Little Rock Central High School students perform the lion dance at the Chinese New Year Reception on Jan. 31 in the Brewer-Hegeman Conference Center.

Chinese New Year celebration teaches community about traditions, cultures

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UCA's Confucius Institute (UCACI) showcased Chinese culture and tradition in a Chinese New Year Reception on Jan. 31 at the Brewer-Hegeman Conference Center.

UCACI Deputy Director Lucy Xiaohong Lu said the Chinese New Year Celebration provides a great opportunity for people from different cultures to connect with each other. “It contributes to the dynamism and diversity on campus,” she said. “Through the event, UCA students and faculty can have a direct and vivid experience of Chinese culture by enjoying the Chinese music and dance, conversing with Chinese students and faculty, tasting Chinese cuisines, etc.”

Lu said Chinese New Year is the most important event in Chinese culture, which is in many ways like the American Thanksgiving Day. “It is an occasion for family reunions and celebration of a prosperous new year,” she said.

“It is also the time for people to give best wishes and thanks to family members, relatives and friends for their help and support.” Sophomore Michelle Kennedy said the event provided the opportunity to bond as a community that loves Chinese culture.

“It’s a great time to show the international students and the sponsors of the Confucius Institute that there are students who enjoy the language,” she said.

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The reception featured traditional Chinese New Year music, food and decorations.

Chinese knots, New Year scrolls, red lanterns and colorful balloons filled the room of Chinese and American faculty, staff and students.

A slide show illustrating major UCACI activities and accomplishments in 2013 was shown.

Ten performances included cultural dress presentations, traditional dances and singing.

American students from Central High School in Little Rock performed the lion dance.

Junior Janae Brazeal said she enjoyed the lion dance because it was something she had never seen before and it’s relevant to Chinese culture.

Kennedy and some other students who were studying Chinese sang a song with a title that translates to, “I’m sorry, my Chinese is bad.”

Su said the lion dance, Chinese music and dance performances and American students singing in Chinese were her favorite parts.

The Hanban Chinese teachers ended the reception with a song.

Graduate student Armstrong Hang Yang said his favorite part of the event was the Chinese song provided by students from different countries who are studying Chinese at UCA.

“It not only brings great joy to everyone but also shows the idea that people can share happiness in one world,” he said. “This is also one of original purposes to celebrate Lunar New Year in UCA, that the pursuit of happiness and the wish for fortune are universal and cross-cultural.”

Brazeal said cultural events like the Chinese New Year Celebration open students’ eyes to the fact that there is a huge population of international students at UCA.

“Cultural events like this are important to have on UCA’s campus because they allow Americans to experience other cultures’ customs and history and draw them out of their ethnocentric shells,” she said. “We have such a rich repository of culture on campus, so holding events like the Chinese New Year Festival heightens awareness of these different cultures and gives the host country a chance to share its culture with pride.”

Lu said UCA has many Chinese students and faculty members.

“By hosting the Chinese New Year Celebration, UCACI tries to bring Chinese culture into the community and to share the joy of the festival among Chinese students, faculty, American students who are interested in Chinese language and culture, and the Conway community,” she said.

UCACI President Tom Courtway and Provost Steven Runge gave New Year’s greetings and expressed their thanks to the UCACI for its contributions to UCA.

Other speakers included Michael Rowland from the Arkansas Department of Education, Rogers School District Assistant Superintendent Robert Moore, Faulkner Country Library Director Nancy Allen, UCACI Director Guo-ou Zhuang, and other Chinese instructors.

Lu said as the only Confucius Institute in Arkansas, UCACI takes it as its mission to bring cultural and academic diversity to the community.

The celebration was one of several major events UCACI hosts during the year.

“The event is an overall exhibition of Chinese culture focusing on the theme of festival celebration,” Lu said.

UCACI partnered with Chinese Scholars and Students Association at UCA and other universities in Arkansas to host the Chinese New Year Celebration Gala on Jan. 26 in Little Rock.