Winter Solstice the SINGAPO人 Way

新加坡过冬至的方式

Winter Solstice refers to the “peak of winter”. Although winter never arrives in sunny Singapore, local Chinese families do celebrate Winter Solstice in our own ways. [1]

冬至，也称冬节，夏日炎炎的新加坡虽然没有冬天，本地华人家庭还是会以自己的方式庆祝冬至。 [1]



INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

1. Britannica - Winter Solstice

Winter Solstice Through The Years
冬至的演变

1979



Lady rolling coloured rice flour balls in her kitchen in Merchant Street in preparation for Winter Solstice.

一位女士在位于马真路的自家厨房里搓彩色汤圆，为冬至做准备。

1990s



Supermarkets started selling frozen tangyuan from the 1990s.

自1990年代，超市便开始售卖冷冻汤圆。

2019



Fengshan CC's 2019 Winter Solstice celebration set a new Singapore record for "Most number of people eating tangyuan together".

凤山联络所在2019年庆祝冬至，创下新加坡最多人同时吃汤圆的新纪录。

IMAGE SOURCE 图片来源:
Chinatown Food Corporation Singapore Book of Records
Singapore Book of Records
The National Archives of Singapore

About
关于

Winter Solstice, also known as *Dongzhi* (冬至) in Chinese, refers to the "peak of winter", and it is the last Chinese festival of the year. The traditional Chinese lunar calendar divides the year into 24 solar terms and Winter Solstice is the 22nd of the 24 solar terms. On this day, the Northern Hemisphere tilts furthest away from the sun, making it the shortest day of the year. The ancient Chinese also believed that as days became longer after the Winter Solstice, positive energy, *yang* (阳), would return to Earth. This made Winter Solstice an auspicious day worth celebrating! [2][3]

冬至，又称冬节，是一年里最后一个传统华人节日。中国古代历法将一年划分成二十四个节气，冬至是第二十二个节气。这一天，由于北半球倾斜轴偏离太阳，所以也是一年中白昼最短的一天。古代人相信，冬至过后，随着白天变长，阳气回升，是一个节气循环的开始，所以冬至也是一个吉日！[2][3]

INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

2. Leon C. (2009), Through the Bamboo Window: Chinese Life & Culture in 1950s Singapore & Malaya, Singapore: Talisman Publishing Pte Ltd and Singapore Heritage Society, p. 48

3. Asiapac Books. (2012). Chinese Folk Customs. Singapore, p. 79

4. Culturepaedia: The Qing Ming Festival in Singapore

5. Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations. (1989). Chinese customs and festivals in Singapore. p. 81

6. Tan Gia Lim, An Introduction to the Culture and History of The Teochews in Singapore (Singapore: World Scientific, 2018), pp. 104 – 105

How was Winter Solstice celebrated in the past?
以前的人们怎么过冬至?

Did you know that in olden times, the eve of Winter Solstice was regarded as the last day of the year and Winter Solstice was also known as the "Little New Year"? When Emperor Wu of Han decided to fix the new year on the first day of the first lunar month, people stopped celebrating the "Little New Year". However, people still regard Winter Solstice as a festival similar to the New Year, exchanging greetings and often returning home to celebrate with their families. Chinese opera performances were also held in the villages and offerings were made to the gods. [2][3][4][5][6]

听过 "冬至大过年" 的说法吗? 历史上曾经把冬至前夕当作一年的最后一天，把冬至当作新年来庆祝，所以冬至也被称为 "小过年"。不过，当汉武帝正式把正月初一定为新年后，人们便不再以冬至为新年。尽管如此，人们依旧视冬至为过年，互致问候，离家在外的人也会回来与家人一起过节。有些村子里还会举行传统戏曲表演，并向神明供奉祭品。[2][3][4][5][6]



About
关于

How did Winter Solstice make its way to Singapore?
冬至的演变

As our forefathers journeyed to Singapore in search of a better life, they brought along with them their diverse cultures and traditions, including the celebration of Winter Solstice.
In Singapore, Winter Solstice is a time for reunion and for people to visit temples and pay respects to their ancestors. Steamed buns in different colours and shapes of animals like chicken, duck, dog, and cats, which symbolise a family's thriving livestock, would also be prepared for ancestor worship. The celebration of Winter Solstice has since evolved over time in Singapore due to societal changes and influences from our diverse ethnic makeup. [7][8][9][10]

从前，当我们的祖先南下到新加坡找寻更好的生活时，他们也带来了庆祝冬至的习俗和传统。 早期在新加坡，冬至也是团聚的日子，有些家庭会在这天拜祭祖先，祭品包括了以鸡、鸭、狗、猫等不同颜色和形状的动物做成的包子，象征六畜兴旺。新加坡庆祝冬至的方式，后来也受社会变化和多元文化的影响， 随时间而变。
[7][8][9][10]



As with all Chinese festival celebrations in Singapore, there is bound to be a culinary delicacy associated with Winter Solstice and in this case, it will be the tangyuan (glutinous rice balls)!
The name of this sweet treat, tangyuan, sounds like tuanyuan ("reunion" in Chinese), and symbolises family unity and harmony. In Singapore, these soft, gooey glutinous balls are usually filled with black sesame or peanut paste, and often cooked and served in a sweet ginger or peanut soup.

新加坡华人过节一定会有相应配合的美食，冬至当天，少不了吃香甜软糯的汤圆！“汤圆” 听起来像 “团圆”，象征家庭团结和谐。在新加坡，人们喜欢把芝麻或花生馅的汤圆搭配甜姜汤或花生汤一起吃！



INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

7. NewspaperSG – Chinese Clansmen Remember Ancestors

8. NewspaperSG – The Chinese Have Their Xmas Too

9. NewspaperSG – It's Their Christmas Day Too Today

10. 新加坡福建会馆. (2009) 阮这世人- 新加坡福建人的习俗. 新加坡: 新加坡福建会馆, pp. 108–109

IMAGE SOURCE 图片来源:

Ecns.cn

Origin Stories
冬至小故事

Winter Solstice occurs when the North Point is tilted at its maximum distance from the sun, making it the longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. Winter Solstice is celebrated in many cultures, but for the Chinese, it is celebrated as *Dongzhi* (冬至), which means "the peak of winter". It occurs on the 22nd of the 24 solar terms and takes place roughly at the midpoint of the 11th lunar month, typically between December 21 and 23 in the Gregorian calendar. It is also the last Chinese festival of the year.

冬至时，北半球太阳直射地球的距离最远，是北半球白天最短、黑夜最长的一天。世界上很多地方都会庆祝冬至。冬至是中国古代历法二十四个节气的第二十二个，一般落在农历十一月中旬，阳历而言便是在12月21日至23日期间。因此，冬至可说是一年中最后一个华人传统节日。

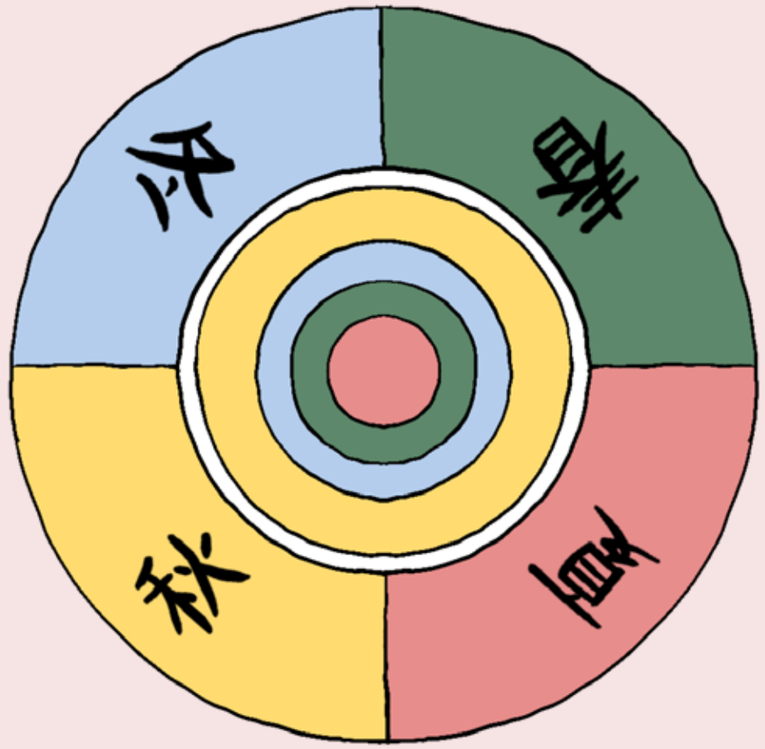
24 Solar Terms
二十四节气

The 24 solar terms refer to the 24 periods in the traditional lunisolar calendar, which ancient farmers used to track seasonal changes and plan their farming activities. Each season has six solar terms. In winter, they are the Beginning of Winter, Light Snow, Heavy Snow, Winter Solstice, Moderate Cold and Severe Cold. Winter Solstice refers to the period when the *yin* energy is at its maximum, as the Northern Hemisphere tilts furthest away from the sun, marking the shortest day and longest night of the year.

In ancient times, people regarded the eve of Winter Solstice as the last day of the year, and celebrated it as the "Little New Year". However, people stopped celebrating it when Emperor Wu of Han decided to fix the new year on the first day of the first lunar month. However, the saying "everyone becomes a year older right after Winter Solstice" remains. Originally, *Dongzhi* was also known as Farmers' Festival, when people offered thanksgiving for good harvests.

古代的农民依照二十四节气反映的季节变化来打理农事。春夏秋冬各有六个节气，属于冬天的节气有立冬、小雪、大雪、冬至、小寒、大寒。冬至当天地球倾斜轴偏离太阳，是北半球一年中白天最短、夜晚最长的一天。

古时候，人们曾把冬至前夕当作一年的最后一天，并把冬至当作新年，所以冬至也叫 "小过年"。后来，当汉武帝正式把正月初一定为新年后，人们也就不再过冬至新年。即便如此，" 过了冬至就长一岁" 的说法还流传至今。从前，冬至也叫丰收节，农夫有祭天的习俗，感谢及祈求来年丰收。



INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

Leon C. (2009), Through the Bamboo Window: Chinese Life & Culture in 1950s Singapore & Malaya. Singapore: Talisman Publishing Pte Ltd and Singapore Heritage Society, pp. 47-48

Singapore Chinese Culture Centre - Kaki Says: Mid-Autumn Festival 卡其说: 冬至

Singapore Tourism Board 新加坡旅游局

The Straits Times – 6 Things You Might Not Have Known About the Winter Solstice

新加坡福建会馆. (2009) 阮这世人 - 新加坡福建人的习俗. 新加坡: 新加坡福建会馆, p. 107

严敬群 (编著). (2009). 中国节日传统文化书本. 北京: 东方出版社, p. 280

It's everyone's birthday?
这天是每个人的生日?

Some Chinese communities believe that Winter Solstice is extremely auspicious. According to Chinese beliefs, *yang* (阳) represents masculine and positive energy, while *yin* (阴) embodies feminine and negative energy. During Winter Solstice, *yin* is at its peak and will gradually be replaced by *yang*, referring to a longer day and shorter night. This also marks the beginning of a new solar term, and is considered a mini "New Year" among the Chinese. Some elderly even consider this particular day to be everyone's birthday!

一些华人社群认为冬至是吉利的一天。在华族观念中，"阳" 代表阳刚和正能量，而 "阴" 则代表阴柔和负能量。冬至时节，昼短夜长，阴气最重，但随后逐渐被阳气取代。这也标志着新节气的开始，因此冬至也有 "小过年" 的俗称。老一辈还认为这一天是每个人的生日!



INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

Leon C. (2009), Through the Bamboo Window: Chinese Life & Culture in 1950s Singapore & Malaya. Singapore: Talisman Publishing Pte Ltd and Singapore Heritage Society, pp. 47-48

Singapore Chinese Culture Centre - Kaki Says: Mid-Autumn Festival 卡其说: 冬至

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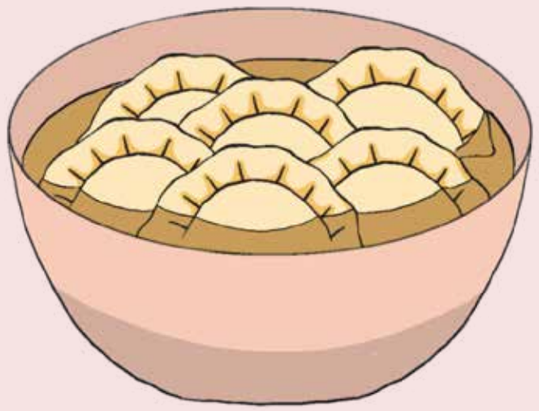
新加坡福建会馆. (2009) 阮这世人 - 新加坡福建人的习俗. 新加坡: 新加坡福建会馆, p. 107

严敬群 (编著). (2009). 中国节日传统文化书本. 北京: 东方出版社, p. 280

Why do we eat dumplings?
为什么要吃饺子?

There's a popular saying in northern China that if you don't have dumplings on this day, your ears will freeze and fall off! The story goes that during one winter a long time ago, a doctor, Zhang Zhongjing, was troubled that many people were suffering from the extreme cold. He then boiled a pot of mutton with medicinal ingredients, minced the meat up, wrapped them in dough, and shaped them to look like ears. Those who suffered from frostbitten ears were given this "cold dispelling" soup. Subsequently, people made dumplings the same way and ate them during the festival to honour him. It has since become a tradition that is still practised in northern China today.

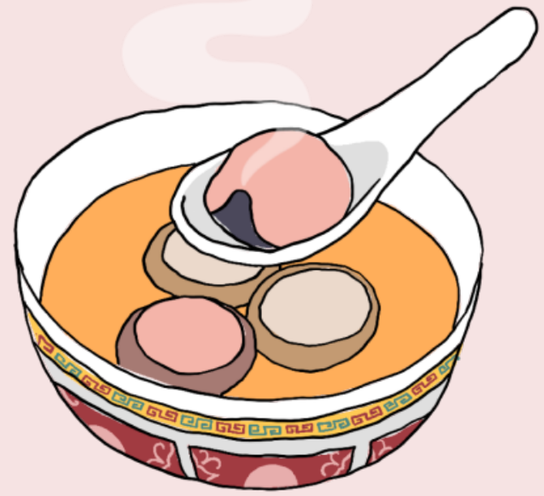
在中国北方，民间还流传 "冬至不端饺子碗，冻掉耳朵没人管" 的说法! 据说很久以前的某个冬天，一名叫张仲景的大夫看到很多人饱受冻伤之苦，便把羊肉和祛寒的药材一起煮，再把煮熟的肉剁碎，用面皮包起来捏成耳朵的形状，给那些冻坏耳朵的人吃。后人为了纪念他，便在冬至包饺子吃，这成了北方习俗之一。



Why do we eat tangyuan?
为什么要吃汤圆?

How did the practice of eating tangyuan during Winter Solstice come about in Singapore? It is said that a pair of poor father and daughter arrived at a small town in Fujian, and the daughter decided to stay on to work for a family. Before leaving, the father took out a tangyuan and asked the daughter to cut it into half, before they each consume half of the rice ball. They made a pact to each eat a full tangyuan when they were reunited. During the next Winter Solstice, the daughter made two big tangyuan and stuck them on the main door, hoping that her father would come back for her. Finally, the father showed up and they were reunited. After that, people in the area followed suit and stuck tangyuan on their main doors to symbolise reunion and good luck.

在新加坡，我们已习惯在冬至吃汤圆。这习俗从何而来? 相传有一对父女来到福建的一个小镇，女儿留在镇上的一户人家为婢，父亲离开前煮了一个汤圆叫女儿把它切半，父女两人各吃半个，并约好团聚之日再吃下整个汤圆。隔年冬至，女儿做了两个大汤圆贴在大门上，盼望父亲来与她团圆，父女两人真的团聚了。后来当地的人也依样画葫芦，把汤圆贴在门窗上，寓意团圆与幸福。



Winter Solstice 101
冬至 101

Celebrating Winter Solstice 新加坡庆冬至方式

SINGAPO 新加坡华





Past 旧时

During Winter Solstice, some families would pay respects to their ancestors in temples by placing offerings in front of ancestral tablets. These tablets serve as placards to symbolise the seat of ancestors, and offerings such as steamed buns of different colours and animal shapes would be prepared to represent the family's thriving livestock. [11][12][13][14][15]

本地一些华人会在冬至这天到庙里祭拜祖先，将祭品摆放祖先牌位前，以表孝心。不同颜色和动物形状的包子祭品，代表家中六畜兴旺。[11][12][13][14][15]



During post-war Singapore, one of the treats eaten during the festival is known as koay ee (pulot rice cake) which were sometimes served in treacle. Like tangyuan, they are ball-shaped glutinous dough cooked in boiling water, but unlike tangyuan, koay ee did not have fillings. [11][12][13][14][15]

战后时期，人们在冬至一般会吃一种叫 koay ee 的糯米面团，有时用蜜糖蘸着吃。它们经过沸水煮熟，类似没有馅料的汤圆。[11][12][13][14][15]



Present 现今

Not too long ago, making tangyuan was a common inter-generational activity where family members made coloured glutinous rice balls together. It's believed that eating tangyuan symbolises that you've turned a year older. Nowadays, people usually buy tangyuan from hawker stalls or purchase ready-made, frozen tangyuan for convenience. The modern tangyuan comes in a variety of flavours and can be prepared in different ways. [14][16][17]

搓汤圆曾经是常见的家庭活动，一家老老少少坐在一起揉彩色的无馅糯米团、搓成汤圆。人们相信，吃汤圆象征又长了一岁。如今为了方便，人们大多选择去小贩中心直接买煮好的汤圆或购买冷冻汤圆。现代的汤圆口味和制作方法也更加丰富多彩。[14][16][17]

Fast forward to today, tangyuan has become an integral part of Winter Solstice celebrations locally. During Winter Solstice in Singapore, Chinese families typically gather for a feast and complete the reunion with a bowl of tangyuan each. Tangyuan in various colours continue to be prepared as part of ancestor and deity worship. [14][16][17]

时至今日，具有象征意义的汤圆已成为本地冬至庆祝活动的一道食物。每逢冬至，新加坡的华人家庭通常会团聚在一起，共进晚餐，饭后每人也会来一碗热腾腾的汤圆。有些家庭还会在这一天祭祖和祭神，准备的供品包括各种颜色的汤圆。[14][16][17]

INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

11. NewspaperSG – Chinese Clansmen Remember Ancestors
12. NewspaperSG – The Chinese Have Their Xmas Too
13. NewspaperSG – It's Their Christmas Day Too Today
14. 新加坡福建会馆. (2009) 阮这世人-新加坡福建人的习俗. 新加坡: 新加坡福建会馆, pp. 108–109
15. NewspaperSG – Winter Solstice Festival
16. Peranakan.org.sg – Reminiscing the Angin Taon Baru
17. The Straits Times – Frozen Rice Balls Are Hot During Winter Solstice

THE SINGAPO人 WAY 新加坡式

Tangyuan Galore
新加坡各式各样的汤圆

When our forefathers arrived in Singapore, they brought along with them recipes like winter tonic soups for Winter Solstice. However, due to Singapore's sunny weather, most recipes proved to be unsuitable, except for tangyuan. Besides climate, influences from Singapore's diverse ethnic and Chinese dialect cultures have also led to local variations of tangyuan as listed below.

我们的祖先带着冬至的风俗习惯飘洋过海来到新加坡，当中也不乏冬季进补汤等食谱。由于新加坡天气炎热，其实大多数食谱都不太合适，但冬至吃汤圆的习俗依旧传承了下来。除了气候，新加坡拥有独特的各种方言文化，也形成了当今五花八门的汤圆。看看以下例子吧！



Cantonese
广东式

Some Cantonese enjoy adding small pieces of brown sugar as the filling for their tangyuan.

有些广东人喜欢在汤圆馅料内加入红糖。



Hakka
客家式

The Hakka version of tangyuan does not have any fillings and is served in a savoury broth made from vegetables and pork.

有别于新加坡常见的甜馅汤圆，传统客家汤圆没有馅料，而是配以猪肉碎和青菜煮成的咸汤。



Teochew
潮州式

Tangyuan for the Teochews is known as "Ah Balling", which comes from the Teochew phrase "鸭母淋" (pronounced as "Ah Balling"), meaning "mother duck's eggs". The term is used to describe tangyuan's resemblance to floating duck eggs while being cooked in soup.

In Singapore, 75 Ah Balling Peanut Soup is a household name which has been serving classic Ah Balling in peanut soup for decades. [18]

汤圆在烹煮时浮在汤里像似一颗颗的鸭蛋，所以潮州人把汤圆叫做 "鸭母淋" 或 "Ah Balling"。

75花生汤圆是新加坡本地家喻户晓的小贩摊位，数十年来一直售卖传统的 "鸭母淋" 花生汤圆。[18]



Peranakan
娘惹式

For the Peranakans, tangyuan is called kueh ee. Some Peranakan Chinese families stick red and white kueh ee to the back of their front doors in order to drive out evil and bring in good fortune. The different colours of the balls represent the *yin* and *yang* of nature. [16][19]

土生华人的汤圆叫粿圆，一些土生华人家庭会在大门后贴上红色和白色的粿圆，以驱邪纳福。这两种颜色的丸子代表了自然界的阴阳，吃了丸子就表示自己长了一岁。[16][19]

INFO SOURCE 资料来源:

16. Peranakan.org.sg – Reminiscing the Angin Taon Baru
18. Singapore Chinese Culture Centre - Kaki Says: Mid-Autumn Festival 卡其说: 冬至
19. Baba Nonya Peranakans – Winter Solstice Celebration – Kueh Ee

IMAGE SOURCE 图片来源:

75 Ah Balling
babanyonyaperanakans.org
Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth
whattocooktoday.com

Other food eaten during Winter Solstice
冬至其它特色饮食

Winter Solstice in Singapore is commonly associated with the making and/or eating of tangyuan. However, in other parts of the world, other types of food are prepared and consumed during this period as part of the celebrations.[18][20]

新加坡华人通常在冬至吃汤圆，其他各地的华人也会在这个时候准备各有特色的食物过节。[18][20]



Nuts
坚果

One's bodily functions begin to slow down during the winter. Some believe that nuts like peanuts, walnuts, and almonds provide nourishment for the body and can help defend the body against the cold.

在冬季期间，人体的功能开始由动转静。有些人相信在这期间吃花生、核桃和杏仁等坚果能御寒且强身健体。



Red bean and glutinous rice
红豆糯米饭

In areas south of the Yangtze River, families get together on Winter Solstice to enjoy a meal made of red bean and glutinous rice as they believe the meal will ward off ghosts and other malevolent entities.

在长江以南一些地区，人们相信冬至一家人聚在一起吃一顿用红豆和糯米做成的饭，能驱赶鬼魂等不祥之物。

INFO SOURCE 资料来源:
18. Singapore Chinese Culture Centre - Kaki Says: Mid-Autumn Festival 卡其说: 冬至
20. The Straits Times – Winter Solstice: All About Dongzhi and 7 Things to Eat in Winter

IMAGE SOURCE 图片来源:
Chinaculture.org
新浪网 – 铲子爱小厨房

Other food eaten during Winter Solstice
冬至其它特色饮食



Mutton and vermicelli soup
羊肉粉丝汤

In Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, people call midwinter the “Ghost Festival”. During this occasion, it‘s a tradition to enjoy a meal of mutton and vermicelli soup, alongside dumplings that are in the soup.

在宁夏回族自治区银川市，人们称隆冬为“鬼节”。
在那一天，宁夏人习惯喝粉汤、吃羊肉粉汤饺子。



Dumplings
饺子

In northern China, eating dumplings is essential during the Winter Solstice. There’s a saying that goes: “To have dumplings on Winter Solstice and noodles on Summer Solstice.” (冬至饺子夏至面)

According to legend, a doctor Zhang Zhongjing met many people who suffered frostbite during winter. Hoping to solve the problem, he cooked a pot of mutton, hot peppers and herbs, and wrapped them in dough to dispel the cold. Today, people make dumplings in honour of him.

冬至吃饺子是中国北方的习俗，民间还流传着“冬至饺子夏至面”的说法。

据说很久以前，一名叫张仲景的大夫在冬天时看到很多人饱受冻伤之苦，他便把羊肉和祛寒的药材一起煮，再把煮熟的肉剁碎，用面皮包起来捏成耳朵的形状，给那些冻坏耳朵的人吃。后人为了纪念他，便在冬至包饺子来吃。

INFO SOURCE 资料来源:
18. Singapore Chinese Culture Centre - Kaki Says: Mid-Autumn Festival 卡其说: 冬至
20. The Straits Times – Winter Solstice: All About Dongzhi and 7 Things to Eat in Winter

IMAGE SOURCE 图片来源:
Chinaculture.org

Other food eaten during Winter Solstice
冬至其它特色饮食



Wantons
馄饨

People in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, eat wantons in midwinter. According to legend, 2500 years ago, the King of Wu was tired of all kinds of foods and wanted to eat something different. Court beauty Xishi made wantons for the king, who liked them very much.

To honour Xishi, the people of Suzhou started regarding wantons as a dish that is associated with the festival.

江苏省苏州人冬至喜欢吃馄饨。相传2500年前，吴王吃腻了各种食物，想吃点不一样的。中国古代四大美女之首西施为吴王做了馄饨，吴王非常喜欢。为了纪念西施，苏州人便把馄饨定为冬至的食物。



Rice cakes
年糕

Residents of Hangzhou eat rice cakes when Winter Solstice arrives. In the past, households would prepare these cakes as offerings to honour their ancestors or as gifts to family and friends.

Today, while fewer families eat rice cakes, locals there still continue to purchase rice cakes for Winter Solstice.

杭州人一般都会在冬至期间吃年糕。在过去，家家户户都会在冬至到来之前制作年糕祭祖或作为礼物送给亲友。现今吃自制年糕的家庭减少了，但人们仍会为冬至购买年糕。

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