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Cross Cultural Internship Programme students formed new friendships and kept Dragon Boat tradition alive in New York

Celebrating its 28th anniversary, the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival in New York brings together more than 120 racing teams from the US to experience Chinese culture

By Phoebe Guan Mingyue, Hong Kong University | July 13, 2018

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Photo: CCIP

The Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival in New York, an annual sporting and multicultural event held every August on Meadow Lake in Flushing, is one of the largest dragon boat festivals in America. The festival hosts more than 120 dragon boat teams and provides visitors with a taste of traditional Chinese performances and food.

On Saturday, August 4, the festival celebrated its 28th anniversary with an opening day parade, followed by the US Dragon Boat Open Championship Race on Sunday.

More than 20 exchange interns from the Cross Cultural Internship Programme (CCIP) took part in the races and festivities, and their team t-shirts showed off the slogan, "We're all in the same boat" to highlight the programme's themes of cultural diversity and cooperation. CCIP interns are spending their summer abroad working for a range of different companies.

Dragon boat racing isn't as easy as it looks: here's what it takes to compete

All CCIP exchange visitors study at top universities in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Macau, and all attended an exchange visitor internship programme in New York with different host organisations that hosted cultural activities like the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival to bring exchange visitors and New Yorkers together for an opportunity to experience US culture at a grass-roots level.



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The paddlers showed their team spirit and determination in tight competition.
Photo: CCIP

The festival kicked off on Saturday with a race team parade and lion dance, before wrapping up with a dragon ritual.

On the water, the interns competed in four of the dragon boat races, including Saturday's Heritage Open 200m, Sunday Educational 200m, Sponsor Challenge 200m, and Media 200m. The competitors raced through the water as cheers erupted from the crowd of peers and new friends.

"When my co-coordinators and I were planning this event, we hoped it would bring us together as a community despite our cultural differences. I'm glad that after we shared thoughts with the rest of the students, many of them couldn't wait to participate," said one of the CCIP team captain and student leader Parthiban R., a graduate student from Nanyang Technological University. "I think the race showcased our unity and ability to work towards a greater goal!"

How dragon boat racing brought Leon Chan Yik-long and his dad closer together

The team was strong despite their lack of experience.

"We had to come together quickly as a team to learn how to work as though we had trained together for years," said Parthiban who is an intern at Antonio Peguero Jr, a law firm in New York City.

Back on dry land, other CCIP students volunteered to work the festival booths where different cultural activities were available. They met programme visitors, chatted with spectators, set up photo booths, and supported a Flushing YMCA initiative and fundraiser to promote health awareness.

The traditional family business of crafting a Tuen Ng festival dragon boat

Phoebe Guan, a Hong Kong University student on the Internship programme who's working at First American International Bank, participated as a group leader and helped manage the racing teams and festival booths. "I am so glad to be part of such a huge multicultural event with so many people," she said. "It was a rewarding feeling to work the booth and see every visitor leave with a big smile."



"The boat race is not so much about winning," said CCIP founder Elizabeth Kay.
Photo: CCIP

"This (Festival) did more than just bond us as a group - it allowed us to spread goodwill and gratitude to the larger community," added Aithent intern Jackson Lai, another group leader and booth manager from Hong Kong.

At the festival's end on Sunday, the students had dinner together to celebrate the weekend's collective hard work and efforts. "The boat race is not so much about winning," said CCIP founder Elizabeth Kay. "What's

important is that) students have tried their best, built friendships, and worked together to accomplish great things."

The students couldn't agree more.

Training for dragon boat race is full of the unexpected

"Our teamwork achieved great results," said co-captain Macy Chan from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Macy interns at NYC Assemblywoman



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The students couldn't agree more.

Training for dragon boat race is full of the unexpected

"Our teamwork achieved great results," said co-captain Macy Chan from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Macy interns at NYC Assemblywoman Nily Rozic's district office in Queens.

Harry Lam, another co-captain from the University of Hong Kong who's interning at New Jersey engineering firm Yu & Associates, added that "dragon boat racing is tougher than it looks! We were all new to it, but its being so hard only made the whole Festival more memorable. We started with zero experience and successfully completed the races."

"Being a co-captain on the squad really tested my leadership skills," University of Macau student Brian Song, who interns at GC Eng, an engineering firm in Manhattan, chipped in. "Not only did I have to master the boat and make instructions clear to the team, but I had to work closely with the other captains. It was a challenge, but such a great experience."

Edited by Nicole Moraleda

The best thing about a little black dress is that you can style the look up or down:

