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It is now the year of the Dog, and Radford, along with many Asian families from the area, is celebrating the new year.

Every year, for eighteen years now, Dr. I-Ping Fu and the Chinese Culture Club at Radford have collaborated to organize a show for both Radford students and Asian families of the New River Valley.

Radford President Brian Hemphill was there to begin the show with a speech about how Radford has long been a place for Asian communities to feel at home.

Covington was lovingly decorated to the stylings of old Chinese traditions. Paper lanterns lined the walls, doors donned red banners and the performers dressed in bright and colorful outfits for their routines. The most distinct outfits were those of the “Happy” dancers. They wore bright yellow dresses that danced around them as they twirled to more modern Chinese music.

Due to some technical issues, Dr. Fu herself described to the audience the story of how the Zodiac came to be. The Chinese calendar is separated into twelve cyclical years that each year represents a different animal.

The order of the animals was determined by a race where the placement of each animal would correspond to their location in the cycle. The highlight of the story was the explanation for how the mouse was first, for apparently the mouse kicked the cat into the river they were crossing, and as a result, the mouse and cat are enemies to this day.

There was a martial arts demonstration from the Dragon Tiger Eagle Wushu Kung Fu school. Grand Master Chi-Chung Kwong has been in the New River Valley for decades and has been instructing Kung Fu since the 70s. Many of his students are Radford graduates. Martial artists both young and old showed off their skills with hand-to-hand combat and traditional Chinese weaponry. The action-packed segment culminated with the master himself appearing to show his students how it is done.

The Blacksburg Senior Group did several performances during the show. They did a choir, a Tai Chi demonstration, and a song and dance called Huangmei, a story of a princess and a farmer falling in love. The man who played the farmer, Renhua Wang, has been practicing that song for twenty years.

Dr. Fu told me a story about how in the past that she had people tell her not to mention the senior performers' age. She would have none of that, however, as an older age is something to be proud of in Asian cultures. Elders are central figures of families and are much respected by their communities. The Chinese New Year festival is a way for the oldest of the community to pass their traditions to the youngest.

This was foremost a festival for the children. The first performance was of a hip-hop routine by several young kids. Two kids would later don the Lion outfit and perform the traditional Lion Dance. Towards the end, every child in the audience was invited up on stage to participate in the "fireworks" which, for safety's sake, were just several rolls of bubble wrap to stomp on.

Both the performers and the organizers being amateurs, the show was imperfect, but that does not matter.

This show is representative of something great. It was the passing of traditions to newer generations that was especially moving to me.

China has one of the most vibrant cultures in the world, and it is remarkable that these families can engage in these practices even so far from their original home.

This may have just been a new year celebration, but it is also proof that these people have somewhere they can feel at home, and a place where they can share their culture amongst a campus such as Radford.

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Photo Credit (Megan Flint | Radford's Chinese Club)