

Colby



Colby Magazine

Volume 107
Issue 1 *Spring 2019*

Article 11

April 2019

A Taste of Their Home: Lunar New Year was the occasion, but bridge building was the mission for Chinese students

Kardelen Koldas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine>

Recommended Citation

Koldas, Kardelen (2019) "A Taste of Their Home: Lunar New Year was the occasion, but bridge building was the mission for Chinese students," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 107 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol107/iss1/11>

This Features is brought to you for free and open access by the Colby College Archives at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

STUDENTS



A TASTE OF THEIR HOME

Lunar New Year was the occasion, but bridge building was the mission for Chinese students

By Kardelen Koldas '15

Inside Roberts Dining Hall one night in February, the first to arrive were already filling up their plates with signature Chinese dishes: vegetable egg rolls with plum sauce, sweet rice dumplings with red bean paste, and Sichuan spicy boiled fish. White and red parasols hung above the food. Red lanterns and *fu* (福) signs livened up the walls for good fortune, luck, and happiness. Chinese flags proudly stretched from one column to another.

Said Beijing native Erica Lei '20, "I feel so warm. It's so rare to see so many Chinese students and the whole campus being together."

For Colby's recently established club, Project Pengyou (pronounced "pahng-youh"), it was mission accomplished.

In Mandarin Chinese, *pengyou* (朋友) means friend. Project Pengyou, a national initiative with almost 100 school chapters, was founded to mobilize U.S.-China bridge builders. This web of friendship extended to Colby with the efforts of two recent graduates, Ling MacLean '18 and

Emily Geske '18. As Asian Americans, they had a unique perspective on both cultures and acted as bridge builders.

Said MacLean: "It was very clear from my freshman year that there's a really big divide between American students and the growing Chinese international student population."

The group, beginning in 2017, wanted to find ways to build community to allow for more cross-cultural exchange and understanding, Geske said. Soon one event followed another. Project Pengyou Day, Lunar New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and a sports night, to name a few.

This year's Lunar New Year celebration was a high point.

The rich menu was put together by a Chinese student, Sihang Chen '20, and Dining Services, with Chen's recipes for greater authenticity.

Occasionally, a group of Chinese students sang along with the songs:



Ni shi wo de xiao ya xiao pingguo (你是我的小呀小苹果) (translation: you're my little, little apple). Traditional red packets, hongbao (红包), were given to each guest; everyone received a chocolate coin, but lucky people with a hand-drawn pig (because it's the year of the pig) inside their packet also won gift cards to local businesses. There was a pop quiz, in both English and Chinese, about China and Chinese culture, and a tongue-twister competition. While Chinese students competed to beat each other in native-level tongue twisters, children of faculty and Chinese learners started at the beginners level and tried to make it all the way up.

Overseeing the effort were Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies Andie Wang, the club's faculty advisor, and co-presidents Elizabeth Stephens '21, from

Baltimore, and Chen.

For Chen, this club serves as a long-desired avenue to share his culture with the Colby community. In his first year, Chen wanted to tell others about his home country, China. But each time, he found himself wondering if others would



It was very clear from my freshman year that there's a really big divide between American students and the growing Chinese international student population."

—Ling MacLean '18

be interested. Now he feels differently.

"Project Pengyou is something I can basically use all my power to show the interesting festivals, Chinese culture, or language," he said. "It's like your home." At events, he's surrounded by people who desire to learn more about China. For them, he said, "It's kind of like a service.

It offers people [a] platform, if they want to know, they have this resource."

Colby's Instructional Media Specialist Qiuli Wang, from Shenyang, China, came to the event with her husband and son, William Xu, waiting to celebrate the Lunar New Year with Colby students.

Wang said Project Pengyou acts as an agency for Chinese and Chinese international students to share their culture and feel part of the community. The effort also gives everyone a chance to gain firsthand knowledge on culture and break away from stereotypes or preconceived notions.

"What I usually tell my students," Wang said, "is it takes friendship to really understand a culture."