



REPORT ON THE UWC INITIATIVE AND STUDENT GOODWILL VISIT TO NORTH KOREA

AUGUST 2010



Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong

Our UWC Student Ambassadors



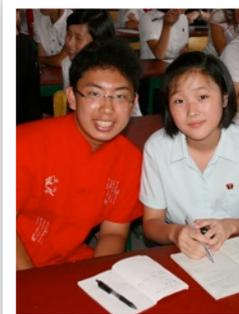
Aaron - Hong Kong



Adrian - Hong Kong



Amelia - USA



Arthur - Hong Kong



Bas - Netherlands



Ben - New Zealand



Billy - Canada



Cherry - Hong Kong



Francis - Hong Kong



Haakon - Norway



Jeany - Hong Kong



Lorenzo - Italy



Mabel - Hong Kong



Michelle - Australia



Nikolaj - Denmark



Piero - Italy



Rudy - Czech Rep.



Sophia - Hong Kong



Vincent - Germany



Winnie - Hong Kong



Ximena - Bolivia

Report on the Trip



Introduction

A group of 21 students from Li Po Chun United World College (LPCUWC) visited North Korea in August 2010, accompanied by the Principal, Dr Stephen Codrington, and his wife, Dianne. This was the sixth group of students from LPCUWC to visit North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of



Korea (DPRK) as it is officially known, previous visits having taken place in March 2005, March 2006, May-June 2007, August 2008 and August 2009.

The students who undertake the trip are selected each year upon application for their skills of diplomacy, their interest in the Korean situation (and in more general issues of peace, conflict,

socialism, the Cold War, and so on), as well as their willingness to make a substantial effort in reaching out to others, especially during the visit to the school and in relations with senior officials, whether they are from the DPRK government or NGOs such as UNICEF. This year, the group comprised 9 students from Hong Kong, 2 students from Italy, and one each from Australia, Bolivia,



Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway - and for the first time, one from the US. Given the large size of the group, the Principal's wife, Di, accompanied the Principal who led the group. This trip brought the total number of students from the College who have had the opportunity to serve as ambassadors of goodwill in North Korea to 94.

The aim of this visit was similar to that for the earlier trips - to advance the relationships previously established with DPRK schools and the Ministry of Education, and build goodwill and trust so that the way could be opened for North Korean students to attend United World Colleges in the years ahead. This long-term initiative is built on the belief that East Asia, and indeed the world, would be a more peaceful and stable place if some members of the next generation of North Korea's leadership could be educated on full scholarships in United World Colleges.

To further this primary aim of the trip, a formal written proposal to establish educational links was presented to the DPRK Ministry of Education through the UNICEF Representative in North Korea during this trip, following up on the submission presented last year which resulted in some fruitful high level negotiations between the College and DPRK officials in Hong Kong.

An important, though secondary aim of the trip was to give students at LPCUWC the opportunity to experience life in the unique society that is North Korea with a view to building a deeper understanding of peace and international issues in such a way that they might become sources of information to others

about the situation in North Korea today. The students' responses to their experiences (see later in this report) indicate that they did indeed find the experience to be mind-broadening, challenging, provocative, and in several cases, potentially life-changing.

The itinerary for this year's group was a little more ambitious than previous years, as it included a visit to Mount Paektu, regarded by Koreans from north and south as the sacred source of the Korean nation. At the summit of Mount Paektu lies Lake Chon, a beautiful deep lake that lies in a volcanic crater, and which is famous for its cold, wet weather and fog-shrouded conditions. We considered ourselves extremely fortunate as we experienced two of Mount Paektu's very rare clear, sunny days.

Mount Paektu has an almost mystical significance for Koreans, enhanced by the DPRK government's claims that the Great Leader Kim Il Sung directed the anti-Japanese struggle from a secret camp on the slopes of the mountain, and the claim that his son, the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, was born under Jong Il Peak in the secret camp in 1942. (Many western historians claim that Kim Jong Il was born in Khabarovsk, a city on the Russian side of the Russian-Chinese border).

Compared with observations made on previous trips, it was evident that there is a large amount of work underway to improve and refurbish buildings and infrastructure in the DPRK (especially in the capital city, Pyongyang) in preparation for the 100th birthday celebrations of Kim Il Sung in 2012. The quality and quantity of food and other goods in the shops seem to improve each year



also; standards of living seem notably better now than they were a few years ago when the College's North Korean initiative began, and this is despite the failed currency reform that was introduced in December 2009.

Another interesting change this year was the new awareness that everyone seems to have of the "Young General". The western media has been speculating that the 3rd Party Conference (of the Korean Worker's Party), scheduled for September 2010, will name Kim Jong Il's youngest son (Kim Jong Un - the Young General) as his designated successor. The group noticed several references to CNC (computer controlled calculations) during the visit, a reference to robotics that are said to be an initiative of the Young General. On many street corners, school children were seen playing music and singing songs glorifying the Young General. However, when we spoke with local people, they didn't even know the name of the Young General; they simply knew that he was a son of Kim Jong Il. As several people said, "we don't want to know any more about him yet because we don't want our excitement to be diminished when the big announcement is made".

One of the criticisms made by some travellers to North Korea is that visitors can only see and hear what the government wants. The College's trips try and overcome this by scheduling opportunities for free conversation (such as during the school visits) and by actively looking for ways to engage with local people (such as in Moranbong Park at a time when many local people were there to celebrate Liberation Day), as well as in other off-the-beaten-path

Itinerary for the Group

Tuesday 10th August: Fly from Beijing to Pyongyang. Introduction to Pyongyang with a visit to the Arch of Triumph.

Wednesday 11th August: Domestic flight to Samjiyon, drive to Mount Paektu, climb to the Summit and Lake Chon, and after a very late picnic lunch, visit the Secret Camp on Mount Paektu.

Thursday 12th August: Visits to the Samjiyon Grand Monument and Samjiyon Regional Museum before an afternoon flight to Pyongyang and a performance by children at the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace.

Friday 13th August: Post-breakfast meeting with UNICEF officials, followed by visits in Pyongyang including Fountain Park, the Mansudae Grand Monument (20m high statue of Kim Il Sung), Chollima Statue and large propaganda posters, the Grand People's Study House, the National Art Gallery on Kim Il Sung Square, the Foreign Languages Bookstore and the Kim Man Yu Hospital. Then, after an afternoon drive, a hike in the hills and waterfalls of Mount Myohyang.

Saturday 14th August: After a visit to the Pohyon Buddhist Temple, a tour of the International Friendship Exhibition (gifts to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il), and then a drive to Pyongyang. Upon arrival, the 1st visit to June 9th Secondary School, followed by a tour of the Victorious Fatherland War Museum and then a performance of the 'Arirang' mass gymnastics.

Sunday 15th August (Liberation Day holiday): Visit to the Kumsusan Memorial Hall (mausoleum of Kim Il Sung), followed by the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery, Kim Il Sung's birthplace at Mangyongdae, the Pyongyang Metro, the "captured US aggressive spy ship 'Pueblo'", Moranbong Park (including joining in the communal dancing with local people), the Soviet war Memorial and the Tower of the Juche Idea (including views from the top).

Monday 16th August: Drive south to the border with South Korea, visiting the DMZ and JSA at Panmunjom. After lunch and a visit to the Stamps Shop in Kaesong, a drive to Sinchon (site of a massacre of local people by invading troops in 1950), including visiting the Sinchon Museum of US War Atrocities and the site of the massacre of mothers and children. Return to Pyongyang for the 2nd visit to June 9th Secondary School.

Tuesday 17th August: Fly from Pyongyang to Beijing.



Galleries containing 735 images of the trip can be accessed at http://web.mac.com/scodrington/Site/DPRK_2010_Images/DPRK_2010_Images.html.



locations. In order to try and obtain a more formal and balanced perspective on the situation in North Korea, an in-depth post-breakfast meeting was scheduled with Mr Bijaya Rajbhandari, the UNICEF representative in the DPRK, and the Deputy Representative, Ms Zeba Tanvir Bukhari. Our discussion with Mr Rajbhandari and Ms Bukhari was informative, encouraging and frank, and provided us with very important information to understand the situation in North Korea, especially with respect to children's and women's health issues, diet and nutrition, and quality of life and environmental issues.

Among many highlights of the visit, several stand out. One was attending a performance of the 'Arirang' mass gymnastics and artistic performance in May Day Stadium. A total of 100,000 performers took part in the show, which involved 20,000 school children providing the rapidly changing backdrop, plus 80,000 dancers, gymnasts, musicians, soldiers and singers whose efforts combined to tell the story of modern Korea, from Japanese colonisation, through liberation and reconstruction and on to the future hope for reunification and peace.

Li Po Chun United World College Goodwill Initiative and Student Visit to the DPRK 2010

As with previous groups of students from the College who have visited North Korea, our visit to June 9th Secondary School (which is named after the date on which Kim Il Sung visited during the 1970s) was a highlight of our time in the DPRK. Unfortunately, however, our visit this year failed to achieve the heights of interaction and understanding experienced on previous visits.

It seems that the school's administration has discovered that school visits can be a lucrative source of foreign income, and rather than the genuinely educational exchange we have experienced in previous years, we arrived to find the school's sports fields half filled with tour buses that had brought visitors on a rapid succession of flying visits to watch a short musical program in the school hall. Unfortunately, despite the goodwill established over several years of successful visits, we were rushed through the same program, with no classroom interaction whatsoever. When the time came for our students to present their reciprocal 'thank you' performances, a large audience of Chinese tourists complained loudly, claiming that they were on a tight schedule and had come to see North Korean children performing, not to watch an international performance, forcing our students to leave the stage and the campus less than an hour after arriving.

The treatment of our group by the school was insulting and dismissive, quite the opposite of previous experiences. This left a very sour taste in the mouths of our students who had prepared performances, worn their national dress, taken gifts to present, all in the expectation of one-on-one time with buddies as in previous years.

Fortunately, some strong words to the representatives from Koryo Group, who were met by chance at the mass games and the Pueblo, resulted in a second and much more fruitful (albeit much shorter than previous years) visit to the school on the afternoon of our last day in North Korea.

The (eventual) efforts of the school's administration to accommodate our desire to build goodwill and understanding, and the personal apology from the Principal, were deeply appreciated, especially as the school's teachers and students had come in to the school during their summer holidays to welcome us. Nonetheless, the school seems to have 'lost the plot' regarding the educational purpose of our visit, and future visits should explore visiting a different school that might be more influenced by idealistic motives.

The group spent its last full day in North Korea by going to Panmunjom, the negotiating point in the centre of the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone) that divides North and South Korea. This must be one of the most extraordinary places in the world today, an active and visible reminder of the Cold War that divided the globe just a couple of decades ago. Although we visited several specific important places, such as the location of the armistice signing in 1953 and the negotiating huts that straddle the border, it was the simple experience of the tension and atmosphere of this front-line location that made the experience significant.

During the return trip to Pyongyang from Panmunjom, the group took a diversion to visit Sinchon, the site of an alleged but well documented massacre of 35,380 local people by US and allied troops during a 52 day

period in late 1950. A museum has been built to honour those who were tortured and killed, known as the Sinchon Museum of US War Atrocities. Very few foreigners visit the museum (although all DPRK students do so) on the grounds that it is considered far too explicit for general foreign tastes.

It is certainly explicit, and the message is unambiguous to say the least! Nonetheless, the visit to Sinchon highlighted the immense and practical importance of the United World College's mission statement (to make education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future). Sinchon was an example (and sadly not a unique one) the all-too-real evils of war and their terrible impact on innocent people.

For many of the students, the most moving part of the experience at Sinchon was listening to the quiet words (in Korean, but translated) of Mr Kim Myong Gum. Now an old man, Mr Kim was one of only three children who survived an incident in Wonam-ri, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Sinchon, in which just over a hundred children were herded into a brick storeroom by US troops, sprayed with petrol and set aflame. To hear the words of the first-hand testimony of a survivor of the massacre left us all stunned, humbled and speechless. It was indeed a very quiet bus ride from Sinchon back to Pyongyang as the students all tried to process what they had seen and heard.

As in previous years, this year's goodwill trip to North Korea was made possible through the generous sponsorship of the Kowloon North Rotary Club, and on behalf of the students who benefitted from the

support, I wish to express my profound thanks. Our North Korean initiative has the potential to change the political face of East Asia, and the far-sighted vision of the Kowloon North Rotary Club is deeply appreciated.

The UWC Educational Initiative

It seems clear that North Korea is opening up little by little. Compared with previous trips, there were fewer restrictions on photography, places could be visited that were previously 'off limits', and the spontaneous gestures of welcome from local people were more frequent and more heartfelt. On the other hand, the attitude of June 9th Secondary School, which we have been visiting now for five years, has become increasingly frustrating, shortening the duration of the visit each year, and for the past two years, renegeing on aspects of the visit that had been carefully and thoroughly negotiated beforehand.

There was a large amount of renovation work underway in Pyongyang in preparation for 2012 (the 100th birthday of Kim Il Sung), and although North Korea remains a strange place by the standards of everywhere else in the world, the door that has been opening slowly over the past few years seems to have creaked open a little further. This is an important point for United World Colleges, and our supporting agencies such as Rotary International, as we wish to be well known and respected within North Korea when those doors are finally open enough for a few more outsiders to penetrate.

The most important part of the task of building goodwill in North Korea is always performed by our 'student ambassadors'. This year's group of students proved to be outstanding ambassadors of goodwill everywhere they went, earning well-justified high praise from North Koreans and other foreigners alike.

It was especially pleasing this year to have the opportunity to meet and discuss North Korea's situation with MMr Bijaya Rajbhandari and Ms Zeba Tanvir Bukhari, the UNICEF representatives in North Korea. This

There is still some way to go before the first North Korean student sits down for classes in a United World College. We always recognised that the path to achieve this goal would be a long one. After all, the pathway to any new, innovative, or ground-breaking objective is never easy - if it was simple, others would have already undertaken the journey before us. Nonetheless, we can be confident that the goodwill and contacts established and nurtured on this recent journey have advanced progress on several important and significant fronts.



early morning meeting represented an excellent chance to learn about North Korea with a neutral and balanced perspective, thus helping us to place our experiences into a broader context of deeper understanding. Mr Rajbhandari's understanding of United World Colleges was deeply appreciated, as was his ready willingness to use his high level connections to present the formal written proposals we had prepared on our behalf to senior officials at the DPRK Ministry of Education.

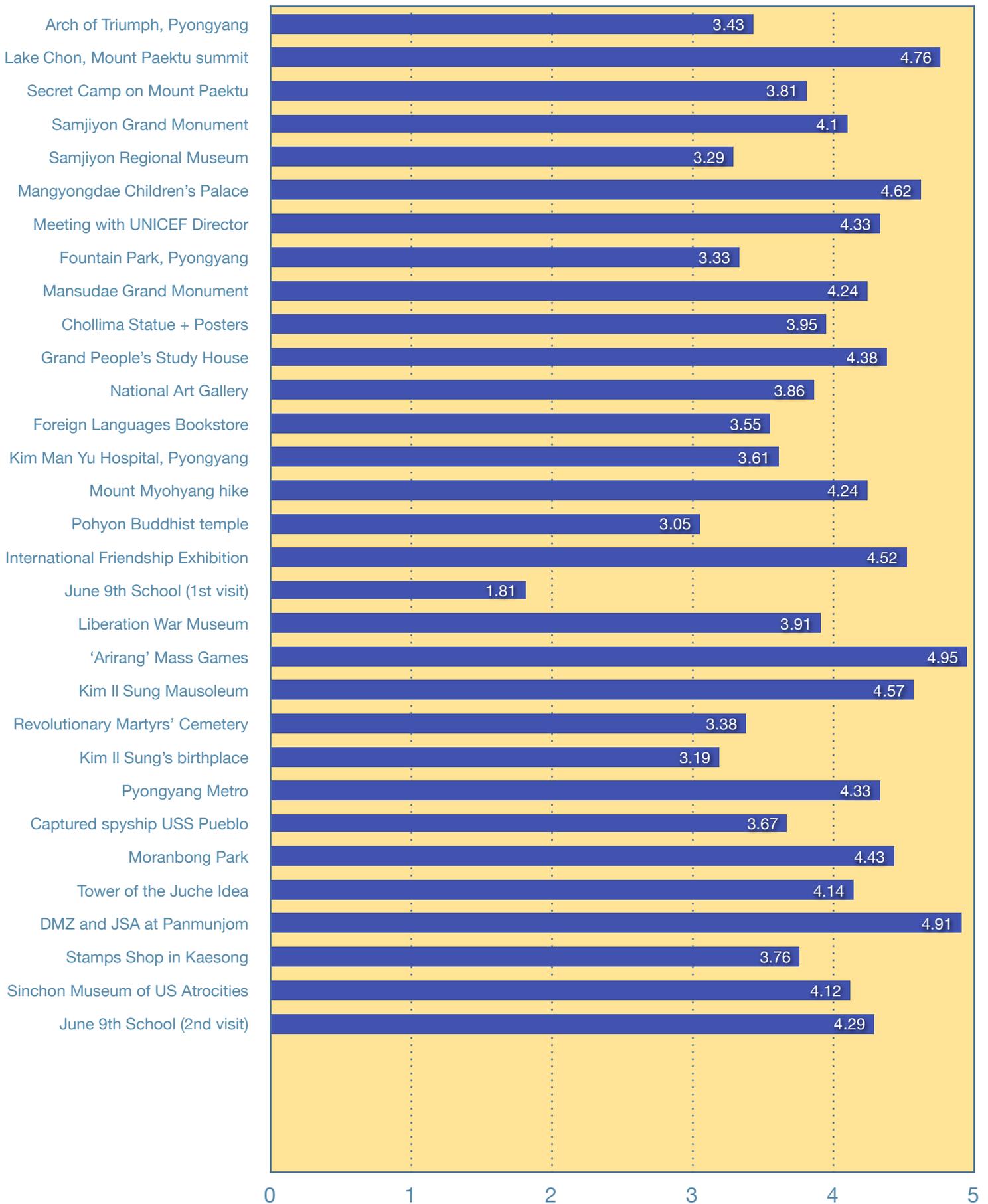
Tour Evaluation

At the end of the trip, the students were asked to evaluate their experiences of the DPRK trip using the following five-point scale:

- 1 = very poor and/or largely a waste of time
- 2 = poor and/or not very useful
- 3 = good, average, okay
- 4 = very good and/or quite useful
- 5 = excellent and/or extremely useful

The results of the tour evaluation for the individual visits are shown on the following page:

Ratings of Individual Experiences

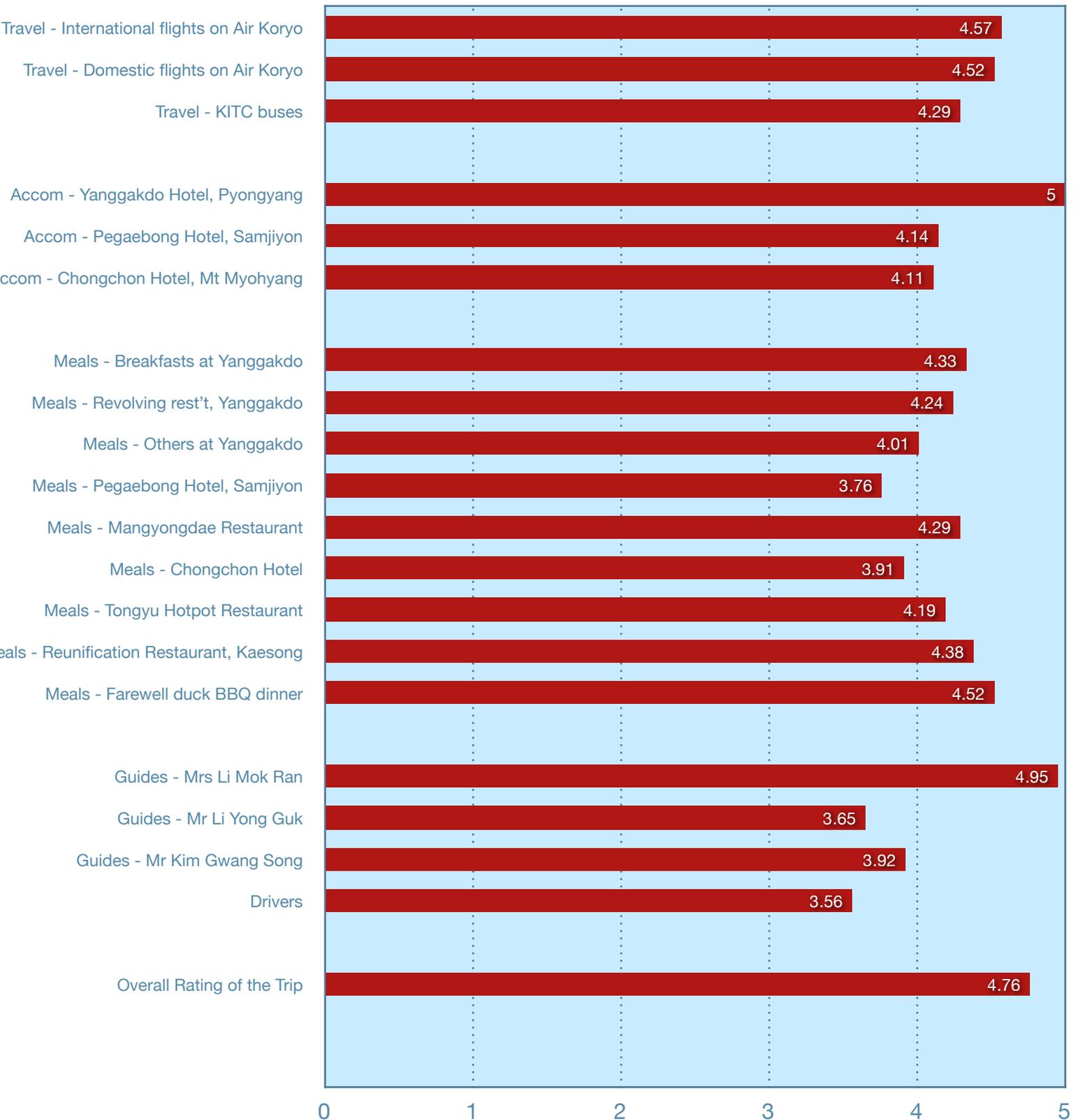


Ratings of the Trip Organisation

The same 5-point scale was used to evaluate the organisational aspects of the trip, including the travel

arrangements, guide services, accommodation and meals. An overall rating of the trip was also

obtained using the same 5-point scale. The results are shown below:



Comments by the Students

The highlight of the trip for me was ... because ...

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Arirang Mass Games because, although it was not the most important moment with regard to the aims of the trip, it was a spectacle that was unlike any I had ever seen before and was surreal in its scope and skill. Mt. Paektu and Lake Chon were also spectacular, and given their deep symbolism for the Korean people as a whole, I was ecstatic about the special privilege we received because of the trust that have been built through the various trips. Had the visit to the school been longer, it would have been the highlight of the trip, but my conversation was so cursory I was not able to receive a huge amount of information from my buddy. My most quaint highlight was our first domestic flight, given the lengthy conversation that I enjoyed with the air-hostess, a moment that gave me my most profound insights into the nature of the DPRK and its mechanisms of control."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Arirang Mass Games because North Korea is the only place on earth where such shows can be displayed, at such a massive scale, a sign of unity and determination in the training and its people. The two-hour show was filled with excitement and the history of the country, and the coordination that was involved was incomparable to anything I have previously experienced."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Arirang Mass Games because it was just absolutely amazing to see the scale of the production, and the various dances and gymnastics they were able to perform. I honestly still do not know how to adequately describe it, so I am going to say it was absolutely beyond incredible, and leave it at that."

"The highlight of the trip for me was Panmunjom. I've often heard stories about the DMZ and have experienced

many depictions of it as one of the world's most hostile and heavily armed borders. The visit completely crushed my impression. Travelling to the border from the North was a completely different experience; all the way on the bus I was looking out for tanks and anti-missile systems and military camps but my search was in vain. What's more was the comparison between the DPRK and the ROK building in the JSA (conference zone). The DPRK building was a simple structure while the ROK building was filled with dozens of CCTVs surveying every corner. Then, when visiting the actual border, many of my impressions changed further, and I began to question



the validity of the information I have received in 'the outside world'. It may seem that the threatening message that we get in the West and the South are another form of propaganda to demonise the North. I believe that the experience was the highlight of my visit because it brought together all my expectations of the trip: to question my perception of this mysterious country and to see the world in a different perspective."

"The highlight of the trip for me was Lake Chon at the summit of Mount Paektu because I was amazed at the beauty of the landscape around Samjiyon. One thing that struck me while travelling there was just how undeveloped the DPRK is in comparison to so many other countries in the world, and how this has allowed nature to remain in a near pristine condition. This journey was also very rewarding because it allowed me to

see an entirely different system of biodiversity and ecosystems to those we have back home while also being able to view pine forests in their natural environment compared to our exotic forests back home. I also really enjoyed being able to interact with the university students who happened to be up Mt Paektu at the same time as us. It was also very relaxing to have the picnic on the small grassy plains surrounded by nature and joining the guides in picking blueberries."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Mass Games because it was the most spectacular thing I had ever seen. Furthermore, it captures all aspects of socialism/communism, the way they look up to the leaders and the history in one show."

"The highlight of the trip for me was dancing in Moranbong Park with local people because I felt that it was a less staged experience that allowed us to peer behind the façade of North Korea."

"The highlight of the trip for me was 'Arirang' mass gymnastics and artistic performance, and also the school visit, because the mass games are shockingly spectacular. I used to think the Beijing Olympics Games opening ceremony was the most stunning performance I have ever watched until I saw the mass games. Before the mass games started, I was very convinced that the show would not be possible due to the pouring heavy rain. Surprisingly, the rain stopped as we arrived at the stadium and luckily the show went on. Apart from being amazed by the North Koreans' efficiency in drying up the floor for the performance, I was also very touched by their determination to put up the best show for the audience. I tend to attribute the success of the performance to the people who made their best effort, in spite of all the difficulties, to make a great impression for their country."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the 'Arirang' mass games because there are many analogues between the mass games and the Open Ceremony in Beijing"

Olympics : big , mechanistic and impressive performance which involves lots of people, including actors and soldiers with a high degree of discipline. Although the show was held in the big stadium with unpredictable weather, I was so amazed that the highly trained schoolchildren could change the slides and create a huge moving pictures / patterns in such a coherent manner.

From the large scale of this mass games, I really felt the effort that the government had put into this event. As mentioned by the Principal, there was a significant difference in this year's performance compared with previous years. This year, there was a scene specially dedicated to China. This indicates the growing influence by China and the strategic alliance between the two countries. An interesting point to note is that North Korea has its own uniqueness in the leadership succession plan by direct appointment, rather than open election in the West."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Arirang Mass Games because it was not just a truly amazing performance to watch, but it showed the great ability of humans living in a communistic society. The show was incredible, with the 100,000 performers doing an excellent, synchronised job, and the backboard completing the tremendous show to make it even greater. It is truly amazing how good it looks when so many people perform together, and not just simple dancing, but advanced choreography and breathtaking stunts that kept the crowd astonished. The games represented a true symbol of DPRK society and way of life, as everyone works together to achieve the goals set out for the people. I will never forget the 2 hours the show lasted, and time flew by so fast that I could not wait to buy the DVD. Together with many other highlights of the trip, such as Mt Paektu, Kim Il-Sung's mausoleum, the school visit etc, the trip and my experiences from it were amazing and will always stay with me."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the visit to Mount Paektu because I was completely stunned and impressed by the incredible natural landscape of the area. It was indeed a great privilege to be able to visit such an astonishing, unique gift of the nature – let alone its political and spiritual importance to North Koreans. We were really lucky to have a fine day for the visit, which gave us the best face of Mount Paektu. The conversation we had with the local students we met gave me further insight and understanding of North Korean people as ordinary citizens. It was a precious opportunity for us to truly get to know how and what a normal North Korean thinks and reacts to. To the



surprise of most of us, they were really friendly, accommodating and enthusiastic. In addition, the stair-walk from the peak to the lake we took was very good exercise that helped refresh one's mind and body for the rest of the trip."

"The highlight of the trip for me was talking to the guides, including sometimes not during their official work time. This helped to build a relationship of true friendship, and an understanding that people in North Korea are not so different from people in the rest of the world, despite the things we sometimes hear in the media. As Mr Li said outside the stamps shop in Kaesong: knowledge comes from the understanding of different sources, because the more you understand the more you know."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the interaction with the people in DPRK such as the UNICEF officials, guides and local students because ... through interacting with them I understood not only the physical appearance of Pyongyang and but also the daily lives of people living in DPRK. My knowledge of the DPRK went beyond the site visits in Pyongyang. I still recall the meeting we had with the UNICEF officials, in which we had the chance to ask them questions that are related to other provinces of DPRK and the people's livelihood there. If I had not had the chance of asking them these questions, I am pretty sure, I would just leave DPRK like any other tourists, with the thought that DPRK (especially Pyongyang) is a very tidy and developed country in its way. Furthermore, by talking to the guides, I came to understand how the Juche idea has shaped the lives of students and people in DPRK. I understand that North Koreans are living in another world and views of North Korea in other countries may be very biased and subjective."

"I've always seen art as something that, throughout history, has been an indicator of cultural and social development, but that the whole DPRK system has managed to even penetrate artistic development. This was something that I found to be especially eye-opening, and on the whole the art gallery visit stood out from the other visits which were more similar in nature. While it wasn't as amusing/shocking as other strongly worded propaganda filled museums, to me it showed the much deeper effect on people's psyche that the North Korean system has had."

"I think I was hardwired for expecting propaganda, especially after all the movies/documentaries I watched beforehand, and so for the most part I was unimpressed by them. The hospital trip, though, was especially interesting because it clearly displayed a contradiction between what we were being told and the apparent reality. I felt for the first time, seeing all the empty beds while being introduced to outdated

machinery, that everything there was all being prepared just for our visit, and that was a bizarre and scary feeling."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Arirang mass gymnastics and artistic performances because it was one of the most impressive events I have ever attended. Furthermore, it gave an interesting and different insight into the Korean culture."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the possibility to interact with North Korean people, because I was not expecting they would have so much interest in discussing things with foreigners and exchanging ideas so freely."

"The highlight of the trip for me was learning to play "Koryon". Although probably not one of the most spectacular events during the trip, learning to play and sing a traditional Korean song from Mr Kim was a highlight for me. Learning to sing the song in Korean, learning the chords and melody, was one of the best cultural interactions of the trip, as I felt that Mr Kim and the other guide really felt like they were giving me part of their culture, something they were proud of. What was even more fascinating was how much effort Mr Kim took in explaining the lyrics of the song, eventually calling Mr Li over to help with translation. Later, I was then able to myself teach Mr Kim a Czech song on the guitar as well. Although I know it is just a simple joy of playing a song with each other throughout the trip, singing and playing "Koryon" in Korean in North Korea was something I never imagined I'd do in my life! For this reason, it was definitely one of the highlights of the trip for me."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the mass games because it was amazing to see the huge backdrop being controlled by the school kids. It was overwhelming because I have never seen such a huge scene which requires such a high degree of cooperation and sophisticated skills.

The performance was wonderful and of a really high standard. The North Korean idea of conformity was highlighted by how synchronised their movements or steps were. What also amazed me was how some ordinary people can be trained as professional performers. As Mrs Li said, most of them are farmers or workers and students. It was indeed one of the most unforgettable performances I have ever seen in my whole life."

"The highlight of the trip for me was Lake Chon, because seeing the majestic view over the mountain was very beautiful. I liked the balance of sightseeing and activities such as hiking."



"The highlight for me was the mass games performance because it was stunning to see a hundred thousand people performing together and their uniform motions in high spirit."

"This trip has made me comprehend in a larger way the nature of the lives and beliefs of the Korean people. It has been a very valuable trip because we didn't only have the opportunity to enlarge our perspectives when referring to North Korea and the mystery of the country, but also we were able to have a real impact on the Korean children, showing them a little bit of what the rest of the world has to offer as well."

The main thing that was different to what I had expected was ...

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that I had to challenge my prejudices and accept that the country, or at least our experience, was not as restrictive as we thought, nor were most of the services under-developed. I was extremely impressed by the hospitality offered to us by our hosts and the efficiency of the schedule, but I really was surprised to see Pyongyang as developed as it was. Although the UNICEF talk provided some much needed perspective, I was really impressed by the beauty of several parts of the city."

"The DPRK was more open than I had expected, an expectation much affected by the portrayal of the country by Western media, and we had greater personal freedoms than I first thought we would have. We had opportunities to interact directly with local people, during our visits to sites (e.g. with the air hostess and with the students at Lake Chon), as well as seeing the scenes on the street through walking along the street from the Kim Il-sung Square to the Foreign Languages Bookstore. On top of that, the visit to the school and our exchange with buddies at the school, as well as our dialogues and questions to our guides, were great ways to learn about the lives of people living in North Korea - which I thought we would not have the chance to."

"It was an encouraging sight that I did not expect to see lights of public housing mostly lit at night, which is a sign of these families living in acceptable conditions and contrary to the portrayal of the 'dark dead city' in the media."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was how well-informed the people seemed to be. It was difficult to tell exactly what they had been told, or what they actually thought, but they were much more up-to-date on current events than I expected, and perhaps a bit less outwardly or openly conveying the same attitudes that are always presented in the media, or at least

in American media. Aside from that, I honestly wasn't sure what to expect – all the coverage of North Korea is very negative in the USA, so that was the only real impression I had, and it was not entirely accurate."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the extent of security imposed on us. Before the trip I expected many restrictions in photo-taking and walking. I expected that my every step, every line and every move was to be monitored by a department of spies. The first impression when I got off the plane was "Where are all the soldiers?" In fact, the government scrutiny was not the most severe that I have experienced. For example, there were jeeps following every bus when I was travelling to Abu Simbel in Egypt. I still remember uncovering every corner of my room in the hotel hoping to find some sort of bug or hidden camera. Of course, this could be just because they were too well hidden. But on second thought, I see no particular reason why they should monitor us so closely. After all, we're just harmless students. Furthermore, I was caught off guard finding the many similarities between life in DPRK and ours. The first day I was surprised to find many foreign electrical appliances, I still remembered taking pictures of the Hitachi TV screen after arriving at the airport, thinking that this was probably the most significant discovery. I also remember the thrill and the shock when I discovered a girl wearing D&G glasses and a boy wearing Nike shoes. After all, aren't these products of the American Imperialists? However as I began to understand more about the country, I discovered that not only were imports allowed, but they were sold openly by government stores. The wages were also in the form of money, as opposed to the rationing system that many would expect in a Stalinist system. Our guide also told us about an incentive system, with the example of a Plasma TV being awarded to her neighbour! Perhaps this sheds light and clears many

of our misconceptions regarding the country. I also wasn't expecting the outgoingness and the openness of the guides and the people I met in the DPRK. Residents of a Stalinist country, in my expectations, always seemed like robots which were reluctant to communicate with the outside world. However, I was surprised to find that our guides and the students we met were very open in discussing all sorts of things, from food to wine, to more serious issues about the diplomatic and the economic policies of the country. Furthermore, they were willing to listen to our side of the story, and many times showed a certain critical attitude towards their own government.



For example, the English class was learning the phrase "Nowadays, food is getting more and more expensive." When I asked the guide about it, he frankly told me about the inflation problem. Although there wasn't a grudge against the government, I was surprised that he spoke openly about the problem, and furthermore that the complaint was echoed by the other guides as well."

"Despite the fact that the DPRK has a very different political system than ours, we should not reject every aspect of it and regard it as a pure form of tyranny. Apparently, it's not that simple. Even if Pyongyang is the best city where all resources are centered in North Korea, the fact that people are living decent lives in the city proves that the system is at least working for the 2 million people residing in the city. My expectations

were too one-sided and I was glad to see more faces of this mysterious country that appeared to be stuck in time."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that the things that we saw were quite nice. After reading and hearing all the stories I expected it to be less 'nice' in North Korea. Of course I know that we did not see things that they didn't want us to see, but that's the same anywhere."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was how much freedom we were granted. Before going on the trip to North Korea I had the impression that our rights would be restricted considerably but I did not recognise this occurring very significantly throughout the trip. While there were some limitations such as not being able to walk the streets of Pyongyang alone, by the time we got back to the hotel there would have been no time to do so. We were free to take photos of nearly anything we wanted; the guides were more than happy to answer all my questions, we even had the opportunities to go off and explore on our own freewill while staying at the Pegaebong Hotel."

"North Korea was actually more normal than I had expected. Everything I had heard about it was true, but the people were surprisingly open and life less strange than I expected. More importantly, the guides were extremely helpful and more transparent than I expected. They really added to the trip. In general, it suffices to say that the experiences of journalists and others who are public about their experiences in North Korea have quite different experiences from those who experienced it the way we did. I was also surprised by how seldom I seemed to be lied to. For such a closed country, the information may have been extremely biased, but not necessarily untrue."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was our accommodation and meals, and also the

knowledge base of our tour guides. Although I guess we were only showed the best side of the country, I am still impressed by the unexpectedly good service at the hotel. Also, the tour guides were more than willing to answer our inquiries, which effectively helped us to get first-hand information about the living over there. Although sometimes they avoided the sensitive questions, they were able and willing to provide satisfactory answers at most circumstances."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the friendliness of the people. Before I come to North Korea, I thought North Korea was a country full of lies and all the relationships between people are fake. However, our relationships with the guides and the students showed that with time and trust, understandings could be developed. During the trip, I had the chance to get to know North Korea first hands. You may not hear the entire truth, but you can feel the friendliness from them. They really want you know more about their home country and they are willing to explain to you whatever problems you mention to them. After the trip, I feel I know a lot more about the lives of people in North Korea. We even played table tennis with local people in the hotel. We drank together and I felt the bond between the guide and us."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that the restrictions were not as tight as I had imagined. I expected almost the whole country to be sealed off and unavailable to visitors, but I soon figured out that this was not the truth. We were assigned places we could go, and three guides were set up to "guide" us, as well as keeping us well inside the restrictions given by the government, but I did not feel a great sense of limitation, at least not as big as I had imagined. Maybe I just got used to the way of visiting the DPRK, where everything was set up by the guides. However, the DPRK contrasted

with my expectations, as I expected to be more cut off from the local population, and not be able to stroll on the streets etc. I understand, though, that things may have been improved for the better for our student groups over the years because of previous groups' good behaviour."

"The openness of DPRK – we were absolutely fortunate and privileged to have the opportunities to chat with ordinary Korean people, and I had not expected that. On top of their friendliness, most of the people we met were open-minded enough to respect – while disagree with – our somewhat-challenging questions, and tried to come



up with an answer. For example, a flight attendant was asked if she found the idea of Juche and socialism contradictory to each other. Despite our opposing points of view, the lady politely yet firmly restated her stance, explaining the general perception of North Korean people on this issue. I learnt that dictatorship in North Korea is not equivalent to absolute control and censorship – challenges are welcome, they are happy to show you the great picture of the ideals of their fatherland."

"People's behaviour towards us - Before the trip, I thought they might be extremely closed on certain topics or cold in their behaviour with us. Instead I found them extremely happy to share with us their thoughts and answering any almost any kind of question that was not a direct criticism to the leadership. Another thing that surprised me was

how two of the guides welcomed me and some others students to stay with them in their rest time, and just relax."

"I thought there would be a lot of restrictions with whatever we tried to do and that people there weren't going to be very friendly. However, the guides and people were very lenient and nice to us. Also, communication with North Koreans wasn't as difficult as I had expected, and therefore I enjoyed talking, learning and interacting with local people. "

"What I saw was completely different to what I had in mind, even though I didn't know what to expect - if that makes any sense. I was prepared to be surprised by the absurd, but I was instead shocked by apparent normality. More than anything, I was surprised to find my first impressions of the country to be overwhelmingly "normal", and this probably spoke to me more about my own pre-conceived perceptions than anything else. Even though I didn't know what to expect, to witness these people, living in what I call the most bizarre country in the world, doing normal stuff – like walking to work, lining up on the bus, was actually surreal."

"We were much less restricted than I had expected. I think that we were given quite a lot of freedom to take pictures and ask questions, which I think allowed me to get a better understanding of the guides and the life of Koreans in general."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the school meeting, because it was completely impossible to communicate with the students. Moreover, the visit looked completely over-organised for us."

"To be perfectly honest, the majority of the preconceived ideas I had about North Korea turned out to be wrong. However, if I were to focus on one specific realisation, it must be when I understood the way the people of North Korea (at

least those we met) viewed their country and the situation they live in. Before leaving on the trip, I talked heavily with my father about how he viewed the communist regime in the Czech Republic. One thing that he said struck me; he said, "Although the message given by the government was strong, everybody knew that it was false and disagreed with it." I arrived thinking this would be the same for North Korea. However, upon interacting with the people, I believe that this was not always the case. There is a definite mis-information and lack of information in North Korea. However, I do not think people are completely unaware that some of their freedoms are restricted. Even so, many of them seem to be content with the way they live their life. I was talking to Mrs Li, and she was telling me about her visit to Malaysia, a relatively capitalist nation. After seeing the reality of that sort of system, she still said that she felt that her home offered her better security and a more comfortable life, something she couldn't get in a purely capitalist system. Another example was a person who was definitely not oblivious to at least some truth of the outside world but still had faith in the North Korean system, our guide Mr Li. Mr. Li was able to travel around Europe at a young age due to his parents' work - even though he had seen this other reality, when I asked him about North Korean reunification, he still believed that apart from people going south, some citizens would still come from South Korea to live in North Korea. It is difficult to say how much of what the guides were saying was what they believed in and how representative this was of the Korean population; either way, what I saw and they said was not only really different to what I expected, but also really made me question what we as humans see as priorities towards reaching happiness."

"The school visits were very different to what I had expected because I thought there would be many more chances to get closer to the school students in North Korea. It turned out we had to hurry, and

we skipped the lesson that had been originally planned. Fortunately, we eventually had the opportunity to be involved in an English class and get to talk to our buddies. It was a fresh and new experience. However, partly because of my overrated expectation, the duration was very short. I expected more interactions with the students to bring them new perspectives and experiences with foreigners. I understand the difficulties because of the restrictions, but it would be a lot better if the lesson could be longer and a little bit more in-depth."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the attitude of



the majority of people we met randomly. In contrast to my expectations everybody was very polite and usually also very friendly."

"The propaganda element was not as omnipresent as I thought it would be. It is true that it appears a lot but it was shown mainly in posters, books and magazines. However from daily conversation, DPRK citizens seem to reflect less patriotism that I thought they would. They did not mention a lot about the achievements of the Great Leaders, but rather focussed on their society, the cities and the people."

"When I first applied to join the trip, I had very limited knowledge about North Korea, its leaders, culture and beliefs. As we prepared for the trip through the different meetings before the summer vacation that were organised by Dr

Codrington, we started having more sense of what we were going to see or what was going to happen. But for sure, nothing compares to the sensation of being there and experiencing it. So I have to admit that as a whole, the trip to DPRK exceeded my expectations in every single way possible. Starting with all the different locations that were shown to us, being able to talk directly with the people and listening to their points of view about their lives (which are a completely different world from ours), learning about their culture through food and all the details that were involved in the organisation of the trip were greatly appreciated."

I will never forget ...

"I will never forget the Arirang Mass Games, for the same reason as I mentioned before. The symbolism, although rather overt and pronounced, was poignant, and the idea of 100,000 people uniting to become one huge, organic mass, stressing the collective over the individual, was actually quite moving. The triumph of the human spirit and the production of a completely seamless and visually stunning show was definitely something I will not be able to forget."

"I will never forget the breathtaking sight of twenty thousand schoolchildren flipping their books as backdrop of the Arirang Mass Games on top of the other eighty thousand who participated in the night's performance, where all their actions were synchronised in such vast scale. The performance of the event and the storyline that was behind the entire evening was unforgettable because of the sheer scale of the event, not to mention it's happening three times a week for three months - simply astonishing. Apart from the Arirang Mass Games, I'll never forget the well-kept natural 'secret' of Lake Chon in Mount Paektu, the sheer volume of the gifts presented to the President and the Dear Leader kept at the International Friendship Exhibition as well as the experience stepping into the negotiation

huts in the Panmunjom Conference Area within the DMZ. There were all experiences that were highly unforgettable."

"I will never forget any of the trip, really. Just the fact that I was able to go to the DPRK still amazes me. But I think the most memorable experience would have to be the Mass Games. I had never seen anything like it. Even the World Cup doesn't quite compare."

"I will never forget Arirang games. It was simply mind-blowing. North Korea's so-called "single-minded unity" was indeed shown at its best during the show. The warm-up of the backdrop, comprising 20,000 children, was already a spectacle on its own, but it only served as an appetiser for the show. Each scene comprised of 2,000 or more performers, all performing the same move at the same time with the same style. Not only was it a spectacular show, but its messages were also highly significant. One could see why such shows are important, for they demonstrate the power of the state and the people. The unity also helps with the conveying of messages. Interestingly, it is much easier to follow a crowd than an individual. One tends to mimic the surrounding crowd and the same logic applied in this case. Many times I was moved by the Mass Games, and for a certain moment even believed in the greatness of the DPRK government. This can only be achieved by actually being in the Stadium and experiencing the Mass Games. If North Korea is a state that specialises in propaganda, then this must be the most unforgettable example of all."

"I will never forget interacting with a North Korean boy (about 5 years old) while the majority of our party were dancing at Moranbong Park. I joined the boy in studying the contents of the nearby pond where we watched tadpoles, collected snails and pulled pieces of cardboard from the water. Even though the interaction was without words, I

found it really interesting to join the kid in discovering the mysteries of the pond. We then proceeded to look at a spiders web before I showed him how to use my camera and to take photos which fascinated him."

"Once again, it is the mass games that I must mention. But also the conversation we had with the flight attendant on our domestic flight. It was very interesting to hear from someone else how they saw the situation in North Korea."

"I will never forget - too many experiences to record!"



"I will never forget the Children's palace, Mr Kim playing the guitar, "I cannot express what I think of Americans", dancing in the park with old ladies, etc."

"The most memorable parts were the small things that happened on the way, not the sights in particular. For example, going to the Buddhist temple was not particularly extraordinary, but learning about religion's role in North Korean society was."

"I will never forget the school visit. I am also very glad that we had the chance to visit the school for a second time. Although it was somehow frustrating that we failed to interact with the students on the first visit, I have actually learnt a precious lesson from that experience. Flaws in their education concepts were explicitly exposed, as well as their failure to offer the students a

great opportunity to interact with the outside world. The North Korean teachers simply treated their students as money-spinners. I could also understand the poor economic situation of the school from this unfortunate encounter. Fortunately, we got another chance to really have our buddies and a taste of their English lesson. The interaction turned out to be great as the standard of English of my buddy turned out to be better than I had expected. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity to have direct contact with the teens in North Korea. Besides that, I am extremely glad that I had a chance to play table tennis with the North Korean

guides and the local citizens at the hotel. Through sport, although we could not communicate very well, I could actually feel the hospitality of the locals. Apart from the Arirang mass games, the table tennis exchange was the second most precious experience in which I could feel the strong sense of ambition of citizens there.

Although they were not very skilful, they were extremely serious about the game and even asked us to discuss the skills with them. The exchange narrowed the distance between the guide and me which successfully paved the way for a friendly chat in the later days of the trip. Mr Kim was extremely open-minded after our "ping-pong diplomacy", and he told me many detailed things about his daily life, and this became the most valuable asset of this trip."

"I will never forget how amazed I was to find that one of the guides knew about 'tax'. We are talking about economics one day. I thought that the guide would not know about the concept of tax or income re-distribution, which is relatively a socialist idea. Indeed, under the leadership, information about the West was blocked, filtered or even distorted. All educational literature is carefully screened, and is taught in a way that tries to 'normalise' people's thoughts, manage their thinking and control their living. With reference to my enquiries in the area of the concept of law and its enforcement,

the guide said that North Korea only had five areas of law. It is my observation that the courts or solicitors may not exist at all. Not surprisingly, the Government had high control of people's living and thinking under the rule of senior government officials, rather than the rule of law in the West."

"I will never forget how Mr Kim recommended to me the book "The US Imperialists Started the Korean War." It was at the Samjiyon Regional Museum that he told me about it, after I was considering buying some books. What he said stands out to me as representative of the people of DPRK, as they fully believe that the Americans started the Korean war, but also larger matters, such as their unbounded belief in the two dear leaders."

"I will never forget the stirring sensations I felt when watching the Mass Games (Arirang): it was not just a performance, or a piece of art – it was a ceremony of a belief and religion. It was a huge production found nowhere else in the planet, which involved thousands of people fully dedicated to each scene and every single detail: the synchronisation, the movements, the flawless flow, the beaming faces... It was a masterpiece of absolute patriotism and the finest skills. The unity and quality of the performance expressed in Arirang are no doubt living proof of the success within the DPRK of the promotion of personality cults of the Kims. In addition, I was surprised and flattered by the newly choreographed Korean-Chinese friendship scene in the Mass Games. Despite the pleasing and entertaining performances, it was also interesting and thought-provoking to study the political value behind the vibrant movements of dancers and the colourful backdrop."

"I will never forget the (second) visit to June 9th school on Monday the 16th when we actually met students. The buddy to whom I was allocated was so curious about me, as I was about her, that we spent all the time chatting and I was

sorry for not being able to spend more time with her. Unfortunately not even talking over the teacher's voice worked and I think she still has a lot of questions to ask me, and I definitely have many to ask her."

"I will never forget the mass games. The mass games were indeed as good as expected, but I was amazed by the scene about the friendship of China and North Korea. It may subtly hint at the plans North Korea's leaders have in mind about the new leaders of North Korea. Other than that, I am amazed by how united and uniformed their performance was. It strongly beholds the image and idea of nationalism, in which all is one.



This is indeed a very interesting and new concept to me as I never thought any country could perform such unified acts, and when I got to see it in the stadium, the view was just breathtaking. On another note, I will never forget the smile on my buddy's face. She looked so innocent and mature. She was very sweet and kept praising me for the performances. We shared stories about our families and school life. The time flew so quickly while we were chatting and enjoying this intimacy between us. Another thing that I will not forget is the way Pyongyang is developed. The Juche idea has allowed North Korea to be developed in the way that is different from every other country. It is shocking to see that mobile phones were prohibited till last year and that no internet access is allowed. All North Koreans share the same enemy - the

United States. Where is their freedom of speech?"

"I will never forget the moment when the two male guides opened up to us. With Mr Kim, that was during the bus ride back from Mt Paekdu when he picked up the guitar and started singing and playing for us. With Mr Li, that was during the hike up Mt Myohyang when I stopped with Billy to go for a swim. He started telling us about his childhood overseas and I was very surprised to learn that he had seen so many foreign film classics."

"I will never forget talking with Mrs Li about how marriage customs have changed over the years."

"I will never forget being picked up by a bus with Billy when we tried to go for a walk to the village at the Mt Myohyang hotel."

"I will never forget our guides (especially Mrs Li and Mr Kim). As mentioned, I think that they did a great job, not only helping us as visitors, but also allowing us to understand their culture and living a bit better. Even though Mrs Li was the most dominant of the three guides, I think that Mr Kim was exceptionally keen to talk about

issues concerning Korea and the rest of the world, and it is my impression that not only I, but also many other students, had some insightful discussions with him. Since the guides were the main people we really had the chance to talk to, the fact that they were so open and welcoming made a huge difference to the trip."

"I will never forget the flight attendants on the internal flight operated by Air Koryo."

"There are many experiences from the trip that are truly unforgettable, but I wouldn't be doing the question justice if I didn't mention the performance at the Children's Palace, the DMZ, and an article in the Pyongyang Times (referring to a South Korea government official)

titled "A Bastard of Unknown Nationality". However, if there is something that sticks out in my mind and that I will never forget, it is what Mr Kim said to me when I was having a discussion with him on the very last night of the trip. We were comparing our two countries, North Korea and the Czech Republic. We were getting quite passionate about the differences, arguing which system worked best, when suddenly Mr Kim said to me, "I respect you because you love your country." For me, what Mr Kim said had an incredibly strong impact; at a personal level it was quite touching to see our guide, coming from North Korea, see past the differences of the two systems. However, more importantly, it was the first time that I not only realised, but really felt, that on the fundamental human level, the nationalistic element in North Korea is less of a hatred towards the Japanese and the US, and more of a love for Korea as a nation; Mr Kim's respect towards the similar love I have for my country was a testimonial to this."

"I will never forget the beautiful and breath-taking scenery I saw at the peak of Mount Paektu. As a citizen in Hong Kong where lands are limited and crowded with seven million people, I have never seen any lakes or natural scenery that were as impressive as the view I saw from the top of the mountain. It was even more rewarding after climbing up and sweating all over the body."

"I will never forget the Arirang Mass Gymnastics performance."

"I will never forget the hug that my buddy gave me at the end of our visit to the school. Even though her English was not sufficient for us to exchange ideas fluently in both ways, I could feel her sincerity when she smiled, thinking so hard to find the right word to express her idea. I really wish the communication could have continued so that we would have been able to inspire her or learn more from her."

"I will never forget the Mass Games, which have been and will forever be the largest and most spectacular example of perfection and discipline that I have ever seen. I believe that in this case words are just not adequate and not really useful, because what we were able to see that night was just indescribable."

The worst thing about the trip was ...

"The worst thing about the trip was, personally, the food. Perhaps it was because I was a vegetarian or that I am simply a picky eater but the food was not



particularly appetising. However, I was warned by Alice (who went there as a student last year), so I made the appropriate provisions."

"In general, I felt that the time we had at each spot (e.g. the Victorious Fatherland Liberation Museum, the Art Gallery and the International Friendship Exhibition) was insufficient as we were sort of rushed through a small proportion of the exhibits. At the same time, a richer programme perhaps can be arranged for our second day in the Mount Paektu region as Day 3 was a little light in terms of the programme compared to the other days. If some of these visits can be distributed more evenly, it might be of greater convenience for our visits."

"The worst thing about the trip was probably the first time we tried to visit the school. It was frustrating and

embarrassing to be told to leave like that, and to be denied the opportunity to talk with the students. I am really glad we got to return, in order to rectify this."

"I was about to say that the worst thing about the trip was the first school visit, as it was a pretty bad experience. But after reflecting on it, I believe that it was an invaluable lesson. This is because we were at least able to discover that the school was being used as a tourist attraction and the performance of the children seen as a sort of way to raise funds. In fact, the whole experience was very meaningful and I really believe that there was always something to learn so long as you open your eyes and ears and keep an open mind. Even the long journeys were very meaningful, I would say, because it provided us with a very genuine and wider picture of life in North Korea. We were able to see people at work, what villages were like, power cables, gas stations as well as other utilities. So frankly, I don't think there is much to complain about in the trip. Though I do believe that certain attractions were more meaningful than others, I have indicated these in the survey preferences above."

"The worst thing was the first school visit and the disappointment of that day. But of course, that was beyond anyone's organising power. Such things can happen, but are a pity."

"The worst thing about the trip was the first visit to the June 9th school. I was really excited about having the opportunity to interact with the schoolchildren and show our performances. However the school turned out to be just a big money earner. To be rushed through the school like cattle, sit through their performance with other tourists and then have our entire performance cut down to 3 pieces was very disappointing. It was very disorganised, and it was also saddening to see the Chinese tourists walking out of the hall during our performances. We then missed out on giving our gifts and

meeting the students, which I found very disappointing. It made it quite difficult for us to return to the school with the same goodwill the second time."

"The food was very repetitive, but I wouldn't expect much better. I don't have any serious complaints."

"The worst thing about the trip was the fact that some students got a bit sick during the trip. The hiking section had posed some difficulties on Sophia and me as we were suffering from asthma. However, we managed to overcome this difficulty and enjoy the picturesque view up the mountain."

"The worst thing about the trip was the 1st school visit. We had prepared well for several days, and we were very much looking forward to showing our performances to the local students, but we were then told to leave by the school during the performance due to misunderstandings and a too tight time schedule. I think everyone were quite depressed after the visit. However, the performance they gave us was nice to see, but the equally significant point for us, I believe, was that we wanted to show ourselves to them, as well as participate in an English class. Finally, with the 2nd school visit, we managed to do so, and it turned out to be in amazingly great contrast to the 1st visit."

"The first visit to June 9th Secondary School was for sure the worst part of the trip. Interacting with local students was one of the emphases of the goodwill trip. However, with the cancelation of the first-hand lesson, we could not have a close look and insight into North Korean education. Moreover, after all the efforts, passion and time we had put into the preparation of the cultural performances, the abrupt cut of our first attempt was a great disappointment. It was a pity that the school put its own economic gain in front of its promotion of cultural goodwill."

"The first visit at the school was certainly the most disappointing part of the trip. I had expected that it was going to be a sort of exchange, like in previous years, and not a display for tourists. Therefore, I didn't like the way we were treated at all."

"The worst thing about the trip was probably the travelling part, but to be honest, there's really nothing I would like to complain about. I am only saying this because just before we travelled to Mount Paektu, a lot of students had travelled to Beijing by train or plane, and then to Pyongyang by plane. It was pretty tiring to travel for so many hours in just two



days. From that point of view, it would be great if the Mount Paektu visit could be moved to later in the trip, although by having it at the beginning, it meant our understandings throughout the trip were much better."

"The worst thing was the bus rides and, towards the end, the repetitive food."

"The worst thing about the trip was that we were only allowed to get in touch with the local population on a few occasions."

"The worst thing about the trip was that we only finished preparing our performances in the evenings during our time in DPRK, and this appeared to me a bit like time wasting. We could use that time in a more interesting way and we should have prepared our performances before entering the DPRK."

"Being very honest, I enjoyed almost all parts of the trip. I think if there were some moments of the trip that I did not enjoy, it was when our first school visit didn't quite work out, and maybe spending a long time in the International Friendship Exhibition."

"I was disappointed that the political lesson which had been arranged at the school was cancelled. This is partly because of my individual interest about politics. I looked forward to the lesson very much before the trip had started. Although I do not know the content of the lesson, it would have been totally interesting to see how the school in a one-man-rule country convinces youngsters to achieve the state's wishes, and I would also have liked to see the reactions of the students there".

"The worst thing about the trip was that we were rushing from one place to the other without enough time to reflect. Of course, I understand that it was necessary to be fast in order to make the best of our scarce time, but I guess that more time to reflect would enhance the experience."

There were 3 things I didn't like: long coach journeys, oily food, and the dark corridors in the hospital."

"The worst part of the trip was the first school visit. I found it really frustrating not being able to talk to the kids from the school or to perform for them, especially after all the rehearsals and effort that everyone have had made. However, this was mainly because there were other tourists who wanted to see the Korean students perform. Having said that, it is really important not to forget that the main goal of this trip is to create strong bonds of friendship and to broaden the relations among North Korean students so that they are able to attend United World Colleges. So I believe I was disappointed due to the fact of not being able to have our English lesson with them as well as not being able to perform."

Improvements I would suggest for future trips are

...

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are not particularly extensive. Really, without the slightest bit of sycophancy, it was brilliantly planned, with at least 10 days of activities done in only 7, without the feeling of being too rushed. Perhaps the only thing I can say that stood out negatively was the first school visit, so the only improvement that I can see would be better communication between the guides and the school. However, on the whole, I do feel that the trip was particularly well done."

"Although I understand that there might be difficulties in arranging activities to get into the people's day to day lives, it would be nice for us to have more opportunities to interact with the locals and to understand the living conditions of the people in North Korea. On top of the current visit to the school, the hospital as well as the short walk along the street, it would be a great addition to the trip if we had chances to visit factories, households of local families etc. where we could have a better understanding of the lives of local people. Moreover, regarding the visit to the school, more time could be allocated to be spent with our buddies so we can have a more in-depth discussion, as the time we had was a little short. Although I know others would disagree, the visit to the Foreign Languages Bookstore was not very necessary in my opinion as the bookstore at the Yanggakdo Hotel where we stayed offered books and other goods, and we could visit during our free time at night. Last but not least, I believe that due to the large amounts of information we had to take in each day in the trip (from what we heard from the tour guide, from what we saw along the bus rides etc.) it may be a rather informative experience which would benefit from daily reflection sessions each night, where each member

of the group could consolidate their findings and share with each other what they had found out in the day."

"There is really very little I would change. Or rather, the things I would change aren't really possible to change – for example, we did spend a lot of time in transit, whether on planes or the bus. Also, the few times we were able to just walk around on the streets were really fun, and if there would be any way to spend more time walking and less time on the bus, that would be a good change to make. The only other thing is that we were often pressed for time, but again I don't see how to change that, aside from



cutting out parts of the itinerary, which I would not want to do."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are an even more detailed briefing and perhaps more group research done beforehand. This would help the group to be on the same page, which would help facilitate the group to discover new things and uncover new knowledge. I also think that a debriefing every day would be a good idea. I know we were tired at the end of each day, but this would provide an opportunity for different members of the trip to share what they had seen in the day, something that would further enrich our experience. Of course, we were already doing this on an individual and small group level, and over lunch and dinner, but I believe that having a systematic and routine whole-group meeting would allow the learning to be even more effective."

"I think a longer, more spread out schedule would help. Looking at the actual schedule, maybe that was just my experience, because I got tired towards the end of the week."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are to take toiletries when staying at the other hotels outside of the Yanggakdo. Don't try and rush through everything or let tourists behind us push us on (easier said than done!). I would sooner have some of the museums explained in more detail and for us to have more opportunities to look about the exhibitions. I would suggest staying with the original plan for the students to meet in Hong Kong before proceeding to Beijing as for some of us it turned into quite a mission to get there seeing as communication throughout the holidays is poor between the students. When allocating the posters I don't think it should be a first in first served mentality. It should be done by random draw so that it is fairer. The same should take place for giving away the gifts from UNICEF, or these gifts could be given with regard to the contribution the student is making towards the school performance etc."

"The main improvement I would suggest for future trips is to allocate more time at the stamps shop. I wish we could be able to spend more time in the stamps shop instead of the 10-minute rush. The stamps shop is a fascinating place and more time should be dedicated to its visit."

"There are minor improvements that could have been made in the logistic arrangement of the accommodations. Extra time and effort was spent in packing and unpacking due to the changes of hotels. This seems unavoidable due to different localities of venues."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are following: First, a short briefing from experienced students who travelled the previous year would be

helpful before the trip. Second, every student can take a thorough look into the documentary films so as to gain some better understanding of North Korea. Third, self study on previous reports on North Korea can enhance the overall understanding of the purpose of the trip as well as the broadness and depthless in the lives of people in North Korea."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are to retain the focus on the school visit, but maybe go to a different school. In the end, it was a great experience for us, but not the first time, which was quite a terrible experience. The schedule needs to be set up to insist on a good time for the visit, as it is a vital part of the whole trip to DPRK. As well, some of the places that we visited could have been cut out, as not all were as interesting. However, I know certain visits are 'required'. And I assume that there is also a limit to how many tremendous places there are to see in the country, and thus we have to visit some less interesting ones. A note to add to that is that we cannot decide ourselves entirely what to visit either. On the contrary, the itinerary of the trip was packed with excellent locations, and especially Mt Paektu, the first visit of an LPC group there, and it should be visited again next year, as it was a very good place. Despite the high quality overall, it would be great if the food provided in each meal could be reduced in amount. Although we tried our best to finish all the delicious dishes, sometimes the supply was merely beyond our capacity. And more fruits, please."

"I think the more contact we get with local people the more significant the trip becomes. I had the feeling that North Koreans know more than the media says and that they are extremely welcoming, but everything depends on the attitude that the visitors have towards the rules."

"It would be great to have a longer meeting with the UNICEF representatives and more time for the school visit. I think

these will help us to really get to see more and different sides of the DPRK. And to me, these were the sessions I enjoyed and learnt from most."

"The two hikes should be spaced out more so that there was a less concentrated pace of visiting places at the end."

"Longer time at the school please."

"I think that everything was extremely well planned, and I am very satisfied with the time I have spent in NK. I can't think of anything that could be done to improve future trips (within the limitations of travelling in NK)."



"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are to give more opportunities to talk with people and visit an office or factory in Pyongyang."

"Although I greatly enjoyed the trip, there are still some improvements I would suggest for future trips. First would be, if possible, to cut down on the time at the Grand People's Study House, International Friendship Exhibition, and the hospital. Although these parts of the trip were interesting, I do not think they had as much value in shedding light on the culture and people of North Korea as did, for example, Mount Paektu, the Secret Camp, and the Mass Games. Second, (although I understand that there were complications with the school visit this year), I would have wished that there was more time at the secondary school, not just to take part in the English lesson with the students, but also some free time

or some activities, to get to interact with the students more fully. An idea could be (if possible) to have a session with activities and ice-breaker type games, which I think would lead to an invaluable interaction with the students. Finally, I believe a lot that I learned about North Korea during the trip came from talking to the guides. I am not sure if it did not happen due to cultural reasons or money issues, but I think a great way to further talk with the guides would be if they would eat at the same table as us. This would provide at least three hours a day of extra interaction with the guides for the students."

"The visit to the school was probably quite a disappointment for most of us. I would suggest a deeper and more thorough conversation with the school or the organisation to improve the rundown or activities during school visit. It was nice that the organisation provided us with another visit after receiving complaints, but it seemed like the students were forced to go back to school on a holiday which made me not too comfortable when I heard about that."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are perhaps having a little group chat in the middle and the end of the trip to sum up everything we have done, ask questions and exchange points of view. It would also be beneficial if we could talk in our group more about the actual situation of North Korea and discuss statements made by the guides, e.g. the claim that there is freedom of religion in North Korea."

"Improvements I would suggest are: (a) longer stay at the stamp shop; (b) better arrangement for the purchase of propaganda posters (not enough); and (c) longer stay in Pyongyang."

"In certain places we were rushing because our schedules were too tight, while in others we had plenty of time to look around and appreciate all the things that were shown. Maybe next time make

the schedule more balanced so that we have equal amounts of activities every day - even though I know that the travel agency is the one in charge of arranging this, and they reserve the right to manage everything in whatever way they find convenient."

If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip is ...

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip is to really engage with anybody they meet and to do their utmost to ask questions and extract crucial insights about the country. I would tell them to make friends with the guides, as we did, eventually playing ping pong with them two nights in a row before we left. The familiarity with the guides is essential because that will make their time there a great deal easier, more enjoyable, and most of all, informative."

"A better understanding of the background of the Korean peninsula, especially its history and its international relations in the past 50 years, should be researched by each participant before the trip, and perhaps shared during one of the preparation sessions prior to the trip, in order to equip every member with the necessary basics to make the most out of the trip. The same applies for the portrayal of the international media of the country, where through the experience we have on ground, contrasts can be made to what we hear all the time."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip is make sure you are not easily offended with regards to your own country! Perhaps this only pertains to American, Japanese, or South Korean students, though. I would mainly just try to impress upon the students preparing for the trip that it really is unlike

anything they have ever experienced, and to be mindful of that. This would come into play especially while talking to people there, such as the guides, flight attendants, or students. I think the most important thing is to be respectful and not try to actively contradict or argue against what they say and believe - and they then extend the same courtesy."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to take a good camera (please, I would really like to reassure the parents that North Korea has a very lenient policy on cameras and they will not shoot you just because you have a



good camera) as well as a good understanding of Korean history. The latter may be detrimental to the trip in a sense that it may block one's open view towards the North Korean side of the story, but so long as one can keep an open mind to accept new things, I believe that a basic knowledge of the history of the two Koreas would be beneficial to learning. (e.g. a brief timeline of the Great Leader)."

"Read up on all the things you are going to visit. Read the articles sent by Dr Codrington, but not only these, and in particular the history and the significance of some of the statues and monuments. Don't start too timidly when you arrive in the DPRK. I think we missed a few of the early opportunities to ask questions to the guides or to take pictures because we were too hesitant about breaking the rules. Showing your guides not only

respect but also good intent will make the trip much less restrictive and educationally enriched. Asking the guides questions that really would insult anyone from any country won't help you find out what's wrong with the country. It's better to use the guides as a source of information - one that you wouldn't expect to find information that is directly critical, but one where you may be able to find information on daily life, history and customs. The guides are not ignorant and should be treated accordingly. Like tour guides from any country, they want to show you their country and don't want to answer questions continuously about negative aspects. Unlike guides from other countries, however, they can exercise a greater degree of control over the outcome of your trip."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to read more information or watch documentaries about DPRK before the trip. The more you read, the more good questions you will have in your head which stimulate critical thinking about this mysterious country."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to bring a lot of sun cream. Most people have amazing colour patterns on their skins."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to prepare performances early on, as the days are fully packed after arrival in the DPRK, with very little time to practice. This advice was given to us as well, and we did manage to put together a list of performances before leaving, but I believe the preparation could have been done even better. The level of the performances presented by North Korean students is very high, so it is vital that we practice our performances as much as possible to give as best impression as possible."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the

trip would be to learn some basic Korean sentences such as 'hello' and 'thank you'. Having a mutual language makes it much easier and more pleasant to communicate. I would advise revising and understanding the western point of view of the important historical events in which North Korea was involved – otherwise, one could be really confused by the new perceptions he/she learns in the trip. Related to this, approach the trip being open-minded. I think that if somebody wants to visit a certain country, one must accept the rules of that country and not break them, especially if that person wants to establish a good relationship with the local population."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to bring some warm gear if they are to visit Mount Paektu! I didn't have enough to wear and I had to borrow a jacket from my mates. Also, it would be great if they learned some Korean language and read some books before they travel to North Korea. They can get much more out of the trip if they do this. Also, read read read up on everything possible, especially the history of the Korean war etc."

"I would advise future students preparing for the trip to read and learn (extensively) about North Korea before going. It was my impression that many students this year (including myself) felt a bit confused when visiting museums and historical/cultural spots, and I think that one can gain even more from the trip by learning more about Korea before going."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to bring a more appropriate set of clothes than I did, and to respect local people when taking pictures. Before reaching North Korea, I would advise students to really do quite a bit of research into the Juche idea, the history of North Korea in the last century, and the lives of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung, as a lot of North Korean philosophy and ways

of thinking are based on the things listed above. By going through this preliminary research, students will be well prepared and have a context in which to understand the information with which they are presented. While in North Korea, I would really suggest that students use as many opportunities as possible to talk to the guides. Not only do the guides have very good English, but overall all they are very interesting people (Mr Li travelled around Europe in his childhood as his parents were diplomats) and they are a great resource to really understand the mentality of people in North Korea. Finally, as clichéd as it may sound, I think the best way to



come prepared for a trip to North Korea is to come with an open mind; to realise that yes, many of the things that you are being shown have been selected for a reason, but that this in itself has great value, and that if you are truly inquisitive (by talking to guides, airline ladies, drivers) you can also get to understand North Korea from the perspective of the people. Finally, bring enough sun-block cream or after-burn lotion, since I observed quite a lot of people on our trip were burnt, especially if there will be hiking at Mount Paektu again next time."

"It is very useful to read a lot before you get to North Korea. My advice for future students would be to read the information given, to try to find the books proposed by Dr Codrington, so that when they get there they will have a better idea of what to expect and what they are going to witness."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be (a) bring more personal photos to show the tour guides and buddies at school, (b) sleep more, and (c) do some reading beforehand."

"If there are future trips, the advice I would give the students preparing for the trip would be to research and read a lot about North Korea. Of course, sun blocker is very advisable if the trip to Mt Paektu is repeated."

If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say ...

"A country that time left behind, a place so comically absurd in some aspects but eerily normal in so many others. A country where extremes, excesses of ideology and control gone amok are evident like nowhere else in the world."

"The DPRK is a more open and developed country than most would expect it to be: the scenes on the street point to a lively society where shops are visited, people attend work and are seen on the streets in all places. If it had to be compared to another place, it would be similar to China in the late 1960s and 70s, and is following the trend to open up to the world with the introduction of mobile phones and computers among its people in recent years."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say it is a country unlike any other that I have been to, and one to which the media does not do justice. It is also quite confusing at times, and I still have difficulty understanding everything we saw and experienced."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say "Yes, the country is a political Dinosaur. But it is not a Tyrannosaurus Rex =]". It was not only a useful and

interesting experience but also an amazing place to be. The parts of the country that you see are a bit old but relatively nice. It is a very 'weird' country."

"A country like no other, which due to the citizens' faithful reverence for the leaders of DPRK, it appears to be a state religion. Amazingly primitive, lacking development, but the leaders are thinking big, even if they might lack the necessary means to accomplish their goals."

"The DPRK is a couple of decades behind the rest of the world in both technology and ideology. Enigmatic and unique, its unparalleled position grants a surreal reflection on the world as we see it."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say "The DPRK trip was a totally eye-opening experience which might be once in a life time. It has totally changed my perspective on this so-called hermit kingdom"."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say "a strange place but with warm and ordinary people - prepare yourself for experiential bombardments"."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say that the DPRK is a country based on not having knowledge, as the people solemnly live as they always have done, because they do not have knowledge of how other societies work, but they are fine with it. The world seems to desperately want to improve the DPRK's living standards and change the way the people think, but they have to understand, that from what I experienced, the people are happy with the life they have and feel no need to 'improve' their society to something unfamiliar."

"It is a country with an unusually united population of ordinary people with an

extraordinary idol as leader (or perhaps two idols). People there are really just like us. It is full of contrasting realities and principles, like many other countries on this planet."

"It is a country where citizens are very united and where truth isn't necessarily what you see with your own eyes."

"The DPRK is a country of contradictions. It's just like you've read about and expected, but at the same time nothing like it."

"I would say that in many ways, North Korea is really not that different from the



rest of the world. To me it seems like North Korea is country that can easily be misunderstood."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say: the DPRK is a parallel world, which is as hard as it is to understand as it is hard it is for them to understand us. In the end, I realised that I share more things with people living in DPRK than with my grand grandfather."

"North Korea is a country of nationalistic people, who through mis-information and a lack of information, are motivated to love or fear their country and the leadership; although they do not have the complete truth, for the most part the same cannot be said about their happiness."

"The DPRK is a mysterious place where you cannot actually find the complete "truth" behind all the rumours. But what I see is an unpolluted, organised and self-dependent state packed with spiritual and energetic people."

"If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in about two sentences, I would say that it is on the one side a deeply misunderstood country, but nevertheless remains an excessive violator of human rights."

"It is the hermit kingdom where you will see alternative political systems in an actual country. If you visit, you will gain an enormous amount beyond the official message by observing, reflecting and asking."

"I could say that it is a very surreal and limited place, especially for us as visitors, but there are many other aspects that are worthy of admiration. I believe that there is no other place in the world like North Korea."

As a result of this trip, I intend to ...

"... read a great deal more about the region, as the trip has been the impetus to go on and do some sort of study of politics and philosophy in university."

"... spread the word and share my experience of the DPRK with friends, families and other young people, in order to allow them to have an alternate point of view on this largely-unknown country, hopefully countering the usual prejudices as portrayed by the media. Moreover, I intend to explore opportunities where the situations in and relations with the DPRK can be promoted to other secondary school students in Hong Kong, to raise their awareness on this country that most students do not know about, which might be interesting particularly due to the close relationships that China (and thus Hong Kong as part of it) holds with the DPRK."

“As a result of this trip, I intend to continue trying to expand my awareness and perception of other countries, cultures, and differences. For example, I understand much better now how it feels to be viewed as the enemy, and how not to be offended by this. But the trip also allowed me to see things from a very different perspective, and I think this can be helpful – especially at a United World College – when viewing any conflict. Being able to see both sides of the argument is a very useful skill, and one I think I can definitely use. I also will try to share my experiences of the DPRK, especially with everyone I know in the USA, to try to do my part to improve the perception of the DPRK in my home country.”

“As a result of this trip, I’ve realised that the country needs a lot of help. As mentioned by the UNICEF Representative, the DPRK is different in the sense that it does not require new infrastructure (it’s already there); what they are missing are the operational logistics. Therefore with just a small push, thousands of lives in the country can be alleviated from extreme poverty. Therefore, I intend to help advocate the cause of UNICEF through my connections with the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF, as well as through UNICEF LPC, which is a group that I am setting up this year.”

“I want to carry out the message of the experience of this trip, to thank our sponsors, but in particular, hope for North Korea to open up as much as needed for the people. I hope to hear of a North Korean student at Li Po Chun in the near future.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to share my experiences with other students at LPC, along with my friends and family back home. I hope to dispel some of the stereotypes we have of North Korea and the way we often view it as a member of the Axis of Evil, even though this is just a label the media and the US have attached to it. I also wish to support, in whatever

ways I can, a successful reunification of the two Koreas, because combined they have so much potential. I would, however, prefer to see the DPRK’s unique and rich history, along with monuments, retained without being destroyed or ridiculed on claims that it is incorrect because as we know, history is written by the winners.”

“I want to read up on North Korea more and do some fact-checking about what I learned. In terms of more public action, I’m not yet sure how I feel about North Korea. It was certainly a thought-provoking trip.”



“As a result of this trip, I intend to tell others more about this mysterious country. It is interesting to hear different views of different people on DPRK. Due to the fact that it is a mysterious country, people tend to have lots of misconceptions about it. After being granted the golden opportunity to get the first hand information on North Korea, I intend to tell others what I have seen. I have already tried to convince my schoolmates that North Koreans are not as hostile and closed-minded as they have thought as I shared my table tennis experiences with many of them. Furthermore, I have kept trying to convince people to make direct donations to North Korea after the chat with the UNICEF ambassadors. People tend to be reluctant to donate money to the DPRK due to the rumours and corruption that are portrayed by the media. However, without our generous

help, the food shortage problem could never be solved and children there would continue to suffer.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to try my best to do something for North Korea. I plan to start up a new *Quan Cai* about North Korea. I hope that this *Quan Cai* can provide a chance for people to know more about North Korea. We might raise money and buy books or stationary for the North Korean students. From this *Quan Cai*, we can do something to follow up the trip. This *Quan Cai* can be one of the criteria used to select prospective students to go to North Korea in the future.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to create more awareness of the situation of the people of the DPRK, especially as everyone seems to laugh at their belief in the two leaders or hate towards the US. The people of the DPRK have very little or no information about the outside world, and it was very interesting to observe this. Of course, the country has issues with the leader Kim Jong-Il probably not always acting for the benefit of the whole country by spending money on himself, but the average citizen cannot be blamed for what the government of the country does. It is the same as the DPRK view of the US, where they have no trouble with proclaiming that they ‘hate’ the US imperialists. However, the ‘US Imperialists’ is a term that does not directly include normal Americans, which was quite surprising to discover. The North Koreans hate the way their country was invaded, the way they were slaughtered as we saw in one of the museums, but they don’t have anything in particular against normal American citizens. Many viewpoints in the media and by people I know, especially back home in Norway, focus on questioning how the North Koreans can live with themselves believing in the two leaders and not trying to overrule them to possibly improve their living standard. The truth is, they have no knowledge of other ways a society can work, they have lived their whole life in what they are

told is the perfect society in the best country in the world, and thus they do not of course question this, as everyone believes the same thing. I intend to inform and share my experiences with people through conversing, and hopefully make them gain a better picture of DPRK and the situation there."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to treasure all the rights I possess and information I receive more than ever – I have never noticed their intangible value before. Apart from feeling grateful, I also am more aware of the freedom I enjoy and the consequences of it. My decisions do make a difference to the community, and – however limited the extent is – the rest of the world. I shall never forget that power and rights come with responsibility. As a Chinese born after the era of Mao, the 8-day trip provides me a peek and insight of how my homeland would have been a few decades ago. I began to be able to visualise the past of my country which I could not do before – it felt like finding and placing a piece of long-lost puzzle in position: now I can see the whole picture of modern China. I definitely want to work in the future for a peaceful reunification of the two Koreas as I promised to Mr Li. I think that at the beginning a system like the one in Hong Kong would be perfect in order not to start from the political debate first but to allow people to reconcile first. I also definitely want to share my experiences with people around me. Moreover, I was deeply touched by the UNICEF officials. I asked them how can we donate money through UNICEF. They are optimistic that finally I can donate money through UNICEF Hong Kong. I was a member of the UNICEF North Korea Service Group in GCAT last year, and I think it will be great and wonderful to be able to continue this service group in LPC in the future. Helping North Korea takes continuous effort from us students. If I can do anything to fundraise and raise awareness among schools, I will definitely be part of it."

"I intend to help out in any way I can to strengthen whatever ties we have and make sure the prospect of having a North Korean student becomes a reality. It was a great lesson on perspectives and ToK issues, and now I intend to take my experiences and lessons learnt and apply them to events I find relevant, such as, for example, when examining news articles. I also intend to continue closely following DPRK news."

"The trip has made me want to learn more about the situation in North Korea and the history of the Korean peninsula. As a result of the trip, I intend to start reading more about Korea and all the



things to which we were introduced during our trip."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to try to return to the DPRK with my family and experience it again, maybe in a couple of years."

"As a result of this trip - firstly, I intend to be a bit more hesitant before developing strong opinions about people, cultures, and places I have never visited before. Second, I hope that now I will be able to see the time period when my own country, the Czech Republic, was communist in a more complex light, especially in relation to the opinions of my family and friends who lived during the time period. Furthermore, I intend to spread what I have learned during this week long experience with relatives, peers, friends, and family, in the hope that they will in part see the complexities

of the country better than previously. Finally, I also intend to be involved in further efforts to allow a student from North Korea to attend a United World College, and at best, here at Li Po Chun."

"As a result of this trip, I have changed my impression and adjusted my biased opinions about this communist country. Especially because of the lovely dance with North Koreans at the park, it made me feel how pure and simple the people there are. It perhaps is because they are totally sheltered from any information outside or lack of human rights such as freedom to reach anything except their safe zones. However, it can also be a good thing that they have simple minds and clean souls to be satisfied and contented always."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to visit South Korea, explore more the history of Korea and of course follow events and developments concerning the international relations of North Korea."

"I intend to do more reading on the DPRK from both sides and raise more money for UNICEF DPRK projects, as well as keeping in contact with my buddy at June 9th Secondary School."

"I would like to see the ambitious goal of building bridges of goodwill between North Korean students and people from all over the world become a reality. It would really be very satisfying to know that we were able to accomplish something as significant as this. I would like to know if there are any other possibilities to continue helping this dream become a reality because I would like to keep contributing to these cause that I think will change not only their lives but ours significantly."

Other comments ...

"I enjoyed this trip perhaps most because of the philosophical implications, the rejection of religion and determinism, the *juche* and *songun* ideas, the socialist governance, and the rights of man. I

really appreciated the opportunity to engage so actively in a real-world quest for knowledge in this extreme country, as some notions that would only be debated in the classroom took centre-stage in the DPRK."

"I just want to say how incredible it was for me to get to be a part of this trip. It really was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me, and I am very grateful for the chance to participate. I have learned so much about the DPRK that I would never have learned from the media or other sources, and it has really helped me to expand my view of both the DPRK and other countries. I did find it sad, though, to see first-hand just how much hatred there was towards the USA (as well as South Korea and Japan), and I hope that this can be resolved at some point in the future."

"I am grateful for the rare opportunity to visit this country. I will never forget this trip."

"I truly enjoyed this trip. It was not what I had expected, and I feel I've really gained from it, though I can't articulate specifically how."

"No comment except to express the utmost gratitude for offering a chance for me to join the trip. It was really an once-in-a-lifetime experience."

"This trip is something that I will never forget. This is one of my best LPC memories."

"I found the DPRK trip to be a large highlight in my life, and I feel extremely lucky to have been able to experience the DPRK while it remains the world's most closed country. I will never forget the trip, and I hope to share my experiences with many people."

"I have promised my North Korean buddy to her write a letter, and I am definitely carrying out my words. I hope that through building our friendship, I can understand North Korea more and more, as well as showing my new friend a new perspective to the world."

"The goodwill trip was undoubtedly an extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime experience. It has brought me to a brand new level of perception and thinking. I am sure that what I have learnt and reflected upon from the week will play an important role in my future. I would like to express my gratitude you for kindly and thoughtfully arranging such an amazing journey."

"This has been an unforgettable experience, both because of the knowledge and understanding gained about North Korea and the Korean people that are, as I like to say, a "media misunderstood population", and because



of the opportunity to build bridges of relationships and communication that generated goodwill that will, hopefully, help in building a greater understanding of each other's reality from both sides."

"I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr Codrington who organised this goodwill trip and to the donors who made it possible. I have learnt a lot from my teammates, Dr Codrington and Di, and most of all the North Korean tour guides. This was indeed an eye-opening and insightful trip! Moreover, I would like to thank my teammates who made this trip inspiring and fun at the same time!"

"I would like to consider how the former North Korea group could somehow be continued with a more meaningful purpose than last year."

"I really want to say thank you to the guide, Mrs Li. She was amazing with all her efforts and bright faces to introduce us to the DPRK. The trip was undeniably wonderful because we had such a good guide! I also want to say thank you to everyone on the trip who made it such a memorable experience for me. Last, but not least, I want to thank Dr Codrington for organising and introducing such an amazing trip to people in LPC!"

"I am more than deeply grateful for being selected to have these significant experiences that I will remember for my entire life."

"DPRK citizens are genuinely hospitable. At the beginning, it might seem hard to find common topics to talk to the guides. But at one point, Cherry and I heard the sound of table tennis balls bouncing, so we ran upstairs to see the guides playing. Then we joined them at the play. Not only were they good players, we also found the common language (English aside) without words, table tennis. We had a nice competition and from then onwards, we became friends - much more than just visitors and guides. They were really open to questions (polite ones) and would share with us as much as they know."

"I want to thank Dr Codrington for selecting me and giving me the opportunity to be part of this amazing experience which I believe has been one of the most extraordinary and educational experiences that I have ever had."

"I would like to take this moment to thank you for the trip, your guidance throughout, and the fact that you actually do it on behalf of LPC. I sincerely hope that ours was a trip that makes the government more inclined to actually send that student from North Korea to Hong Kong."

"Before going to North Korea, I sincerely doubted that a trip like the one we have

been on could really create any sort of connection between the North Koreans and us. I think however, after having been there, that it is possible to create bonds despite all the restrictions."

Thanks for Di's caring treatment too! (eg. asthma, sore muscles, cough, etc). I am sorry to have been bothering her during the whole trip.

"The food is oily and hopefully next year it will be better."

"If possible, a second school should be chosen to visit because the school we visited now focuses too much on performing to tourists, and in doing so, it deviates from our cultural exchange objective. The makeup lesson somehow gave the impression that it was a

compensating gesture to a customer instead of a genuine inter-school exchange. Another school would be an ideal platform to start extending the friendship network across North Korea rather than still visiting the same school."

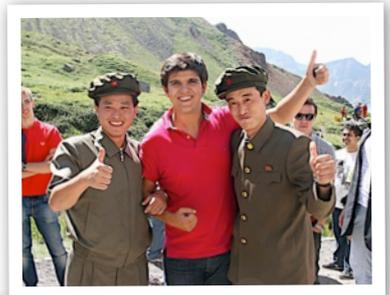
A note on the students' feedback

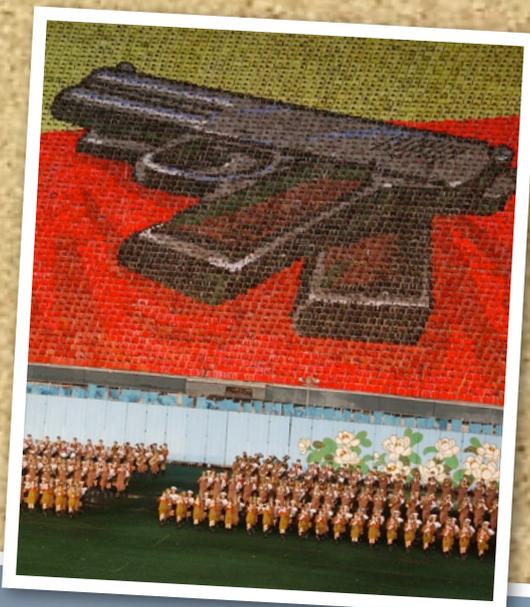
The students' constructive suggestions to improve future trips are well-taken, and usually repeat comments by past groups.

For example, following suggestions by last year's group, we had sought and obtained a lengthy visit to the school, including a lesson on political theory. The agreed lesson was cut unilaterally after arrival in the DPRK, and

the brevity and dismissiveness of the first visit was frankly insulting.

Comments such as avoiding certain sites, having less food served, having more contact with local people etc, have been made in the past and passed on, but it seems impossible to change 'the way things are done' in DPRK". Similarly, we cannot provide service work due both to our visa type and the DPRK self-reliant 'line' that they have no need for such help.





Concluding comments

Galleries containing 735 photographs of the trip have been posted on the internet at http://web.mac.com/scodrington/Site/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2010/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2010.html.

I would like to thank all those who assisted with the organisation of this trip, especially Ms Catherine Peart (Koryo Tours, Beijing) who acted as the principal liaison between the College and the North Korean authorities in negotiating visas and the itinerary.

Deep and sincere thanks go to Mr Bill Benter and the Kowloon North Rotary Club who have generously supported the College's DPRK goodwill initiative since it began in 2005. Without this support we could not have even begun

to make the progress that has occurred. I would also like to thank a donor who wishes to remain anonymous who stepped in to support the trip financially for the third year in a row to cover fluctuations in exchange rates between the Hong Kong dollar and the Euro.

I am very grateful to Mr Bijaya Rajbhandari and Ms Zeba Tanvir Bukhari, the UNICEF representatives in North Korea, for accepting my invitation to speak with our students at a post-breakfast briefing. Their insights into conditions in North Korea, especially as they affect medical issues, human welfare and economic development were extraordinarily astute and perspicacious. I am also indebted to them for their ready willingness to assist in our liaison with the DPRK Ministry of Education.

I would like to thank my wife, Di, for all her support in accompanying me on the trip (her first time to North Korea), and for her help in so many ways, from administering the first aid kit, to waking up students in the mornings, through to being a constant friend and companion not just to me, but to everyone in the group.

Finally, I would like to thank the outstanding group of 21 students from Li Po Chun United World College who participated on the trip for their interest, co-operation, enthusiasm and diplomacy - they were sensational ambassadors for their countries, their College, and the United World Colleges Movement.

(Dr) Stephen Codrington
8th September 2010