

# ASA Takes UNC on a Journey Into Asia

Photos and Story by Cindy Hong



*Featuring performers from three schools in two states, Journey Into Asia opened with N.C. State ASA members who performed the traditional Chinese Lion dance.*

As escorts led in the guests and servers bustled around the room, there was an air of excitement, for the journey was about to begin.

On Nov. 19, the Great Hall was transformed for three hours into an Asian extravaganza that included foods, decorations and entertainment representing 10 Asian countries: China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, the Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam. Over 400 people attended the event.

The festival was spearheaded by the Asian Students Association (ASA) and funded additionally by the Carolina Union Activities Board and the Bicentennial Observance Committee in an effort to raise awareness of the diversity of Asian culture on the University campus. Principal organizers of the event also included individuals from the Korean American Students Association, the Vietnamese Students Association, Sangam (the South Asian student group) and the Japan Club. About 75 volunteers, 50 which served food, helped with the celebration.

Shirley Liu, a junior international studies major, and Billy Fan, psychology major and ASA president, independently thought of the idea for the festival last semester and collaborated this semester.

Liu described the event as one which celebrated the Asian culture in a way that was not controversial.

"The purpose is to raise awareness of the diversity of Asian culture on campus," she said. "It takes something of this nature, something enjoyable, as a good stepping block to introduce other issues. This is the first grand-scale event we've attempted."

Originally called Asia Night, the name of the festival was changed to Journey Into Asia in order to include Asians and non-Asians alike into the celebration.

"[Journey into Asia] is more inclusive," said Liu. "[We changed the name] to allow anyone to take a journey into Asia."

She added, "We [were] aggressively trying to attract a non-Asian audience. There is an Asian presence on campus, and we'd like to share our background with [non-Asians]."

Upon stepping into the Great Hall, the guests encountered bright Chinese lanterns hung on the side panels of the hall; two Chinese scrolls; Japanese origami

made of colorful paper folded into flowers and cranes, placed along the dinner tables; and the flags of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines and Korea draped along the walls. Indian, Chinese, Filipino and Korean music filled the air both before and during the meal.

The journey began with a meal of fried rice and treats from Korea, India, Thailand, Japan, China, Laos or Vietnam. Local restaurants donated the dishes.

"With the food, we were trying to get things that non-Asians wouldn't get to sample," said Liu.

Junior business major Doug Butler said that the food was definitely unique. While his favorite dish was General Tso's Chicken, which is a specialty of the Hunan province in China, Butler said, "The most unique dish was Chop Chae [a vegetarian Korean dish] because I've never seen clear noodles before."

Freshman Priti Patel said that she thought the different spices made the food interesting and said that one of the desserts, almond-flavored gelatin with exotic fruits like "dragon eyes," jackfruit and lychee, was very good.

After the meal, the presentation began with a welcome from Asian nations, which included welcomes and hellos in each of the 10 languages of the countries represented. Students dressed in national costumes.

The main entertainment was focused around six dance groups, who performed a variety of Chinese, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese and Filipino dances.

Each dance told its own story. One painted a legend. Others honored a city or incorporated some primary facet of the cultures they represented. The dances reflected differences between all of the Asian countries and even differences within the individual countries themselves.

One example of such a difference in style within a country was the Filipino Culture Dance, which consisted of four parts, each reflecting Spanish, Hawaiian, Tahitian and Filipino influences within the Filipino culture.

Sophomore political science major Stacey Brandenburg said that the entire night was "absolutely phenomenal." In particular, she cited the unique dances.

"The distinctions between the dances represented different cultures," she said. "It's so easy to group all the island and Asian cultures together, but most people don't realize that there are so many distinctions."

Junior biology major Liz Kim said that watching the dances was touching for her and gave her a sense of Asian pride because they were so beautiful. She also said that while the dances were unique to each other, there were also similarities because they were all Asian dances.

"[You] can see the influences of Asian culture," she said. "They're all connected somehow. They can't help being influenced by each other."

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*Having performed in the North Carolina Museum of Art and in the UNC International Festival in October, Korean Fan dancers windmill on stage.*

*Duke University's Chinese Folk Dance Club stands poised for the next move in their crackling, fan-snapping rendition of a martial fan dance.*

