

Celebrating our Pacific ties

East Asian Festival kicks off Sept. 30 at Kitchener City Hall

Seeing the posters going up for the 1998 East Asian Festival at Renison College made me realize that a full year has now passed since I started writing these weekly offerings. A lot can happen in one short year. I'm thinking particularly about what has happened in Asia since I tried to convey my enthusiasm for the 1997 East Asian Autumn Festival in this column last September. Few people realized then that such momentous changes were just around the corner. But we had been warning signs. The collapse of the deal to produce a film series for broadcast in Asia featuring the K-W Symphony, for instance, may have been an early symptom of the so-called "Asian flu." This was a great loss. An opportunity like this, which would have brought world-wide attention to our premier cultural institution, may not come again for some time.

Surprised that project failed

I remember being very surprised when first I read the news that this project had failed. I had thought that Japanese firms were invulnerable.

I had been told that the future was Asia, that the economies of Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and China were setting the pace for the century.

We would all have to discipline ourselves — tighten our belts, cut frills, and hustle, hustle — or we'd be out of the game.

There has always been a threatening undertone to this "competing in the world market" rhetoric, which has become a substitute for the language of the Cold War — the same combative, fearful tone. It serves similar purposes: to sustain our interests, to justify channelling re-



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sources in chosen directions, and to make us feel insecure and ready to accept hardship and sacrifice.

The world looks different than it did a year ago.

But I still stand by what I said back then: That the global marketplace is not some kind of combat zone.

That it is important for Canadians to become aware that there's a world out there.

And that the cultural dimensions of an event like the Asian festival at Renison College represent things that are far more interesting, more important, and more enduring than the ups and downs of stock markets and currency exchanges.

Dedicated organizers

Hopefully, the economic shifts of 1998 haven't dampened the enthusiasm, eroded the confidence or weakened the dedication of the people involved in putting on this event.

Because our ties to the peoples and cultures across the Pacific are as much a cause for celebration as they were a year ago.

With regard to trade connections, there may have been a faddish quality to the recent Pacific Rim fixation which is probably now on the wane.

But it is worth keeping in mind that doing business with Asia was the purpose for build-

ing the Canadian Pacific Railroad and the Panama Canal.

Remember also that this was the original obsession of Columbus himself, and that for at least two centuries after he first encountered this hemisphere, the North American continent remained a great geographic nuisance to the entrepreneurs and adventurers of the West.

A fascination that has lasted half a millennium is not likely to disappear with a few glitches in the stock exchange.

Official opening set for Sept. 30

The official opening of the 1998 East Asian Festival will be held, once again, at Kitchener City Hall, on Wednesday, Sept. 30 from 7 to 9 p.m.

This is a free event that will feature an Asian food fair, martial arts, craft demonstrations, Chinese and Western folk music and Korean dance. Cultural offerings throughout the rest of the week will include a keynote address on Korean architecture, an exhibition of sculptures and drawings by Kitchener artist Nicholas Rees, and a literary evening followed by a special screening of *Under the Willow Tree*, a film about pioneer Chinese women in early Canada.

The celebrations will conclude with a full day of cultural demonstrations at Renison next Saturday. This is an event that is worthy of enthusiastic support from all the communities of the central Grand Valley region.

Need to know more?

For more information call 884-4404, ext. 657, or visit the Renison web-site: <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/inforen>

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