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Liam Lawless
Seattle University

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Seattle University Students, Organizations Celebrate the Lunar New Year

Liam Lawless , Staff Reporter

A Great Race took place millenia ago, the finer details of which are disputed amongst the various accounts that are still around today. Even so, the epic's plot unravels the same: a divine power commissioned a race to Heaven's Gate, open to the first twelve animals who reach it.

After traversing through valleys and over mountains, a mighty river threatened to sweep away weaker competitors. Knowing their own aquatic frailties, the cat and rat conspired to cross the river on the ox's back. Craftily, the rat pushed the cat into the rushing water before jumping onto shore ahead of the ox and stealing first place. Debate continues on whether or not the cat made it across. Only the tiger swam strongly enough to compete with the ox, but they still finished third. Then came the rabbit. Arriving fifth, the dragon touted their recognition of flight as an unfair advantage. The snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and pig all eventually made their way to Heaven's Gate, completing the Zodiac.

Now, three years into this zodiac cycle, we entered tiger territory Monday, Jan. 31. Lunar New Year is celebrated by an estimated 1.5 billion people worldwide, and includes a range of social and cultural practices, many of which have made their way to the Pacific Northwest.

Tina Chau, a third-year business analytics and marketing major, is the president of the Vietnamese Student Association. This year, the club dedicated their last meeting to the importance of Lunar New Year to Vietnamese culture, and hosted several games traditionally associated with the holiday. Like other clubs on campus, the COVID-19 pandemic created additional planning complications, but Chau is still excited about what the club was able to offer.

"Getting participation is difficult. It's completely understandable, a lot of people are very cautious about COVID-19 if they are immunocompromised or if they have family members at home that they want to protect. Regardless, the members who do show up have a good time, and we continually create these events so that we can bond more with the members," Chau said.

Several other clubs on campus also offered Lunar New Year events, including the new Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Student Association (APIDA). Grace Nguyen, a second-year cell and molecular biology student, is an officer of the APIDA, which held a Lunar New Year Event.



Andrew Mori

“First, we went over a general view of what Lunar New Year is, how people celebrate it and who celebrates it. Then I was able to talk as a Vietnamese person about how I celebrate it. We went through food, culture, traditions and decorations. Then another officer was able to talk about her experiences as a Chinese person and how she celebrates it. It was really cool because we were able to make comparisons,” Nguyen said.

The club created a conversation around how the different members of the club celebrated the holiday, and what it meant to them.

For some students, the holiday takes on spiritual meaning in addition to the social activities surrounding it.

“Not only does it have all of the celebratory traditions, my religion is also connected to the Lunar New Year. Before I moved up to Seattle, every year my parents would take me to the Buddhist temple, and the temple would have bright colored decorations, and we would pray to our ancestors,” Chau said.

The importance of lineage is a time-honored tradition on the Buddhist sacred day, in which many celebrants express reverence for their family members who have passed on.

“You are giving thanks to your whole ancestry and saying ‘thank you for bringing me here, I wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for you,’” Chau said.

For college students, traditions which were once practiced with family need to be modified for the new surroundings and context.

“Generally in the past when I was at home, we would visit grandparents, and it was a nice time to catch up,” Nguyen said. “I’ve been able to celebrate it a bit up here in Seattle, because this past weekend the Wing Luke Museum hosted a Lunar New Year fair. I was able to go there and see what they had. They had lion dancing, story time for kids and tables for community organizations.”

Community, luck and prosperity connect the wide array of Lunar New Year celebrations together. The Asian & Pacific Islander Law Student Association (APILSA) brought their wishes of luck and prosperity to share with the rest of Seattle University earlier this week. On Monday and Tuesday, students in Sullivan Hall could receive hongbao with positive messages from APILSA members.

APILSA President Myranda Buiquy, a second-year law student, finds the timing of Seattle U’s return to campus with the Lunar New Year to be a chance for positivity and new beginnings to dispel the angst and uncertainty felt by the entire Seattle U community.

“The year of the tiger is about making big changes or making bold choices,” Buiquy said. “It’s supposed to be a spontaneous year for people to step out of their shell.”

Given that the university is returning to in-person instruction, students will have new opportunities to make bold choices for the first time since the shift to online instruction.

“The 31st is when everyone [returned] to school in-person, so it’s really special that that coincides,” Buiquy said. “It’s hard to be flexible online and do a lot for our community just through Zoom, so it’s nice to hand make things and give them to other people with love.”

APILSA, like many, have been frustrated with the limitations that COVID-19 has put on their engagement and community outreach efforts. Staying true to the positive and prosperous mindsets of the Lunar New Year, APILSA still plans to do as much for their community as they can this academic year.

“We’re not sure how things look in the future, but we’re planning to have a lot of big in-person events in the spring, so we’re pretty happy to be able to be greeting people in person for the Lunar New Year. Hopefully things are looking a little better as the year progresses,” Buiquy said. “We didn’t get to have that for the last two years, so it’s pretty exciting to start planning for it now.”

Amanda Lee, a second-year law student and APILSA’s treasurer, follows her family’s Chinese traditions when celebrating Lunar New Year.

“I’ve always celebrated Lunar New Year,” Lee said. “My family is pretty old-school Chinese: we don’t use knives or do laundry or clean the house on New Year because you’ll wash or cut away the good luck.”

Like many cultural holidays, Lunar New Year is both a time for families to connect and reminisce.

Mayme Krueger, a third-year Global Business student and a member of the Chinese Student Association, looks forward to sharing quality time with her friends and family every Lunar New Year.

“For me, Lunar New Year is a way to reconnect with my Chinese heritage,” Krueger said. “I have a lot of older siblings and they’re all trying for kids, so raising the nieces and nephews with these traditions to start a new generation is really exciting for me.”

Pursuing a Chinese minor in addition to her Global Business degree, Krueger has also taken time to dive into the significance behind Lunar New Year. While some celebrations are intentionally as exuberant and lively as possible, they all maintain similar historical and cultural importances.

“It’s all about the community and being with your people and being able to intentionally sit down, share a meal and share with each other,” Krueger said. “In other Chinese classes I’ve had, we’ve actually watched the Lunar New Year specials from China. They go all out, they’re huge performances. A couple years ago they had Donnie Yen perform with a bunch of his students, it was incredible. It was a mix between the traditional dragon dances and a lot of newer performances too. It’s a huge spectacle with all that bravado, and everyone’s pitching in.”

Lunar New Year is a chance for everyone to connect and share in each other’s fortune, prosperity and company. With so much uncertainty and chaos in the world, the entire Seattle U community benefits from the luck and joy our Asian and Pacific Islander communities provide year after year.