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Getting the best of both worlds

Pang Yin Fong

TWIN happiness or double joy. As a Chinese Muslim, Fan Zi Ming gets the best of both worlds in the dual celebration of Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Aidil Fitri or Id as it is known in China.

Fan and his relatives in the north-western province of Xing Jiang celebrate the two festivals with great gusto. The fact that they are fasting during the first two days of the Lunar New Year does not diminish the zest with which they rejoice.

"Once we break fast in the evening, we would visit relatives and friends. By the time the Id festival starts on the third day of the Chinese New Year, there will be a really big celebration of feasting and visiting," says Fan, a 27-year-old student at the International Islamic University in Petaling Jaya.

"In China, we get five public holidays to celebrate Chinese New Year. Everything is closed. Firecrackers are banned in the cities but allowed in the countryside. There are lion dance performances in Beijing but not where I live in."

Although there are several common elements in the way the two festivals are observed in both China and Malaysia, Fan notes that the ubiquitous red packet or ang pow is not used in the area where he hails from.

"The children in China also go from house to house to collect candy and money but we don't use red paper to wrap the money. I guess the children want to know how much they are getting!

"The Id festival is celebrated on a smaller scale in China as compared to Korban (Hari Raya Haji) which commands three to four public holidays. We get only two public holidays for Id. There are some 50 million Muslims in China. My family has been Muslim for many, many generations."

On the eve of the Chinese New Year, the family reunion dinner consists of several items including the main dish of meat-filled dumplings.

Fan's family does not observe any taboos such as not sweeping the floor on the first day for fear of good luck being swept away "because Mao Zedong got us to throw out a lot of superstitious beliefs".

On the first day of Id, the men would go to the mosque for prayers while the women prepare food which will later be served in the mosque. At some point during Ramadan, Fan and his family would have visited the graves of their ancestors. This differs slightly from the Malaysian Muslim practice of visiting the cemetery on the first day of Hari Raya.

However, the feasting, the practice of "open house" and asking for forgiveness from one's elders are all part of the Id celebration among the Muslims in China.

"This is the second time I'm celebrating the two festivals together in Malaysia. There isn't too much difference except for the food. This year, I hope to visit the residences of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and the King," says Fan who is in his final year of a masters degree in library and information science.

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