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## **Greet the dragon and celebrate Asia**

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DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

If you see a colorful dragon snaking through the downtown Chain of Parks trailed by an equally eye-catching parade of people, don't be alarmed.

You might just want to find a parking space and join the throng for the opening ceremony of Experience Asia 2007, the third annual celebration of Tallahassee's fast-growing and multi-faceted Asian community. It's hosted by the Asian Coalition of Tallahassee, which was formed in 2005, the same year the festival made its debut.

"The reason we organized the Asian Coalition of Tallahassee was to raise awareness in the community about the various Asian segments of the (local) population," said ACT chairman Clyde Diao, who also serves as president of the Big Bend Filipino-American Association.

Coalition members wanted to give something back to the community that had welcomed them so warmly as residents.

Tallahassee's friendly folks and pretty neighborhoods have made it mighty attractive to Asians, many of which come to attend FAMU or FSU and end up staying to work and live. Diao came to the city in 1983 to earn a master's degree and subsequent Ph.D. in economics from FSU. He stuck around to put down roots, start a family and even entice sisters who lived in other states to move to Tallahassee.

"When I first came here, there were very few Asian people and very few Asian restaurants," Diao said. "But now the Asian community is growing."

Coalition members now include groups representing the Filipino-American, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Japanese, Pakistani, Persian, Vietnamese, Thai and Taiwanese communities, as well as such organizations as Cornerstone Learning Community, the FSU Foundation and Tallahassee Families with Asian Children.

Like the influence and presence of Asian cultures in Tallahassee, the Experience Asia festival also has expanded.

"The first year, I wasn't sure if the community would embrace it," Diao said. "But by noon we had run out of food because so many people came. Last year, (close to) 6,000 people came."

Organizers expect even more attendees this year at the event, which features a full slate of activities, performances, demonstrations and presentations. For the first time, the festival will welcome performers from abroad - the Taiwanese Youth Folk Sports Troupe from Keelung, Taiwan, and a dance troupe from Korea. The Taiwanese group will dazzle and amaze at a separate performance at 8 p.m. Saturday at Opperman Music Hall. Tickets are \$10 for the public, \$5 for senior citizens and students, free for children age 10 and younger. Call 942-6766 or e-mail taiwanhuang@yahoo .com for more information.

Other fresh additions to the lineup include the Naginata Japanese Martial Arts group from Pensacola and the Bamboo Ensemble, a Filipino group from Tampa's Bayanihan Arts Center.

Here's a look at the complete lineup for Experience Asia 2007:

**Main Stage in Bloxham Park**

**10 a.m.** - Dragon Entrance with participating Asian nations.

**10:15 a.m.** - Zheng player Shannon Lu.

**10:35 a.m.** - Members of the Thai community perform two dances.

**10:55 a.m.** - FSU bellydancers.

**11:30 a.m.** - Bamboo Ensemble of Tampa.

**11:50 a.m.** - Members of the Japanese community.

**12:15 p.m.** - Grand opening ceremony with Tallahassee first lady Jane Marks and Belinda Keiser.

**12:35 p.m.** - Championship cabaret dancer Kay Picart and the Arthur Murray Dancers.

**1 p.m.** - TCC Dance Company.

**1:25 p.m.** - Dance performance by Salim Talib.

**1:35 p.m.** - India Association.

**2:06 p.m.** - Bamboo Ensemble.

**2:35 p.m.** - Members of the Japanese community.

**2:55 p.m.** - Taiwanese Youth Folk Sports Troupe.

**3:20 p.m.** - Mau'oli'oli Dancers.

**3:40 p.m.** - FSU's Kappa Delta Psi sorority and the FSU Filipino American Student Association.

**4:05 p.m.** - Korean dance troupe.

**Demonstration Stage in Lewis Park**

**10:30 a.m.** - Pink Shoelaces.

**11:05 a.m.** - Tai Chi Society.

**11:30 a.m.** - Okinawan Martial Arts.

**12:30 p.m.** - Falun Gong.

**1:05 p.m.** - Stubbs Music Center.

**1:25 p.m.** - Chinese Association of Tallahassee martial-arts demonstration.

**1:50 p.m.** - Arnis de Mano.

**2:10 p.m.** - Chinese Folk Arts.

**2:40 p.m.** - Simply Panama.

**3 p.m.** - Naginata Japanese Martial Arts of Pensacola.

**3:20 p.m.** - FACE.

### **If you go**

**What:** Experience Asia 2007

**When:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lewis and Bloxham parks in the downtown Chain of Parks on Park Avenue

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** Visit [www.asiantlh.org](http://www.asiantlh.org)