

U.S. Postal Service begins new series of 12 Lunar New Year stamps

A new Year of the Rat stamp is the first in a third series by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) celebrating the Lunar New Year. The stamp was dedicated this month during opening ceremonies of the Monterey Park Lunar New Year Festival, one of the largest festivals of its kind in the nation.

With blue as the predominant color (said to be one of the lucky colors for individuals born during the Year of the Rat), the rat mask in the stamp design incorporates elements with symbolic meaning. Several of the patterns were created with the style of Asian textiles and the circle in the center of the Rat's head represents the new moon on which the Lunar New Year begins. A pop of the very lucky color red ties the design in with other common celebratory decorations.

New Year celebrations

The Lunar New Year is the most important holiday of the year for many Asian communities. In the United States and elsewhere, the occasion is celebrated in various ways on New Year's day and in the days that follow. Parties, special events, and parades featuring enormous and vibrantly painted papier-mâché dragons are common at festivities. The Lunar New Year is observed by people of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Mongolian, and other heritages.

Around the world and across varied cultures, there are many traditions to ring in a new year of good luck and prosperity. In communities across the United States, people shop for food and other supplies, hang decorations, and ceremoniously clean their homes and streets to welcome the year with a fresh start.

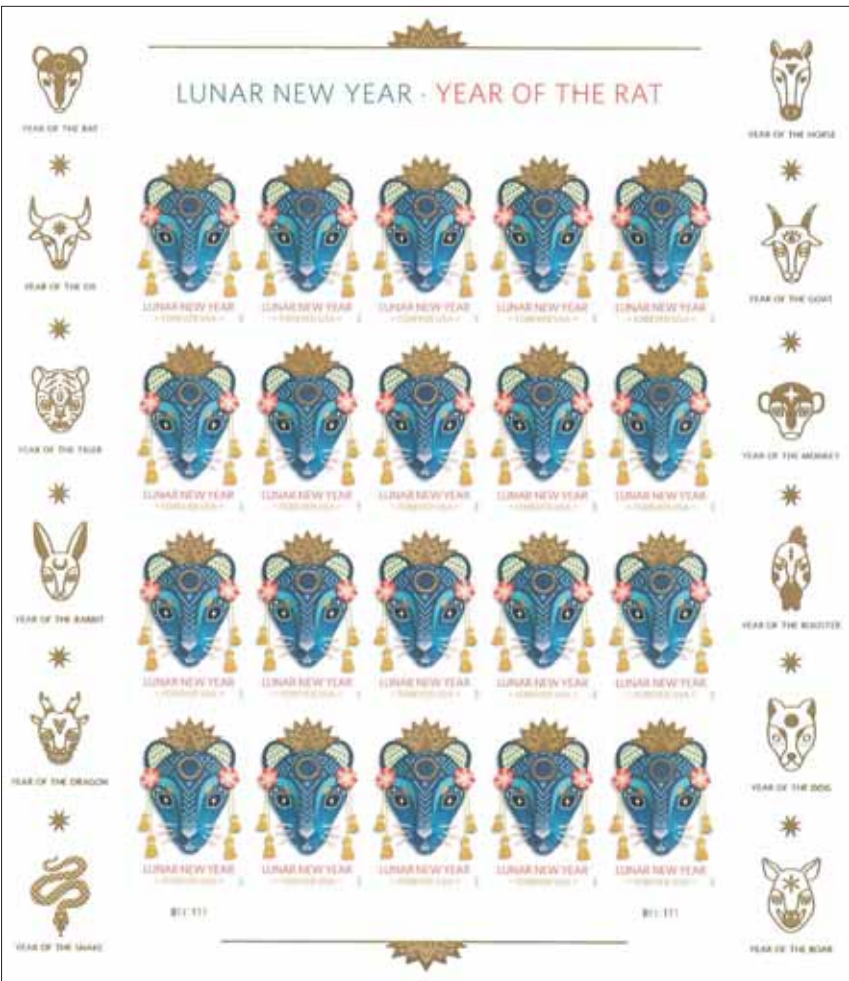
Year of the Rat

The Rat, also referred to as the Mouse in some cultural traditions, is the first of the zodiac animal signs associated with the lunar calendar. Those born during the Year of the Rat are often viewed as clever, self-aware, and highly social. The Year of the Rat begins January 25, 2020 and ends February 11, 2021.

Art director Antonio Alcalá designed the 2020 stamp with original artwork by Camille Chew.

First series started in 1992

Late artist Clarence Lee, an American of Chinese descent who was born in Honolulu, designed the first series of Lunar New Year stamps, which began in 1992 with the 29-cent Year of the Rooster stamp. The stamp had a paper-cut two-dimensional look. The other 11 animals in the lunar zodiac followed,



NEW DECADE, NEW SERIES.

A new Year of the Rat stamp (top photo) is the first stamp in a third series by the U.S. Postal Service celebrating the Lunar New Year. The first stamp in the first series — the 29-cent Year of the Rooster (bottom photo) — was released in 1992. It was created by the late artist Clarence Lee, an American of Chinese descent who was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

one each year. Also on each stamp in the series were *kanji* characters stating the name of each stamp written by a professional calligrapher.

After the original series ended, Asian community members urged USPS to continue the annual issuance of Lunar New Year stamps.

Second series released in 2008

A second set of stamps, called the Celebrating Lunar New Year series, began in 2008. The stamps were designed by Kam Mak, an artist who grew up in New York City's Chinatown, along with art director Ethel Kessler of Bethesda, Maryland.

Instead of taking the obvious route of illustrating the animals each year, Mak chose to depict symbolic objects featured in Lunar New Year celebrations. They were:

Year of the Rat (2008):

Red lantern

Year of the Ox (2009):

Lion dance

Year of the Tiger (2010):

Narcissus flowers

Year of the Rabbit (2011):

Cumquats

Year of the Dragon (2012):

Dragon dance

Year of the Snake (2013):

Firecrackers

Year of the Horse (2014):

Drums

Year of the Sheep (2015):

New Year sweets

Year of the Monkey (2016):

Peony

Year of the Rooster (2017):

Red envelopes

Year of the Dog (2018):

Lucky bamboo

Year of the Pig (2019):

Peach blossoms

Each stamp also featured small animal illustrations, in traditional paper-cutout style, by Lee, the artist who created the first stamp series in 1992.

The 2020 Year of the Rat stamp is sold in panes of 20. A forever stamp, it will always be equal in value to the current first-class mail one-ounce price. To learn more, or to purchase the new Lunar New Year stamp, call 1-800-STAMP24 (1-800-782-6724) or visit <www.usps.com/stamps>.

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The staff at The Asian Reporter wish you and your family a safe and happy Lunar New Year!

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