



Weekly Hand-out January 27, 2020

The Chinese culture as with so many cultures is filled with stories and myths. These stories become an important part of the traditions. The tradition of giving a red envelope at the Chinese New Year is one such story. The envelopes are usually beautifully decorated with red and gold coloring as a symbol of good luck, abundance and are used to ward off evil spirits.

The story begins with a demon that would come on the eve of New Year and enter the room of sleeping children. He would touch their heads. The children would be frightened and cry. Some children became ill from the demon "sui".

One story begins with once upon a time, as all good stories do; there was elderly couple with a precious son. On the night of New Year's Eve, since they were afraid that *sui* would come, they took out eight pieces of copper coins tied together with thread to keep their son occupied so he would not fall asleep. Their son was very sleepy, however, so they let him go to sleep after placing a red paper bag containing the copper coins under the child's pillow. The two older children stayed with him for the whole night.

Suddenly, the doors and windows were blown open by a strange wind, extinguishing the candles. It was *sui*. As *sui* was about to touch the child's head, the pillow suddenly brightened with a golden light, and the *sui* was scared away. The power of the "red paper wrapped copper money" to ward off evil spirits spread throughout the country.

Another version of the story dates back to the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in China. In this story, a demon was terrorizing a village and there was no one in the village that was able to defeat the demon; even the best warriors could not defeat the demon. 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 filled with money to repay the young orphan for his courage and for ridding the demon from the village.

In Japan, a monetary gift *otoshidama* (お年玉) is given to children by their relatives during the New Year period. White or decorated envelopes (*otoshidama-bukuro* (お年玉袋)) are used instead of red, with the name of the receiver written on either side. In China, a white envelop is given at funerals.

The proper etiquette for receiving a red envelope is with both hands, palms up.

As you receive your red envelope, may the message contained within have meaning to your life.