

# StarEdu

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## Spirit of unity

Foreign students celebrate the Spring Festival  
away from home. > 6 & 7



# A little taste of home

Chinese nationals share their traditions for celebrating the Spring Festival

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MANY children would probably say their favourite thing about Chinese New Year is collecting ang pow (red packets).

Some adults, meanwhile, would answer that lip-smacking traditional food is what they look forward to the most.

For Kong Zi Institute Universiti Malaya (KZIUM) Chinese director Dr Wang Zhenghai, the Lunar New Year is about "reuniting" with family.

"It is a big event for us in China. The family must return home for reunion dinner and will enjoy special dishes - such as rice dumplings, braised fish, lion's head, all of which has a meaning behind them - together till midnight where we would welcome the new year together," shared the Chinese native who hails from Yangzhou, which is located in China's Jiangsu province.

For Dr Wang, who arrived in Malaysia in July last year, this is his second time celebrating the Spring Festival away from home.

"I do miss my family, but I have a job to do. Given that I have not reached one year of service (as the director), I couldn't take leave just yet."

"However, the advancement of technology makes the distance between my family and I



closer," he said, adding that he video called the family through WeChat.

"I see this as a special and unique time for me. I get to experience how Chinese New Year is celebrated in Malaysia," said Dr Wang.

KZIUM is part of the global Confucius Institute (CI) network established by Hanban (Confucius Institute Headquarters) and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU).

Set up on Nov 1, 2009, in UM as a government-to-government programme between Malaysia and China, the institute focuses on enhancing the understanding of the Chinese language.

KZIUM teacher Kelly Wang Kailli is celebrating her first Spring Festival away from home.

Dubbed the "dumpling expert" of KZIUM, Wang who hails from China's Shandong province does not let the distance from her family dampen her Chinese New Year spirit.

She continued with the traditions she would normally carry out when with her family in China.

"It is our tradition to make dumplings, which is an important dish to have for the Lunar New Year



Performers from the Gansu Art Troupe, China, showcasing their Thousand Hands Guan Yin dance during the China Acrobatic Night.

An artiste in the midst of the Chinese Face Mask performance.



and do paper cuttings of flowers to decorate our windows," said Wang.

She added that despite not being able to celebrate with family, she was able to enjoy herself by experiencing how Malaysians celebrate the festival that is known as the world's largest human migration. Wang headed to Chinatown or Petaling Street during the new year to enjoy performances and soak in the Malaysian culture.

KZIUM also held events, which were able to give Dr Wang, Wang and the rest of its teachers a little taste of home.

The institution collaborated with Art Printing Works (APW) Sdn Bhd in mid January to organise the Gong Xi Market in Bangsar, where many Chinese cultural performances and workshops were held.

KZIUM Malaysia director Assoc Prof Dr Noor Zalina Mahmood, who took on the position in January 2018, said the one-day event was a good opportunity for the Chinese teachers to experience the Chinese New Year ambience in Malaysia.

"It was also a good opportunity for KZIUM as we had never had an exhibition publicly. Every year we try to celebrate on a large scale, but during the Chinese New Year period there are not many students around so the vibe won't be there."

"So we tapped onto APW when they approached us to collaborate for the Gong Xi Market," she said.

Dr Noor Zalina added that though Chinese New Year isn't something new to Malaysians, understanding it would bring everyone closer together.

"Being in KZIUM, I understand more about the celebration. It helps us to understand each other better," she said.

Dr Wang agreed that the Gong Xi Market was a good platform for the teachers to showcase their talent through the workshops and Chinese culture exhibition they conducted. He said that KZIUM would like to organise more of such events in the future.

APW representatives Nabillah Nazmi and Shannen Ser Huey Yao said it was the company's first collaboration with a higher learning

institution.

"We partnered with KZIUM as we want people to know more about Chinese culture," said Huey.

The institution also hosted the China Acrobatic Night to commemorate Malaysia's relationship with China and to mark the 10th anniversary of KZIUM.

"It was also to welcome the Spring Festival," said Dr Noor Zalina.

Sponsored by Embassy of China in Malaysia, the 90-minute event featured enigmatic and professional performances from the Gansu Art Troupe - a professional acrobatic troupe from China's Gansu province.

## Creating new traditions

Meanwhile, dumplings filled with ground meat and vegetables are her favourite dish.

Normally, Lyu Shanshan, her mother and grandmother would slog in the kitchen all day to prepare a 10-course meal to welcome the new year.

However, the UCSI University sec-

ond year Mass Communication student did not return to her home in the Heilongjiang province in north-east China, to celebrate Chinese New Year this year.

"Everyone is busy throughout the year, and we hardly spend enough time with each other."

"So when we get together for the new year, we spend an entire week with each other. It's lovely - we'd play traditional Chinese games and watch TV shows," said Lyu, 20.

Though missing her family and the traditions back home, Lyu made the most of her new year celebration here: the student and her friend flew to Penang for three days.

"We read a lot of articles online about Penang."

"We have explored most of Kuala Lumpur so we wanted to travel to another part of the country and relax," she added.

Clad in a white top with a navy blue blazer, Lyu and four other Chinese nationals from UCSI University tossed the yee sang during a mini Chinese New Year celebration at UCSI's Le Quadri Hotel.





The collaboration featuring the 24 Festive Drums and the Kompang is a highlight of the Chinese New Year celebrations at Sunway University.

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This year's theme, 'The 1970s Oriental Spring' is very inclusive of the young and old because it pays respect to the older generation and at the same time, it brings us forward to the present. Spring also signifies hope.

Elizabeth Lee

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Experiencing this for the first time, she described it as "crazy and fun".

For Zhang Qiyao, collecting angpao is her favourite part of the new year.

The first year English Language and Communications student welcomed the new year with her friends.

"We went out for a nice dinner; the yee sang is very different!

"We don't have this tradition back home so I will definitely introduce it to my family and friends; it will be fun," said Qiyao, 20, who hails from Shandong in east China.

This year, Chen Yujie, missed out on his family's annual traditions of buying new clothes and decorating the house together.

"Steamed bread, rice dumplings and traditional dumplings are my favourites," he said with a smile, sharing the difference between the two types of dumplings.

Chen, a first year Accounting and Finance student, took the opportunity to explore Kuala Lumpur and also went shopping with his friends.

#### A more Malaysian flavour

The spirit of national unity was the soul of the Chinese New Year celebrations in Sunway University this year.

On top of the usual lion dances and cultural activities, there was a mash-up collaboration featuring the 24 Festive Drums and the kompang.

The university's 24 Festive Drum team and members of the Sunway Sahabat Society took to the stage on the second day of the celebrations. The performers even switched their instruments halfway through with the drummers picking up the kompang and vice-versa.

Sunway Education Group and Sunway University senior executive director Elizabeth Lee said the collaboration was her favourite performance.

"We have included the kompang as well this year, which is very Malaysian.

"There was the whole idea of the celebrations having a more Malaysian flavour and that it doesn't matter what race you are,"



(Fourth from left) Prof Wilkinson, Weng Keng, Elizabeth and Teo with the lion dancers, Sunway mascots and God of Prosperity.



(From left) Lyu, Zhang, Chen, She Ke Xin and Su Shen take a selfie as they toss the yee sang during a mini Chinese New Year celebration at UCSI's Le Quadri Hotel.

she said. She said it summed up the essence of Sunway University.

The theme, she added, chosen by the organisers, Sunway University Chinese Independent School Alumni (CISA) club was also very inclusive.

The club had chosen "The 1970s Oriental Spring" as the theme for 2019 and filled the Sunway University foyer with throwback antiques and knick-knacks.

"I thought this year's theme is very inclusive of the young and old because it pays respect to the older generation and at the same time, it brings us forward to the present. "Spring also signifies hope," she added.

The celebration's project leader Ezac Chong Jip Jun, 21, said the

team sourced for the antiques from their families.

Among the items they borrowed from their parents and relatives included a phonograph, radios and cassette tapes, which were used during the official launch.

There was also a 1970s mini market set up selling popular snacks and sweets from the era.

A Wishing Pavilion was also erected with bamboo plants being sold on-site for participants to write their wishes, which were then hung in the pavilion.

Other activities at the cultural corner included Chinese calligraphy, the Chinese knot, Plum Blossom drawing, tea art and a Sichuan Opera Face exhibition.

Chong said his team is thankful that the event was a success.

"From the building of the Wishing Pavilion to setting up and decorating the mini market and the booths from scratch, the event would not have come happened without the efforts of all the committee members and helpers," he added.

This is the fifth year the annual event is being organised by the CISA club.

Also present were Sunway University vice-chancellor Prof Graeme Wilkinson, Sunway Group Education and Healthcare Division chief executive officer Dr Lee Weng Keng and Sunway College executive director Teo Ee Sing.