Asian Americans gather to examine diverse roots

By HARRIS HWANG

They came from countries such as China, Korea, the Philippines and India. Or at least that's what the forefathers did.

Last Friday, about 900 Asian-American college students representing universities from Coby College in Maine to the University of Miami journeyed to Duke to attend the 17th annual East Coast Asian Student Union Conference, marking the first time that Duke has ever hosted the event.

This year's conference expanded on the theme: "Exposing the Flight of Asian Pacific Americans in our Nation's Inner Cities." Trinity senior Darren Jer, co-coordinator of the conference, said the theme was relevant to the socioeconomic climate at Duke.

"We wanted to do something that might debunk the model minority myth," he said. "Most of the Asians at Duke are from middle- to upper-class suburban, so most of the Duke community might think that all Asians are from the middle or upper class. Not all Asian Americans are from this class. There is a significant percentage in our nation's inner cities."

Attendees said raising such awareness in American society is important in an effort to gain equal rights for Asian Americans.

"You look at places like Chinatown, and when you go there, it's a lot different from suburban areas," said Kai Kuribara, a junior from the University of Vermont. "You see..."

J.D. Hokyoma, keynote speaker for ECASU 1995, addresses students about confronting the model minority myth.

Speakers challenge students

By HARRIS HWANG

Three speakers shared nearly 500 students from about 20 East Coast universities to step forward in the battle to eliminate Asian-American discrimination.

Speaking as part of the 17th annual East Coast Asian Student Union Conference, they addressed the conference's theme, "Exposing the Flight of Asian Pacific Americans in our Nation's Inner Cities," and recounted their own experiences overcoming prejudice.

J.D. Hokyoma, keynote speaker, sought to dispel myths and stereotypes held about Asian Americans.

"We need to confront myths like the model minority myth—a stereotype that we have made it in the country, are rich and secure, and have overcome all forms of discrimination," Hokyoma said.

In reality, we are not all the model minority. We run the whole range. We also have individuals who are struggling," he said.

Hokyoma currently serves as president and executive director of Leadership for Asian Pacifics, a non-profit organization founded in 1982 to increase the number of leadership positions among Asian Americans.

Hokyoma sought young leaders in the audience to express..."
Duke marks first time ECASU conference held in South

ECASU from page 1: Asian homeless people, which you’re not accustomed to. It’s actually kind of sad.”

Although the conference was attended mainly by Asian Americans, some non-Asian Duke students did participate. “We really attracted the mainstream community,” Jern said. “It says that people are generally interested in diversity and Asian-American issues, because they are American issues.”

Previously, ECASU—the oldest and largest network of Asian-American students in the United States—has convened in cities farther north such as Philadelphia or New Haven. Coordinators were finally able to buck this trend in bringing this year’s conference south of Philadelphia for the first time.

“It says a lot that everyone attended. I’ve heard rumors about the South being racist,” said Wei-Lin Wang, a junior from Wesleyan College. “It was nice to see the support that ECASU got from the [Duke] administration.”

In congregating all types of Asian-American college students from all points along the East Coast—Chinese-Americans from Johns Hopkins, Japanese-Americans from the University of Pennsylvania and Filipino-Americans from the U.S. Naval Academy—Jern says he hopes the conference provided a forum for students to establish a sense of unity.

“We came to get more informed on Asian-American issues,” said Grace Lee, a sophomore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “Everybody basically came down here for that. It’s not just about seeing.”

Over a span of 30 hours, ECASU participants flew through a whirlwind list of workshops, speakers and panel discussions. Three speakers leading the Asian-American movement addressed members, while many students participated in a panel discussion on the economic, political and social ramifications of California’s Proposition 187 (see related stories, p. 1). Students also participated in more than 25 workshops covering issues from inter-generational conflicts among Asian-American families to the growing number of Asian street gangs.

But all work and no play makes for a boring conference. An Asian-American rap group, “Yellow Peril,” and “herandros,” a nationally-touring Asian-American theatre company, performed for conference attendees during the weekend.

Approximately 200 people attended the “Yellow Peril” concert, which kicked off the conference weekend, but not all were pleased with the material presented by the rap group.

“I liked the way they rapped, but some of the content was kind of insulting,” said Trinity sophomore Di Su. “They’d say Asian men have the hardest time finding a spouse. I don’t think a person’s race has anything to do with the relationship... They were anti-everything except Asians. They would say things like, ‘Puck Chuck Norris.’”

The workshops provided a medium through which participants could openly share their views and feelings on Asian-American issues.

“It’s not statistics and data that I learned. It was really nice to sit in the same room with those who shared my interest in Asian-American politics,” Wang said. “Although the activity-packed conference only lasted a weekend, the planning that led to its precipitation started well before last year’s conference, hosted by Yale.

“Without walkie-talkies, we’d be dead. Things have been falling into place, and we’ve worked to the max,” said Trinity junior Henry Lin, financial coordinator, with ECASU binder in one hand and walkie-talkie in the other.

Next year’s conference will be held at the University of Maryland.

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