Chinese tradition calls for prosperity and a bright future in 2009

COMING TUESDAY IN LOOK:
Ten students from China have come to Greenville as part of an exchange program with The Oakwood School. Students from Chengdu, China, have been getting a taste of snow and sweet tea and experiencing everything from basketball to City Hall during their two-week stay.

Aspects of the western New Year and Thanksgiving traditions, Zeng said.

Zeng is a member of The Oakwood School, one of the Chinese traditions included in the event.

Zeng, who has already been an exchange student in China, said the tradition is ‘a way of giving thanks and preparing for the coming year.’

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is known for its importance in Chinese culture, said Zeng.

China has always been a predominantly agricultural society, whose traditional calendar is based on the lunar cycle, so this celebration accommodates

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mances by students and faculty of the Greenville Chinese School included several dances and dramatic readings in Chinese, choral songs, an arisa from a Chinese opera and gymnastics by an 8-year-old Chinese-American girl.

Many superstitions, traditions and myths were woven into the fabric of the New Year celebration and its theme of prosperity, said Zeng.

“We like to eat bean sprouts because the yellow stalk looks like gold. So we place the sprouts on a long stick, and if you eat it, you will get gold next year,” he said.

Another traditional superstition involves the number eight, connected to the Chinese pronunciation of the number — “fa.”

In the original Cantonese provincial dialect, the pronunciation was very similar to the word for prosperity — “faa.” Zeng said.

The color red is also associated with prosperity, as could be seen by the predominance of the color in most of the clothing, decorations and party favors seen at the festival.

From tonight’s turnout, you can see how crucially important it is to Chinese Americans to celebrate their cultural roots, Zeng said.

He talked about the challenges and benefits of assimilation and tradition.

“Greenville does not have a very large Chinese community, but the retention of language and culture is good for people and for larger society. It’s good for all kids to know where they were born and their parents come from,” Zeng said.

“The Chinese people are thousands of years old. Now we have come to America to seek the American dream and our children are sandwiched between the two cultures. It’s hard for them to adjust. They live in a confusing mixture of cultures. It’s also hard for parents to teach their young people the traditional values and culture of China. But we don’t want them to forget their roots, so celebrations like this are important,” T.K. Li said.

“Chinese, I should feel very strongly about my culture. Life is still the same for me, but I have a lot of pride as a Chinese person,” Zeng said.

Young Li, an associate professor at ECU, was pleased to see the large turnout at the Murphy Center.

“This is the first time we have gathered together in Greenville to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The festival makes me feel like I am home in China,” he said.

He was also glad to see so many non-Chinese here.

“Chinese culture has always been attractive to the American people,” he said.

Phillip Hou, owner of the China Ten Restaurant, contributed many Chinese dishes to the long buffet table from which guests were served after the performances.

Raised in India and America, he considers himself more a part of the larger culture of America than of China. His wife, Lin, however, saw the value of Chinese tradition and culture as part of their children’s lives.

“They are born in America, and we are Asian-Americans, proud to be Americans. But we have pride in our cultural heritage and want our children to feel this as well,” she said.

On this night of celebration and pride for the Greenville Chinese community, everyone, Chinese and otherwise, shared the pride and the cultural delights. Now it’s on to the next year of prosperity and good luck for all, they predicted with hope.

That said — and the overflowing banquet table — drew a positive response from everyone at the festival.

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