

Chinese New Year Steamboat Dinner 2016

On the 2nd February 2016, Physoc held a free steamboat dinner in celebration of Chinese New Year. The event attracted more than 80 people, exceeding the turnout we anticipated from our online registration site. Among the attendees were dedicated staff of the Physics Department, Physics undergraduates, Physics graduate students and even some junior college students. More than a Chinese New Year celebration, it was an opportunity for juniors, seniors, colleagues to interact, exchange ideas, have fun and know each other better. Its intention, like many other Physoc programmes, is to cultivate a more bonded and cohesive physics community in NUS.

By 6.00pm, 10 steamboat pots were simmering with chicken stock and the ingredients of a hot pot meal were displayed enticingly beside the pots. A variety of catered food such as fried dumplings, fried fish balls, bee hoon and fried rice were also available to early attendees. Beverage dispensers were filled with iced green tea. Additional drink supplies and pudding desserts were kept cool in an operating mini refrigerator. With speakers wired to an amplifier, we filled the air with festive music as people started to stream in. At 6.30pm, the steamboat dinner was officially commenced.



The evening air was fragrant with the mild sweetness of a brewing broth. Conversations range from academic matters, career prospects, physics, personal stories to raw humour. A handful of freshman undergraduates were seated with their orientation camp's group leaders, catching up fervently with one another. Senior students gave earnest advice to their juniors on managing physics courses while staff members informed interested students of their research directions, discussing ongoing UROPs and FYPs.



Dedicated staff who supported the event. Top left: Dr Cindy Ng, Dr Wang Qing Hai. Top right: Tan Meng Ho, Dr Ng Wei Khim, Dr Ching Chee Leong. Bottom left: Prof. Valerio Scarani. Bottom center: Prof. Andrew Wee, Provost Chair's Professorship, Prof. Sow Chorng Haur, Head Of Department. Bottom right: Dr. Yeo Ye, Assistant Dean.

At every instance, each table varied in its choice of items in the hot pot. Some had more vegetables, some were more homogeneous and others were more meat inclined. While their conversation topics were just as varied, they were commonly peppered with laughter. In subtle ways, it resonated with the festive spirit through the willingness to connect differences. Everyone was having a good time, enjoying a meal of hot pot over laughter and chit-chat.



Physics undergraduates across all levels enjoying a hearty hot pot meal with their friends.

Below are some of the feedback we received from the participants. Each of them expressed great satisfaction towards the Chinese New Year steamboat dinner.

“The number of participants was very high... great opportunity to mingle with fellow physics majors!” – Jonathan Yeo, year 2 Physics major

“Occasionally, I see Physics lovers engaging in a deep discussion in physics with their peers or their professors. Regardless what the topic was about, every conversation I observed was sincere with kind intentions. Wildly nonsensical discussions were purposed for hilarity.” – Anonymous, year 2 Physics major

“Some of us were OGLs of the freshmen. It was nice that we could do some catching up through this event.” – Leong Jin Feng, year 3 Physics major

“I got to know my lecturers better. They have a different side to them when they are relaxed and having fun.” – Anonymous, year 1 Physics major

Towards the end, we enter Lo Hei. Lo Hei is a Cantonese phrase that roughly translates to Prosperity Toss. It is the traditional gesture shared by many of us in welcoming a new year. Central to this cultural activity is a salad dish named Yu Sheng whose literal meaning is raw fish. However, its name implies abundance and life by playing on a homonym in the Chinese language. Conventionally, the dish is served with turnips, white radish, carrots, capsicum, pomelo, shrimp crackers, peanuts, sesame seeds and various flavourful sauces. Lo Hei invites us to toss the knotted strands of the Yu Sheng, flicking it high into the air in synchrony with cheers of auspicious wishes.

We readied ourselves for the moment. On the mark of the Physoc's President announcing over the microphone, our chopsticks darted downwards in unison but passed into a chaotic flail almost immediately. Strings of Yu Sheng danced to the chorus of our wishes. Amidst the cacophony of cheers, someone yelled, "Cap 5, cap 5!" upon which more laughter broke out. It was truly a harmonious scene by one united physics department.



The diners were kindly asked to pause their meal at the steamboats and were gathered around the Lo Hei tables. We had arranged 3 tables of Yu Sheng so that around each table, people stood in circles with radius within the length of their stretched arms.

It was 9.30pm when our last diners took their leave. The event might have lasted 3 hours but it was more than 9 hours of preparation and cleaning up by the organising committee. There were also problems to be circumvented. It was no easy feat for the event to be successful as it was. I believe, however, that the committee vastly benefitted from the experience as we grew closer and matured in our perspectives. We would emerge as better planners and continue to deliver programmes targeting the welfare of the physics community.



NUS Physics Society 29th Management Committee group photo at the end of the steamboat dinner.