

## WHY ASIA BECKONS

by Meena Wilson

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I was chatting with several new friends in a small restaurant in Singapore, popular with the locals for popiah, one of my favorite meals. The conversation turned to whether leaders are born or made. “When you observe elementary school children on the playground,” said one, “you can spot the ones with the leadership qualities.”

“Perhaps some young people have more leadership ability than others,” I countered, “but surely everyone can learn to be better at leading. Compare leadership with parenting. Maybe some individuals have the talent and personality for being a top-notch parent and others do not. But surely we expect each man and woman to learn to be the best parent they can be.” There were nods around the table.

The opening of our new Asia campus in Singapore promises many more opportunities for rich dialogue about the nature of leadership and how leadership can be nurtured. The Center for Creative Leadership’s office in Singapore will open its doors by the end of July 2003.

The Center has been serving clients in Asia for nearly three decades. Recent statistics show that the proportion of participants originating from Asia is climbing steadily — from 2 percent in 2000 to 4 percent in 2001 to 6 percent in 2002. We expect these percentages will continue to grow. In today’s interdependent world, there is increased need for leadership at all levels to resolve the complex and quickly changing economic, technological and human issues that confront us. The ability to offer our leadership programs in Asia through a regional office is another step toward fulfilling CCL’s mission: Advancing the understanding, practice and development of leadership for the benefit of society *worldwide*. Clients can now expect consistently high quality leadership development services on three continents, delivered by an international cadre of talented professionals.

Beyond the enhanced ability to teach in Asia, we see a great opportunity to learn. By bringing together managers and professionals from different Asian countries, we will sharpen our understanding of cultural variation in leadership practices. Greater diversity of participants will enrich the classroom dialogue on how leadership practices differ across countries — for both program participants and CCL’s professional staff.

I am excited about this opportunity to look at *leadership* and *leadership development* from non-Western perspectives. Under conditions of economic, political and social turbulence, inspirational leadership is needed; Asian organizations may offer special opportunities for studying this kind of leadership. For instance, the exemplary leader in Confucian value-based societies must demonstrate benevolence or kindness toward the feelings of other people, much as the head of a household must set the tone for family members being respectful toward one other. This means that followers expect to feel love toward, and be loved by, their leaders.

Through our work in Asian countries, CCL can expand its leadership knowledge. We can also more broadly share the learning we have acquired through three decades of focused attention on leadership research and education. Harvesting fresh ideas and turning *ideas into action* has always been the essence of our work. A bountiful harvest is waiting for us in Asia. ▲

*Meena Wilson has served as CCL’s acting managing director for Asia. Over the past few years she has shuttled between North America and Asia to lay the groundwork for our official launch.*