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**Coming Home**

Reunion. As the cold, wintery months come to a gradual end, and the annual spring festival looms around the corner, for many Chinese people, it is the word that first comes to mind. Of course, the festival celebrated by over a quarter of the world’s entire population has much else to offer, from delicious foods (including dumplings to represent wealth, and fish for its same pronunciation as the word “surplus”), to vibrant celebrations, galas, decorations, and of course, the children’s favourite-much anticipated red packets. And yet, apart from such fantastic festivities and delicacies, the shared desire by all to ‘come home’, going back to family, friends, and loved ones; in order to enjoy the wonderful traditions together in good spirit, is perhaps the most unique and heart-warming cultural phenomenon of all. In this essay, I would like to analyse in short what it means to ‘come home’, and why ‘coming home’ for the Chinese New Year is regarded at such importance in the hearts of all people in China, as well as for Chinese people all across the globe.

Language is a powerful tool, mere words can inflict moods and bring back memories good and bad, and undoubtedly, for all people of China, the word “Chunyun” or Spring Migration, brings a great number of discomforting ones to mind. This is because everyone in China has experienced the hustle and bustle of the crowds of people, all travelling in what can only be described or likened to a western “rush hour”, except the former lasts approximately twenty-four hours of every single day of the entire month surrounding the most important dates of the Lunar year. Another fact that should be mentioned is perhaps the sheer size of the crowds of people; travelling to their hometowns while trying to balance budget with comfort, before making the same tiring journey back, to where they are more usually and permanently based. The cramped train-rides, bumpy bus journeys, and hauling suitcases and luggage containing suitable clothes and crammed with gifts, is a memory for most of us that brings out sweat just at thought. However, as tiring and perilous as the infamous Chunyun spring migration may seem, it is continuously carried out, be it a short ride to a nearby village, or a 12-hour plane journey home. During the festive months, the people of China ‘come together on the move’ no matter the distance. All the hard work of the year, summarized in one final journey, is paid-off with an outcome most grand to all.

To an outsider, especially to someone from a less populated country, they may wonder what caused the people to be so far from their hometowns and families in the first place. Well, firstly since the Chinese economic reforms of the late 70s, new economic opportunities came to light, often quite far from people's hometowns. Soon, Special Economic Zones developed, and until this day the wealthy coastal cities offer employment and often, a more improved lifestyle. Consequently, a massive migration came to be from rural to urban areas over the course of the last few decades.

Secondly, education reforms have rapidly increased the number of university students, who often study outside of their hometown. With their winter break falling around the same time as the Spring Festival holiday, students (often residing in dormitories) continuously account for a large section of the migration during the period.

Lastly, because the Spring Festival is a week-long holiday period in China (the only other being the National Day holiday), many people choose to travel for leisure around this time. Tourism in mainland China is reaching record levels which in turn adds pressure to the transportation systems.

Now that it is clear why the people are away from home to begin with, we can start to develop an understanding of their motives. One may ask, what is it that motivates almost a third of the world’s entire population to make the journey almost every year? Why not save the hassle and do it only every now and then? The list of reasons seems endless, but to all of us the most important answer, must be the simplest of all. Over years of existence, the Chinese New Year has simply become attached to the idea of reunion and shared love. So much so that one could even make the point that it has now become a beautiful tradition, and a firm part of our culture. To most, without it, the new year’s celebrations lose their sense of purpose and the delicious foods and exciting festivities become mere side features of the greater picture, that is, the love we share to one another, and the desire to share happiness with the ones we love most. In that respect, anybody who truly understands “Chunyun” tends to agree, that the most heart-warming tradition of all; is coming home.