



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

AUGUST 2009



Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong

Our UWC Student Ambassadors



Abel - Malaysia



Abhishek - Nepal



Alejandro - Paraguay



Alice - UK



Amparo - Spain



Anne-Margreet
Netherlands



Anu - Estonia



Bertha - Hong Kong



Carlos - Venezuela



Chris - Hong Kong



Emil - Denmark



Evelyn - Hong Kong



John - Hong Kong



Kate - Hong Kong



Martin - Hong Kong



Meike - Canada



Mona - Yemen



Pedro - Nicaragua



Tedi - Albania



Yuka - Japan

Report on the Trip



Introduction

A group of 20 students from Li Po Chun United World College (LPCUWC) visited North Korea in August 2009, accompanied by the Principal, Dr Stephen Codrington. This was the fifth 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 and August 2008. The students came from Albania, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong (6 students), Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Spain, United Kingdom, Venezuela and Yemen. 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 73.

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.

Although this goodwill initiative may seem over-ambitious and far-fetched to some, it was very encouraging to read an article by noted commentator on North Korean affairs, Andrei Lankov, in *Newsweek* (27th April 2009) that related directly to the underlying concept of our initiative. Under the somewhat provocative title "Toppling Kim Jong Il", Lankov argued the case for 'regime change' in North Korea, and I quote in part from the article:

The past 15 years have seen the spontaneous growth of grassroots markets in the North and partial disintegration of state controls. Rumours of South Korean prosperity have begun to spread, assisted by popular smuggled DVDs of South Korean movies. The world's most perfect Stalinist regime is starting to disintegrate from below.

*The best way to speed things up is for Washington and its allies to push for active engagement with the North in the form of development aid, **scholarships for North Korean students** (my emphasis) and support for all sorts of activities that bring the world to North Korea or take North Koreans outside their cocoon. Such*

exchanges are often condemned as a way of appeasing dictators, but the experience of East Europe showed that an influx of uncensored information from the outside is deadly for a communist dictatorship.

Pyongyang understands the danger of such exchanges, but it needs money and technology badly enough that it might allow them nonetheless — so long as they fill its coffers and don't look too dangerous. This is even more the case when exchanges ostensibly benefit members of the elite. For example, a scholarship program to study overseas would go mostly to students from top families. Yet this wouldn't limit its impact: experience of the outside world will change these young people and turn some of them into importers of dangerous information. A similarly small step helped to unravel the Soviet Union: the first group of students allowed to study in the U.S., in 1957, numbered just four and were carefully selected. Yet two grew up to become leading reformers, and one of them — Alexander Yakovlev — is often credited as having been the real mastermind behind perestroika.

This approach will take time, but it's the only one likely to work. The sole way to make North Korea less dangerous is to change its government. And the only way to do that is to change the North Korean people themselves.

The UWCs were first established during the Cold War to achieve precisely this aim of bringing together future leaders from all parts of the world to educate them into a deep understanding of one another's cultures and beliefs; North Korea is perhaps the last place in the world today where this original Cold War vision remains highly relevant.



When the first students from Mainland China attended a UWC (Atlantic College in the early 1970s), they came from among the families of the elite. Within a decade, China was a radically transformed nation.

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.

A key component of this visit, as with all previous visits, was the visit to a North Korean secondary school. This was our fourth visit to the June 9th Secondary School in Pyongyang. As was the case in previous visits, this experience was excellent (the most frequent criticism being 'too short!'), and it represented a true highlight of the trip. Although, like last year, the school visit fell at a time when all the North Korean students were not at school a substantial group was brought back to the school specifically for our visit, to engage in a language lesson and to share in free conversation with our students. The visit offered a sensational and extremely rare opportunity for our students to speak freely with local students on any topic, and it was followed by a concert performed by the students from the school, reciprocated by performances from our students.

Itinerary for the Group

Tuesday 11th August: Fly from Beijing to Pyongyang. Visits to introductory places in Pyongyang such as Fountain Park and the Mansudae Grand Monument (20 metre high statue of Kim Il Sung)

Wednesday 12th August: Morning visits to places in Pyongyang with a focus on understanding the Korean War, including the Victorious Fatherland War Museum and the 'captured aggressive American spy ship', USS Pueblo. After a visit to the Grand People's Study House on Kim Il Sung Square, the group drove to Nampo (a port city west of Pyongyang) to visit an orphanage and inspect the West Sea Barrage.

Thursday 13th August: Visit to the Chonsamri Co-operative Farm (between Nampo and Pyongyang), and after returning to Pyongyang, inspection of the Mansudae Arts Studio (where much of the DPRK's propaganda is produced). Afternoon visit to June 9th Secondary School followed by the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace.

Friday 14th August: Visit to Panmunjom on the border with South Korea, the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone) and JSA (Joint Security Area), the Concrete Wall in the DMZ, and after returning to Pyongyang, the Reunification Arch.

Saturday 15th August (Liberation Day Holiday): Morning visit the Mangyongdae Native House (birthplace of Kim Il Sung), Mangyongdae Fun Fair, Pyongyang Metro, Kim Il Sung Square, Moranbong Park (where the students joined local people in dancing and picnicking), the Tower of the Juche Idea, the Monument to the Founding of the Korean Workers' Party, followed by an artistic performance of the mass gymnastics "Arirang".

Sunday 16th August: Visit to the Kumsusan Memorial Palace (mausoleum of Kim Il Sung), followed by the Revolutionary Martyrs' cemetery, the Arch of Triumph and the stamps shop, before driving north to Mount Myohyang and having a hike in the mountains.

Monday 17th August: Visit to the Pohyon Buddhist temple, followed by the International Friendship Exhibition (Halls of Gifts to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il). After returning to Pyongyang, visits to the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital and Department Store No.3

Tuesday 18th August: Fly from Pyongyang to Beijing.



The trip was designed to strengthen goodwill and links with young North Koreans, with schools, and with government officials, as well as give the students a taste of life in the DPRK.



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. Paradoxically, this year's group of students made noticeably more remarks about the lack of personal freedoms than previous groups, even though they were subjected to fewer constraints than student groups in previous years.

There was a large amount of renovation work underway in Pyongyang, 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 one of our intentions is to be well known and respected within North Korea when those doors finally open wide 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 Mr Gopalan Balagopal, the UNICEF Representative in North Korea. This early morning meeting was arranged through the initiative of one of the students, Chris Hui, and it 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 Balagopal's already detailed 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.

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.

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:

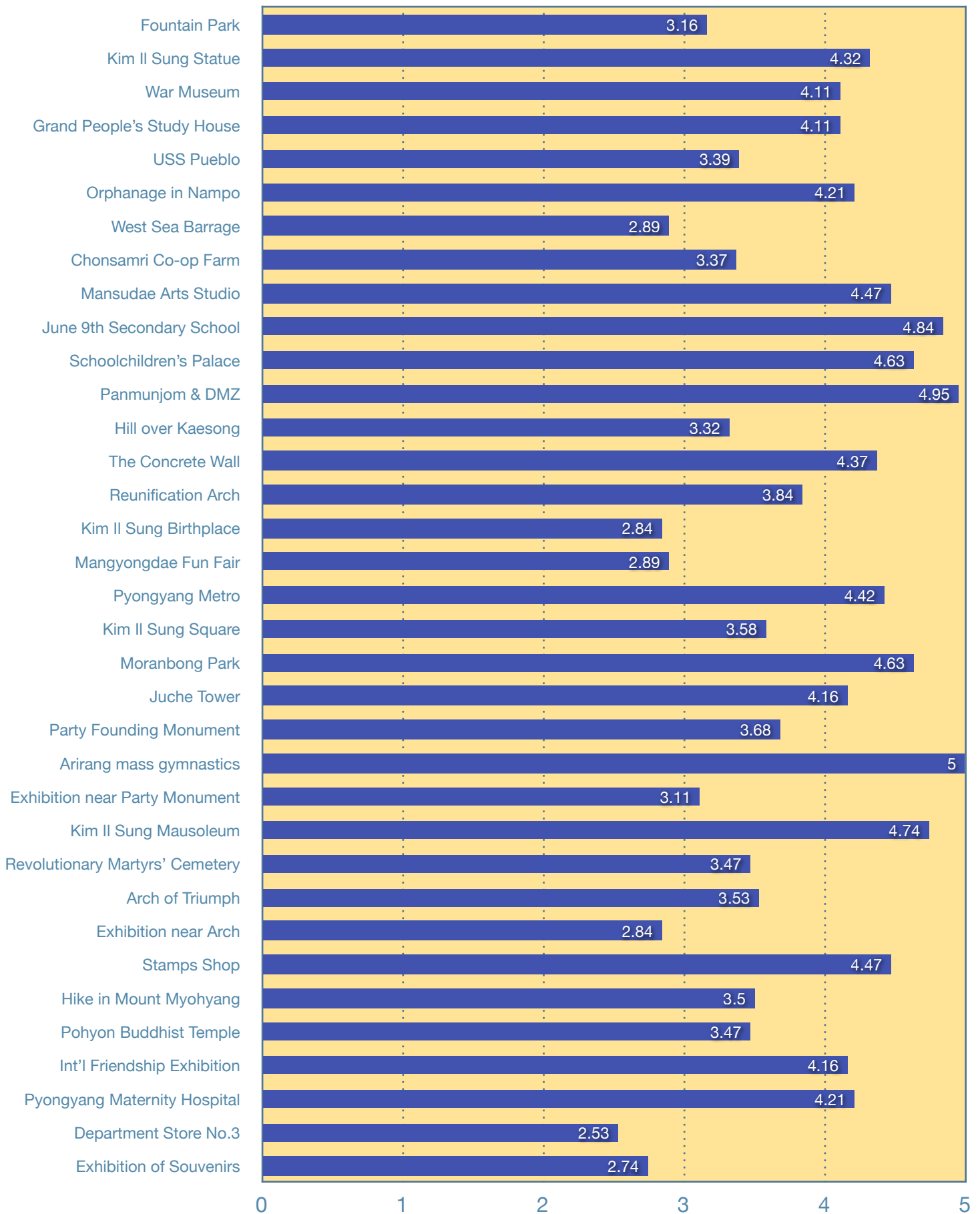
- 1 = very poor and/or largely a waste of time
- 2 = poor and/or not very useful
- 3 = good, average, okay
- 4 = very good and/or quite useful
- 5 = excellent and/or extremely useful



A detailed daily diary of the trip has been posted online at http://web.mac.com/scodrington/Site/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2009/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2009.html. This page also has links to galleries containing more than 700 images of the trip, which can also be accessed directly from http://web.mac.com/scodrington/Site/DPRK_2009_Images/DPRK_2009_Images.html.

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

Ratings of Individual Experiences

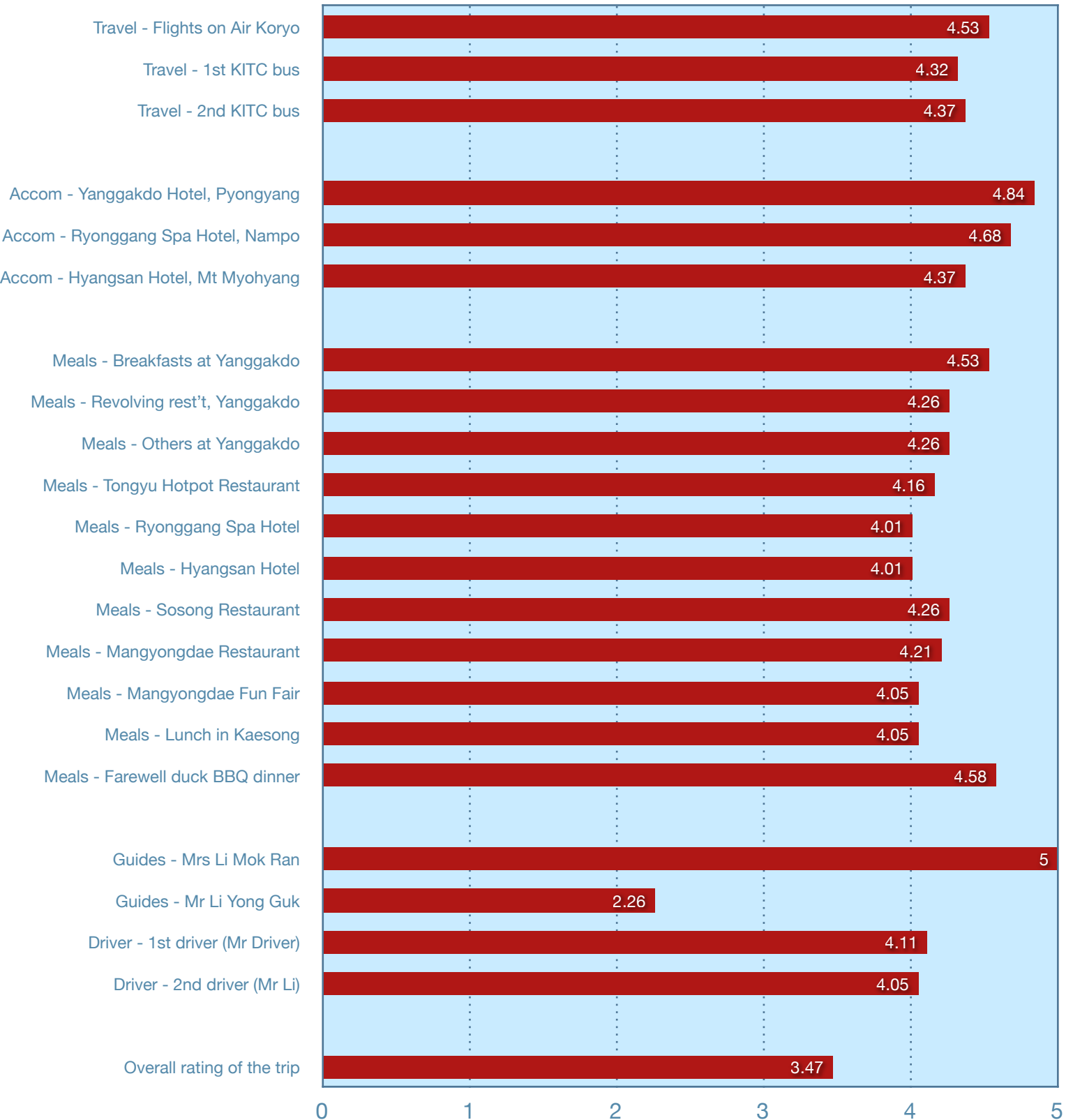


Ratings of the Trip Organisation

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 conversations with Mrs. Li in the bus, and one-to-one as we walked were actually the best times that I had overall in the whole trip. She gave me insights to what it is really like for North Korean citizens, behind the stage with her personal experiences. Everything else that we were shown and had explained was just information that the government wanted us to know. Not necessarily knowing if it was the truth or an exaggeration made me feel uneasy because I did not know what to believe in."

"June 9th Secondary School, Arirang/Children Summer Palace, DMZ/Pyongyang Metro were all highlights because I had a preconception that people in North Korea are somewhat backwards in their thinking. After having this trip, not only did it show me that I was wholly erroneous in my thinking, but also, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the strong spirit and bond amongst the North Korean people became evident."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Maternity Hospital because I got a chance to see how a government that in my opinion squanders a lot on monuments dealt with expensive health care. The result was an elaborate hospital, open perhaps to only the party elite and favoured, and this was a bit confronting to my bias against the government. It provided the chance to ask a lot of questions that showed the facade to be rather shallow."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the mass games, or 'Arirang', because I have never seen such a mass display of people in perfect harmony. The discipline and the commitment of every single participant made this event just incredible. It also reflected the collectivity of North Korean thinking, where every

individual belongs to a body, and where every individual belongs to something much greater than just themselves. An performance like 'Arirang' would be impossible outside North Korea, because of various factors, but inside North Korea the impossible becomes possible and the individual becomes a group."

"The highlight of the trip for me was actually talking to Mrs Li about North Korea. Although seeing North Korea for yourself is even more amazing, actually being able to talk and converse with her allowed me to see further into North Korean society. We learnt not only from her explanations but also from her more free conversation on aspects as diverse as



contraception, marriage and the university system. I could also tell that Mrs Li was interested in the UWC movement and she asked me many questions about it, from how a student would finance their education to the type of education given. As much as I love learning about North Korea I also love sharing about our lives and schooling here in LPC."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the different shows that North Koreans performed for us, because I was totally impressed by their extreme dedication to the perfection."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the mass games because it was something that showed me how North Koreans are different to other people around the world. After watching so many documentaries and having read many

books, seeing the mass games just totally fulfilled the picture. It was incredible to see that 100,000 people can put together a show, without making mistakes. Everything was perfectly synchronised. From the young age of 6 years old, training every single day, voluntarily, just couldn't seem to be reality to me. That these kids give up everything to be in the mass games, is unbelievable. The impact of the show was indescribable - so huge, the change of the picture in the back at the same time, perfectly - just immense."

"The highlight of the trip for me was Arirang and also meeting with the representatives of the UNICEF and the UN in North Korea. Arirang was something I have never seen before, it was amazing and I was totally speechless after that. All that energy and positive emotions - unforgettable. It is hard for me to imagine how much effort it takes to organise and also participate in that performance. I was also amazed by how professional everything seemed and all those detailed pictures, etc."

"Meeting with the representative from UNICEF gave me lot of knowledge and a different perspective on what is happening in North Korea, with its people, and especially the conditions of the children as well as what is being done to make things better. That meeting was very inspiring for me."

"The highlight of the trip for me was 'Arirang' mass gymnastics and artistic performance. Indeed, it was an eye-opening experience to witness all the marvellous performances in North Korea, but 'Arirang' included gymnastics, singing and the solely human-controlled 'backdrop', all condensed into an-hour-and-a-half long show. It was in no ways inferior to any opening ceremony of an Olympic Games. As an American tourist shared with me while watching the mass games, 'there is no need to rehearse if North Korea is going to hold an Olympic Games. The mass game itself is an opening ceremony.' Moreover, I was even more fascinated by the message given out through the mass games

performance that the love story of 'Arirang' was extended into the hope of the North Koreans to achieve reunification. In particular, the last scene, when all performers surrounded the globe, spread a clear message that world peace and unity is the ultimate goal the North Koreans would like to pursue."

"The highlight of the trip for me was being able to sense, portray and understand such a reclusive country as North Korea through my own first-hand experiences and the lens of my camera."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Mass Games because this performance really showed the uniform spirit of North Korean people. The performers were all so well-trained that their actions were exact and flawless. The Mass Games are so incredible that I remained speechless throughout the performance. Its impact on me was even more stunning than the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. However, it also started to make me think whether such a show is actually economical or worthy. The show involved one hundred thousand students and only a few thousand in the audience. With only a few hundred HK dollars as entrance fee, I do not think it can possibly cover the high cost (the time, effort and labour used in training of one hundred thousand people) of such a massive event. If it were not in North Korea, where people believe that being able to participate in the Mass Games is a personal glory, such a huge show could never be held."

"The visit we made to June 9th School was my personal highlight, even though the experience was constrained by time. It was incredibly interesting to see such a radically different school system. Being students ourselves, I feel that we could all compare the DPRK school to the schools in our own countries, pointing out the contrasts and perhaps finding similarities. I feel that the connection for me occurred when I got introduced to my

'buddy' for the day, and he immediately started asking questions about my life and how I lived. I asked him the same questions, and was given an exclusive, eye-opening view into the life of a "regular" North Korean citizen. It enabled me to ask questions I could not normally ask, and talk one-on-one with someone who was not a tour guide, tourist advisor or exhibition manager."

"The highlight of the trip for me was June 9th Secondary School because this was, after all, a goodwill trip to open the way for North Korean students to attend United World Colleges and to introduce the UWC Movement in the country in



general. Thus, the visit to the June 9th Secondary School was of course the most significant activity in achieving this mission, especially through communication and exchange with local students. On the other hand, the other activities were to deepen our understanding of the regime. and thus benefitted only the 20 of us in a direct way."

"Although there was only a handful of local students present at the visit to the June 9th Secondary School (being holidays), it was a heartwarming experience to talk to them using a common language, and to understand the situation they are in – although it is understood that they come from a very privileged group as compared with the rest of the country. My "buddy" was very timid at first, and was so anxious that his hands visibly shook when we

spoke, but afterwards as we held hands while heading to the school hall together, I truly felt that I had somehow made a rare friendship in the most unusual of circumstances. Later on, after our performance, I really felt that all the preparation we had done before the trip had paid off for the purpose of cultural exchange and mutual understanding – the students were obviously in awe of the variety of cultures we presented, just as we were astonished at the talent demonstrated to us in their performance. This most certainly did live true to the LPC school creed – "Friendships across the world make near neighbours of far horizons"! This may be some wishful thinking, but I hope that as a result of our trip, we have somehow instilled in the students a sense of the UWC Movement and world peace, which was also demonstrated by the Reunification Dance that they invited us to join. Of course I kept in mind that these students may have been hand-picked to meet foreigners of the same age, and may not be as much the typical North Korean student as we imagine them to be. I am not sure if the students to be selected for United World Colleges would come from this school, but I sure hope to see them again – they were all so jovial and friendly, and I can imagine them contributing to the UWC experience in the College."

"The highlight of the trip for me was visiting June 9th Secondary School because it was the opportunity for us to achieve the objectives of our goodwill trip: building friendships between the North Korean with UWC students. During the discussion, I realised everyone, including our North Korean buddies, had UWC values rooted implicitly in our hearts. Each of us, breaking through the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices, chatted openly about our own cultures and exchanged some opinions of political issues; such a carefree communication is the fundamental element to build up a friendship. I think we helped overcome the stereotypical image of North Koreans

generalising all white people as American devils as we saw portrayed in propaganda and documentaries. However, simply through our buddies' body language and broad smiles, we could tell they treated people from all races with unbiased hospitality; they held hands with both boys and girls, put hands gently on our shoulders and smiled brightly in front of cameras. All of us enjoyed having each other as companions."

"The highlight for me was understanding cultures from different countries and untangling conflicts through direct interaction, not through second hand resources such as newspapers, internet and documentaries, thus helping to develop a peaceful World Village."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Grand People's Study House because when I first read the itinerary and saw this name, I thought it was merely a place for people to revise for exams. This was because I related the word "Study House" to the Student Study Rooms in the libraries of Hong Kong. Then I was amazed by what I saw; it was a combination of a huge library and a university. I was impressed by the classifications of classrooms according to different subjects, as it showed the meticulousness of the government. When listening to the introduction by our tour guide, Miss Li, I loved the concept that lectures can be attended by any North Koreans of any age group if they find the lecture useful, but I doubted if anyone would actually do it. Yet I found a group of middle-aged technicians waiting patiently in their seats for a lecture, and I appreciated their continual striving for perfection and yearning for learning very much."

"The highlight of the trip for me was Mass Game because it showed that the North Koreans are capable of working as a team together. They are willing to spend lots of time into something to make it look perfect. It fully revealed

their reverence of the Great Leader, President Kim Il Sung, and Leader Kim Jong Il. I can still remember clearly that when the picture of Kim Il Sung was shown in the backdrop, everyone clapped wildly."

"The highlight of the trip for me was visiting the June the 9th school because I really and truly learnt the expanse of the cultural divide between the DPRK and my part of the world. For example, when my student "buddy" asked me a generic question, "what is your mother's occupation?", I suddenly had a difficult time explaining to a 15-year-old that my mom was a lawyer and had been a judge



in Germany. My buddy's parents were, of course, "workers" and I had a really tough time explaining to her what a lawyer and a judge did, because her concepts of that profession either didn't exist or were very different from my own. Other parts of the trip that particularly stood out were the visits to the DMZ (learning about the propaganda used by the US-South side), the visit to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (to learn part of what propels the country's militarism) and the visit to the USS Pueblo (which I felt represented the strongest anti-US rhetoric the entire trip)."

"The highlight of the trip for me was meeting Mr Balagopal from UNICEF because he gave us an idea of what we couldn't see and experience for ourselves during our stay in Pyongyang. The information that he gave us helped me

realise how unrealistic the things we saw were. He also showed us the contradiction between what we were getting and what the common people were getting. It was also interesting to hear what Mr Balagopal had to say about the work of the UN in the DRPK; it gave me hope and it made me appreciate their efforts much more, knowing the difficulties they encounter. As I intend to work for the UN, this session was also very important to me because he gave me some career advice. He made me feel like the UN would be pleased to work with me. I also learned many things from the questions we asked, and I was actually able to make a comparison between what happens in the DPRK and Yemen, especially with respect to health and education. I hope the students of future years will get to meet him again or other officials from the UN."

"The highlight of the trip for me was getting to know actual Koreans. This helped balance the image of the DPR Korean as being brainwashed and having no will or decision making power. For me, this stereotype is gone – I hope – for ever. Interacting with Ms Li was priceless. She would explain things to us with such ease and

confidence, things that in our minds we might have first seen as an outrage. I believe that was a crucial contribution to our understanding of the Korean Peninsula and the socialist regime in the north. She would use phrases like '... and that's how we do it in this country', which I thought was astonishing. The sense of belonging was quite enviable. Yes, it is very likely regular North Koreans do not understand the western world as we do, and maybe they haven't even heard about it for that matter, but it made me wonder whether some of them truly do not want to and are happy with the comparative little they have. And if they are not happy at least they feel they belong."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the visit to the Mausoleum of Kim Il Sung because I was able to see the Cult of

Personality in action. Even though he is dead, he was treated with utmost respect and affection. Even though I believe that not all people felt sad for him being dead and that many of them were just pretending to save themselves and their families from the communist authorities, I cannot deny that many people felt real affection for their deceased leader. This helped me better understand the effects that propaganda has on people's lives and it gave me an insight to the way my own country was when it was suffering under the Communist dictatorship."

"The highlight of the trip for me was the time we had a conversation with Mrs. Li about the "real society of North Korea". This was a highlight because everything else that we were shown had explained was just information that the government wanted us to know. Not necessarily knowing what was the truth or what was an exaggeration made me feel uneasy because I did not know what to believe."

I will never forget ...

"I will never forget the one hour meeting with the head of the United Nations and UNICEF, whom we luckily met with gratitude to Chris Hui. During our meeting, he gave us a huge amount of insight that was of high value in terms of understanding the situation of North Korea's health systems. Although his statistics were not necessarily accurate (seeing that UNICEF does not have access to some areas in the country), I believe that it is a huge step that he is making. I hope that LPCUWC will continue this goodwill trip to North Korea, and as this happens, we should also help raise awareness in Hong Kong and China that there are organisations such as UNICEF that are trying to help North Korea's people in spite of political rejection by many outside nations."

"I will never forget the ways in which people treated me in North Korea: their warm and welcoming smile, the knowledge and happiness that Mrs Li gave us, the touch of not being an alien in

a foreign country at the June 9th Secondary School with the kids, the overwhelming performance at the Arirang. All these will become part of my memory, and will become a factor which shapes me into a different person."

"I will never forget the trip for showing me that communism really doesn't work. Allocation by the centre can never match Adam Smith's Invisible Hand, and it is the rule of a group of proletariat acting as the bourgeoisie ruling over the supposedly liberated proletariat masses."

"I will never forget the talent of the children in the children's palace and



neither the other side of the coin, the faces of the poor kids in the Nampo orphanage."

"I will never forget the Kim Il Sung mausoleum. It was very interesting to arrive there and see the lines of well-dressed North Koreans (and not so well-dressed American tourists) waiting to go in. After our VIP entry, I don't know whether you noticed but you and I were particularly stared at (a hazard of walking fast). I really enjoyed being able to see the 3 star generals coming out of the mausoleum. In the public grief associated with Kim Il Sung, there definitely seems to be less of a division amongst the hierarchy in North Korea. The much extended and drawn out escalator ride (more for the elongation of the journey than a means of less strenuous transport I believe) gave us a chance to see and then reproduce the still

faces of Koreans coming out of the mausoleum. It was a perfect embodiment of the North Korean worship of Kim Il Sung and the spectacle that is Kimilsungism in North Korea. A sort of frozen hyperbole of grief-in-state."

"I will never forget how frustrated I felt. How oppressed. Everything was like set up for us. It wasn't real. I didn't feel like doing tourism but that I was in a 'Truman Show'. Lack of freedom. Not being able to stop with a group of children and play with them, as a symbol of goodwill trip. We couldn't because we were driven and manipulated by our guides and North Korean citizens. In the beginning of the trip I didn't have much of a problem with this, although of course I was surprised, but I just observed. However, towards the end of the trip it came to annoy me and frustrate me. We were in a bubble, where you couldn't be yourself, and most probably what we were seeing wasn't true either."

"I will never forget the visit to the June the 9th secondary school. It was very special to be able to talk to real North Korean students and to exchange parts of our lives. It was nice to show pictures of my family, and to tell them about my culture, knowing that they probably have never heard of my country before. The way they were taught was completely new to me, and it almost seemed like indoctrination to me. The way they answered, the conversations they held, everything was following guidelines. On the other hand, I felt it was one of the only opportunities that we could have some freedom, and talk about what we wanted. The cultural exchange was very nice, especially because they invited us to dance their national dance with them. Although our performances weren't as well organised as theirs, I hope they also learned something from our visit, and hope that one day, a North Korean student will come to LPC and see that there are many other cultures around the world."

"I will never forget when I was in Moranbong Park and local people asked us to join them dancing. I found it really special, because it was something genuine and not planned. I felt more close to the people and got lot of positive emotions out of it. Besides the school it was first time that I could make contact with regular people even though we didn't speak the same language."

"I will never forget the time in June 9th Secondary School. Although the time given in the school was relatively short, I had a precious down-to-earth experience to interact with North Korean teenagers through class-time conversation and performances. In the course of conducting an informal conversation with my buddy, Pak Ji Yon, I came to understand a little of the general thoughts and ideas deep-seated in the new generation of North Korea. Particularly in discussing my buddy Pak Ji Yon's favourite subjects, and those of her classmates, I was surprised to know English was one of the subjects that they liked and even wanted to excel. "English is difficult but the whole world speaks it," said Pak Ji Yon, despite the fact that I had tried several times to grasp what she was trying to express. Nevertheless, this was definitely a good sign that implies the young generation of North Korea do not constrain themselves to one nation, but gradually want to expose themselves to the outside world."

"I will never forget that silent, intense exchange of looks between the North Korean people and our group when we would find each other in the middle of a museum hall, a subway carriage, or some of the countryside farms. A look that without signifying much at first sight, told me a lot about the mindset of those individuals and the lives they live everyday. I will also never forget when the Mass Games warm-up were going on and while sitting at the back, across the stadium I could feel the energy of all those minds that at that moment were synchronised upon a sole mission.

100,000 people, all there for one thing; it was so overwhelming and breathtaking."

"I will never forget the importance of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to the North Koreans. Most of the monuments like Juche tower, the Arch of Triumph, Kim Il Sung Statue, International Friendship Exhibition etc. we visited in North Korea are meant to be birthday presents or gifts to the Great Leader. I will never forget when we were having lessons in June 9th Secondary School, the teacher told students that though the Great Leader died, he would still remain as their great leader and would look after them. All students replied 'YES' without hesitation.



Nearly all North Korean television programs are news reports of Kim Jong Il. When we visited the farmland expecting to see how the farmland works, what we actually did was to bow to the statue of Kim Il Sung, visit a museum which was built specifically to record the 33 visits by the Great Leader, and visit the piece of farmland where Kim had worked on. As a Hong Kong person, I could understand the strong relationship between the government or the leaders and the public at first because Hong Kong people are so used to criticising our leaders. However, after the 7-day trip, I understand that the strong bonding comes from education or 'indoctrination' when people are young. Worshipping the leader has become a religion to the North Koreans."

"I will never forget the walk in Moranbong Park. I had expected this to be a short walk, seeing a nice park, a few

local people from distance and then getting into the bus and moving on. However, this trip to the park exceeded all the expectations I had, and turned into a moment of the trip that I will never forget. When we met the local people dancing in the park, and we were invited to dance with them, a barrier between us and the North Korean people was broken. It was like there were no boundaries and no cultural and political differences that separated us in that moment. We were laughing and dancing with the local people, and I felt that we were suddenly not under total supervision. Before the trip I had decided that it was important for me to connect and meet with a regular North Korean citizens, and experience the local culture from the people and not just from museums and tour guides. I also very much liked seeing the DMZ, which was such a nerve-wrecking, adrenaline-pumping and frightening experience because of the tense situation between the two countries, so clearly visible at that point. The same goes for the Concrete Wall, which contributed to this tense feeling. I felt that the two countries at this point were so close in distance, but so far away in mind, and that was really interesting to see."

"I will never forget the visit to the demilitarised zone, which was a very memorable experience. I remember watching the documentary before the trip featuring the American man visiting the site, and thinking it couldn't be true. However, the actual scene opened up in front of me that day, and I was in awe of how soldiers from both sides of Korea were brought so close together, although with radically hostile motives. A somewhat ironic effect was created by how the soldiers were standing practically back-to-back with each other, between them the military demarcation line; all originally from the same country, yet miles away in heart and principle, separated by just one mere concrete hedge between them. The knowledge that this is the most heavily armed region

on the planet was rather chilling, and coupled with the reunification slogan at the entrance, made me reflect on how much of a hypocrisy the whole situation had become – it is even called the “demilitarised” zone! It was also a remarkable experience to go inside the American-built negotiation hut and to step across the military demarcation line to the South, if only for a few moments, and to witness the reactions of the South Korean soldiers just inches away from us outside the window. Another interesting aspect of the visit was how we saw tourists on the South Korean side of the border, and after listening to descriptions of the restrictions they face from the Principal, my aforementioned feelings towards the situation of these two regions were deepened.”

“I will never forget the three little kids, about 5 years old, in cute humble bee costumes performing on the stage in front of thousands of people in the audience (at the Schoolchildren’s Palace); I will never forget the calmness of the children’s orchestra after the sudden blackout of the theatre; I will never forget the sweet voice of a girl singing a song which praised the great leader Kim Il Sung. These scenes happened in the Schoolchildren’s Theatre nearly two weeks ago. However, they are still freshly stuck in my mind. I immensely appreciate their fabulous performances, but at the same time I pity them because their standard could definitely be rewarded with great honour in international competitions. Unfortunately, due to tight control by the government, they can hardly leave the country. We, tourists, may not be able fully account their excellent performances or describe our excitement during the show to our relatives and friends. These excitements can only be felt through live performances.”

“I will never forget Arirang. I was dumbfounded when I first saw the documentaries and photos presented by Dr Codrington, but the feeling was much more powerful and profound when I was

witnessing the event with my own eyes. I will never forget the smooth change of background done by the school kids, and the grandness of the whole performance. Besides, I was touched, yet a bit confused by the fact that Arirang is performed to glorify its Great Leader, as it seems that they treat Kim Il Sung as a god. However, I found myself wondering whether they have a reason for seeing Kim Il Sung as an eternal guardian, or simply because they were brainwashed since they were young.”

“I will never forget how North Koreans are proud of their leaders and their history. They also preserve their cultural



heritages/traditions really well. This is something that rarely happens in where I live. (Of course, how the government achieved this is another completely different question.)”

“I will never forget dancing with the friendly locals in the park. At that moment I felt that we aren’t actually that different at all. This made me believe that soon North Korea will open up to the world. (In fact, I think that this is already happening. DPRK and South Korea are already breaking the ice after the death/funeral of the ex-president of South Korea).”

“I will never forget the Arirang Mass Gymnastics, dancing with the local people in the park and people bowing on three sides of Kim Il Sung in his Mausoleum.”

“I will never forget the miserable condition the citizens suffer, and at the same time the amount of money spent on all those monuments, exhibitions and towers. With the scarcity of resources in the DPRK, it would have been much better to put this money into improving the humanitarian situation of the citizens, and especially their nutrition. Such discrimination is something I never expected to see in the DPRK, especially that it is a communist country, but I guess that communism works on paper but not real life.”

“I will never forget the kids in the Schoolchildren’s Palace. Their dedication to the different fields of study or the arts was remarkable. I also thought that a place where kids can improve their abilities or understanding of the different areas of knowledge or further develop their talents for the performing arts was a great contribution to the formation of North Korean youth. It impressed me a lot for a number of reasons; the first being that you could feel the kids’ commitment to be better and I think that in some ways is related to the many initiatives and philosophies that the government encourages people to apply in their daily lives, like Chollima for example. The second reason was that I thought it was pretty outstanding that the DPRK had such structures for kids’ development. I applaud that. And the third and last reason was that at the end of the day the children were brilliant in their performances.”

“I will never forget the day when we went to the Arirang Mass Games, since it was not only a delightful experience, but also it made me aware of the way the North Korean authorities try to suppress the individual under the banner of the collective. This performance gave me an interesting view to the way propaganda works. It also had an historic value, since it tried to represent the “history” of modern Korea. However, the most important thing for me was the fact that all the performers in the Mass Games had

put an incredible amount of work into it, and artistically I think it was a masterpiece.”

I am a different person after this trip because ...

“I am a different person after this trip because I am able to formulate a better personal opinion than prior to the trip. As I only had second hand reports from the newspapers and television, I had no way of formulating an opinion that I thought was correct and be able to justify it.”

“I am a different person after this trip because I have broadened my horizons, and thus learnt to appreciate the beauty of life around me in Hong Kong. Being in DPRK for a week, it showed me how much I take things for granted – especially in terms of food. Also, I have learnt to understand not only one side of the coin, but also the other. Seeing a totalitarian country functioning is inspiring, yet confusing. Not only do I begin to question what I am inculcated with, in terms of the information regarding DPRK, but also I am becoming sceptical of what is reported in our media.”

“I am a different person after this trip because my country Nepal is at a crucial point where we have a choice between the two systems facing the people. Having seen a truly communist system at work and living in what is probably the world’s most capitalist one (Hong Kong), I can make a more informed judgement and help others do the same.”

“Well, I believe that as human beings the environment where we live modifies our way of thinking, in the same way the places we go throughout our life modifies our way of thinking and behaviour. In North Korea, I saw things that I could only imagine, or perhaps not imagine at all. I saw how a whole country can be isolated from the world and keep on living, how a whole country can be

indoctrinated. The things I saw have modified my way of perceiving the world, and also my way of judging, making myself more aware about media and its lies, making me aware that not everything that I see is true or real.”

“I am a different person after this trip because I have seen a different side to the world, but more importantly to the people of the world. I saw the better side of North Korea, the availability of many services like the schoolchildren’s palace in particular. Although some on the trip felt this was a form of forced schooling, if I was a North Korean youth I would have liked to attend. In this way I have



received a greater balance between the viewpoint of the west and the carefully choreographed version of the DPRK that we were shown. Unlike others I have not acquired a new-found respect for Kim Il Sung. I still consider him a political oppressor who enforced a totalitarian Hermit Kingdom. I wouldn’t be a UWC student if I believed in hermitage. What I have acquired is an appreciation for the respect North Koreans have towards Kim Il Sung and an understanding of why so many genuinely feel it, even beyond the brain-washing exercises seen in the textbooks. Lastly I understand more about the reunification of the Koreas. Whilst, as you may remember, the only question I asked at the reunification monument was related to the army, there is a severe problem of military force in Korea preventing reunification. I would like to see a reunified Korea, under the

southern system, but without the US/UN forces (and the DPRK military...). Regrettably it is one country with two different mindsets and not just systems.”

“I am a different person after this trip because now I know what I have. Now I know where I live. Now I know how the ‘socialist’ system in North Korea works, so I have a better formed opinion regarding this. Now I value living in a country where I can speak, scream, say my opinion, take pictures, where I have freedom of movement and of thoughts.”

“I am a different person after this trip because I have experienced being in a country where there is almost no freedom, no internet, and definitely a totally different life expectation compared to mine. I realised that North Koreans can only leave their country for a number of days, and will get a passport for only those days. The chance that they will get that passport is very small as well. Then I realised that I can travel all around the world without any problems. I realised that I am very fortunate with the life I have, and the freedom that I have. I realised that North Korea is different from what I had expected. I respect the people more in their own way, I understand why they believe and do what they do.”

“I am a different person after this trip because it made me value the freedom I have. It also gave me a great knowledge about the DPRK. I wouldn’t say that this trip turned me into another person, it just gave me a new perspective on different societies and also on freedom.”

“I am a different person after this trip because I learnt to be more critical in my personal perception on different issues, whether as big as a country or as insignificant as a piece of news. For instance, when visiting Panmunjom and the DMZ, I was amazed by what Dr Codrington had told us - that the concrete building at the DMZ was merely portrayed as a façade by the South Koreans, and the fact that the concrete

wall was only a steep slope full of grass when viewed from the border of South Korea. Such beliefs, in my view, would very likely be circulated in South Korea in order to manipulate its people to view North Korea as an aggressive rival. Therefore, the best way to test the authenticity of the claims of either side is to witness with our own eyes to come to a solid conclusion."

"I am a different person after this trip because the week I spent in North Korea made me realise all the freedom I enjoy at home and in Hong Kong that very often I took for granted. As a person that wants to go onto further study in careers such as journalism or political science, having the chance to visit a country with so many regulations and strict norms that even regulate what you can see, take pictures of, ask, say – or even at some point, think - originated a powerful flow of thoughts that frustrated me a lot, yes, because I felt oppressed in so many ways that I've never experienced before, but I also learnt a lot from it. I learnt to value freedom of speech and opinion. Now these concepts have become less abstract to me and I have started to see them more clearly and present in my life and environment."

"Before the trip, I was quite indifferent to the 'justice fighter' in Hong Kong who always criticised the government and I sometimes even found them a bit annoying. During the trip, I was always asked by our tour guides to check my photos. Moreover, when I made a local call to contact the head of UNICEF in North Korea, I was asked to leave my full name and room number. These restrictions made me feel under surveillance at all times in North Korea, which I found really disturbing. I became really tense mentally towards the end of the trip."

"I am a different person after this trip because I got the opportunity to experience a country, which is different to my own country on so many different

levels. Considering the wide attention from the world's media and the pressure on North Korea from other governments, I had formed certain assumptions of North Korea before going. The trip definitely gave me a better understanding after seeing the country with my own eyes. It made me fully understand what North Korea is made up of, and where that vision is coming from. Being probably the most closed country in the world, I am honoured that I got the opportunity to see it. This trip also confirmed my future plans for university and career, in the sense that I am now even more interested in international relations, NGO-work and political structures."



"I am a different person after this trip because I learnt to understand what a previous DPRK-er had once told me – outsiders can never fully understand a certain situation, but the people within are too indulged to make complete sense of it. Every conflict is caused by the inability to understand and compromise with each other, no matter big or small. Visiting North Korea, learning its long conflicted history, and observing the reactions and behaviour of what few North Koreans we have met, instilled those words in me as a universal truth after this trip. This of course is what I would keep firmly in mind in the future, for applying to the many global issues and conflicts that I will get to understand and discuss in a United World College and beyond. Being brainwashed by communism and idolising slogans all their lives, these North Koreans have lost

the capability to think for themselves and to create any unique point of view. I recall commenting to a fellow student on the trip that this country would never produce any distinguished philosophers, artists, or thinkers aside from the "royal" Kim family – think of all the lost talent, what with all the resources the country has to offer! When several million are blindly under the absolute command of one single person, how are they supposed to develop any practical concepts of compromise and mutual agreement? In my opinion, this is the major reason why reunification and world peace are not near future prospects for North Korea – that is, if they even favour the idea – and it would take a lot of hard work to push them towards that direction."

"I am a different person after this trip because I was touched by the perseverance of the North Koreans, especially the youngsters. Watching the mass games and the spectacular performance by children aged from 4 to 5 years old, or even younger, in the Schoolchildren's Palace, I was inspired to see that perseverance and diligence are the elements of success; and that age should not be a barrier to attain great

achievements. I was worried about the heavy workload and the demands of my university application in the coming year. After the trip, the fire in my heart is rekindled; I'm going to face the challenges ahead with excitement and confidence because I understand "nothing is impossible" can be true."

"I am different in the way I see North Koreans. I knew before the trip that Koreans loathe the Americans and is not reluctant to let the world know about it, but I didn't know why they had such strong hatred. and therefore I found them very unreasonable. After visiting all the museums, statues and having explanations by our tour guide, I could put myself into their shoes and I know that I would loathe the Americans as well if they took away my relatives and split my country into half. Yet I reckon that

history is the past and instead of being mournful of what damage has been done, we should focus on how to improve things. Thus I really hope that the Reunification Arch will not merely act as a memory of a dream, but a reminder that there is a goal to achieve."

"I am a different person after this trip because ...

- I learnt to understand and respect other people's seemingly odd culture and behaviours. At first it felt weird living under such restricted atmosphere.

- I have learnt not to presume anything. I originally thought that life would be much more restricted in North Korea and everyone would look afraid, poor or miserable. I was wrong in this case. (But then, we only saw a side of North Korea...)"

"I am a different person after this trip because even the parts of the trip that I didn't particularly enjoy (the Maternity Hospital, the orphanage), made me feel as if I was learning something. Most of the time it wasn't exactly learning something from what the guides were telling us or from the questions we asked, but learning from my observations. This was probably the first time in my life where in my attempt to gain knowledge, I couldn't just read a book or ask various people and then form my opinion; this time I had to form my opinion when sometimes what I was being told was very different from what I was seeing. It was also the first time in my life that I couldn't remark on the differences in my perception and what I was hearing. Previously I may have held back for fear of making a conversation turn awkward or because of societal constraints, but this time I couldn't speak my mind for fear of more serious consequences. Therefore I am a different person after this trip because I have realised the importance of being able to speak my mind and to enquire deeply into something because now I have experienced what it is like to have such massive barriers imposed on my search for knowledge about Korea."

"I am a different person after this trip because I learnt what a Stalinist country is like, and how it can never work. I believe that capitalism should be followed and improved. I have also learnt so much and the amount of knowledge I got was amazing about every different topic in according to the North Korean perspective."

"I am a different person after this trip because going to a place where you cannot really be yourself in a way is always challenging. It made realise how important it is to keep an open mind about everything. When it comes to ethical judgments there is no black or



white, everything is grey in its different tones. I believe literature has made me quite sceptical about the things that we take for granted to be real, true or valid. It sounds very ToK-ish, but it has its obvious implications when it came to the trip. I questioned myself a lot, such as whether the system by which all countries that form 'the free world' is the 'right' one. For me, going to North Korea was a learning experience and I didn't think at any time that I was going there to teach people my 'western ways'. I think the fact that I'm able to undertake things I don't agree with, with ease and respect, is a quality that UWC has taught me, and North Korea has made it stronger."

"I am a different person after this trip because I became more aware of the way North Korean citizens live, and this helped me to get rid of any stereotype imposed by the western media. I think

that the idea that North Korea is part of the "Axis of Evil" is untrue and it is derogatory, because I saw many kind and hardworking people who just wanted a better future for themselves and their families. However, I think that the dictatorship imposed on them should be demolished and I hope that one day North Korean citizens can be free."

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

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the reaction by the North Koreans when they found out that I was Japanese - "a sworn enemy of the DPRK". I had expected the teachers and students in the school would be hesitant in coming into contact with a Japanese person, but it turned out that they were more curious."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the warm welcome by the farmers in the countryside. I did not expect them to wave at us so openly and so friendly, as if we knew each other. This is something totally beyond expectation, and it rocks me

to my core. I was thinking of this question as I saw them waving: if farmers in the DPRK could be so friendly that they could wave at any passers-by, why do we, as Hong Kongers, never wave or say anything decent to our neighbours (who live just next door)?"

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the quality of the food, but I guess it was naive of me not to expect a 'facade of plenty' on that area as well."

"Actually, the only thing that was different was the fact we had a lot of freedom (at least from my point of view). I was expecting to be more observed, but we were 20 and we only had 2 guides. Meanwhile a group of two Americans had two guides as well. I was expecting a heavier control over our heads, but I

believe that our College's reputation in the past has allowed us to enjoy more privileges. "

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the greenness of North Korea. I really hadn't expected it to be as green as it was. Pyongyang was particularly green (although less so as you looked out over the city-scape). The countryside too was field after field of the vivid lime of rice, interspersed with maize, soybeans and potatoes. It did also reveal a lack of diversity in North Korean farming. They grow the essentials. I also didn't expect to experience the vitality of the people in the park. In the West, I believe we have a belief that the peoples of the old communist bloc lived in a sort of morose obedience, but the revelry of the North Koreans in Moranbong Park was high and genuine. Perhaps it was we then who had been drilled into conformity (of thinking), and the change surprised and enlightened me. The man with the nose addition was, I believe, mocking the apparently large nose of westerners quite on his own creative initiative."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that this trip was more a touristic-'manipulated' trip than a Goodwill trip. However, I understand we did what we could. We gave the best of us, and even though some people came and questioned me about the purpose of the trip, I still think it was a Goodwill trip. As the student that I am, I admit I can't do more than we did in North Korea. Another thing that surprised me and didn't expect to be so extreme was the extent to which they live in the past, in the sense that once you are in the DPRK it seems like you are in Germany 40 years ago."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the food. I had been warned about the food quality, and that it wouldn't be that good. However, against all my expectations, I really liked the food a lot. One of my favourites was

the lunch at the revolving restaurant where we had a view all over Pyongyang. Also the hotpot place was just amazing. Although North Korea is a bit limited in its resources, their food is very good."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was connected to food and hotels. I was not expecting that we would be staying in hotels which were in such good condition, so that was a good surprise I guess. Also they gave more food than it was necessary and I was surprised by that waste, even if the leftovers go to the farmers."

"The main thing that was different to



what I had expected was my preconception of the North Koreans. Upon reading some news on North Korea before the trip, I had in mind that hunger, which is apparently prevalent among the common people of North Korea, would definitely push the people to a harsh character. But my personal encounter with the North Koreans and the personal anecdote as told by Mrs Li, the tour guide, helped me to see its people in another perspective. Most North Koreans, even suffering in situations where food was lacking, pursued a diligent manner towards work and held a positive disposition towards life. Just as well-to-do people in more developed countries embrace luxury for comfort, many North Koreans, the less wealthy ones, can equally gain happiness simply through dancing and picnicking with families."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the relative 'freedom' we enjoyed regarding taking pictures (I expected something much more restrictive and not so trusting), and the openness of our tour guides. I had imagined that we would be treated harshly or as 'foreign intruders' but I found such a different situation when we got there and Mrs Li was outstandingly nice to us."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that the North Korea trip was going to be a relaxing trip. However, it turned out that our travelling schedule was really tight and we had to keep on travelling and changing hotels quite often. As most participants had travelled to Beijing before going to North Korea, we were really tired by the time we started the North Korean trip. I myself caught a cold as soon as I arrived in Pyongyang and developed a serious sore throat and cough. This made me really tired for the first three days of the trip and was not active enough to ask questions and understand more about the country."

"My motivation for going on the Goodwill Trip was to first and foremost get an impression of North Korea and perhaps try to understand the ideology behind it. I surely got a view into what the country is like, but the in-depth knowledge was left out for me, in the sense that I felt that there was always a show put on for us. Anywhere we went, the situation was staged and I didn't feel like I saw the real Korea. Of course I had expected this to happen, but to the extent it occurred was something I had not anticipated."

"Surprisingly, the country was much less communist than I expected – at least from the angle from which we (were permitted to) saw it. Perhaps I was a bit extreme in presuming that all allocation of resources in the country had been done by measures adhered to central planning, such as food rationing – after all, this is the last Stalinist regime left standing! Yet

it is undeniable that North Korea has taken steps to develop itself into a more market-oriented society, in other words, more similar to the rest of the world from which it is isolated – no matter how tiny and insignificant these meagre attempts may be at the moment. Of course, all the dedicated monuments, paintings, museums, and the extremity to which the country's leaders were portrayed across the regime made it obvious from the start that it is an absolute dictatorship. But I was not that overwhelmed by these works we were shown – after all, we had seen them in the documentaries prior to the trip, so they were expected. What I did not expect was something these videos did not normally portray. Take for example the introduction of supermarkets into the society (although the guide did admit that the local people are not very used to the market mechanism at the moment). The Department Store No.3 and other stores we visited along the way made me realise that North Korea does have a range of foreign imported goods, meaning that it does not give in to absolute communism entirely. I was also reminded of the Special Economic Zone in the country where special laws are implemented for trade to be possible in and out of the country – something that, unfortunately, most of the North Koreans do not know about. Perhaps even the most centrally-controlled countries on the planet (DPRK by now being the only one still standing) do need to resort to capitalism. I also recall being shocked on the first day upon being notified that elections were actually held in the country – corrupt and unfair as they may be, they are still elections. I was also surprised to learn that around 95% of North Koreans supported the Korean Workers' Party, instead of the assumed 100%, and that the tour guides actually gave us this information. However I acknowledge that this view as presented to us cannot be trusted as the tour guides were trying their best to convey the most favourable impression of Korea to us foreign tourists, instead of revealing what the country is truly like

within. Yet I still find it rather interesting that a Stalinist dictatorship would want to portray itself as a free regime and economy."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the freedom of taking pictures in North Korea. I went to Tibet in Project Week, there were tight restrictions on taking pictures, especially of soldiers and the police. Our cameras and passports were checked frequently in Tibet. I had thought that the situation in North Korea would be similar or even tighter, especially during a politically sensitive period. Unexpectedly, we were allowed to take as many photos as we



liked in the military area, the DMZ, and even at the borderline between the North and South Korea. The American are said to be considered as "evil" in the eyes of DPRK government. That is probably a myth. During our trip, we met another overseas tour group and we asked them where they came from. They replied, "U.S.A." Nearly all of us gasped. We thought Americans could not step on an inch of North Korean soil. The interesting thing is, when we tell our friends that Americans can also go to the DPRK, they give us the same surprising look."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was how enthusiastically the North Koreans treated the foreigners. When we were in the June 9th Secondary School, my buddy Kim Ji-Hyang took my hands when we walked. When we were strolling in the

Moranbong Park on the Liberation Day, we were invited by the locals to dance with them. Although I heard previously that North Koreans are less wary of foreigners than they used to be, I didn't expect them to be this friendly. Also, the extravagance of the three hotels that we stayed was much more than I expected. It seems that the North Koreans are absolutely determined to leave a good impression on the foreigners!"

"The main things that were different to what I had expected were:

- I thought we would be able to interact with the locals more, especially with students from the secondary school.

- I thought we might be able to do some more service, instead of pure sightseeing.

- I didn't think I would have as much freedom in North Korea as I had. I thought we would be searched and questioned by officials everywhere. Instead, the restrictions were looser and we could take photos almost everywhere."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected were my emotions regarding the things I saw. From all of our meetings beforehand and my own research I

knew that to a certain extent our visit to the DPRK would be a chance for us to be the audience of a big, elaborate show. However, I had no idea how incredibly angry some things would make me. I expected the anti-US, anti-Japanese sentiments and worship of the Dear Leaders. I just didn't realise that once I saw real people (our guides, the people visiting the sites we visited) believing in all of it, that it would arouse such emotion in me."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the great stress on not allowing tourists to communicate with the locals, under any circumstances. Even when we went to the school, were you expect to spend more time with the students, and be able to communicate and ask questions, it didn't work. This actually made it even harder on us, to tell

them about our mission and leave a good impression on them, hoping to bring students with us the following years."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the stunning quality of North Korean cities, their infrastructure and the development, which was remarkable - at least in Pyongyang. The capital seemed so well designed, with abundant green areas and parks. The streets were very good and the roads that connected the city with the country side as well."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the relative freedom that the guides gave us. Before departing I had heard from people back home that in communist countries, they are very watchful towards foreigners and that we would have limited freedom of speech and movement. But from the beginning Mrs Li was very tolerant with us and left us take pictures in most of the places we went. On the contrary, Mr. Li was more conservative and he tried to have more control on us, but on the whole we were pretty free. The most incredible part was when we were in the DMZ, which is a military zone. We were not only encouraged to take pictures of military buildings there, but I personally had the chance to have a picture with a high-ranking general. This was a good sign in my opinion since it shows that North Korea is opening."

The worst thing about the trip was ...

"The worst thing about the trip was going through several "exhibitions" (really shops) where they tried to sell us North Korean souvenirs which mainly consisted of items very similar to those mostly seen in mainland China."

"The worst thing about the trip was the limited time spent with the secondary school kids. It would have been a

pleasure to spend a whole day with them, as Dr Codrington had arranged beforehand. Furthermore, when we were performing at the secondary school, I felt that our performance was substandard when I saw them performing. We could have done better by practising and preparing well in advance in order to avoid this embarrassment in the future."

"The worst thing about the trip was how we ended up more like tourists going from site to site and had too little interaction with the people. I understand this was due to the nature of our visa, but it was disappointing nonetheless."



"Well there are two things to observe here. First of all, there was the Nampo orphanage where I am certain we were observing a theatre and not precisely an orphanage. When we arrived at the orphanage the little kids were like puppets acting for us, and I got heartbroken at that place. The second was the hospital which was more like a zoo. Technically, in a serious hospital you are not allowed to be wandering around... but in the hospital at Pyongyang we even went to see the woman who had just given birth. In other words, it was like a tour inside this zoo called a hospital. Sometimes it can be amazing how far the people or a regime might go to show off the "good things" they have."

"The worst thing about the trip was an overdose of Kim Il Sung. There were too many museums, particularly noticeable at

the Co-operative Farm, which could have been a great visit if it was devoid of the museum and equipped with ostriches instead. I understand the intensity of emotion towards Kim Il Sung is actually there in North Korea and that this is not a ridiculous overload, but I wanted to learn about North Korea not just Kim Il Sung. I also think we could create more goodwill if we spent more time with the people and the present, and less on the leader. In actuality I believe that the main statue, mausoleum and International Friendship museum would more than suffice."

"The worst thing about the trip was ... yet again, lack of freedom. And well, ... the food?"

"The worst thing about the trip was hopping in and out of the bus. I really liked that we visited many places, but I felt that we did not really get the opportunity walk around and connect with the local people. Although we got that opportunity in the park, I felt that they drove us from point A to point B, even though it might be only 2 minutes away."

"The worst thing about the trip was going to the Maternity Hospital.

This is because I personally felt so uncomfortable in there and I felt sorry for the patients, because at some moments it was so obvious for me, but maybe I was wrong, how they didn't feel comfortable with us looking at them and taking pictures like we were in a zoo. Also, in some rooms, I felt like those women were just asked to be there until we went away."

"The worst thing about the trip was that as a foreign tourist in North Korea, I could not possibly see some of the genuine faces of its people in certain visiting places. For instance, in the orphanage in Nampo, I was acutely aware of the fact that the kids were well-dressed in preparation for their performances to entertain the visitors; whereas in the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital, I was more shocked to see the so-called experts were continuously

opening and closing windows when said to be conducting 'research' and the optician was writing in air when consulting a patient. These experiences, however, have motivated me to carry out further investigation into issues related to orphans and the medical situation in North Korea in order to look beyond the façade."

"The worst thing about the trip was the situation we had to face on the last day when some money went missing. That honestly had us all, as a group, face a very delicate position. Being honest, the idea of going to a North Korean police station was very scary at some point, but besides that, the sole bitter experience of having to address and manage this situation was one of the downwards of the trip for me."

"The worst thing about the trip was the possibility that we may have to visit a North Korean Police Station. As the justice system in North Korea was really different to those that we came from, we did not want to get into trouble in that country. I was also worried that if we had to stay in the police station all night and even the next day, we might miss the flight back to Beijing. Luckily Dr Codrington said that the business will only be a College matter and would not involve North Korean authorities. This made most of us relieved. In the end, we did not have to visit the police station."

"The worst thing about the trip was this - I felt that the initial mission statement for the trip (to build bridges between UWC and North Korea and eventually get a North Korean student to UWC) was not clear enough throughout the trip. Although I understand that this purpose can't be too clear, I did not feel that the mission of the trip was put very much into focus during the trip. I specifically refer to the June 9th School visit, which was shortened to only two hours at the insistence of the School. This really restricted our time with the students and our chance to bond with them, and build

the necessary bridges between cultures. Even though the time was restricted, this experience was one of my most eye-opening in North Korea, so I can only imagine how great it would have been to have spent more time there. Although I do understand that it is not up to us to decide the itinerary, and that it is hard to focus explicitly on this mission statement while in North Korea, I think that the purpose of the trip should be re-evaluated. Is this a trip with the purpose of experiencing North Korea, one of the last closed countries in the world (which would be a perfectly fine purpose of the trip) - or are we still trying to get a North Korean student to UWC? And how?"



"For me the most disappointing aspect of the trip was that we were only led to view various attractions and monuments in Pyongyang, the showcase city, even though this was entirely expected. I think this has significantly hindered our understanding of North Korea, allowing us to perceive it as a perfectly civilised regime with clean-cut laws and well-behaved citizens - when our previous knowledge and research information tells us otherwise. I understand the importance of visiting the attractions and understanding the significance they hold to the establishment and glory of Juche Korea (as DPRK calls itself sometimes), but the monuments and the messages they portray get rather repetitive. I distinctly remember more than one student or foreign tourist saying - Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, all day, every day! (or something to that effect). Another impact

is that this somehow dilutes the original purpose of the trip - advocating the UWC movement in the region and getting local students to attend United World Colleges around the world. I was discussing this with another student during one meal and she said, in a somehow exasperated tone, 'The tour is very nice, and all, and the monuments are fantastic, but how is this going to get North Korean students to come to UWC's?' Somehow I felt that the most significant attempt in this aspect throughout the trip was the discussion with the United Nations ambassador to North Korea, who I understand is helping us forward the official invitation to the Education Ministry in the country. Having said all this, I know that it is inevitable that our visas limit us to only official tours around Pyongyang, and that these tours would only contain such manifestations of DPRK glory and pride, so I guess it cannot be helped. I do hope that improvements in this respect can be made in the future, wherever possible."

"The worst thing about the trip was visiting the orphanage in Nampo. It was not a matter of "visiting"; the orphanage gave me a pretty good impression of its condition of hygiene and the joyful smiles of the baby-sitters. However, the attitude most of us had during the visit might be a bit disappointing. Laughing loudly, taking pictures with flash and surrounding the little kids, we acted as if we were visiting a zoo. We ruined the tranquil environment babies needed. Besides, I reckon a bunch of people taking pictures of a baby at the same time was inappropriate. One day when the babies grow up and remember that a group of "giants" were taking photos of them, they might ask "why?". The answer might be "because they haven't seen orphans before". Would our acts make them feel inferior for being an orphan in the future? We should have paid respect to the orphans."

"The worst thing about the trip was the amount of food we wasted every meal. I understand that North Koreans would like to show us their generosity but I really feel guilty about wasting food where there are people in the country suffering from malnutrition. And I felt especially hopeless as I could not do anything about it during the trip, but only smile and decline further dishes so as not to waste them. Furthermore, I reckon the way we toured around Pyongyang Maternity Hospital was quite disturbing to the patients. I found myself guilty of intruding the patients' privacy. For instance, we were allowed to see how a dentist washes the mothers' teeth and how the mothers take rest after labour. I would love to visit the hospital, but I think it would be better to appreciate the facilities than observing the patients."

"The worst things about the trip were

- I felt bad about wasting lots of food at every meal every day. The restaurants always served way too much food.

- Everything happened so fast that I did not have time to process and digest everything. This made me enjoy some of the attractions less than I would have loved to.

- The schedule was so tight that we had little time to rest or discuss the day with each other (and when we had free time, we were too tired to do anything).

- Sometimes, everything seemed a bit too good to be true. At the hospital and orphanage, everything seemed so perfect that I thought that the people might have put up a performance for tourists like us."

"The worst thing about the trip was, as I stated before, not being able to speak my mind or ask the guides more probing and challenging questions. "Do you, really, honestly believe that Kim Il Sung beat the Japanese single handedly?" "You caught that spy ship in the 60s, do you honestly believe the US hasn't sent any more?" "Doesn't it seem rather obvious that some people would be too short and some people will be too tall for the

generic tables in the Grand People's Study Hall and was it REALLY necessary to replace all of them just because the Great Dear Leader made this comment?"

"The worst thing about the trip was that there wasn't enough real communication with the citizens of DPRK. The conversation with the school students was too short, and we didn't get to speak to anyone else either, especially at the farm or the orphanage where it felt like we were only spectators and were not allowed to get involved. There wasn't much of service or help that the group did or offered to the North Korean citizens, which would have left a better



impression in their souls. I understand to do service would have maybe been not possible, but I'm hoping that in the future, with a better relationship and more trust the students will be allowed to perform some service and meet more locals. Perhaps this could be done by arranging in advance with a human rights organisation like the UN and others. I also understand that this would require staying for a longer period in DPRK to be able to fit everything in the schedule, and a different kind of visa."

"The worst thing about the trip was probably the fact that it was all very hectic and guided. I wish we would have had a free afternoon to enjoy Pyongyang's parks, to maybe talk with children, play with them like we did when we were up the hill in Moranbong Park. In general, I would like to have more time with real Koreans, which I

know is quite unlikely given the circumstances of the current regime. However, that's my hope for future trips. Basically more interaction with people."

"The worst thing about the trip was the fact that we had to stop in so many "Exhibitions" (which were ordinary stores). In my opinion this was not so positive because it was not a good use of our valuable time, which could have been used for more sightseeing or for more interactions with the locals. I think that in itself it was a good idea, so we could see and buy Korean products, but I think that it should have been limited only to two Exhibitions and the Stamp Shop."

"The worst thing about the trip was going through several "exhibitions" where they tried to sell us "North Korean" souvenirs which mainly consist of items very similar to that of the one mostly seen in mainland China.

Improvements I would suggest for future trips

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are - firstly to obtain a longer time for the school visit to help DPRKers to bond a little more outside of their English class. Secondly, having less exhibitions and more activities which involve talking to people, such as the UN chief in North Korea, artists, or other interesting locals."

"An improvement I would suggest for future trips is less sightseeing. We should probably attempt to visit a variety of schools, and save only a day or two for sightseeing."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are spending more time in the school and at the hospital, and less time going to exhibitions. I believe we did the best we could from our side, but what could be improved would be the length of the trip. I think there is much more to do and see, but I think we covered the most important areas that are allowed as foreigners to see."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are a clearer definition before going of which questions to ask. "Were you upset when Kim Il Sung died?" was unsuitable, as would be a comment about Kim Jong Il's birthplace etc. I felt the guidelines were not clear enough, and because of this, there was hesitation before the questions we knew we could ask were actually asked. I would also suggest re-visiting the artist even if no-one on the trip was doing an art EE on North Korean propaganda. I also suggest spending more time at the school, and if this is not possible, spending time with pupils in the Schoolchildren's Palace during their English class, which I presume would include better English speakers and possibly future UWC students... Otherwise perhaps we could meet university students who would be more our age group. My North Korean buddy asked me what my job was."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are more time in the orphanage and time to actually be with the kids and interact with them. It really shocked me how they are making use of them as if they were machines. I am sure the restaurants can't be improved. but eating the noodles Mrs. Li mentioned would be nice."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are trying to prepare the students better for the situation in North Korea, by asking students that went on the previous trip to share their experiences. This could include giving advice about money, about performances, about things that are on the schedule, etc."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are more time in the school, and if this school is not that excited having people from LPC, then maybe it is possible to find a new school. Also our performances should be organised better. I think we were counting on having more time to practice in North Korea."

"An improvements I would suggest for future trips is the inclusion of more down-to-earth experiences. Undoubtedly, museums, famous statues and many other must-go tourist spots were worth visiting as they can provide a clearer background on the rise of North Korea and an overview of the minds of its people. However, I believe the most ideal way to comprehend the customs and culture of a country depends largely on personal interactions with the indigenous people. Therefore, down-to-earth experiences such as visiting local families (perhaps the family of our buddies), interacting with children not only in secondary schools but also those in the



Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace would give us further insight into the genuine lives of the North Koreans."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are scheduling the June 9th School visit later in the week and maybe ensuring that it lasts long enough. I know these are not issues that can be handled easily or that fully depend on the College's will, but I felt like the time with the Korean students wasn't enough to ensure a successful interaction so that the UWC message could go through effectively."

"Next time when first years are preparing for the trip, second years should join the meeting to share their experience with the first years in order to let them have a better understanding of the country and their roles in North Korea. I believe sharing between first years and second

years can definitely improve the trip next year."

"An improvements I would suggest for future trips is having a clearer definition of how to act, according to what best benefits the purpose of the trip. It was hard for me to know how to act towards the guides and the North Koreans when it came to questions and curiosity. It was definitely difficult to figure out what my role was – to observe the country and learn, or questioning and being critical in my questions. I chose the first option, to just follow the guides and observe, as I thought this decision would benefit the mission statement for the trip most effectively; to build bridges between UWC and North Korea. However, future groups should think about what role they want to take on in DPRK."

"Following up on the previous question, I would definitely hope for travels around the country in future trips, taking a look at and experiencing the abject poverty that millions of North Koreans are subject to. This would allow for more complete understanding of the region's desperate situation, and would let us reflect on the different effects of communism and capitalism. However, I understand that this would definitely not be possible in the near future, but I do hope that it would be possible someday – and that I would be there. I would also like to suggest, if possible, that more school trips be organised on the tour. This is especially seeing as this is a goodwill trip focusing on students and education, as aforementioned, so it would be more relevant and a lot more helpful if the education component were a bit heavier in the forthcoming trips. At present we are only spending less than an afternoon in a school, which I feel is not quite enough to promote understanding between students of different cultures, and to achieve the ultimate objective of our trip. In addition, if different schools were visited, students would have the ability to compare and contrast the different types of students they met, their

learning approaches, their backgrounds, and so on. I wonder if this would be allowed, especially with the visa restrictions, but I am sure that the students visiting DPRK in the future would be very grateful if further arrangements could be made in this aspect."

"An improvement I would suggest for future trips is less food. We realised that after each meal there were a few dishes remaining "untouched". Although the image of a self-sufficient country was projected to us during the trip, we understood that poverty was still severe in places outside Pyongyang. As told by the UN head of Korea, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the newborn babies were suffering from malnutrition. We were merely students and did not make much contribution; we did not deserve to have big feasts in hotels and restaurants by sacrificing the lives of the poor. I suggest the future trips can reduce the amount of food for each meal."

"Most importantly, it would be nice to suggest to the tour guide not to prepare too much food for us. For instance, they do not have to serve both beef and fish in one meal, and the amount of rice per bowl can be reduced. Also, it would be great to increase the time the future trips will spend in the primary schools, as the time we stayed is merely enough for very superficial understanding of the school and students. Moreover, I would suggest that we can have a Korean lesson with the North Korean students to learn some basic dialogues, and in return we can teach them some English. There would be more interactions if we exchange lessons with them. Also, I don't know if this suggestion is too much to ask for the travel agency, but it would be awesome to have a visit to one of the factories in Pyongyang as well. Since we've been to the school (for intellectuals), the co-operative farm (for farmers), it would be nice to take a glimpse into the life of workers. Lastly, it would be great to have a meal in a local family home. I had this experience during my China Week in

Fujian, and it was an effective way to comprehend what the life of North Koreans is like by observing their furniture, their house setting, and by conversing with the family members. Actually, the itinerary we had this year was a great one – the suggestions that I made are merely some extra things that would make the trip even more memorable."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are:

- Let us order our own food so less will be wasted.
- Don't visit so many places in one day.
- Opportunity to do some service.



- Spend more time with students in the secondary school.

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are fewer exhibitions and a longer time spent at the school. Also a longer time some of the more interesting sites, such as the museum would be useful."

"An improvement I would suggest for future trips would be allowing students to stay in LPC before and after the trip if they want to, as it was very hard for me to get my parents to approve staying at my roomies' houses; this is because of the Islamic cultural background I come from. Starting the trip from Hong Kong or providing more help with the transportation for students between Hong Kong and Beijing would have definitely made it easier. Spending more time with the children at school would

also be better, as there would have been a chance for us to know more from them, and get to know them more. I feel the contact time we had them was very short and it was mainly used as introducing time without giving us the chance to ask more about DPRK."

"An improvement I would suggest for future trips is that it should be made clear from the start whether the goodwill trip to the DPRK is really a goodwill trip in the sense that LPC students go there not to question the regime's methods but to respect their decisions and their ways of handling their country. This is not to say that there should not be any questions at all but we would save a lot of time and energy if we know how to structure our questions in a way that when we say them we're not implicitly disagreeing with them."

"Improvements I would suggest for future trips are to spend more time interacting with the local students at the school in order to know each other better and to learn from each other. I also think that a good idea would be to organise a meeting between our group and representatives from the Ministry of Education of North Korea, so they can have a better idea of what a

UWC education represents. By getting more personal with each other, they can start to let go of their fear and disbelief towards foreigners."

As a result of this trip ...

"As a result of this trip, I intend to raise awareness of the existence of UNICEF, Food Aid, and other organisations aiming to help DPRK nationals, and help them in any way that I can find through Chris."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to share with others my experience of the DPRK, to show them the other side of the coin (it may not be the entire picture, but at least this part of North Korea is great)."

"As a result of this trip, my resolve to be a diplomat and study law and economics have been considerably strengthened."

“As a result of this trip, I intend to work for those people who really have needs. Even if we weren’t able to see the poverty and problems in North Korea, I could feel it. The fact that you only see the good things of a country makes you think that something might be really wrong with the country. The trip aroused in me the need that these people have for freedom of choice, for freedom to do what they want to do (as long it doesn’t violate the principles of freedom: “your freedom ends when the freedom of someone else starts”) and also - no less importantly - it aroused the feeling that I need to do something for the world, because in the end we are all connected and what we do has repercussions for eternity. That’s why I will try to carry out a program to fundraise for UNICEF North Korea, from inside the school to Hong Kong, so then we can do something for the people who really need it up there.”

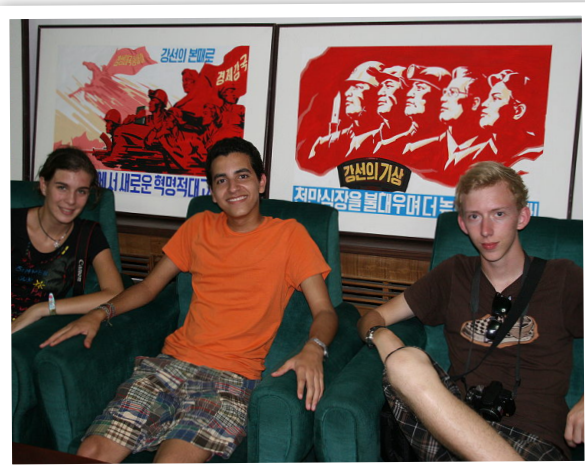
“As a result of this trip, I intend to write a piece for my village magazine about my experiences in North Korea. It will make a change at least from “voyage to the Algarve”, the current piece, and they haven’t even left England! I also plan to engage more with schools in my area when I go back. My county council part-funded my trip and I would like to be able to share my experiences in schools in Cambridgeshire, which would have the added benefit of advertising UWC to more students in an area strangely dry of applications. If you need help organising a GCAT fundraising evening then I would be glad to help out with that too, from serving to performing to speaking.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to transmit to other people the reality I saw in the country. Or at least, the reality I saw from what they wanted us to see. And hopefully one day, help to achieve the reunification of the two Koreas in a REAL and peaceful way.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to share my experience with everyone around me to tell them about North Korea and its

current situation. I feel that we should try, as United World College students, to increase cultural and international understanding, to get students from North Korea, and I think that our trip made a step in the right direction for this contact. I hope that future trips will increase the good contact.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to be involved with other activities concerned about getting finances to North Korean UNICEF, and I also became motivated to try and make contact with Estonian UNICEF with who I have worked before.”



“As a result of this trip, I intend to take more initiative to learn about different areas of North Korea. Apart from concentrating on its political side which is often reported in news, I become more interested in the cultural and social side of North Korea, and in particular, the nurturing of the young generation. In light of the visit to Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace and undoubtedly, the ‘Arirang’ mass gymnastics and artistic performance, I become more convinced that many North Korean children are filled with perpetual tenacity and overflowing passion towards their works. But how is such an attitude commonly formed among youngsters? Is that the result of instillation of knowledge from schools or the influence of an overall social atmosphere? These questions aroused my interest to continue

further exploration into this specific area of North Korea.”

“As a result of this trip, I intend to share and treasure my experience, as I’ve already started to do with my friends and family. I now have a changed perception of North Korea, not provided by the media or by other people, but one that I’ve experienced myself. The series of pictures I was lucky enough to take will give support to show the true goods and bads about the country. North Korea is beautiful, full of talented people. It has the colour of an old-fashioned black and white movie, the taste of kimchi’s cabbage and the sound of high-pitched voices of gifted boys and girls that synchronise to the rhythm of military parades and songs. It is definitely a special country that craves for understanding from the outside world. I will treasure my experiences in Korea. It was a unique trip that will be useful to me in so many ways, maybe highlighting the fact that I’m doing my EE on North Korean posters. The visit was also incredibly helpful for the development of my investigation. Also, as leader of the IFP team in school, I would like to explore the conflict in the Korean peninsula in closer focus in our conflict resolution meetings, maybe organising some presentations and even a GIF for discussion.”

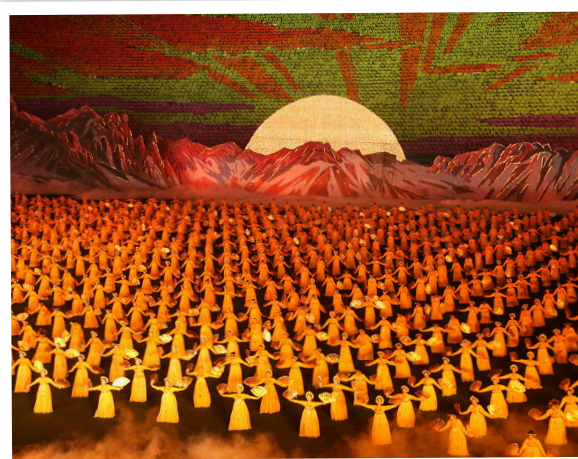
“As a result of this trip, I intend to study politics, economics and international relationship in university. The restriction of freedom and blocking of information and ideas, and the indoctrination in North Korea, show how politics can affect the social environment and human behaviour. Our tour guide once mentioned that North Korea went into a severe famine from 1995 to 1998 due to the collapse of the barter system with the Eastern bloc, extremely cold weather and foreign sanctions on North Korea that together caused millions of people to die. However, I found out that lots of luxurious monuments used for the glorification of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung were built in this period. This made

me wonder whether there is a misallocation of resources. If they had put the human labour, capital and expertise used in the construction of the monuments into food production or exchange for foreign grains, it might have alleviated the severe famine problem in North Korea during that period. These experiences further strengthen my view that politics and economics are essential tools to create a harmonious social environment. As a result, I believe good management of the above three aspects can allow people to have a sufficient life, both in quantity and quality. Thus my experience in North Korea sparked my interest in studying politics, economics and international relationships."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to take this incredible experience with me further on in life, and pass on the impressions I have of North Korea. I think it is important to let other people know where North Korea is coming from, and what it is built upon, and I will definitely contribute to any discussions I might have about this topic in the future. Before I went, a lot of my friends asked me questions about North Korea, some of them not knowing about the situation in North Korea, and although I was able to give them a brief outline, I can now go into deeper discussions on this topic. I also think this trip has opened my mind to how important international co-operation is, as a result of seeing a lack of this in North Korea. I will preach for international co-operation and understanding across borders from now on, with my experiences from North Korea and this trip in mind."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to return to North Korea again! It may sound impossible to some people that I might actually want to return to this most absurd country in the world, but the place is indeed special in its own way, and very interesting to learn from. I guess I can understand why the Principal organises trips to North Korea every year over and over again – after all, it is a great experience, and it is changing rather

rapidly, so you never know! I would also like to point out that out of all the places that I have been to, North Korea is one of the most beautiful countries I have ever seen. This may be due in part to underdeveloped industrialisation in the region, or the agreeable weather it is blessed with, but it can be seen that the country has made effort in conserving the nature it possesses, at least in the areas in and around Pyongyang. I am also inspired by my fellow classmate Alejandro, who, unbelievable as it seems, has set his mind on returning to North Korea to join UNICEF (the only NGO in the country) when he gets older, and help all he can. He has already joined the



Korean Friendship Association initiated nine years ago by a Spanish citizen, and he might also be appointed ambassador of the association to Paraguay. Although I may not necessarily agree with the Association's direction, I think this is a real encouragement not only for him, but also for us other students who have seen DPRK and have a devotion to the cause. I do hope to return to this country after a few years when the situation has improved – and it is indeed improving. When their foreign policies have loosened up enough for me to obtain a visa that enables me to travel around the country without joining a tour, I would definitely visit again, and try my best to see for myself what the country is really like underneath the façade that is presented to all tourists at the moment. If it is possible, like Alejandro I hope to join UNICEF in aiding the country by its

multi-oriented projects – especially after the talk we had with the head of the North Korean UNICEF Committee during the trip."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to put some thought into one of the plans of reunification suggested by Kim Il Sung. Before the great leader died, he ideally hoped that North and South Korea would one day reunify peacefully without intervention from other countries. The reunification allows both capitalism and communism to exist and a joint government will be established to control both regions. It is like "one country, two systems" in the relationship between Hong Kong and China. Although this plan seems idealistic and far from actually starting, this is probably a notable suggestion to develop a World Village, allowing counties of different political systems to co-exist. From economics classes, we have learned that there is a trend towards countries forming unions like the European Union. Therefore, if we can successfully execute this plan, it will have a significant impact on unify the world."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to share my thoughts with my family members (which I have already done) and my friends. Many of my friends asked me if the country is full of crime and if it is uncivilised, and I feel responsible for telling them what I saw in North Korea."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to:
- Continue to learn more about North Koreans' way of living, their culture and beliefs.
- Learn more about North Korea's history.
- Tell other people what I saw and felt. I know many people who believe that North Korea is just a backward and poor country that has no freedom whatsoever. (I must admit that they might not be completely wrong. After all, we were only presented the good and beautiful side of DPRK)."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to learn more about the DPRK and the Republic of Korea and their histories as well as the government structure (if possible) of the DPRK."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to go back to the DPRK as member of a humanitarian organisation and help improve the situation in the DRPK. I will also try to raise awareness about what happens in the DPRK, and try to raise funds to improve the situation of many DPRK citizens who need help, because their government is not taking a good enough care, not even on basic level of providing them with food."

"As a result of this trip, I intend to –in the small way I can - help correct the image that many people have about North Korea, that dirty, sombre, grey and moody place – a member of the Axis of Evil. I don't agree with many of the regime's policies – most of them actually - but there are some things that they have learned to do right and in the process they've secured a better lifestyle for regular North Koreans."

"As a result of this trip, I feel more mature and I think that I can better understand not only the North Korean people, but also my parents and the other Albanians that have lived under a Communist Dictatorship. This has made me more determined in my plan to return to Albania after I finish my education. I want to go back, so that I can help cure the wound that Communism left in my country, and I will always be in support of North Koreans living in a democracy. But I think that this doesn't need to be done with violence, but by emancipating people and gradually bringing change."

Other comments ...

"Mrs Li was absolutely fantastic. She should be extolled for what she has done so nicely and wholeheartedly."

"The experience of being in North Korea has brought a deep change in me. Now

I'm more certain about what career I want to follow and why, and that career is diplomacy. Sometimes the only way to sort out a conflict is through diplomatic means to avoid ending up in a war with terrible consequences, both for the parties involved and for the rest of the world. And as I have said before, whatever I do in the future might have repercussions for the whole world."

"It's the best type of trip when the explanation of the souvenir is worth more than the souvenir itself."

"I think the park experience - dancing with the North Koreans on Liberation



Day - should be repeated. It was really good and satisfactory. As well, I think that the performances for the school being held in the first days allowed us to rest more on the last nights, when we were more tired, which was good. However, I know it is not easy for us to control the schedule."

"Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to visit North Korea."

"That trip was for sure something I will never forget. I actually felt like I was going back in time – co-operative farms etc. It was organised very well, the group was good and apart from a few incidents, this trip was excellent."

"I sincerely appreciate the effort made by one of our guides, Mrs Li Mok Ran, who always projected enthusiasm and patience in answering our questions as

well as bearing responsibility for every detail of the trip. She is undoubtedly an experienced guide who was always ready to settle our curiosity, and at any time, was willing to share her personal experiences with us."

"I honestly have to say that the North Korean trip was like no other traveling experience I've had before. Beautiful, insightful, frustrating, fun, thought provoking. I had the chance to be put out of my comfort zone and be challenged in so many ways - of exploring my reaction to different situations I've never ever faced before, while at the same time grasping a bit of the essence of the North Korean people, and having the chance to bond with all the people in our group and share their impressions as well. Asking a lot of questions, that were marvellously answered by our guide, and with camera in hand, I got the chance to create my own perspective of North Korea. I will hopefully expect to return to North Korea someday as part of my professional activity, but until then this trip will definitely remain in my memory. It has also generated a very keen interest on the conflict in the Korean peninsula, that as a member of IFP I would like to further explore in our

conflict resolution meetings. This might come as a surprising opinion, but for a dictator-led regime, I do not think North Korea is that badly off. After all, it must take certain remarkable feats for this communist country to end up as the sole survivor in such a dominantly capitalist world, especially with such widely developed globalisation. For example, I do find that many of the country's measures work rather well and provide for a peaceful society, such as its policies on children and health care, and its Great People's Study House. I hope I have not been exceedingly brainwashed, but I suppose that the Great Leader Kim Il Sung might truly have been a great man indeed, with a wide range of talents and outstanding leadership ability to lead a country out of post-war distress and disaster. Of course, this is not to say that I agree with his philosophy and ideology

on how the country should be led (although the Juche Idea was indeed rather inspiring), but I am just saying that the situation could have been a lot worse. It is not an easy job to manage brainwashing millions of people into idolisation all at once, and failure to do so has led to the fall of many other communist states in the past all over the world, leading to other dreadful consequences. However I do keep in mind that Pyongyang is merely a showcase city, devoted to the admiration of the country's Dear Leader and the foreigners who visit the region, and that what we have seen is merely a mirage of North Korea, a performance comparable to the splendid Arirang Mass Games we saw at the May Day Stadium. As an extension of all this, conflicts can only be resolved when both parties achieve mutual understanding and are truly willing to reach a compromise with each other. Countries should start to make genuine attempts to understand North Korea, its background and its underlying motives, and to start thinking from the DPRK's exceptional point of view in order to reach an agreement with the regime for the ultimate goal of maintaining world peace."

"I want to thank our guide Ms Li for helping us for the entire trip. Without her taking care of us, we would not have been able to have such an enjoyable and smoothly arranged tour in DPRK. I hope LPC can still have her as our tour guide in the future trips."

"I love the weather in North Korea. The air is refreshing and I didn't feel sticky at all. Also, our tour guide, Mrs Li, was really professional and admirable. I'm glad that she let us take photos most of the time and shared with us lots of information, including some of her personal thoughts. I enjoyed talking to her on our way down the escalator to the platform in the railway station, as she expressed how much she cared about her children by quitting her job as a tour guide for four years to take care of them."

"This is an extremely worthwhile trip. I hope that one day we can have a North Korean UWC student. I look forward to visiting DPRK again when it unifies with its southern neighbour."

"At times, I felt this urge to ask some pointed questions when something seemed ridiculous to me. But then I thought this might offend the North Koreans. We were not there to criticise but to observe and learn. Also, we had this mission of trying to get North Korean students to come to a UWC. Asking controversial questions would not be helping at all. Therefore, I was



sometimes confused about my role in this trip."

"Overall I found the trip to be an incredible learning experience and I would definitely recommend a trip to the DPRK to anyone. However, I would make sure that they ethically examined their reasons for going. Because of the expense of going on a trip like this, a normal tourist's visit would, in my opinion, provide funding (however small it is) to a regime that the tourist may not actually agree with. Personally, I justified my traveling to the DPRK by telling myself that I was, in some small way, helping to open the borders of this very closed country. Therefore I think that it is VERY important that this trip continues. My contact with the few people that I met in the DPRK has proved to me the importance of introducing at least a small part of the population to other ideas that

do not revolve around Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and the Worker's Party of Korea."

"It is a one of a kind experience; I would definitely advise first years to apply for it and to get the special experience. I'm very happy I went on the trip and will never regret it. I would also like to thank Dr Codrington for putting this together and organising everything so well, as well as fitting so many activities into very little time."

"The trip for me was an incredible experience. There are always two sides of a story and I finally got to see and hear the other side of the story of the Korean Peninsula. I appreciate that and I'll always carry the DPRK with me for all its efforts in making us understand their reasons and where they are coming from."

"I would just like to say a very heartfelt thank you for organising this trip for us :) This was a very memorable experience, absurd and unusual in every aspect but at the same time incredibly inspiring and thought-provoking, that would without a doubt stay with us for the rest of our lives."

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 full day visit to the school, including sharing lunch with the students. This was cut unilaterally to a two hour visit after arrival in the DPRK.

Comments such as avoiding 'exhibitions', having less food served, 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

A day-by-day travel diary of this trip, together with galleries containing 738 photographs, has been posted on the internet at http://web.mac.com/scodrington/Site/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2009/DPRK_Travel_Diary_2009.html.

I would like to thank all those who assisted with the organisation of this trip, especially Ms Hannah Barraclough (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 second year in a row to cover fluctuations in exchange rates between the Hong Kong dollar and the Euro.

I am very grateful to Mr Gopalan Balagopal, the UNICEF representative in North Korea, for accepting the invitation from Chris Hui to speak with our students at a breakfast briefing. His 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 him for his ready willingness to assist in our liaison with the DPRK Ministry of Education.

Finally, I would like to thank the outstanding group of 20 students from LPCUWC 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
10th September 2009