

"The cultural background of Asian Canadians is a part of their very being. It is also a part of who we are as a nation."

- Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) Raymond Chan, February 1, 1997

Building a Human Bridge to Asia Pacific: CYAP's Cultural Component

The cultural component of Canada's Year of Asia Pacific reached over one million Canadians. Over 550 projects, covering everything from ancient craft traditions to the latest in Asian television production, showcased the richness of cultural life in the region.

Many CYAP initiatives were hosted by some of Canada's largest galleries and performances centres. However, hundreds of other cultural events filled to capacity the school gymnasiums, church basements, local libraries and galleries of smaller cities and towns across the country. A good deal of the credit for this rests not only with local arts organizations, but also with communities of Asian Canadians, who embraced the CYAP concept wholeheartedly. These organizations were asked to come up with ideas for local projects and the response was tremendous.

Whether it was the Vietnamese Association of Nova Scotia, the Edmonton Japanese Canadian Association, or the India School of Dance, Music and Theatre in Winnipeg, ethnocultural groups put on a variety of events that showed Canadians how this country is enriched by its long-standing ties to the Asia Pacific region.

For example, The Chinese Cultural Association of New Brunswick invited their friends and neighbours in the city of Fredericton to join in their 20th anniversary celebrations with a performance called, *Our Maritime Home - A Gala Performance*. The Fredericton Daily Gleaner described it as, "a feast for the eyes, shining with rich silks and satins". As local city councilor Tom Jellinek remarked, "you have added another thread to our Canadian cloth and we are stronger for it." Special thanks were also given to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office for providing the traditional costumes used in the performance.

Montreal's Korean community welcomed the public into celebrations surrounding their traditional harvest festival, known as Tchou'Sok. Events included a narrative history of Koreans in Quebec, a performance by the Orchestre des Jeunes Coréens de Montréal, and a film and video festival. In Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto, *A Perfect Exchange of Cultures* showcased the arts, music, theatre, literary, dance and fashion of emerging artists from the Filipino-Canadian community.

The recent popularity of dragon boat racing in Canada is a colourful example of the impact of Asian influences on our society. Over fifteen thousand paddlers participated in dragon boat races in fourteen cities across Canada this year. Dragon Boat Racing first appeared in Canada during Expo '86 in Vancouver. It has now spread to other cities, such as Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Stratford, London, Ottawa, and as far east as Montreal. The Regina Leader Post pointed out in a September 3, 1997 editorial how these events contribute to CYAP's objectives, "dragon boat races might seem far removed from matters of