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Relg 181G
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SEEKING THE SACRED OF ASIA: PART I

First and foremost, I would like to thank you Dr. Ko for organizing this fabulous event! You managed to bring together an amazing group of performers and speakers. I truly felt as though I had been transported 6,000 miles to Asia for the evening. It is not often I get to say that!

I come from a Christian, specifically a Roman-Catholic religious background. I was born and raised in suburban Lorain County, Ohio. As I suppose was fairly typical, my parents made few if any attempts to introduce my siblings or I to any sort of cultural diversity. I didn't mind. All I was concerned about was typical teenage drivel, and what my favorite sports team was up to. That all started to change in the years following high school. I joined the military, traveled extensively (still do), and saw the world. What I've experienced may be minute in comparison to the experiences of others, I understand that, but from the perspective of a small town kid from Ohio, my eyes had been opened. Travel changed me. The world was not as simple as I had imagined, not all people are like me. The world is full of diversity, and it is a beautiful thing!

The Seeking The Sacred of Asia at LCCC on Wednesday evening was the perfect example of the beauty that diversity can bring. The turnout was phenomenal with over 150 guests in attendance. The crowd ranged from young to old, from white to black to Hispanic to Asian. Those in attendance were treated to two fantastic hours of cultural performances, presentations, and even food samplings from the Asia community of greater Cleveland. To my surprise, the Asian-American community is very pronounced here in the Cleveland area!

Janice Liu played three beautiful (and peaceful) songs on her Chinese erhu, a traditional Chinese stringed instrument which, to me looked similar to a fiddle. Giyoung Lee, Irene Chang, Woojin Jeon, performed a traditional Korean talchum dance, which was especially impressive considering Irene and Woojin were only children. Em Sovan, and Sou Hoeuth rounded out the performers with performances on two traditional Cambodian instruments, the takhe and the tro. I was very moved and taken back by the skill exhibited by all performers. Clearly, they take the preservation of Asian culture and tradition very seriously.

For the first presentation, Dr. Yizhen Wang, an expert in traditional Chinese opera and folk culture spoke on the topic of Chinese culture, specifically Confucianism and Daoism. He was very knowledgeable on the similarities and the differences of the major segments of Chinese culture, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. He even shared with us some interesting facts about Chinese food. Mr. Born Nai, spoke next, he was a Buddhist monk in Cambodia for 20 years, and he is now the Vice President of the Cambodian American Buddhist Association. He spoke about and history of Buddhism in Cambodia and its proliferation around the world (and to Elyria, OH), he introduced us to some traditional Cambodian-Buddhist foods. Offering, receiving, and eating food are all part of the Buddhist tradition. According to Nai, in the Buddhist culture, “food is graciously accepted with gratitude and reverence, but it is also important not be greedy about food.” Sadly, Buddhist and American culture could not be any further apart in this aspect. Mr. Nai also talked about curry’s significance in the Cambodian diet and some of the ingredients they use to make it. I was getting hungry. To conclude the evening, you spoke briefly on the topics of the Korean and Japanese ancestral rituals.

Looking back on this event, I feel it was a raving success, not only was it successful for its entertainment value, but more importantly for its ability to literally and figuratively bring Asia

to the community! The same community which I grew up in. The same community that for me, as a child, offered little to no cultural diversity. Hopefully this event and others like it will change that for future generations. Thank you.