

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre
Media: Leader, Wagga Wagga
Published Date: 19 March 2014

Inmates ring in Chinese New Year

JUNEE Correctional Centre created history when inmates, staff and members of the wider community came together to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

A large crowd packed the prison's inspiring and empowering Cultural Centre recently to support Asian inmates as they celebrated the important traditional holiday.

"This year we have five different nationalities involved in the festival," master of ceremonies, inmate John told his captivated audience.

"We have China, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and Vietnam represented here today.

"It's our most on record."

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, is celebrated at the turn of the Chinese calendar.

Principal of the Australian School of Contemporary Chinese in Canberra, Doctor Fuxin Li made his second visit to the centre to represent Canberra's 20,000-strong Chinese population.

"This is the most important festival in Chinese culture and in many other countries as well," he revealed.

"The festival is always a time to celebrate unity, care and harmony."

Within China, and across South-East Asia, regional customs and traditions concerning the celebration of the Chinese New Year vary widely.

"It is a chance to throw for a whole country to throw a big family reunion all at one time," John said.

"It is also a time we pay our respects to our elders."

For close to six weeks inmates prepared a variety of performances

including dragon and lion dances, musical pieces and riddles for the event.

Another inmate, Johnny, believes the opportunity to put together the cultural showcase had been an enriching experience for inmates.

The 33-year-old immigrated to Australia with his family from Thailand when he was nine years old and, until now, has never delved into the holiday's traditions.

He hopes what he has learned will allow him to participate in future Chinese Festivals with his children in their home suburb of Cabramatta.

"Our culture is very important," he said.

"It was special to learn from one of the other inmates... He was a master who used to teach (the different traditions) on the outside."

Johnny was full of praise for Junee Correctional Centre management who continue to support the Cultural Centre's broad range of activities.

Offender services manager Trevor Coles applauded inmates for the effort and dedication they showed to bringing the festival to life.

"Four percent of inmates here are from an Asian extraction," he said.

"It is important they have a chance to recognise their culture."

One of the highlights of the festival was the delicious Chinese feast visitors and inmates alike enjoyed at the completion of the performances.

"The meal is always a hit," Trevor said.

"To have this sort of meal prepared in a corrections environment is somewhat out of the ordinary."



TRADITION: Junee Correctional Centre inmates perform a lion dance during Chinese New Year celebrations in the prison's Cultural Centre.

