The Temple Fair and the Power of Memory

“Another year has passed since we decided to cross the sea for friends, adventure and a new journey at Michigan State University. We still remember navigating the crowded streets, clinging on to mom and dad as we tugged on the corners of their shirts during those Spring Festivals so long ago. We still remember the girl next door raising her candied fruit dreaming of a sweet year to come, and how the old-timer across the street would decorate his door in New Year’s scrolls.”

Upon reading the various promotions posted to Chinese social media by CSSA for the upcoming Temple Fair, the first thing clear to any learner of Chinese as a second language is the flowery, eloquent writing style and the numerous allusions to personal memories. This rough translation above does not quite do justice in describing the many unique concepts in Chinese culture that are simply not present here in the States. These references can be casually made to a Chinese audience and be met with nods and grins, they are a testament to the power of memory and the nostalgia associated with the Chinese New Year. With this in mind, CSSA has made it a point this year to bring as much of that power and nostalgia possible to the local MSU community in a way that is both friendly to fellow Spartans unfamiliar with the Chinese language and also interactive and fun.

CSSA has pinpointed five unique elements that are crucial to delivering the Temple Fair experience. They are: Food, Fun, Appreciation, Learning and Ceremony - 食玩赏学礼.

Food: Expectedly enough, the roster of dishes released a couple of weeks ahead of the event garnered the most attention from our hungry followers! A special food area will be prepared with mouth-watering dishes, some of which will be familiar to local students and others more so to Chinese students. To list just a few of these dishes there will be Kung Pao chicken, curried beef, Yeung Chow fried rice and dumplings. To CSSA’s great excitement, many of our followers on social media have expressed their eagerness to have a taste of the food we carefully chose for this event.

Fun: While this event is designed to be educational, it is also meant to be fun for students of any background. With this in mind, it is CSSA’s goal to make sure students move and actively participate in the event. In previous years Chinese New Year events on campus mostly consisted of on-stage performances and recreations of the television programs aired in China during this festive time. While that is most definitely a fun and rewarding experience, CSSA has decided to put its efforts towards presenting the Chinese New Year in a more hands-on, creative way. Therefore we have included an area with activities like games, fortune-telling and paper lantern riddles. It is our hope that students will be laughing and encouraging each other to try out each activity.

Appreciation: The meaning of this element may not be as clear as the others, as the individual character does not translate well into English. “Appreciation” is the word that most accurately captures its meaning in this context, and it essentially means performances. Many performers have signed up for the Temple Fair to liven up the atmosphere, with acts including but not limited to traditional Chinese opera, dances and a display of traditional clothing.

Learning: Here is arguably the most important aspect of the event. To be sure the Temple Fair will not be solely based around learning; it will not be like a dreadful Monday morning lecture. As mentioned above, this will be a hands-on learning experience complete
with papercutting, lantern folding and knot-tying. We would like participants to not only be able to take prizes home to show off to friends and family, but also a skill and a memory. These elements are meant to recreate memories and feelings unique to this holiday, it naturally follows that the best way to achieve this is through interactive events.

Ceremony: Holidays all come with formalities and ceremonies, and the Chinese New Year is certainly no exception. This event is an ideal opportunity to dive into the ceremonies and icons associated with Chinese culture in general. Displays with information on Chinese culture have been prepared and explanations will be ready for any participants with questions.

These five elements of the Temple Fair exist so that memories can be made. All students are invited to dive into a rich culture that has a history spanning thousands of years and connect with a community that is an indispensable part of MSU. It is our hope that we can impart unto you some of the memories and nostalgia that warm up this freezing holiday season. Come and be a part of the CSSA Temple Fair on February 13th, from 3:00 - 8:30 PM in McDonel Hall. Admission is free and doors are open to all students and members of the local community.

Other upcoming Chinese New Year Events include:

East Neighborhood Chinese New Year Celebration  
Thursday, February 19th  
5:00 – 8:00pm  
Hubbard Hall Dining Room  
Must have a meal plan or purchase a meal ticket on-site. Open to the public.

Confucius Institute at Michigan State University New Year Celebration  
Friday, February 20th  
10:30am – 1:30pm  
International Center Spartan Room (Food Court area)  
Free and open to the public

CUSA MSU Chinese Spring Festival Gala  
Friday, February 20th  
7:00pm  
Breslin Center  

Chinese New Year Celebration at Meridian Mall  
Saturday, February 21st  
1:30 – 6:00pm  
Meridian Mall  
Free and open to the public.

For details and for more China-themed events, go to http://artsandculture.msu.edu/