



## On 3rd and 4th Street……

By Michael Li

It was a sultry afternoon on Penn Ave. Tents were assembled side to side on the asphalt road, hanging colorful flags and showing off vibrant signs. Not a single car passed through that street; at least not for the duration of such a special occasion. T' was the day of the Chinese Cultural Festival at the heart of Washington DC. T' was also the day for volunteers at their own tent, ready to attract passerby living in DC and outside tourists alike.

The Chinese Cultural Festival on September 2 invited dancers, singers, restaurateurs, calligraphy enthusiasts, go players, martial artists, and even the Chinese ambassador. Such

diversity in the various sub-cultures of China necessitated variety in activities and entertainment at the Festival. For one, the largest and most prominent attraction was the vivid red stage, a platform for speeches, dances (with a fair amount of acting), and songs. Numerous groups performed in traditional clothing, ready to sing tunes of their culture.

Nevertheless, hungry visitors would have to stop by for a place to eat, as this Festival was teeming with all types of cuisine. There was the iconic Peking roast duck, chicken teriyaki, la mein, beef kebabs, and even a Korean BBQ.

Additionally, there were plenty of activities too, such as

the aforementioned calligraphy and go, as well as shirt painting and statue making. Around the halfway point of the Festival, delegates took to the stage to address visitors of the festival, preceding with singers of both the Chinese and American national anthems.

All in all, the 21st annual Washington Chinese Cultural Festival represented (and will continue to represent in the years to come) the connection of cultural ties between the Americans and Chinese. By showcasing Chinese culture in the center of the US, this event bridges the gap between two unlike traditions.



## My Experience at the Chinese Cultural Festival

By Iris Li

Growing up as a Chinese-American, I always felt a bit out of place with my heritage. Not knowing the language well and feeling awkward with my appearance and food was a common struggle, and I always felt like I was too different from the Chinese kids that lived in China and were familiar with their culture. I remember the days in elementary school where I would be slightly embarrassed about my home packed lunch. While I had noodles and dumplings, the other kids had lunchables. I envied them and wished deep down that I could fit in like the rest. As I grew older and moved around to different places with my family, I could slowly feel the Chinese roots disappearing away from me. I no longer had home packed lunches, my Chinese soon got worse and I noticed myself speaking English more. As a child, I didn't mind it much, but as a teenager now I wish I had learned Chinese and appreciated my culture.

My main reason for joining the Capital Youth Outreach Club and attending the Chinese Cultural Festival in D.C. was because I needed to earn service hours for my school, but I felt that the experience might actually help me reconnect with my roots a bit more. As soon as I arrived at the festival, I could feel the spirit of the place and all the activities bring a smile to my

face as I saw all my culture being on display. I could feel the happiness and enjoyment, I loved seeing people from other cultures appreciating mine, and most of all, I loved helping out and making the festival as fun as it could be.

To begin with, my first task was to hang up flags near the tents so that visitors could recognize the stalls better and help decorate the place. Seeing all the excited faces around me with the chatter of the people as the festival filled up, brought a huge surge of excitement and enthusiasm to me. For my second task, my brother, me, and two other volunteers had to go around near a museum and inform people about the festival. I put on my best face and confidently opened my scroll with the festival information, as I talked to local people on the streets and told them about the festival. Some people looked cheerful being told about the festival, some people didn't seem to care so much, some people even walked by and said they just went, but I made sure to put as much eagerness and commitment while enlightening them. Time passed so quickly as more and more guests arrived and dances like the golden dragon dance started. My third job was to push the hordes of guests away from crowding around the dancers because even though they were yearning to get photos and as happy as I was seeing them

happy, I had to make sure the dragon got a clear path to dance and celebrate. My brother was one of the people selected to dance with the dragon, and I remember seeing him with a cheerful look as he danced around under the hot sun.

Finally, as my shift was ending and beads of sweat dripped down my neck, my final job had come. It was a fairly simple task, but quite an important one. It was to stand with the golden dragon on the red stage as the photographers got a picture. I had wanted to have an experience with the dragon, but I never imagined standing in the same places as the famous ambassadors who had come had sat. Although the moment had lasted for what seemed like a few minutes, my heart pumped as I stood with the dragon while looking at the photographers and the further view of all the visitors and merry interactions as people laughed and had fun cherishing the culture. As the minutes went by and time was soon coming to an end, my whole body filled with bubbling excitement for what was yet to come with my culture. I have learned to treasure my culture because it is filled with beautiful food, clothing, and experiences, and the Capital Youth Outreach Club and Chinese Cultural Festival have done just that.