CCFS-Ottawa celebrates the Year of the Rat
by Irene K. Ip

One hundred and forty-three friends of China braved the bitter winter weather on February 10 to celebrate the start of the Year of the Rat at the Mandarin Ogilvie Restaurant. In contrast with the hostile conditions outside, two *gu-zhen* players, Vicky Ye and Sandy Ip, provided gentle background music as all found their places at the banquet.

CCFS President Lolan Merklinger introduced the special guests, Ambassador Lu Shumin; Senator Mac Harb; Mr. Pierre Poilievre, MP; Ambassador Arthur Menzies; Mr.Craig Hunter, President of the Canadian International Council, National Capital Branch; Ms. Elizabeth Yeh, Publisher of Asia Network Canada; Mr. Joseph da Sylva, Gatineau City Council; and Mr. Alykhan Velshi, Director of Communications for the Hon. Jason Kenney. Ambassador Lu, Senator Harb, Councillor da Sylva and Mr. Poilievre each addressed the assembled guests while James Steele read greetings from the Ottawa Mayor.

Tsin Van, a founding member of the Society, as in previous years explained the origin of the 12-year lunar cycle and the selection of animals by which the years were named with a focus on the characteristics of people born in the years of the rat. The rat guests were identified and presented with a gift.

Musicians Vicky Ye and Sandy Ip provided additional melodic intervals while guitar-playing singers Dominic D'Arcy and Georges Saponides entertained with energetic lyrics, including Chinese folk songs. Some courageous guests did some impromptu karaoke. Edwin and Mary Lee drew names for many draw prizes which had been generously donated by the Chinese Embassy (which also provided wine for the banquet), Canada Post (which also gave table favours), the McGarry Family, the Mandarin Ogilvy and Lolan Merklinger.

Satisfied by an excellent 10-course meal prepared by the staff of the Mandarin Ogilvie and entertained by such diverse performers, the guests left the restaurant to face the challenges of an Ottawa winter more cheerfully than when they came.