

A Different Hongpao in the Year of the OX

By Gong Yan Jun



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This year was the first time that I celebrated the most important festival in China, the Chinese New Year, far from home. I thought it was going to be the saddest New Year of all. Fortunately, the activities in Shelton gave us enormous excitement in ushering the Lunar New Year. It was surprisingly grand because it had given us a feeling of home shared in the presence of our teachers and schoolmates who came from different cultural backgrounds. It was very amazing to look at our friends from other countries digging in a pot of dumplings in search for the lucky bean and receiving Hongpao from our teachers.

On the eve of the New Year, we hang the lanterns along the corridors of the school and posted good wishes on the walls and the posts. On 22 January we had a party that was filled with laughter and excitement at our canteen after a tiring day in the classrooms. Other than the sumptuous dinner served during the event, we also feasted on the most traditional food of the festival—the dumplings. Miss May, our SCISO adviser, together with Mr. Mark of the High School hosted the whole event. We wrote our wishes and resolutions on different coloured papers and posted them on the board for everyone to see. Allowing my friends to read my resolution was an added pressure for me but I thought I could use it for my own sake. I am sure that telling my friends about it will generate support so that I could reach my goals. I'm sure my friends felt the same! Another interesting activity was using the orange peelings to write Chinese characters. My team spelt the word 'Fu' which means lucky in English. We didn't win but it was fun. The climax of the program was put to a very soothing mood when two of our Indonesian friends strummed their guitars and serenade us with a popular Chinese song. My fellow Chinese students and I couldn't help but sing along with them.

I thought the celebration of the New Year was over after that day's dinner. On February 2, at 10:45 in the morning, our teacher brought us down the school's façade for what I thought was going to be just another gimmick. All the members of the school gathered to witness a colourful Lion Dance. Once again, it brought back wonderful memories of home. After the lion dance, we were all asked to queue and receive more Hong Baos, but this time it was our beloved principal and CEOs, school heads and senior teacher mentors who gave them. We exchanged well wishes and blessings for the New Year. It didn't end with it yet! We also had the traditional tossing of the raw fish salad, the "Loh Hei." I thought this was a very good gesture for everyone in an international school because it tears down walls and builds bridges across our differences.

All these did not only make me happy but it also gave me a feeling of attachment and belongingness. I surely miss my own family in China but our Chinese New Year's celebrations in school have definitely embarked a sense of family too! I think that having good friends in school to celebrate an important family-centered tradition is the best Hongpao I received in this year of the Ox.



牛年快乐

Have a blessed ox year ahead!