



元日

jyun4 jat6/ yuánrì
The First Day of Chinese New Year

by 王安石 wong4 ngon1 sek6 /
wáng ān shí

This poem describes the excitement of families celebrating Chinese New Year together. The poet, 王安石 lived in the 11th Century. He was a politician as well as a poet and this poem is also thought to have political significance. The poet hopes in the coming year the old political order will be washed away and replaced by a new one.

爆竹聲中一歲除

baau3 zuk1 seng1 zung1 jat1 seoi3 ceoi4
bào zhú shēng zhōng yī suì chú

[exploding] [bamboo] [sound] [in the middle of] [one] [year] [send away]
Amid the boom of firecrackers a year has come to an end,

春風送暖入屠蘇

ceon1 fung1 sung3 nyun5 jap6 tou4 sou1
chūn fēng sòng nuǎn rù tú sū

[spring] [wind] [brings] [in] [slaughter] [awaken]
The spring wind sends warmth into the wine.

千門萬戶曈曈日

cin1 mun4 maan6 wu6 tung4 tung4 jat6
qiān mén wàn hù tóng rì

[one thousand] [doors] [ten thousand] [households] [sunrise]
[sunrise] [day]
Each and every household sees the rising sun

總把新桃換舊符

zung2 baa2 san1 tou4 wun6 gau6 fu4

zǒng bǎ xīn táo huàn jiù fú

[Always] [grammatical] [new] [peachwood] [change] [old] [charm]

People replace the old peachwood charms with new ones.

Notes about the poem

元旦 is the first day of the Lunar New year.

爆竹. Before gunpowder was invented, people used to set pieces of bamboo alight. It made a popping sound whilst it burnt. Ancient people thought this noise could drive away evil spirits.

屠蘇 is short for 屠蘇酒 a type of medicinal alcoholic drink created by a famous doctor 華佗 at the end of the Han Dynasty. According to the custom in ancient China, every year on Lunar New Year's Eve, each family used this kind of plant 屠蘇草 to make wine. On the first day of Lunar New Year the plant was taken out and the wine drunk.

The wine's name links to the ideas of 屠 slaughtering the bad demons and 蘇 a spiritual awakening, both of which herald the new year.

桃符 are panels made of peach wood with pictures of the Gods on, which were placed on doors on New Year's Day. It was believed the panels could help ward off disasters and evil spirits. Over time the wooden panels have been gradually replaced with simple red paper couplets.