*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Celebrating the beauty of the moon**

Recently, we celebrated another Chinese festival. The “Mid-Autumn Festival” was Thursday, Oct. 1, on our regular solar calendar. However, according to the lunar calendar, the official date is Aug. 15.

Yes, it is quite confusing trying to observe the same event on two separate calendars — the solar and lunar calendar — as the difference can sometimes be weeks or months apart. Living in the United States all these years, I stopped using the dates of the lunar calendar, as I do not have one on hand. Well, they are available at the Asian grocery stores, and I could get one for free if my purchase is over $50 (or just pay $3 for one); but there aren’t any Asian stores around where we live; plus, I am the only one who would use it. So why bother?

Anyway, Mid-Autumn Festival is the second-most important celebration in the Chinese culture, second only to the Chinese New Year. It started out as a celebration during the Tang Dynasty, 600 to 900 A.D., to acknowledge the farmers’ hard work all year-round. There would be feasts after feasts, celebrating the gifts from heaven above.

Somehow, the moon is at her fullest during Aug. 15 in the lunar calendar, and what an occasion to celebrate and to be creative. Homemade desserts would be sent to friends and neighbors (thank goodness no one had heard of fruitcake then).

It would be a long celebration indeed, as the festival would start the night before the full moon (the welcoming bash), another formal event during the evening (the appreciation bash), and another one right after that (the farewell bash). Each gathering would start when the moon appears until the sun comes up.

During those evenings, many poems and stories would be composed by witty poets and novelists after a few drinks. One of the most well-known stories is Queen Cheng-E who resides in the moon, and more stories with different characters would follow after that. I guess when staring at the moon after a few drinks, one may be able to come up with many unique stories. Hmm, I think I might give it a try on some full moon evening. Ha-ha.

Anyway, living in the woods with no interference from the city lights, we have a lot of opportunities to look at the sky and just observe the simple wonders of the universe. Our naked eyes couldn’t see any of it during the daytime, yet, once the evening gets darker, especially with no clouds to block our view, the vision of heaven is simply imposing and mesmerizing. Staring at the millions and billions of stars from far, far away, I can’t help but think — is there anyone out there looking at us like I am looking at them?

Then the old thoughts came back to me — even though they look so very close to us, just how close are they? I once read that the moon is 238,900 miles away from us; and that in one second, light can travel 186,000 miles, which is 7.5 times around the Earth (the circumference of which is 24,800 miles). Looking through my binoculars, I could see clearly all the peaks and valleys of the moon, and they look absolutely amazing. However, with the naked eye, they do resemble shades of palaces with trees and animals. Ah, now I understand how those poets and novelists got their inspirations, especially after an evening or two of festivities.

Realizing that our planet Earth is only a small speck in this almighty universe, with billions and billions of stars from thousands of many other galaxies, I can’t help but wonder, “Just how small is our planet Earth; and how small am I in comparison?”

Many of the stars are so far, far away that it would take years before we can actually see them with our naked eyes. It never ceased to amaze me that the scientists at NASA have just discovered another galaxy 2,000 million light-years away.

Oh wow, I said to myself at first. Then, when I started to think just how far away this “new” discovered galaxy is, I would be in a daze for days. First, there are six zeros in a million, and three zeros in a thousand; so, a thousand million (or a billion) has nine zeros. There are 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and 24 hours in a day; so, there are 31,536,000 seconds in a year, now multiply that number by 186,000, and just what do you have?

That is one light-year. So, what about 2,000 million light-years? I tried to do it with my calculator, and it comes back as error, error and more errors. Then it dawns on me, it is just a bunch of zeroes, totally irrelevant. After all, when our government officials tell us that we are only 3.2 trillion dollars in national debt, we all laugh it off as it is just bunch of zeroes. It seems too far-fetched to even trying to comprehend.

So, I’ll just summarize it by saying “Oh yes, that’s far, far away.” We have to trust the scientists anyway that they have scientific proof to back up their theories. But to me, anything over a million is a lot. I can’t worry about things that I cannot comprehend.

So, on the evening of the next full moon, go to your back porch and admire this wonderful sight. Have a glass of wine and enjoy your company sharing this beautiful and gorgeous moon. Have another one or two, and you can see the palace where Queen Cheng-E resides, with her loyal rabbit buddy and other favorite characters. Who knows, you might see things that no others could see. Look farther, can you spot someone with binoculars from another planet staring at you?

I miss the moon cake dessert, the pomelo (Chinese grapefruit) and all the festive gatherings; and carrying lit lanterns in different designs and colors parading the neighborhood.

Oh, I’d better enjoy the moment all that I can, as I heard that it might start to snow next week!