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 political leaders 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 as 'money to avoid old age.' The belief was that the receiver would be protected from sickness and death and prevent ageing. When printing presses became more commonplace, 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" which 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 give should depend on your financial situation and relationship with the recipient. 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 £6 (about USD 7). 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. You should also avoid numbers with a four, such as 4, 14, 41, 46 etc.

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.

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 fortune to the company.

Some people do not believe in placing coins in an Ang Pow although there is no real explanation on this online, and it seems to be more of a superstition than anything else, and I do not see giving coins as a problem.

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 meanings). 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**

During Chinese New Year, Red envelopes will be 'fed' into the Chinese Lion's mouth during the Lion dance as it is believed that this will bring luck to those who give money and is also a nice donation to the people who perform the Lion dance as this can be a very tiring job!

You can also use an Ang Pow to give a gift to someone, and I have a lot of clients who will pay for a consultation by placing the money or cheque inside an Ang Pow, which is always a lovely surprise, although it is not strictly necessary.

Traditionally, you should not give money in a white envelope during a Malaysian wedding, birthday or celebration as it is believed that this will result in the giver facing a bitter feeling from the receiver. In 2018, the oil company Petronas designed and handed out white Ang Pow's and later apologised for the mistake and redesigned the envelopes in red.

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 white envelope on a sad 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

Red envelopes will usually come in a rectangular shape as this is believed to represent a shield bringing protection. The size of an envelope can vary, although the most common is about the size of an iPhone, which is perfect for folded banknotes; a larger envelope can take an unfolded note and will usually be used when giving large amounts of money for a wedding gift or consultation.

Laura's Story - *"From personal experience, I have only been celebrating Chinese New Year for the past six 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. 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 meanings and what they symbolise.

When do you give Ang Pow's?

The giving and receiving of Ang Pow's are a century-old tradition and have become more popular around the world in recent years. The main time that red envelopes are handed out will be during Chinese New Year to children and unmarried adults. For 2022, the Chinese New Year falls on 1st February, although this date will change every year.

Chinese New Year dates:

2024: 10th February

2025: 29th January

2026: 17th February

2027: 7th February

2028: 26th January

2029: 13th February

2030: 23rd January

Ang Pow's are not just for Chinese New Year; they can be given any time of the year to friends, family and loved ones to pay for fees. 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 it in your purse, handbag or wallet. You should never use the total amount you receive to pay off debts as this is seen as leaving without anything for yourself.

Birthdays

In Eastern culture, a longstanding tradition is to give a red envelope to new parents when their child celebrates their first month of life. The parents will give gifts such as red-dyed eggs (and nui), yellow rice (nasi kunyit) with curry chicken or bean cakes (an ku) to anyone they have received an Ang Pow from.

It is also customary in a lot of areas to give an Ang Pow with money inside as a birthday gift to people of all ages. The older generation will even give money to the younger generation when they celebrate milestone birthdays such as their 70th!

Weddings

At a wedding, you would traditionally give an Ang Pow with a gift of money inside, which is also used to cover the cost of the wedding. In southern China, the unmarried (mainly children) would give the envelope to the newlyweds. In Northern China, the elders would give an Ang Pow to a young person, 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 and Ang Pow's have a very long history, and it is believed that placing a single gold-coloured I-Ching coin inside a red envelope will bring good luck to the bearer of the envelope when it is kept close in a purse, handbag, wallet or accounting book. You can also use an Ang Pow as a wish holder by writing your dreams and aspirations on a piece of red paper and place it inside the envelope. It's believed this would encourage your thoughts to actualise and the reason why we include them free with every order.

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, although receiving cash or cheque nowadays can be pretty inconvenient.

School Activities

Around 18 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 want to buy them already made

Making your own Ang Pow is a great activity that brings a lot of joy to young children and adults alike. I spent a long time writing this article and have printed one out for my niece to colour in, and when she is finished, I will be cutting it out and glueing it together to give to her on **Chinese New Year 2024** with some money inside.

Colouring an Ang Pow will usually lead to a lot of questions about Chinese New Year and is a great way to teach the younger generation about these traditions.

If you do not want to make your own Ang Pow, we sell them in packs of 10, which you can view by clicking the link below. We have a good range and will only select the best envelopes to send out.

Ang Pow red envelopes

To make your 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 it in your class.

- 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 2024

Chinese New Year (according to the lunar calendar) starts on the 10th of February 2024 and will be the year of the Yang Wood Dragon. 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. Chinese New Year is a period of celebration, reunion, forgiveness, sharing, and thanksgiving. The 10th of February 2023 will be the date you would celebrate Chinese New Year with Ang Pow's, fireworks, Dragon and Lion dances, etc. 10th February is not the date you would place your **2024 cures and enhancers** in Feng Shui philosophy. Instead, your cures and enhancers would have been set up on 4th February 2024.


The Lunar Chinese New Year Day differs from the Solar (Hsia) New Year Day, which will be on 4th February 2024 this year. 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.

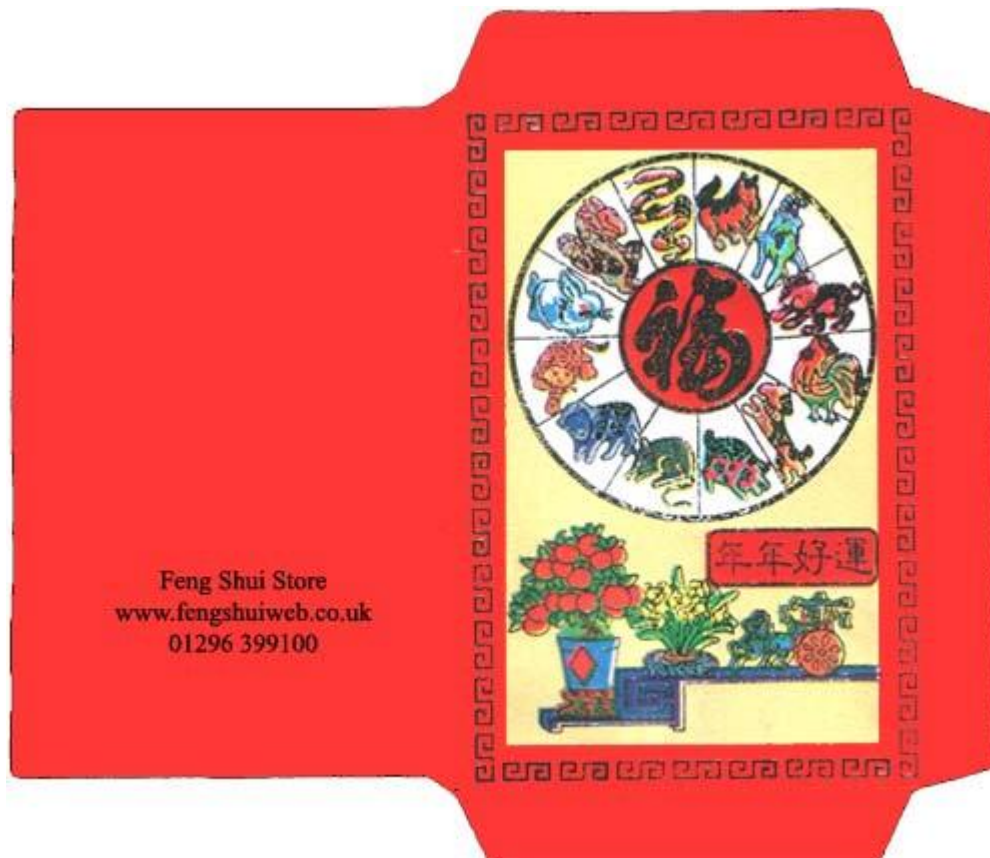
Although the Chinese solar year starts on a different date from the western year, the theory of how the year is calculated (how long it takes the earth to go around the sun) is the same. The lunar cycle lasts approximately 29.5 days, and for the start of the Lunar New Year to not be too far removed from the Solar New Year, the Chinese insert an extra month. This tact is called an 'intercalary month' and occurs once every few years which is why Chinese New Year's 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 4th of February, the Lunar (Yueh) calendar marks the New Year on the second new moon after the winter solstice. In 2024, Lunar Chinese New Year, also called the Spring Festival, falls on the 10th of February 2024 which is the New Year celebrated by all ethnic Chinese. The Solar New Year 4th February 2024) is not celebrated at all and is only used for Feng Shui placement.

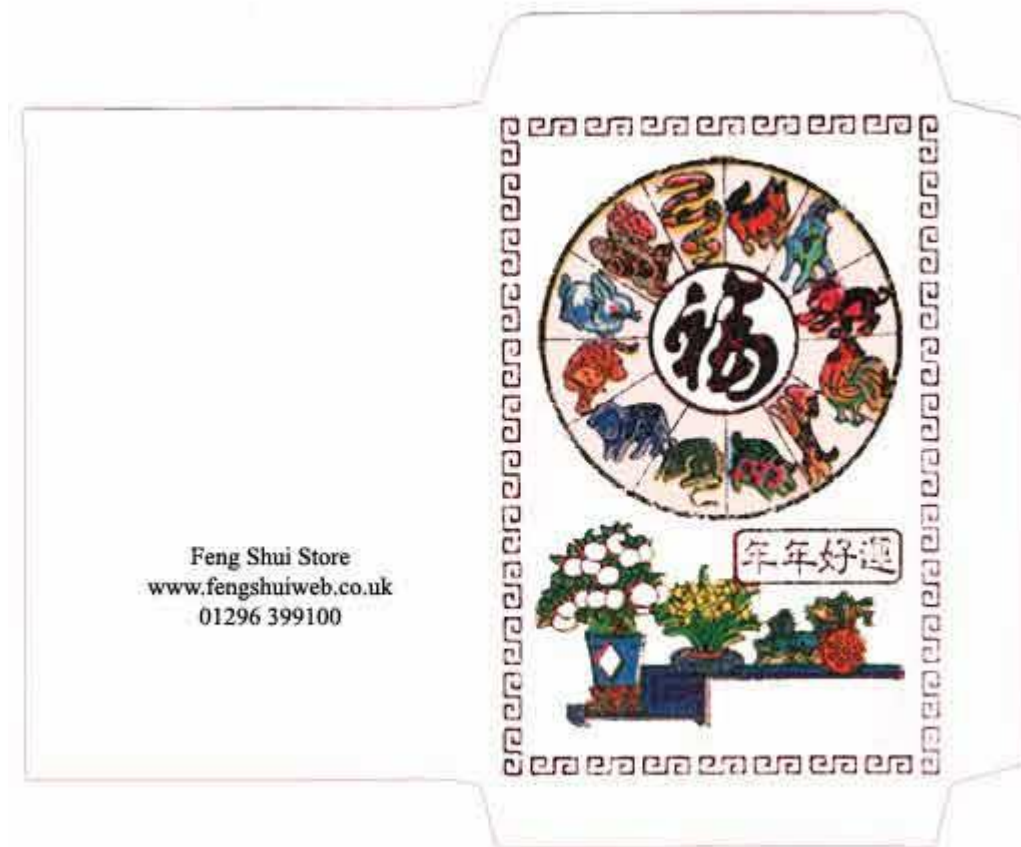
Visit the pages below for further details on the 2024 Chinese New Year.

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