

Christmas tree stays for Spring Festival

I have a January confession to make — my Christmas tree is still up.

Back in Cleveland, Ohio, where I grew up, this is not the norm. By Jan 6, most people have already packed away their ornaments and



Jocelyn Eikenburg
Second Thoughts

let garbage collectors remove the dried-out firs and spruces that were once dazzling in their living rooms. To them, the holiday season is over.

But my Christmas tree remains for a very good reason. To me, it's also a symbol of the holiday season and my holidays aren't finished yet.

Years ago, I married Jun, a man from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. And just as I taught him how to "deck the halls" with decorations and

write Christmas cards, so he initiated me into Chinese New Year customs such as adorning the doorway with auspicious red couplets and *bainian*, visiting family and friends in the new year while bearing gifts.

Over years of celebrating our respective holidays together, it was inevitable that our marriage would eventually lead us to create a cross-cultural hybrid of our holiday seasons.

The Christmas tree would come to have Chinese knots and baubles with the good fortune character *fu* alongside gingerbread men and Santa Claus. Preparing *jiaozi* (dumplings) soon became a tradition for Christmas Eve as well. We even imagined a Chinese New Year feast when we might introduce his family to that American holiday standard, the roast turkey.

Our holiday calendar also

expanded to begin with American Thanksgiving, which starts the Christmas season in the United States, and end with the final day of *zhengyue*, the first month of the new lunar year.

So naturally, it didn't seem right to stash the Christmas tree away on Jan 6. How could we relinquish this beloved holiday tradition when there were still holidays yet to come? Besides, our Christmas tree with Chinese characteristics had evolved into a tradition for the Chinese New Year.

Even Jun's family seemed to agree, as they enjoyed the Christmas tree I once decorated in their home right through the first lunar month.

I'm grateful to have a good reason for keeping the Christmas tree a little longer. As a child, I always dreaded the arrival of January — a month known for its mourn-

ful, snowy days — and the urgency to box away all the holiday mirth and magic. It's hard during this time of year, as the first signs of spring might not appear for another two months, or more.

Sometimes I wonder why it's an American Christmas tradition to leave the holidays behind when we need them most. Why aren't we more like China, where the Chinese New Year promises the coming of spring soon after?

While I'll never know, I am thankful that my extended holiday season, from Christmas to the Chinese New Year, will accompany me through the entire winter season, along with my Christmas tree.

Its shiny tinsel and sparkling lights brighten the coldest days of the year.

Contact the writer at jocelyn@chinadaily.com.cn