CEO Hong Kong Reflection Essay
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Pulling in below the low line of clouds I saw the mountains and the sea come up suddenly through my plane window. This was my first glimpse of East Asia and my initial impression of Hong Kong was one of incredulity and awe — that such an incredible city could defy physics and be built on just a few mountainous islands with almost no flat land. As my taxi took me back to our residence I marveled at the uniqueness and efficiency of Hong Kong; instantly I knew it was going to be a great summer.

Looking back on the past few months, I can without a doubt say that this was the best summer I’ve ever had. With a great mix of learning from my internship at Clifford Chance and exploring all that Hong Kong has to offer, I’m glad I could get the complete CEO experience. Which means it’s certainly worth mentioning that the CEO Hong Kong program is a wonderful experience to which I highly encourage all sophomores and juniors apply.

I worked as a summer Business Development Intern at Clifford Chance, which is a London-based international corporate law firm. With offices on six continents, it is one of the top ten law firms in the world, and the Hong Kong office is the head of the Asia-Pacific region. Being in the center of the Asia-Pacific market gave me a great glimpse of how work is done all over the continent, especially since the other Clifford Chance offices report to Hong Kong, including Singapore, Tokyo, Beijing, Australia, among others. With familiar clients such as Goldman Sachs, HSBC, and Coca Cola in the daily work I did, it was very interesting to see what major deals were going on in the rapidly expanding economy that is East Asia.

My role as Business Development intern was great to learn what goes on in the company, as I served as a conduit to the four main practice groups at Clifford Chance Hong Kong: Capital Markets, Corporate, Litigation and Dispute Resolution, and lastly Banking and Finance. The Business Development Team performs all sorts of functions to ensure that the legal services Clifford Chance gives its clients are of the highest quality. We were responsible for the pitches that attract more clients to the company, client services and products, and also PR and media communication. The Business Development Team works closely with the other Clifford Chance
offices around the world (especially London) to ensure that the services of all the offices are of a similar level and clients that work in multiple countries are receiving help from multiple Clifford Chance offices. Being a part of a global company such as Clifford Chance made me appreciate the coordination that is required from the Business Team, especially when dealing with multi-billion dollar deals.

The type of work I did had to do more with addressing how Clifford Chance is perceived and raising the standing of Clifford Chance even more than it already is in the legal world. For example, one of the projects I worked on during the length of my internship dealt with how the feedback from our clients about our services has changed over time, and if we have done sufficient work to address their concerns. I looked through feedback surveys we gave our clients after each deal and compared those to older reviews and wrote about what we did well according to clients, and where Clifford Chance Asia-Pacific has room to improve. I condensed all the material into a report that will be sent to all the company Partners in the Asia-Pacific region. I researched particular clients and competitors during my summer as well. For example, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the different types of “thought leadership” Clifford Chance provides to clients, and how that compares to our peer law forms across Asia-Pacific. Thought Leadership is the different legal advice briefings and updates law firms provide to their clients to keep them updated with current events happening around the world, such as the Greek Debt Crisis or the Chinese Stock Market collapse, both of which had a huge impact on our clients this summer. Another type of work I did helped prepare pitches to prospective clients. When preparing pitches to show the merits of Clifford Chance over our competitors for a particular deal, I was responsible for putting together the section containing awards and rankings that show the companies successes over the past few years. Among other things I also worked on organizing media lists for different practice groups of the company, helping to plan the 35th anniversary of Clifford Chance in Hong Kong, and taking detailed notes and concrete recommendations from feedback sessions with different employees on how to tailor Clifford Chance’s services better towards our clients, starting from the everyday workers and tea room helpers up to the lawyers themselves.

One of my goals for the internship was to figure out if working at a corporate law firm was something I would like to do in the future, and by extension, if applying to law school at all (as I had planned to do) was the right decision for me. After working with corporate lawyers and being a part of the company for two months, I realized that I enjoyed the type of work and the culture of a company like Clifford Chance. With a global reach, Clifford Chance’s network is one of the best in the world, and I already learned so much by working in one of the main offices.

Aside from work, living in Hong Kong was an amazing experience, and I am very grateful that Columbia was able to provide us with housing for the summer. Considering how Hong Kong real estate is some of the most expensive in the world, it would have been highly unlikely that I could’ve done this opportunity without CEO. Moreover, with the close connections between the CEO program and the Columbia Alumni Association in Hong Kong, we were able to meet so
many alumni who treated us very well. Almost every week we had an event with an alumni and it was great to meet them and hear about their experiences while they were at Columbia. From them we also learned a lot about the history of Hong Kong, and tips on how to succeed in “life” from people who had far more experience than any of us had. Whether it was Edith Shih taking us out again and again to several tourist places and her own home, Robert Meyer treating us to the China Club for brunch, or Danny Lee taking us out to a night on the city, we enjoyed the time and company of these alumni greatly. Not to mention having the alumni treat us to the Ivy Ball was quite the experience!

Exploring on my own and getting to know the other CEO interns was also half the fun. While we all worked till the evenings on weekdays, we were free on weekends to explore Hong Kong, which was a fun learning experience! Luckily the fact that most people knew English (a remnant of the British colonial days) helped us wander around even in areas we were completely unfamiliar with. We went all over, from the Street Markets of Mong Kok to the nightlife areas of Lan Kawai Fong. We even checked out some nature parks with monkeys, and the famous Big Buddha statue on Lantau Island. And it’s worth mentioning I won $1,500 HKD while gambling on a day trip to Macau, right across the river delta. And one of the most exciting things I did was to take a boat trip in Hong Kong and see some of the sights that I’ll hopefully get to see again sometime.

Without a doubt this experience through CEO Hong Kong was made my summer in 2015 in Hong Kong the best summer I’ve ever had. Not only was I able to learn a lot by working in my internship at Clifford Chance, I was also able to explore and experience “Asia’s World City,” and see Hong Kong in depth for an amazing two months in Asia. Thanks to all the alumni who treated us in Hong Kong. And a special thanks to Laura Maltz for making this experience in Hong Kong possible.