

CHICAGOLAND

'Ethnic Handbook' aims to tell stories, debunk stereotypes about 33 of the city's most populous immigrant cultures.

Guide looks inside Chicago melting pot

By Jake Batsell
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In Cambodian culture, children are supposed to avoid looking their elders in the eye when speaking to them.

Many people of Palestinian descent mourn their dead for 40 days.

And the Ethiopian New Year falls on Sept. 11—except during leap years, when it's celebrated a day later.

In a city like Chicago, which boasts such a multitude of ethnic neighborhoods, getting a handle on the melting pot's array of cultures can seem a daunting undertaking. But a new directory produced by the Illinois Ethnic Coalition and released this week, the "Ethnic Handbook"—provides an expansive collection of information on Chicagoans of diverse heritages.

Hailed by its contributors as the most comprehensive and far-reaching guide ever made devoted to the cultures and traditions of Chicago's communities, the 228-page book profiles 33 ethnic groups with "significant populations" in the Chicago metropolitan area.

"This book, I hope, is sort of like the ABCs of ethnicity," said Jae Choi-Kim, past president of the Korean American Citizens Coalition and one of nine essayists featured in the book.

"Culture is not only food, song and dance," Choi-Kim said. "It's a lot more than that—it's about people's feelings and belief systems, and the kinds of things that they hold very dear in a humanistic way."

Equipped with maps pinpointing ethnic concentrations in Chicago and Cook County, and packed with demographic data and immigration patterns, the guide has plenty of fodder for the statistically-minded. But it goes beyond figures to include historical backgrounds, cultural traditions and essays.

"Usually with information like this, people only see one dimen-

City watch Neighborhoods



Fred Gardaphe (left), professor of English at Columbia College, and Jae Choi-Kim (below), who has a dry-cleaning business, are two of the essayists in the "Ethnic Handbook." The 228-page guide profiles 33 ethnic groups with significant populations in Chicago.

Tribune photos by Ovie Carter



sion," said Fred Gardaphe, an English professor at Columbia College who wrote an essay for the book's Italian-American section. "This adds another dimension that you don't get from statistics or encyclopedias... this is kind of making the statistics talk."

The result of nearly two years' work, the book contains input from some 50 Chicago-area ethnic schol-

ars and community leaders, whose contributions were compiled by editor Cynthia Linton, an adjunct professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. The book was sponsored mainly through a grant from AT&T.

The maps—created by Phillip Beverly, a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago, who consulted with the City of Chicago's

Department of Planning and Development—spotlight ethnic neighborhoods in clear-cut, visual form.

Those who contributed to the book hope it helps chip away at long-held ethnic stereotypes. In one section of each community profile, scholars attempt to debunk the most common "myths and misconceptions" associated with their ethnic communities.

The book's target audience includes professionals in business, government, education, non-profit organizations and the media.

"I'm a businessperson, so I tend to think very businessy," said Choi-Kim, who operates a dry cleaner. "But aside from that, it promotes good will, because it encourages people to become familiar with the unfamiliar."