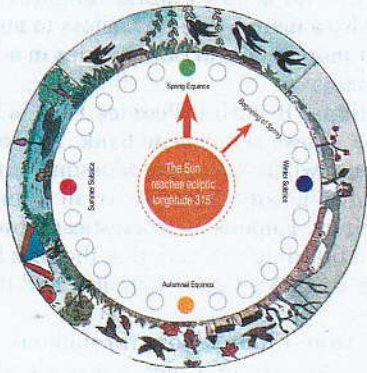


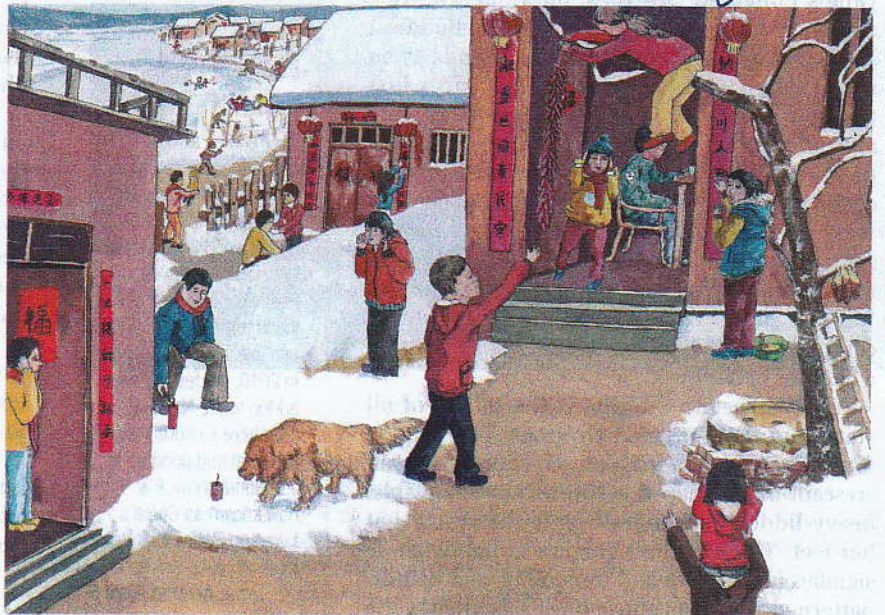


*Editor's note: Last month we introduced to readers two solar terms – the Lesser Cold and the Greater Cold – which fall in January on the Gregorian calendar. Following them are two solar terms to usher in the spring. When we talk of spring, it conjures up a picture of a healthy young person with rosy cheeks and red lips. So, with this picture of vitality in mind, let's get started!*



立春

## Beginning of Spring



On the Chinese lunar calendar, a year is divided into 24 solar terms. The “Beginning of Spring” (立春) falls on February 3 this year. Lifting the curtain of spring, it ushers in a period when everything outside turns green and is full of vigor. The weather starts to become warmer. Spring starts on this day and ends with the seventh solar term, the “Beginning of Summer.”

This solar term entered people's lives as early as the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). For the last 3,000 years, holding special ceremonies on the day of the “Beginning of Spring” to welcome spring into the fields has been an important cultural activity. Both the nobility and commoners made sacrifices to Gou Mang, the god of spring and agriculture, to ensure good weather for the crops.



The Spring Festival always happens close to the “Beginning of Spring.” As the most important Chinese festival, it's a time for family reunion. Everyone who studies or works away from home, such as college students and migrant workers, joins the annual Spring Festival travel rush in order to get a plane, train or bus ticket back to their hometown and celebrate the festival with their family and friends. In every household, people paste Spring Festival couplets and paintings on their doors to pray for good luck in the New Year.

Chinese farmers value spring the most of all the four seasons as they believe the whole year's work depends on getting a good start in spring. As the warmth of spring gradually seeps into rocks, rivers and soil, the bodies of hibernating animals are warmed too in preparation for their awakening. The land is a sleeping beauty. In the chilly air of very early spring, most plants keep their flowers under wraps, but winter jasmine stands up against the cold and blooms. From dark corners its yellow flowers peep out, shining with vitality.

Any mention of the “Beginning of Spring” makes Chinese people think of special springtime activities. In many parts of China, people observe the custom of “biting the spring” on the day of the “Beginning of Spring.” They eat spring pancakes, spring rolls or a few mouthfuls of carrot to get a taste of the coming spring.

Spring is also the best season for kite-flying, which has been a traditional folk activity for over 2,000 years. It also has the added health benefits of boosting blood circulation and speeding up the metabolism. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that a breath of fresh air blows away the musty smell developed over winter. In some parts of China, people wear colorful silk badges depicting swallows on their coats, as the swallow is a herald of spring and a symbol of prosperity and happiness.