

Gong Xi Fa Cai 2013

THE Chinese New Year music is now heard at many places and it does have an infectious effect. The Year of The Water Snake would now take the place of The Water Dragon. The Chinese New Year is a cultural event and it falls on Sunday, 10th February 2013.

Many of us have made preparations for the festivities regardless of individual race and cultures. I think it is important for Malaysians to understand that the celebration of Chinese New Year is a cultural event and not, a religious event. It is time for us all to start looking at things in the correct way and not be misled by those who aim to politicize or aim to confuse.

I am not sure if many have noticed but we now see many not going back to their hometowns to celebrate the most important part which is the reunion dinner. There are also those now who choose to eat out at restaurants rather than to cook at home to celebrate. The earlier traditions have been simplified and some have been broken.

Very soon, it would be something which could be relegated into the history books and form part of our nostalgic memories. This would in fact be a sad fact. When this happens, the beauty of celebrations would lose its very meaning.

I am sure many of you would remember when kitchens would be a hive of activity at many homes of the Chinese community in weeks leading up to Chinese New Year. Ovens would be alive with the baking of cookies and cakes. As the sweet and enticing air spillover onto the streets, this would add to the anticipation of a celebration.

Traditional recipes would be dusted and used to create that special treat for the occasion. Many elders would also use the time to teach and impart their knowledge to the eager young of their skill.

Markets would be busy with the people

buying produce and placement of orders for the reunion dinner. Houses would be spring cleaned and new clothes would be sought out.

The celebration it seemed then would have already started weeks before the actual day. Business folks would also start winding down their work and concentrate on collection of debts whilst those who have unpaid debts would try to make good and pay up.



Today, it is something I have seen changed. Many people have forsaken tradition and culture. It is now just in Chinese New Year that we see this but in many other festivities. Many have changed to convenience themselves and to remove themselves from the festivities with an excuse for quiet time with their immediate family.

Some have chosen to go on a holiday instead. It is sad. When children grow up, no one would understand why things were then and why things are today. This is because no one would be able to comprehend enough to explain. In fact, when culture dies and get diluted, people would lose their identity.

In some Chinese communities, the celebration of Chinese New Year would also be extended and held up in praise by

their belief in their own religion. These two aspects are independent of each other and does not equate to each other.

The celebration preparations would also use the colour "RED" and "GOLD" for decorations. The meaning of red and gold are significant in denoting prosperity, wealth, longevity and happiness. Words of the same in calligraphy on red paper would be used for decorations. New lanterns would be raised.

The significance of spring cleaning is not just about being logical or practical but the belief that the action represents the removal of ill luck and the preparation to welcome new luck.

That is why during the first day of Chinese New Year, no sweeping of the house would be done. What is lost today is would definitely be the cacophony of bursting firecrackers at the stroke of midnight going in the New Year. This cacophony had not been heard for the past 20 over years now in Malaysia. There would still be some but no longer on the same scale as before.

Reunion dinners vary from the simple menu of fresh vegetables and dishes that denote good meanings from the dish's name to the elaborate for those who can afford. What would be important is the reunion and that would hence be the argument today used by those who eat their reunion dinner outside and not cook at home.

Of course this is true but the preparation and the painstaking effort to create dishes and treats together and with their heart would not be there. It is akin to having a life without a soul where it is just important to do the things which are significant but to avoid the journey and appreciation of that journey that would accentuate and give meaning to a celebration.

The giving of red packets has its



significance as well between the elders and the young. It is not about the content but the significance of giving and receiving.

Many who celebrate Chinese New Year would also visit their extended families as well as close friends. In Sarawak, open houses as in other festivities are a big thing. People visit each other to participate in the celebrations. The communal feel is stronger as the fabric of society forgets their individualistic pursuits and embraces a sole united intention to be part of a celebration.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone here a very Prosperous Gong Xi Fa Cai 2013 and ask that we all take a step back and remember the traditions and try to learn of its significance from the elders so that we may then be able to pass this down to the next generation. We owe it to the next generation.

GONG XI FA CAI!!!!

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