



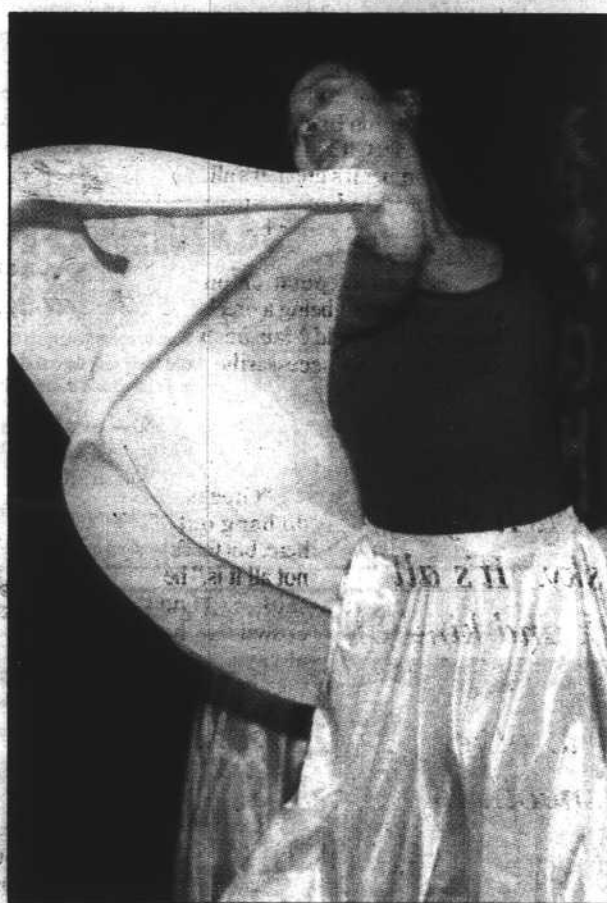
LEFT: MICHAEL XIA (left), 9, and Daniel Zhou, 8, perform a series of magic tricks at the Chinese New Year celebration Saturday night. Zhou made a piece of paper "turn into money."
BELOW: THE LION DANCE TROUPE, from the Asian Community and Cultural Center, performs the Lion Dance in the Centennial Room in the Nebraska Union on Saturday night. The lions ate lettuce and threw pieces at the audience. The Chinese New Year celebration is observed each year on the second new moon after the winter solstice.
BELOW LEFT: STUDENTS SELMA LI LOO and Vivian Cheng Lee dance "The Good Shepherd," a story from Psalms in the Bible, at the Chinese New Year celebration.



A shared celebration

Community celebrates the Year of the Dragon

Story by Jackie Blair
 Photos by Nikki Fox



"Let's go play, Marky," said a boy to his new friend. The two took off to play tag with all the other children, who were from various ethnic backgrounds, in the back room, while their parents stayed and enjoyed the entertainment at the Chinese New Year Celebration in the Nebraska Union.

The interaction between the children was exactly what Mandy Guo, Chinese Students and Scholar Association's event organizer, had in mind.

One of the goals of the celebration was to create interaction between the Chinese and Americans, Guo said.

More than 750 people participated in the event, which was held Saturday to mark the Year of the Dragon.

The turnout was higher than expected, so Guo was busy finding alternate seating for the latecomers.

"We only expected about 550 people, so we had a great turnout," Guo said.

A traditional Chinese dinner from Great China Buffet, 6145 O St., including egg rolls, rice and egg drop soup, was served buffet-style.

As dinner ended, the attention switched to the stage, which was brightly decorated with red and gold, the traditional colors of Chinese New Year.

Red symbolizes happiness, and gold symbolizes wealth. There was no black used because the Chinese believe it is a depressing color, said Jian Shan, CSSA vice president.

Black is associated with death in China, Shan said. "Chinese don't even like to buy black cars," he said. Mayor Don Wesely kicked off the entertainment with a welcome address. He said he attended the celebration because part of his job is to reach out to different cultures of the community.

"For you to come here to share your heritage with us, that is truly wonderful," Wesely said.

After door prizes, the first performance was the Lion Dance, which draws from Chinese martial arts.

It was performed by the Asian Community and Cultural Center's Lion Dance Troupe, founded and led by Gary Yuen, a UNL plant pathology professor.

"The Lion Dance ushers in the good luck and expels the bad," said Ray Petersen, one of the dancers and a junior at Lincoln High School. "That's why it's the first performance of the evening."

The fifth performance of the night was a Chinese kung-fu demonstration that was performed by Jeremy Jewell, a UNL freshman international business major.

There were two comedy skits that CSSA members wrote and acted in. The first one, "Happily Ever After," was a reflection of the Chinese students' lives at the university.

The other comedy, "The Culture about Eating," showed how Chinese children living in the United States struggle when learning the English language.

The rest of the 22 performances included children's dances, magic tricks, soloists and calligraphy.

All of the performances were in Chinese, so a projected screen next to the stage gave English translations. Guo said she hoped the celebration would identify not only the differences but also the similarities between both cultures.

One of CSSA's goals for the celebration was to raise enough money to sponsor one school library through the U.S.-based Adopt a Rural School Library in China Program.

The program will provide better education and opportunities for Chinese children who live in rural areas of China. Donations were being taken throughout the night.

There are about 450 Chinese students at the university, and many of those in attendance were their guests. However, there were some who came for other reasons.

Arlene Smith, a graduate student in the Teachers College, said: "I came here to become a better teacher in the rapidly changing cultural scene of Nebraska."

Adam Ahlmeyer, a Southeast Community College student, said he attended simply because he wanted a taste of Chinese culture.

Guo said she was pleased with the event. "All in all, I think the celebration went very successful; I'm very happy," Guo said.

Guo also said she is very appreciative of all the support the university has given CSSA.

The University Program Council, Nebraska Alumni Association and International Affairs all sponsored the celebration.

The evening came to a close with the performers joined on stage, singing "Great China" as the children said goodbye to their new friends.

"For you to come here to share your heritage with us, that is truly wonderful."

Don Wesely
 mayor