California recognizes Lunar New Year

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The Lunar New Year, the grandest celebration for Chinese and many other Asian cultures, was designated a day of special cultural significance in California when Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill into law on Friday.  
Senate Bill 892, authored by California State Senators Richard Pan and Scott Wiener, officially recognizes Lunar New Year in the state and requires the governor to honor it annually.  
The bill, proposed in January, also encourages all public schools and educational institutions to conduct exercises recognizing the traditions and cultural significance of the Lunar New Year, the contributions of Asian and Pacific Islander Californians to the state, and hold local festivities and celebrations for the occasion.  
"Millions of people in California celebrate the traditions of the Lunar New Year which are transmitted from one generation to the next," said Pan, who is of Chinese descent and represents Sacramento, on Sunday at a news conference in San Francisco.  
The passage of this bill recognizes the rich history of one of the most celebrated events worldwide and demonstrates to the Asian Pacific Islander (API) community that they are part of the California family, he said.  
Asian Pacific Islander communities have been in California for more than 150 years, since Chinese immigrants came to build the transcontinental railroad and Japanese and Filipino immigrants established farms and small businesses.  
API communities have played a key role in building California and making it what it is today, however, California mistreated the API communities for many years, including adopting discriminatory laws, Wiener told the news conference.  
"We now have a great opportunity to embrace and celebrate our API communities. I am proud that California will recognize the significance of Lunar New Year," said Wiener.  
Lunar New Year falls generally on the second new moon following the winter solstice, which will fall on Feb 16, 2019. The Lunar New Year celebration in San Francisco Chinatown is considered the oldest and the largest of its kind outside of Asia and dates back to the 1860s.  
San Francisco is among a few jurisdictions in California that have already designated Lunar New Year as an official school holiday. The state board of education recognized Lunar New Year as a festival of special relevance in its third grade curriculum in 2016.  
California Assembly members David Chiu and Phil Ting, both of Chinese descent and co-authors of the bill, applauded Governor Brown for signing the bill.  
Chiu said he was proud that California has taken the step to recognize the significance of Lunar New Year and celebrate the traditions "so many of us hold dear".  
"An annual proclamation of the Lunar New Year encourages schools to participate in the holiday's traditions and discuss the accomplishments of API Californians across our state," said Ting. "It's a great way to promote cultural understanding and inclusivity to our children."  
San Francisco's mayor London Breed called the passing of the bill "monumental". "This not only further demonstrates our appreciation of this rich cultural history that emphasizes family and community ties, but also strengthens our commitment on promoting our cultural diversity as one big California family," she said in a statement.

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