Red Packets The Mandarin word for “red packet” (红包, hong bao) - also referred to as “Ang Bao” in the Hokkien dialect - is commonly used in Singapore. The practice of giving red packets originated from one of the legends revolving around the Eight Immortals. It was believed that the Eight Immortals transformed themselves into coins to help an elderly couple save their son from a demon named “Sui”. According to the folklore, the coins were wrapped in red paper and placed under the child’s pillow to ward off the demon.

Parents eventually adopted this practice and would give their children money wrapped in red paper, known as Ya Sui Qian (money that can suppress the demon). After many generations of practice, it is now commonly known as “money given to children by their elders”.

Traditionally, red packets resemble a red narrow envelope with gold Chinese characters such as “福” (Blessing), 吉祥如意 (Good luck), 恭喜发财 (Wishes of wealth) and other prosperous wordings. These days, a variation of red packets comes in bold colours, intricate designs or even made from expensive materials such as leather and satin. It has gone beyond its original meaning of blessing to a hobby of collecting rare Ang Bao designs.

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Practices observed during the festive season

**Ancestor Worshipping** is the custom of venerating deceased ancestors who are considered still a part of the family, and their spirits are believed to have the power to intervene in the affairs of the living. Ancestor worship is a family affair usually held at home by burning joss sticks, serving as communication and greetings to the deceased. Prayers and offerings such as food and snacks are also placed before the memorial tablets. This custom is usually carried out before Reunion Dinner to invite the ancestors to join in the celebration.

**New Year Vigil** also known as 守夜 (Shou Ye) is practised by the Chinese during the Lunar New Year Eve. It is the time of the year where children are encouraged to stay awake past midnight to send off the “old” year and welcome the “new”. It is also believed that the longer the children stay awake, the longer the lives of their parents will be.

**Praying to Kitchen God** A deity who oversees the kitchen in every household, is believed to make reports of the good and bad deeds of each household to the supreme ruler of heaven and earth during the 12th month of the Lunar Calendar.

Sweet food offerings such as sweet cakes, candied fruits, and sweet rice dishes are provided to the Kitchen God, in hope that he would put in good words for the family to the Jade Emperor.

**God of Wealth** A Chinese deity associated with luck, wealth and economic opportunities, is especially popular during the Lunar New Year. The 5th day of Lunar New Year is believed to be the birthday of the God of Wealth.

Families will welcome him early in the morning into their home for blessings. Many shops and businesses also start work on this day, with some inviting the lion dance team and the mascot of the God of Wealth to celebrate the beginning of a new year.

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Look out for our U.n.I Bite in 2021, where we cover the aspects of New Year foods & their significance for Lunar New Year!