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Seattle University's Chinese Student Association Hosts Virtual Lunar New Year Celebration

Nicole Kudyakov

Seattle University's Chinese Student Association (CSA) held a virtual gathering in celebration of the Lunar New Year. This holiday represents new beginnings for many Asian communities, and is an important facet within multiple cultures. The celebration began Feb. 12, on the night of the first full moon, and will continue through Feb. 26. Traditionally, the celebrations last for a period of 15 days.

The Lunar New Year corresponds with the Chinese zodiac, which features a rotating system of twelve animals. As the 2021 is the Year of the Ox, it is expected to be auspicious, bringing movement and other positive attributes.

The CSA was founded earlier this academic year, so this was their first opportunity as an official club to celebrate the Lunar New Year. Third-year civil engineering student and President of CSA, Darwin Phu, felt that celebrating the festivities was a good opportunity to strengthen club relations.

"Lunar New Year functions as a catalyst for more members of the club to get together and share our experiences. Everyone has different amounts of exposure to the holiday, and it's a great way to bond with each other," Phu said in a written statement.

Per COVID-19 limitations, the CSA meeting was held virtually in order to facilitate a safe environment for participants.

Third-year business major Hope Lang took part in the event, which gave her a break from the virtual limbo of classes and served as an opportunity to actively catch up with her peers. She was excited to see the high levels of participation her fellow club members showed, despite the virtual format.

"I'm glad that there's a community interested in the tradition and are wanting to celebrate it as well," Lang said in a written statement. "It definitely builds up camaraderie and a sense of belonging that people are interested in the holiday and want to share their experiences with others."

The CSA's celebration featured a miniaturized version of several traditions performed on the Lunar New Year. This included club members who shared Lunar New Year superstitions they or their families followed. These ranged from not washing their hair the day of the event in order to avoid washing away good luck, to keeping lucky coins around to bring good fortune and safety.



Third-year civil engineering major and club member Janelle Ho viewed this event as having dual purposes: it was both a learning experience and a chance to come together and spread the joy of the holiday.

"I think our Lunar New Year event provides us a wonderful opportunity to teach others about Chinese tradition and celebrate the things we have in common," Ho said in a written statement.

Ho also believes that this event filled a necessary role by offering students support during a time of great uncertainty.

"Given the rise in hate crimes towards members of the Asian community, providing our members a space in which they could feel comfortable sharing their concerns and experiences was our first priority during our Lunar New Year Event," Ho said.

The CSA also hand-folded envelopes, known as lai see, and decorated them with Chinese characters and other drawings. This is part of another Lunar New Year tradition, wherein younger generations receive money from family members and close friends in red envelopes. The color symbolizes good luck and fortune.

Large family gatherings are also a typical part of Lunar New Year celebrations, as the holiday is an opportunity to pay respects to older generations. Many members of the CSA found that their celebratory experience was somewhat curtailed, as they missed out on any activities that required spending time with a large group outside of their immediate household.

"The part of the celebration that stands out to me the most is being able to catch up with my extended family and being able to see them, as we only get together for big holidays," Lang said.

Similarly, Phu also experienced an interruption in his usual set of Lunar New Year plans, leading him to miss out on an integral familial bonding experience.

"Typically, my family would gather at a relative's house and we would sit down and have a big meal together," Phu said. "One of the most important parts of Lunar New Year is family time, and food is definitely one of the easiest ways to bring people together."

Though safety limitations prevented the Lunar New Year from being celebrated to its fullest extent, Ho and other CSA members are hopeful that next year will look different and that the CSA will continue to strengthen and develop as a club heading into the new year.