2012 Seoul Study Trip Report

Department of Public Policy
City University of Hong Kong
Forward

The Department (formerly under the name of Public and Social Administration) has always been keen on promoting whole-person development among students. The **SA Goodies and Excellence** (SAGE) scheme was set up by the Department in 2006 to link up teaching and learning resources in the department, college and institution, aiming to provide a wide-range of student-centered activities for enhancing students' learning culture, contributing to the growth of ideal graduates according to the institution’s mission statement. Among the scheme’s various activities is overseas study trip. Based on the successful learning experience from a study trip in January 2012 to study the presidential election in Taiwan, a group of the Department’s students initiated to plan another study trip of a similar nature to Seoul. With their devotion and the Department’s support, the trip was successfully conducted from 18th to 22nd December 2012 with 19 students taking part in the learning activity from planning of the trip to producing this report. It is a great pleasure to witness the students' intellectual and personal growth during the process. It is also great fun to read what they have discovered during the trip. Enjoy reading.

Arthur Cheung, SAGE Coordinator
Itinerary

DAY 1
Direct flight from Hong Kong to Seoul, and hostel check-in.

DAY 2
Met with and interviewed local Koreans for their opinions about the Korean presidential election in morning;

Visited polling station organized by the Republic of Korea National Election Commission and observed voting inside the station in afternoon;

Visited poll counting station organized by the Republic of Korea National Election Commission and observed poll counting inside the station in evening.
DAY 3

Visited **The Korean National Assembly** (Main Building and Memorial Hall) in morning;

Visited **Kyung Hee University** in afternoon and attended a lecture by Dr. Yun Seong-yi, Department of Political Science, on ‘Korean Politics: Presidential Election’.

DAY 4

Visited **Yonsei University** in morning and met their Department of Political Science and International Studies students and Head of Department, Prof. Jungmin Seo;

Visited the **Republic of Korea National Election Commission** head office in afternoon.

DAY 5

Visited the **Election Headquarters** of the winning Saenuri Party in morning;

Visited Seoul National University in afternoon;

Direct flight from Seoul to Hong Kong.
STUDENT REFLECTION & Sharing
The strong voting atmosphere and high turnout rate reflect that the Korean voters treasure their right to vote and select the leader of their country.
From 18th to 22th Dec, I joined CityU’s study trip to the capital city of Korea, Seoul. It surprised me because it was the first time I saw the polling station there, and the actual procedures for counting votes. Even though I am a Chinese, I don’t have a chance to visit the vote counting station, National Election Commission nor National Assembly in either Hong Kong or China. That’s why I feel honored to go there by using a foreigner’s identity and learn about another country’s political system.

When we went to the polling station and the place for counting votes, the settings were not very different from that in Hong Kong. However, the attitude of the Korean citizens towards their presidential election had a huge difference from that of Hong Kong’s citizens. That is something that I need to go and feel from their election atmosphere and actual environment in Korea.

From my observation, Hong Kong’s people are more passive, some of them may not even go to vote. However, almost all eligible Koreans will go to vote. Instead, a lot of citizens want to take part in the vote counting procedures.

Their sense of political participation is high among different age groups. During our visit, a woman felt angry and argued with the official why she could not get in and see the counting process while foreigners (we) could enter into the venue. It makes me realize that Koreans think the election is really important to them and they cannot bear the cost if they miss it. In addition, the most interesting point is that, the two major candidates in the election represent different meanings for Koreans. For the female candidate, she is conservative and favored by middle age to elderly age group while the other male candidate represents youngsters because he is innovative and concerns creativity in his policy and agenda. Even they promote themselves like that, not all young citizens will vote for the male, they will really look at the different aspects of policy that the candidate proposes. For example, they will concern about the policy about how to deal with North Korea.
When we talked with some students in the Yonsei University, and asked for the reason and motivation for Korean people’s willingness to take part in political activities, some of them told us that it was their president, and his/her policies would affect their life seriously, so they thought there was no point to avoid these important issues. It seems an easy answer that everyone knows, however, if we really put it into practice, it is not easy for citizens to do it actually. In Hong Kong, people may just say they are busy, or they forget to go to vote. I feel ashamed that even the general education level in Hong Kong is high, the willingness and political participation of citizens are quite low compared to other Asian countries. Even people vote, sometimes they don’t even know what kinds of policy the candidates promote; some just follow the major trend in the society without thinking the policy agenda and past experience of the candidates. Some teenagers are even mobilized by their peer groups without independent thinking. Therefore, I am quite surprised that Koreans have their independent thinking towards presidential election and they are willing to spend time to analyse and understand the policies that candidates advocate. In Hong Kong, election seems like a game, candidates will go to promote themselves by giving short term benefits and travelling tours to citizens. Some of them even booked coaches to pick up citizens from rural areas to go to vote for them. The process of election is commercialized and the real meaning of election lost.

Therefore, I appreciate Koreans’ good election attitude and their education for taking part in political affairs.
When we compare the political situation in South Korea to Hong Kong's, we find out that there are many differences between them. The election in South Korea is more democratic than the election in Hong Kong.

Also the power of the parliament in South Korea is greater than Hong Kong's legislative council. For example, members of the South Korean parliament can impeach the president or the prime minister when they make some huge mistakes. But in Hong Kong, we cannot impeach the chief executive even he makes some big mistakes. Therefore, there are many things we can learn from the political system of South Korea. In my point of view, the election system in South Korea is even better than the
election system in U.S.. Since the big companies such as Samsung cannot affect the election process in South Korea, it can prevent the presidential candidates giving benefits back to the companies when she/he really becomes the president. So when the president decides to dissolve or ban the cross-shareholding of the big companies, she will not have limitation to do so. However, big companies play a huge role in the presidential election in U.S.. It can affect the policy of the government toward the big companies after the election.

So, when we are trying to speed up and improve the progress of democracy in Hong Kong, the election system of South Korea may be a role model for us.
My report of this study trip, concerning with the Korean Presidential Election, aims to focus on the main concerns of Korean citizens in this election and reveal the difference between Hong Kong media’s perspective and my actual observation and exchange of opinion with Korean people.

Before the study trip on presidential election in South Korea, I found that Hong Kong media gave more emphasis on the relation between South Korea and North Korea as the most important concern of South Korean citizens in this election; nevertheless, after discussing with the university students and professors in Korea, I observe that there are some differences from what we understand in Hong Kong. The problem in North Korea becomes less important than the previous election in South Korea. The sound of unification has also less influence in this election that South Koreans seem to have given up this idea of unification after a long period of separation.

In the presidential election, economic development and economic democratization become the first priority in Korean people’s view due to the fact that the big businesses (Samsung, Hyundai, Lotte) monopolize the whole market in Korea, stopping the development of small companies in today’s Korea. Similar to Hong Kong, it is difficult to have further development in enterprises by youngsters because of the monopoly by big businesses.

Also, the proposed reform in education by Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in also become the main concern of youngsters and parents. From the lecture in Kyung Hee University, the professor points out that the tuition fee in university is unaffordable for the lower-class (about 80 thousands HK dollars per year). It means a kind of injustice and unfairness in the education system, for poor people can hardly attend higher level education. Even though the stance of Park and Moon are different in dealing with this problem, the reform must go on to resolve the discontent against injustice in education.

The aging problem, not only happened in Hong Kong, but also in Korea, has affected the whole society and the development in long term public policy and taxation. It will be one of the main concerns for Park Geun-hye to increase the birth rate in today’s low-birth rate Korea. And we can see in this election, the aging problem is one of the key points to show that even though about 65% youngsters support Moon Jae-in, it is useless because of the fact that the population aged 19 to 49 has less people than those who are above 50. Korea shows the common aging problem in today’s East Asian countries. If we do not have an effective way to deal with this problem; the myth in today’s well development in East Asia might be broken in the future caused by aging problem.
To conclude, the study trip gives us a chance to experience the democratic election in Korea.

In Hong Kong, it is rare to understand the politics in Korea from the media and education, however, Korea, where is building up a lot in the past 20 years, should be one of the role models for Hong Kong to learn concerning democratic system, development in technology, and high political participation and voting rate.

The process of democratization is also one of the focus points in this study trip. After the universal suffrage started from 1987 in Korea, this is the first time to vote for a female president Park Geun-hye in election; also, Park Geun-hye is the daughter of a former dictator, Park Chung-hee. Her governance in the next five years will be the concern in Korean people’s view of how she can give confidence in promoting democracy in Korea. It is because her image is cold, impersonal that some people are worried about the restoration of dictatorship by her. Her first job may be to gain improvement in people’s impression of her by using more policies which concern people first.
The five days study trip to Seoul was a valuable experience for me to understand the real democratic system and the practice of democracy in Korea.

As we had visited the polling station and counting station, the National Assembly and National Election Commission, met with the professors and political science students of two top universities, Kyung Hee University and Yonsei University. During that period, I knew more about the two major political parties in South Korea, their ideology, history, political style and platform, etc. We learn that the people of South Korea have a vote to choose their president by universal suffrage. In Hong Kong, the Chinese government has made a promise to allow “universal suffrage” for the next Chief Executive in 2017 that would at least give Hong Kong citizens a vote. In this case, there is a practical learning experience for me to evaluate the Korean practice of representative democracy and act as a reference for Hong Kong democratic development.

The 18th South Korean presidential election was held in South Korea on 19 December 2012. It was the sixth presidential election and was held under a first-past-the-post system. Park Geun-hye of the Saenuri party was elected the first female South Korean president with 51.6% of the vote opposed to 48.0% for her opponent Moon Jae-in. Dr. Yun Seong-yi, a professor of Political Science of Kyung Hee University, pointed out that there were 30.7 million people voted with turnout at 75.8% in that presidential election. I was very surprised with the high turnout rate. It was because on the election that day, we went to the polling station and observed their voting activities and arrangement. I found that there were not many people entering the polling station even that day was a holiday. So how could 75.8% turnout rate come out? Through communicating with the Political Science students of Yonsei University, I found out one of the factors that contributed to that high turnout rate was the overseas polling station system. For South Koreans living abroad, they can vote through oversea polling station in their local city for exercising their right to vote. I appreciate this system because it can fully protect the political right of citizens and ensure all eligible citizens having the chance to vote even they are living abroad.
Dr. Yun Seong-yi pointed out that there were three major factors that affected the election results, however, I found one common feature of South Koreans no matter he or she is young people, middle age people or elderly, they would put the family background of presidential candidates as one of the key considerations, such as the ruling New National Party candidate Park Geun-hye's father, former President Park Chung-hee. South Koreans consider the political origin of the candidates. When I talked with the students of Yonsei University, one girl told me that she was disappointed with the election result as Park Geun-hye was Park Chung-hee’s daughter, she would perform the similar way as her father. And one man told me that he would not support Park Geun-hye as her father was a dictator.

Through participating in this study trip, now I can differentiate the two major political parties in South Korea with their political ideology, political platform and connection, etc, and have more understanding of their election system through visits organized by the National Election Commission.
What is the relationship, if any, between the processes of democratization in South Korea and the rapid developing economy? Is it similar to the Western theory like modernization theory?

It is generally accepted that economic growth will promote democracy as sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without relaxing political restrictions. But first of all, the concept of democracy has to be clearly defined, especially for Korea, in order to make the discussion meaningful. Take it simply, democracy is the processes of institutionalization that make the government accountable to the citizens by a competitive process in which people can choose their leader. In South Korea, there was no political democracy during the first five Korean republics, the authoritarian regime ended and a form of democratic institution was achieved only since 1987 — the Fifth Republic of president Chun Doo-

CHENG KI FUNG

Hwan brought parliamentary democracy including direct presidential election, despite the fact that the economy of Korea started to grow dramatically in the 1960s during the dictatorship of president Park Chung-Hee.

In the case of some Western countries, for example Europe in the nineteenth century, the advance in economy led to the emergence of the middle classes, or so called bourgeois who strived for democracy in order to check the economic power of the state and to advance their own economic interests. The result was movements against excessive political power of the government or rulers and contributed to the rise of democracy. However, this had not happened in South Korea.

In South Korea, public opinion polls have consistently rated Park Chung-Hee as not only the most effective president in the 60-year history of the Republic of Korea, but the most respected leader in all of Korean history. Only a leadership like military junta Park can give priority to the economic sectors while demobilizing the social and political sectors. However, it seems that forcing resources into the economy will result in an imbalanced society, which was the case of South Korea in 1960s, with highly developed economy, moderately developed society, and underdeveloped politics. Obviously, there was a crisis of legitimacy where people would desire for democracy.
It is true that democracy is unlikely to last without economic progress, be that as it may, economic progress does not guarantee democracy.

In South Korea since 1961, a high level of economic development was achieved, together with the effective mobilization and allocation of capital, collaboration with private entrepreneurs and superior control of the working classes. As entrepreneurial sectors are usually playing the leading role in pursuing democratization programs, this could stabilize the society by resolving the need for democracy of the private capitalists. Also, the appearance of democracy and constitutionalism that Park built—National Assembly controlled through political parties (the Democratic Republican Party and the Democratic Justice Party)—helped credit the armed force of Park.

In fact, there are many factors that can contribute to the process of democratization besides economic growth. For example, the demands for democracy in the 1980s against the sense of injustice and unfairness that Koreans felt in the 1980s but not in the 1960s. In the case of Korea, it seems that the link between economic growth and democracy is not obvious.
It has been about 15 years since I travelled to South Korea for the very first time, but my recent trip to it is far from a usual one. This time I went there to study about the 2012 presidential election of South Korea with my fellow classmates. I am glad to have the opportunity to witness the battle between Saenuri Party presidential candidate Park Geun-hye and the liberal candidate, Moon Jae-in of the Democratic United Party.

This presidential election turnout is impressive. 75.84% of the 40,507,842 registered voters casted their vote. It is the highest voting rate since the 1997 South Korean Presidential election. The voter turnout rate of the recent presidential election in the democratic United States is just about 57.5%. Unlike Australia, there is no law to stipulate the South Koreans to vote to elect their head of government. The campaign rally in South Korea did not seem to be particularly frantic, though legal. There was no political party giving out free foods and drinks to people to amass supports and there was no TV commercials rallying support for certain candidate.

So once they were given the right to select their president directly, they would cherish the opportunity to choose the leader of their country. It may also help constitute the intense political culture, urging the country’s young to participate in the election. If universal suffrage is really introduced to Hong Kong in 2017, Hong Kong people should act like South Koreans and actively participate in the election of the Chief Executive though the nomination and selection process of the CE candidates has yet to be announced. But still, we should cherish the opportunity as the right to vote never comes easy.

I ascribe the high turnout rate to the memories of the era under the dictatorial rule of Park Chung-hee lingering in the mind of the older generation.
Before I participated in the study trip, I knew very little about the politics of South Korea. Now I definitely know more about her political affairs and socio-economic condition and I will pay more attention to the political news of South Korea, especially those about Park’s administration. Time will tell if South Korea will flourish under her leadership.
It is a precious opportunity for me to join the five-day study trip in Korea to have a deeper understanding about the 2012 South Korean Presidential Election. During the study trip, I was surprised that Seoul was surrounded by the election ambiance, which was difficult to see in Hong Kong. In fact, those kinds of fervent election ambiance was partly caused by the keen competition between the two presidential candidates, Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in. By the survey of Gallup Korea, it could be seen that the supporting rate of the two candidates was really close, with discrepant rates between just 1.3 to 3.0 per cent. One of the special phenomena is that the supporters of Park and Moon were mainly from different generation respectively. When we discussed with the students in Yonsei University, the students mentioned that since Moon concerned more about human rights and their needs, for instance the tuition costs cut, most of the university students were more likely to support Moon instead of Park. They also indicated that one of the reasons that Park lost the election was because of the lower voting rate of the younger voters. One of the students even expressed her worry that human rights might be undermined under the ruling of Park.

Unlike the younger voters, the elderly (50s and over 60) are more willing to support Park, one of the reasons is because of the background of Park – the daughter of Park Jung Hee. Since there was a rapid economic development under the ruling of her father in the past, most of the elderly also believe that the policy implemented by Park can improve Korea’s economy. Moreover, the university students also indicated that besides the 50s and 60s generations, Park also got a high support rate in the region with good development under the economic policies of Park’s father.

Besides the presidential election, the close relationship between China and Korea was also showed in the trip. During the study trip, some of the students whom we met were studying Chinese. When we asked them what was the incentive for them to study Chinese, most of them said that the main reason was because they could find a better job, since there was a large market in China. Moreover, since Park is interested in Chinese culture and philosophy, and can even speak fluent Chinese, most of the scholars predict that as Park becomes the President, the relationship between China and Korea will become closer.
Last but not least, the fervent election ambiance really impressed me a lot.

As we all know, there is no universal suffrage of the top leader in Hong Kong. Even there is legislative election in Hong Kong, the voting rate is not really high. In the past, Hong Kong people were often identified as having political apathy. It seems that Hong Kong people are indifferent to political activities, such as elections, public opinions, and civic responsibilities. In fact, after this trip, I strongly believe that to a large extent, the phenomenon of political apathy is one of the disastrous effects of the lack of universal suffrage in Hong Kong. If the people cannot choose their leader, how can they be convinced that the government will concern about their needs and be encouraged to engage in political affairs? It seems that the high voting rate of the 2012 South Korean Presidential Election (over 75 per cent) inspired us one thing, i.e. the necessity of implementing universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Otherwise, it seems that the credibility of government will become one of the serious problems behind the increasing discontent of Hong Kong people in the future.
Attended the valuable lecture given by Dr. Yun Seong-yi, Department of Political Science at Kyung-Hee University, on 'Korean Politics: Presidential Election'
During the several days in Seoul, it was a nice and precious opportunity to recognize the political developments of South Korea. For the visit of the Republic of Korea National Election Commission and the opinions from some professors and local students in Kyung Hee University and Yonsei University, I have learnt a lot on the background of the Korean political system.

The main theme I am interested in is the result of the presidential election.

The election was focusing on two strong candidates. They come from the first party Saenuri Party (Park Geun-hye) and the Democratic United Party (Moon jae-in). Park is the representative of conservative party and also the daughter of the previous dictatorial president (Park Jung-hee). Moon is a lawyer and also a politician. Finally, the vote which support Park is 51.6% and Moon is 48%. The former one gained more votes and became the next president of South Korea.
In my first impression, I assume that the gender factor will be the crucial cause to influence the result when I know nothing about the South Korean politics at first. Owing to the traditional custom in Korea, women often receive a lower status than the men. Therefore, Moon would likely win the election due to a superior gender identity. However, the result is different from my expectation and the factors which led to the final result can be summarized as below.

First of all, the background of the candidate is the main point that electors may concern about. The current president Lee Myung-bak is conservative which is similar to the Saenuri Party. The large number of stable votes from the 50s and 60s generation tend to support Park but not the liberal party. The 50s generation (P: 62.5% VS M: 37.4%) and 60s generation (P: 72.3% VS M: 27.5%) are her main supporters. They do so mainly because of the glory of Park’s father, who made a great influence in South Korea’s economy. Thus, the majority of the elderly usually prefer Park to remain no major change.

Another factor is the political platform of the two candidates, especially in the economic aspect. Park avoids defeating the current situation and the interests of the financial magnates and suggests promoting the democratic economy step by step. This soft planning is more capable of winning support from the middle and higher class people. Nevertheless, Moon’s platform suggests a reform to prevent the financial tycoons like Samsung and LG from continuously occupying the market and controlling the middle and small enterprises. It is disadvantageous for the businessmen so it may lose certain electors.

Last but not least, the tactics which the candidates used to lobby for the votes are also important to affect the choice of citizens. Moon did not have effective tactics to lobby the public. He thinks that Park is favored by the elderly because of her father’s success in Korea’s history. He just suggested to oppose Park but did not have many attractive justifications for canvassing the votes. By contrast, Park had done a great job in lobbying for the votes. She is single and does not have family burden which can prove that she would serve the state as the first priority. Also, she tried to apologize for her father’s faults and the wrongdoings. These tactics can help her gain a positive evaluation from the public. Thus, she won the election at the end.

To sum up, the result of the presidential election is not a big surprise. Although the outcome is not similar with my first impression, yet the reasonable and objective facts can become the evidence to analyze why Park can become successful in the election due to the political background, platform and the tactics she used.

It is a nice trip for me to recognize the Korean politics with direct touch on interviewing the local people and experiencing the election process.

It is beneficial to students to have more opportunities to grab and acquire more knowledge and experience by visiting the other countries.
To me, this election can offer different lessons to our Hong Kong citizens, government and political parties to prepare for the coming universal suffrage of the Chief Executive (CE) Election in 2017.

Whenever talking about the latest South Korea presidential election, what comes to our mind will probably be high turnout rate and the first female president, Park Geun-hye. Nevertheless, it is more worthy for Hong Kong people to put their eyes on the lesson given by this universal suffrage.

It seems that other countries’ presidential election has no relationship with Hong Kong. 75.8% turnout rate of the South Korea presidential election is only a number without any meaning to Hong Kong people, yet this high turnout rate reminds us of our civil responsibility. We not only need to comply with the law, but also take the initiative to vote. After all, political election is not a game of politicians, but an issue for every citizen. The success or failure of democracy is dependent on every vote. Therefore, they should take the initiative to play a part in politics rather than keep silent.

In hopes of holding a successful and fair universal suffrage, the South Korean government sets a good example to Hong Kong. The government paid much attention to the presidential election, for instance, the National Election Commission has made a clear and informative video which explains the election’s information, such as eligibility of candidates, voting process and methods, in order to let the public have a deep understanding on the election issues rather than just vote for their favorite candidate. Also, it sets the voting day as official holiday for encouraging citizens to perform their civil responsibility of casting vote and build an image that political election is a public issue. Compared with South Korea, our Hong Kong government has many things to learn and improve undoubtedly. We always say Hong Kong people are politically apathetic and only concern about their livelihood or pocketbook. The reasons why such phenomenon has emerged are not only the present small circle
electoral system, but also scant promotion by the government. I understand that it is not fair to compare Hong Kong’s election with Seoul Korea’s at present because of different electoral systems, but we can employ the former as a blueprint for future universal suffrage. What the government should devote to is showing respect for the coming CE election, for example, setting voting day as a public holiday, promoting more and detailed information of the electoral system in various media platforms and establishing a voting system for overseas Hong Kong residents like Seoul Korea did. Hence, the government plays an important role in democratic development in Hong Kong.

Besides, diverse platforms between Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in give an apocalypse to political parties and people who want to participate in the coming CE election to formulate a suitable election program. As we know, Park Geun-hye, the representative of conservative party, only advocates little changes in different aspects, such as ban of new cross-shareholding, subsides for some specific social groups and so on. On the contrary, Moon Jae-in, the representative of liberal party, advocates big changes in the election campaign, for example, disintegration of existing cross-shareholding, provision of more welfare to all citizens and so forth. It seems that aging of population is the key cause that results in Moon’s loss since most 50s or above people incline to support Park. In fact, his excessive reform caused many neutrals, namely the 40s and 50s, to depart from him. Although they experienced past democratic struggle when young, they have heavy economic burden now. They are afraid that they may lose their jobs when cross-shareholding is dissolved because Korea’s economy is mainly sustained by the plutocrats. Moreover, his welfare program may spark off heavy financial burden on the government and a bad social ethos, laziness, in the future. On the other hand, Park’s little change program is commanded by many supports as her policies are more foreseeable. It reminds me the Hong Kong CE, CY Leung’s slogan, “seek change whilst maintaining stability”, during the CE election. We hope for change when facing dilemma; even so, undue innovation seems to be an utopia like Moon’s ideas. These two candidates’ platforms warn our political parties that social conditions should be taken into account seriously when planning their electoral program. Don’t make a blank cheque, namely excessive welfare, to the public for seeking quick success and instant benefits. There are many protests striving for various welfare to different social groups in Hong Kong, for instance, old age allowance, 15 years of free education and so on. Providing welfare to the needy is obligatory, yet excessive welfare provision will turn the public to lean on the government. If the government always takes care of people, “from
cradle to grave”, how can we expect our future generation contribute to society actively? The young is producer, but not consumer. Thus, welfare should be a means to cultivate people’s self-responsibility and civil responsibility. There is no doubt that South Korea’s election gives a lesson to Hong Kong’s political parties that “interest” cannot curry favor with the public. A long-term planning is more important than the short-term.

It is worth mentioning that South Korea is not a traditional democratic country and has only experienced democracy for around 34 years, but the average turnout rate in the presidential election is over 75%.

Hong Kong is similar to South Korea since it has never been a true democracy, even after the handover. Hence, I believe democracy will become mature in Hong Kong one day if it has more consultations on other countries’ democratic system. South Korea’s is a respectable model.
The Republic of Korea had returned to democracy in 1987 and started their democratic presidential election in the same year. The sixth presidential election was held on 19 December 2012 and Park Geun-hye won the election. Park’s presidency has become eye-catching, it is not only because she is the first female president in the Republic of Korea, but also her father was a dictator who controlled the country for almost 20 years. Hong Kong and South Korea are both included in the ‘Four Little Asian Dragons’. Korea has developed a relatively good democratic election system, while Hong Kong is still in the very beginning of democratic election of our chief executive. As a competitor or role model, there are still many learning points for Hong Kong to learn from South Korea in the process of democratic development. I am going to talk about some key points in terms of age group, sophisticated political skills and media in this essay in order to find some useful information for our future election of chief executive.

Age group of voters is one of the important factors affecting the result of the election. We were told that the younger generation in South Korea was supporting the liberal side, while the elder generation was supporting the conservative side. I did ask some elderly locals on the last day and they told me that they supported Saenuri Party because of the history of the party and they believed that the party could help them to solve economic problem. In comparison, the elder generation also seems to support the conservative party in Hong Kong, but getting benefits from the conservative party has been seen as the main reason of the elder generation to vote for conservative party in Hong Kong. Some elder voters were interviewed by reporters and they even did not know whom they were voting for during the 2012 legislature election. This problem is not only due to education, but also regulation related with election. When we visited National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea, their PowerPoint presentation showed the strict regulations for their election. I think there is a need for Hong Kong to review election regulation before introducing universal suffrage in order to avoid some parties using benefits to attract elder voters.
In this election, I really appreciated Ahn Cheol-soo because of his sophisticated political skills and his sacrifice. He was one of the liberalist candidates, but he withdrew from the election in order to transfer his votes to Moon Jae-in, another liberalist candidate. As a result, Moon’s support had enormous increase, although he lost in the election.

This is a really good lesson for liberals in Hong Kong, since democratic groups are always criticized with low cohesion and poor cooperation during election period.

It is important for different democratic parties in Hong Kong to compromise and well cooperate in any election; otherwise the conservative party will keep winning again and again.

Last but not least, the use of media is another point that I want to highlight. Rally can be organised in South Korea during the election period, but political parties and candidates are more likely to choose using the media for their promotions. The use of media worked and the turnout rate of young people around 20 year-old was about 65.8%. In contrast, media tool including Facebook and YouTube are also used by political party and government in Hong Kong’s elections, but the turnout rate of young people is still low. I am wondering whether the problem is not due to the promotion work of government, but more related to the citizenship identity issue. I hope the universal suffrage of our chief executive could increase the sense of citizenship of the younger generation in Hong Kong and increase the turnout rate of the election.

Overall, I have gained insight into South Korea’s politics and understood more about their democratic development. The above suggestions are based on my observation during the trip and I think they are useful for the democratic development in Hong Kong.
The Korean presidential election was finished last week. The conservative candidate Park Geun-hye won the presidency by 3.6% to her main opponent, the progressive candidate Moon Jae-in. During the election period, I participated in a study trip, which was organized by the SAGE Scheme of the Department of Public and Social Administration, to South Korea for experiencing the presidential election and Korean politics.

After the study trip, I have experienced and benefited a lot that the trip has given me a new image of South Korea.

Firstly, the study trip helps me understand that there are several conflicts among Korean people in politics. I used to think that the so-called conflict in Korean politics was only an ideological disagreement between the conservative party and the progressive party. However, after a lecture given by Dr. Yun Seong-yi in the Kyung Hee University and some dialogues with local universities’ students arranged by the study trip, I understand that regional conflict and generational discord are also important in Korean politics, alongside with the ideological conflict.

The presidential election result did show us these conflicts. The generational discord was displayed in the result that more than 60% of voters aged below 40 voted for the progressive candidate while more than two-third of voter aged over 50 voted for the conservative candidate. The election result also shows that regional conflict in South Korea is significant. Almost 90% of voters in Jeolla province (southwestern Korea) supported Moon Jae-in whereas around 70% of voters in Gyeongsang province (southeastern Korea) supported the conservative party. Those conflicts were based on my assumption before I came to South Korea, but the study trip gave me a chance to recreate the picture of Korean politics in my mind.
Secondly, I learned a new concept – economic democratization – which can help me a lot to reflect on the political and economic development in Hong Kong. North Korea–South Korea relations and economic growth are two key issues that people outside Korea would think are the most important concerns for Korean people in the presidential election. However, both of them were not. In fact, one of the key issues for voters is economic democratization. Similar to Hong Kong, Chaebols, the big business conglomerates in South Korea, monopolize the economy and therefore play a significant role in Korean politics and economy which has brought injustice and inequality to Korean society. So, the request to democratize in economy was roused in the recent decade.

After a chat with some Korean people, I found that the economic democratization started after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 – the government launched a series of policies, targeting at the Chaebols, to reform the economy, under the ruling of President Kim Dae-jung. In South Korea, economic democratization simply means to minimize the influence of those Chaebols over the economy and politics in South Korea. But it is far from successful, especially we are witnessing the growth of Samsung and LG.

Despite the fact that the economic democratization in South Korea is still indulging in empty talk, I find that it is appreciative. Korean economy is dominated by the Chaebols whereas the property developers occupy the economy in Hong Kong. With such a similar situation between South Korea and Hong Kong, the Korean government and politicians have started to target at those chaebol in the name of economic democratization. However, in Hong Kong, what we had done was only to introduce a term called “developer hegemony” to criticize developers and the incompetence of the government. Any kind of actual idea is yet to suggest. So, I think the concept of “economic democratization” can be used to tackle the monopolization by developers in Hong Kong’s economy.
By referring to The Korean Times, voting turnover rate of 2012 presidential election of South Korean held on 19th December reached to 75.8% (The Korean Times, 2012). Even though the election was carried out in cold weather, nearly 26.4 million out of a total 40.5 million eligible voters exercised their civil rights to show their stands on who would be their future head of their own Government (The Korean Times, 2012). Comparing with the Hong Kong context, the voting rate of 2012 Legislative Council Election was 53.05% (Legislative Council Election, 2012), which was much lower than that in South Korea. Some may claim that direct comparison cannot be carried out due to the difference in nature of elections in these two places, yet, reasons which led to the high voting rates in South Korea is worthy to be investigated. These successful reasons can be adopted by the Registration and Election Office of Hong Kong Government to boost the number of voter registration and voting rate.

Besides monitoring and managing free and fair elections, Democratic Citizen Education is another important duty of the National Election Commission (NEC) of South Korea (National Election Commission, 2009). Education at Korea Civic Education Institute for Democracy (KOCEI) tried to promote the importance of democracy among Koreans through different channels and among different target groups including secondary and university students and teachers (KOCEI, 2007). Understanding the value of democracy is the principle of election as election will become meaningless if aims of voting are being negated. Educational Programs were launched by KOCEI for teachers who are responsible to transmit knowledge to the next generation. An indirect form of messages transition related to the importance of democracy will be carried out to develop students’ creativity simultaneously (KOCEI, 2007). This program is match with the purpose of KOCEI as the institution aimed at disseminating democratic values and civic-mindedness from different gateways. According to Anastasiu (n.d.), schools are the sources of secondary socialization that refers to “a process through which a human being becomes a member of a society (Anastasiu, n.d.). With teachers’ instructions, students are able to absorb values of democracy which is commonly agreed by the society and understand the significance of
In contrast with South Korea, there is a low degree of willingness for the HKSAR government to promote democracy among citizens. Solely issuing advertisements during registration or election periods to encourage citizens to participate in politics is ineffective as mindset of democracy is not deeply footed in the minds of Hong Kong citizens. There were slightly changes in the number of Registered Electors from 2003 to 2012, which could be evidence to indicate that more should be done by the Government to boost the number of electors in order to develop a habit of voting in elections among citizens. An increasing degree of political participation can be a key factor to urge the development of democracy in Hong Kong. Hong Kong citizens can also be better equipped for future universal suffrage of Chief Executive and Legislative Council members with in-depth comprehension of the rationales of participation in politics.

To sum up, voting rate of 2012 South Korea Presidential Election was high. One of the factors which led to this outstanding voting rate was due to the successful & comprehensive education program launched by the National Election Commission. Messages related to democracy were transmitted through different means explicitly and implicitly. The South Korean model can be a good example for Hong Kong to learn from so as to mature the path of democracy of Hong Kong citizens.

Official institutions should be set up to achieve this purpose which helps to ensure full preparation for future direct elections.
The Republic of Korea was democratized in the late 1980s, along with a number of countries like Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines during the third wave of democratization, according to Samuel Huntington’s categorization. Although there were presidential elections during the eras of Rhee Syng-man, Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, competition was very unfair. Political dissidents were imprisoned, martial law imposed, media controlled by the government, the police used as a political tool, and public demonstrations disallowed. Almost all scholars classify South Korea prior to 1987 as an authoritarian regime, and the political leaders as dictators. In the year 1987, shortly after Chun’s announcement of Roh Tae-woo being his successor, mass democratic protests broke out across the nation because of the deaths of two university students. Facing growing internal grievances and external pressures from the US Congress and the International Olympic Committee, Roh issued the June 29 Declaration to please the angry Koreans, by promising human rights and liberties, fair and competitive elections, etc. This was undoubtedly an important milestone of the democratic movement in South Korea.

Currently, Korean people can exercise the voting right to choose their own president, representatives in the National Assembly, local governors and various district posts. Open, fair and competitive presidential elections are held every five years, closely supervised by an impartial body, the National Election Commission. Within the semi-presidential political system, the President of the Republic of Korea is both the head of state and head of government, enjoying extensive political, military and diplomatic powers. But his/her power is constitutionally constrained by the arrangement of serving one five-year term at maximum, meaning that re-election is not possible, which is very different from other presidential systems in the world (e.g. American Presidents can serve two four-year terms at maximum). On the one hand, this arrangement eliminates Koreans’ fear of the return of dictatorial rule. Yet, on the other hand, it can undermine policy continuity. Because different presidents tend to be influenced by different ideology and have different positions on the political spectrum, policy shifts are very likely to occur. What one president has achieved may be counterbalanced by his/her successor, especially if the two presidents are from different political parties, making progress highly difficult.
On 19 December 2012, from 6 am in the morning to 6 pm in the evening, eligible voters went to the polling stations to cast the ballot. The voting was conducted in an ordered and serious manner, with voters’ preference kept in secret. However, election campaigns were not as vigorous as expected, despite of some broadcasting vehicles occasionally passed by and a few posters about the presidential candidates. The election atmosphere on the voting day was far from heated that foreigners could hardly recognize the on-going presidential election. The result was announced after hours of counting. Park Geun-hye from the conservative camp defeated the liberal candidate, Moon Jae-in, by a small 3% margin in the presidential election and became the first female President of South Korea, a predominantly patriarchal nation. The conservative party continues its status as the ruling party, controlling both the presidency and the majority seats in the National Assembly, while the Democratic United Party remains to be the opposition, having to wait for at least five more years to regain power.

Apparently, this election was not simply a fight between the conservatives and the liberals, but also fights between regions, and between the younger generation and the elder generation.

Of course, in nearly every democracy there is a struggle between the progressives and the conservatives. In the USA, the fight is between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, while in the UK, between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. Similarly, in South Korea, there are two major political parties, one on the left and the other one on the right. The Saenuri Party, having been the governing party for most of the time, supports contemporary conservatism, which can be clearly reflected in Park’s policy pledges. The Democratic United Party gained power during Kim Tae-jung’s and Roh Mu-hyeon’s time and returned to opposition after Lee Myung-bak’s victory in 2007. It is more progressive and liberal in political reforms, economic restructuring and social security.
In this presidential election, one of the key issues was related to economic democratization. While political democratization means the decentralization of political power to the whole population instead of being held by one or a few people, the idea of economic democratization, by the same token, refers to the decentralization of economic power/resources to the small businessmen and the grassroots citizens through restricting market monopoly. No one would find it difficult to name some gigantic conglomerates in South Korea, SAMSUNG and LOTTE are two good examples. These conglomerates, often controlling a number of cross-national companies, enjoy substantial market share and small businesses are gradually squeezed out of the market. In response to this phenomenon and the associated public discontent, both candidates promised to regulate conglomerates. Park promised to ban new cross-shareholding whereas Moon, even more radical, pledged not only to prohibit new cross-shareholding, but also to dissolve the existing one and raise corporate tax by up to 25%. As Park’s policies were relatively less harsh towards conglomerates, she was able to secure firm support from the commercial sector, which partly accounted for the lady’s final victory. Another policy difference that helped Park win the election was welfare provision. Moon’s welfare pledges, like establishing a welfare state and cutting college tuition fees by half, were criticized as too idealistic. Many Koreans doubted whether or not Moon could realize these unrealistic policy promises after being elected. On the contrary, Park’s pledges seemed more pragmatic for actual practice, and were thus appealing to a lot of moderate and swinging voters. Finally, the attitude towards North Korea also played a part. Moon was relatively sympathetic to North Korea, in contrast with Park’s tough attitude. Since the South Koreans could not easily forget the attacks by North Korea in 2010, in which a submarine was sunk by torpedo and the island of Yeonpyeong was bombarded, Park was more successful in mobilizing public support by presenting herself as an anti-North Korea candidate.

Regionalism was also an important factor determining who was going to win the election. Provinces such as Chungcheong, Gyeongsang, Gyeonggi and Gangwon were strongholds of the conservative camp, where Park beat Moon with no difficulty. Unfortunately, Moon could only win in Seoul, Jeolla, and a number of places with sparse population, thus he was doomed to failure. However, it is worth pointing out that in Gwangju, and northern and southern Jeolla as well, Moon defeated Park by an inconceivably large margin (he secured around 90% of the votes). This result reveals Gwangju citizens’ hatred of the conservatives, whose former leader Chun was primarily responsible for ordering the violent crackdown of democratic protests in Gwangju in 1980, killing several thousand people.

In this election, there appeared to be a sharp contrast between the younger and elder generations in terms of voting preference. Just like younger HK people are more pro-democracy while the elderly more pro-establishment, youngsters in Korea prefer the progressive camp to the conservatives. The younger generation welcomes changes, especially radical changes, which can be seen in Moon Jae-in’s party platform. Very much in contrast, the elder generation is more willing to preserve the status quo, or at most, to have incremental changes. In addition, the elder generation tends to evaluate Park Geun-hye’s father, Park Chung-hee in a more positive way. They strongly believe that Park was
the main contributor of modernization of South Korea. By focusing on economic development and engaging in international trade, Park built a society where every Korean could have a decent standard of living and receive quality education, which are necessary prerequisites for democracy as suggested by the Modernization theory. Hence Park Geun-hye would be their choice.

As expected, Moon gained greater support from the 20s, 30s and 40s age groups whereas Park had her major base of support from the 50s, 60s and over 60s. Yet the structural composition of the population was to Moon’s disadvantage. Due to aging population, a common and perhaps inevitable phenomenon in developed countries, the relative population size of the 20s and 30s has been shrinking. In 2002, the year which the liberal candidate Roh Mu-hyeon won the presidential election, these two age groups accounted for approximately 49% of the total population, but the percentage dropped to 39 this year. On the other hand, the size of 50s, 60s and over-60s age groups expanded from 29% in 2002 to today’s 40%. Moon’s situation was further severe because of the lower turnout rate among the youngsters, not reaching 70% in average, comparing with over 80% among the elderly. Therefore, despite the impressive overall turnout rate (75% is regarded as very high in democracies and is generally considered favorable to the progressive camp), the conservatives still gained the final victory. Apart from unfavourable structural composition of the population and lower turnout among the main supporters, Moon’s defeat was also owing to the fact that the gentleman was unable to gain as many votes in the 20s and 30s as the lady’s mobilization of votes among the 50s and 60s. In other words, Moon could only secure around 27% of support from 60s-and-over age group but Park successfully won 1/3 support from both the 20s and 30s.

Not surprisingly, both camps have been more aware of the rise of information technology, making use of which can surely bring advantages to the candidates. Manipulating electronic platforms was one of the campaign activities of the political parties in this battle. Such platforms including Twitter and Facebook were used to raise candidates’ profile and mobilize support. Though the use of which helped boosting the turnout rate, particularly that of the younger generation, the Democratic United Party still suffered a defeat. Perhaps the progressive camp has to rethink the strategy in order to get more support from the elder people while maintaining youngster’s allegiance at the same time, because obviously the Saenuri Party was able to penetrate voters of the opposition camp, gaining more and more recognition from the youngsters by making good use of Facebook and Twitter.
Nonetheless, the experience of South Korea reflects that the road to democracy is uneasy and long. After gaining independence from the Japanese, the newly-formed country had been under dictatorial rule for nearly four decades. Although South Korea was democratized in 1987, party alternation did not take place until 1997 when Kim Tae-jung won the presidency. Even up till now, many western scholars still do not regard South Korea as a liberal democracy, though it obviously meets the requirement of electoral democracy. Most prominently, the press freedom of the country is deteriorating, ranked 44 among 179 countries in the 2012 Press Freedom Index. According to some Korean university students, official censorship on online content has been stricter since the regaining of power by the conservatives in 2007. Some sensitive information is screened and websites sympathetic to North Korea are deliberately banned by the state through the use of IP blocking. Posting articles on the internet requires verification of citizen identity. When using online searching engines, some words and phrases (e.g. Gwangju Massacre) are intentionally put to the end of the list and never show up until the whole word or phrase is typed. The democratization movement in Hong Kong started off much later than that in South Korea. Political groups were established in the 1980s and political parties came into existence not until the 90s. Direct elections for Legislative Council Members are held since the early 90s. And there still has not been universal suffrage for electing the Chief Executive (CE) of the Special Administrative Region. Hence, it can be sure that Hong Kong will not be able to achieve liberal democracy within a short period of time.

Unlike South Korea, Hong Kong is not a sovereign country and therefore the Chinese factor has to be taken into consideration as well. Doubtless, the Beijing authority is very anxious to control the pace and direction of democratic movement in HK. The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress has formally promised that there will be universal suffrage for electing the CE since 2017, but no promise is made regarding the eligibility to stand as a CE candidate or whether there will be filtering mechanism which prevents pro-Democracy candidates from winning. Even though every registered voter is constitutionally guaranteed one vote to choose the CE in 2017, there may not be a meaningful choice for the voters in the first place. Democratization in Hong Kong would be far more difficult than in South Korea, with the Central Government as the major obstacle to full-scale democracy.
Visited the Korean National Assembly and The Republic of Korea National Election Commission head office to study the practice of democratic presidential election in Korea.
The aim of the study tour is to examine the Korean 2012 presidential election and evaluate their practice of representative democracy. In the election, there were mainly 2 presidential candidates who were Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in. In fact, their popularity rates were more or less the same and most of the younger generation supported Moon Jae-in, who treated the policies or events more aggressively, while the older generation supported Park Geun-hye, whose father was Park Chung-hee, who was the president from 1963 to 1979. Finally, Park Geun-hye won the election and became the new president as well as the first woman president in Korea.

During the study trip, we had visited the election stations, different universities and other institutions to understand more about the democratic election in Korea.

I discovered that most of the Koreans valued the presidential election and regarded it as important as the voting rate was high. However, in Hong Kong, the voting rate was much lower. So I questioned why the election rate was so high in Korea? It was because the election could have many promotions such as Facebook, twitter, banner, media, etc. to let many people know about it and the citizens could have the right to select the president, so they were more willing to vote. People may also question why Hong Kong cannot have a high voting rate? I think the main reason is that the citizens think that the posts which they can cast a vote (District and Legislative Councilors) are not very important and cannot fully represent them, so Hong Kong people are not keen to vote.

Besides, the winner of the election, Park Geun-hye can also reflect some of the society power. Although many of the younger generation support the other side, Moon Jae-in who is more aggressive, the young supporters are not stable as they may not go to vote as some of them may do other events rather than voting. While the supporters of Park Geun-hye belong to the older...
generation which is more stable as they respect politics and they tend to think that it is their responsibility to vote and support the daughter of Park Chung-hee. So this might be the reason why Park Geun-hye got more votes than Moon Jae-in.

In my opinion, Hong Kong can have election of the top leader. First of all, Hong Kong also has the similar procedures of the election which I observe in the Korean election station, so the foundation is built. Secondly, the sense of politics in Hong Kong has become higher in recent years, so it may be the time for Hong Kong people to make a choice of top leader for themselves. Some people may think that democratic election is not workable in Hong Kong as people focus only on making money. However, the fact is that more people are involved in political events such as demonstrations. So I think that Hong Kong can implement election of its top leader.
In the 2012 presidential election of Korea, there were two major candidates at the end of the election. They are regarded as the representatives of liberal and conservative side respectively – Moon Jae-in and Park Geun-hye.

In the 5 day trip, we talked with some Korean students. They are studying in politics. I would try to summarize their opinions with mine in order to give an explanation of Miss Park’s winning the election.

In sum, there are three main reasons that affect the consequence of the election besides their policy difference.

First, citizens hope that the next leader can create another miracle like the former dictatorial president Park Chung-hee. Park Chung-hee was a dictator in 1960s-1970s. After the war between South and North Korea, the economic problem in South Korea was very serious. He proposed the Saemaul Undong (new village movement) and the Korean five-year plan. These were two important policies which made Korea’s economy developed rapidly. People describe this development in Korea as the miracle of Hangang. This is the honorable time in South Korea. After the government of Mr. Park, the corruption problem of the Korean government and the monopoly of plutocrat become more serious. The citizens are looking forward to a leader who can lead them back to the time they are proud of.

Miss Park is the daughter of Mr. Park. She is not married and her strong appearance is regarded as similar to her father’s. A survey made by the television company showed that people who were over 40 year-old in Korea tended to support Miss Park rather than Mr. Moon. This may reflect those citizens wanted to have another Mr. Park who could solve the problems facing Korea. They believed his daughter would be a good choice for following the steps of her father if she won the election.
Second, the size of different generation groups means a lot in the election. In the last paragraph, I have mentioned that the people who are over 40 tend to support Miss Park. This does not mean that she would definitely win the election. The younger group tends to support Mr. Moon because he is the liberal representative.

Korea is a cosmopolitan country where the schools imbue a lot on the children with the concept of democracy.

Most of them tend to support a democratic leader instead of a dictator’s daughter who may destroy the liberal society in Korea. Unfortunately, the younger group is not significant enough in this election to surpass the influence of the elder group. In other words, Mr. Moon cannot win the election even he can take most of the youngsters’ votes.

Third, Miss Park also gains some supports from the youngsters. Although the younger generation is afraid of her governance with the shadow of dictatorship, some of them support her. Apart from the political consideration, they think that she is the one who can lead Korea to have a foreseeable future in the 21st country. Korea is a patriarchal country which means male would have a higher status than female. In the teaching of the typical western knowledge in school, students learn the concept of gender equality. When they vote, they ignore the gender of the candidates.

People may criticize why do the citizens over 40 year-old would vote for Miss Park if this is a patriarchal country. According to Korean students’ ideas, they explain that Miss Park does not have a family, without parents and children, showing a strong appearance in front of the citizens. In other words, she is regarded as a male.

In retrospect, the success in 1970s of the elder group and the rational vote of the younger group are the main reasons which determine the result of this presidential election.
O
outh Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are being termed as “The Four Little Dragons”. They have a similar ingrained patriarchal value and level of economic development with Hong Kong, thus female is treated as an inferior sex in these countries. South Korea has universal suffrage with high voting rate, however, Hong Kong citizens are more politically apathetic.

This study tour allowed us to witness the birth of the first female president of South Korea and to explore some interesting phenomena during the election period there.

It is surprising to find that the citizens in South Korea are devoted to choosing their leader, and will have strong feeling if their chosen candidate loses in the election. This shows a sharp contrast with the Hong Kong society, in which citizens are politically apathetic, have a low voting rate even for the legislative council election and would not have strong feelings tied with the candidates. There are not many promotions by the candidates in South Korea, but a high voting rate is still the result, showing their citizens’ enthusiasm to participate in political event. On the contrary, it is predicted that citizens in Hong Kong will remain apathetic towards the political development even the universal suffrage is approaching. This prediction reveals the fact that the high turnout rate and politically active citizens may not be shaped by political situations and values but historical events.

The unique historical background marks the difference between South Korea and Hong Kong. The separation of South Korea and North Korea has been an astonishing event in the history and leaves an impact on the citizens there. With a strong determination to elect a strong leader to boost the economic development, citizens in South Korea show eagerness to participate in political events. However, the steps toward democratic development become stagnant in Hong Kong under the control of the central government in China; this has frustrated many citizens who wish to turn Hong Kong into a truly democratic society.
In spite of this, the first female president also reveals an elimination of sexism in South Korea. This phenomenon can be a marked historical moment in a patriarchal society, with the tradition of aspiring male to play a leadership role. It represents an advanced development not only in the political sense, but social as well. In Hong Kong, female is still placed in an inferior role where they usually act as assistants of male leaders rather than taking up the leadership roles. Thus, South Koreans can be an example for people and scholars in Hong Kong who applaud equality between the two sexes.

This study trip is a short but inspiring one. It offers a chance for us to experience the special culture in South Korea and gives us some insights into its political atmosphere. With these memorable experiences, I would like to explore more of the political environment in Korea in the future. Lastly, South Korea can be a resourceful reference in studying the political events in Hong Kong, it is hope that Hong Kong can go forward on the democratic road in the near future with the next generation being nurtured as politically active citizens.
I feel so fortunate that I can participate in this presidential election study trip, because I have experienced and obtained a lot from it.

Comparing Korea with Hong Kong, I found that the atmosphere of election campaign in Korea was more popular than in Hong Kong. Banners and posters of the election campaign were everywhere on the street of Seoul. Also, I could see there was a huge screen outside of the building of KBS showing the latest supporting rate of the candidates and the most updated news of the election campaign. Besides, Korean people do care about presidential election and they would take very deep consideration to choose the most favorable candidate. As I had met several university students in the visits to Yonsei University and Kyung Hee University, they said that the platform of the candidates was the most important criterion to be taken into consideration. People in Korea are also very rational, because they would not just merely look at the surface of the platform, but they would really think about whether the platforms are pragmatic and workable. For example, one of the students said that she would vote for the Saenuri Party (pro-conservative), because she thought that the platform of the Democratic United Party (pro-liberal) seemed very attractive but they were too radical and not sustainable for the long term. On the other hand, she thought that the platform of the Saenuri Party was more practical, as the policies were to be implemented step by step rather than by big changes. Another students criticized that the Saenuri party gave so much benefit to the big companies in the economic policies to obtain support from the big companies. Hence, they would vote for the Democratic United Party, because the platform of the Democratic United Party had more focus to improve the life of the grass roots and middle class and charge less taxation on them. Unlike Korea, many people in Hong Kong do not care about the platform of the candidates of chief executive and legislative council elections. Even worse, many of them do not care about who is elected. Also, the voting rate of the election of geographical constituency of legislative council is
relatively lower than Korea. I believe that this is because Hong Kong people do not have universal suffrage to elect the chief executive and people also think that the legislative council is just a rubber stamp. Hence, people consider that their votes do not have much influence on the politics in Hong Kong, so that is why Hong Kong people do not care about politics.

Apart from this, when I was talking with the Korean students, I would like to ask them about how they regarded North Korea. Many of them said that they did not think that North Korea and South Korea could be unified in the foreseeable future. Although they thought that North Korea and South Korea should be reunited one day, they would like to maintain the current life style rather than any changes. One of the students answered me with a very meaningful sentence to conclude their complicated emotion toward North Korea: “We are family but enemy, we are enemy but family.”

I also visited the War Memorial of Korea by myself in the leisure time. It is a museum mainly showing the history of Korea under Japanese rule and during the Korea war. When I was walking around the museum, I could feel that the atmosphere in the museum was very serious. I saw that there was a family visiting the museum, when they walked into the memorial hall, the parents taught their kids to bow toward the memorial book which records the names of the soldiers and other heroes who died because of Japanese rule and Korea war. I was surprised that the South Korean people are very patriotic and they treat these two periods of history seriously.

In conclusion, I think I have obtained a lot from this Korea study trip.

The trip opened my horizon to the world politics and helped me learn the politics outside of the classroom.

I think this is a very good opportunity for students. If there is any study tour in the future, I am very willing to join and introduce it to my friends.
The first time travelling to South Korea really makes me excited, and this study trip is a treasurable experience to examine the 2012 Korean presidential election. I am lucky to have the opportunity to witness the battle between the two main candidates, the Saenuri Party candidate Park Geun-hye and the Democratic United Party candidate Moon Jae-in.

This trip gives me a chance to know more about the political background and recent situation of South Korea.

The result of the Korean presidential election is impressive that there is a high rate of registered voters to cast their vote, i.e. 75.8% turnout rate. In this election, the fierce battle between the candidates representing the conservative and progressive factions causes great concern of Korean society, and the class who support the candidates also has been expanded. I think the increase in the fifties and sixties voters is the main reason for the increase in turnout rate. At the same time, the Korean network and community networks to encourage voting atmosphere is strong, which attracts the attention of more young voters to participate in the voting.

That night, the South Korean media reported that Park Geun-hye had been elected as South Korea’s new president. It is quite exciting to hear that she will become the first female president in the history of Korea, or she perhaps can bring Korea a new outlook. The strong voting atmosphere and high turnout rate reflect that the Korean voters treasure their right to vote and select the leader of their country. Comparing with the relatively low voting rate in Hong Kong, how can we create an intense political culture like Korea’s? Moreover, if the general election will be introduced in 2017, it is an important moment and opportunity for us to
actively participate in the election of the Chief Executive, just acting like South Koreans. The pursuit of democracy is never an easy road; once we have the right to vote, we must cherish this opportunity.

Apart from examining the Korean presidential election, this trip also provides us the opportunity to communicate and learn with Korean university students. It is very enjoyable to exchange opinions with them, to know more about their ideas of Korean presidential election. And we study the Korean culture and social-economic development which is also affecting the whole political environment. I really appreciate the Korean students for having clear political concept and standpoint, and active concerns about their political condition. It is what we should learn from them, as a Hong Kong university student.

In the trip, I learned a lot about the politics of South Korea and was deeply impressed by their political atmosphere. The progress of Korea gives us a lesson, i.e. we cannot stop the pursuit of democracy. Currently, even the political culture is not mature enough, but the sense of politics in Hong Kong is much higher than before. I am looking forward to seeing the democratic presidential election in the future of Hong Kong.
This report aims to analyse the situation of monopoly of big enterprises in South Korea and investigate the new government’s policies to improve and protect small and middle companies. First of all, let me talk about the monopoly situation in South Korea. Due to the needs of national management and production after World War Two, Samsung Group (三星集团), Hyundai Group (現代集團), Daewoo Group (大宇集團), LG Group (樂金集團) and SK Group (鮮京集團), the five largest chaebols in South Korea, were gradually formed to support national economic growth. Each enterprise is mastered by a kinship family, with business projects covering almost the entire industrial and commercial sectors, and even branching out into the media, politics, and social domains. Huge resources lie in the hands of a few companies. The Samsung Group alone accounted for 15% of South Korea’s gross national product.

Actually, before the new government, there were some reforms and regulations to control the worsening situation. Under President Kim Dae-jung (金大中), elected in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, the government made several efforts to reform the economy. Instead of competing in every industry, the chaebols were pressured to focus on core businesses and spin off unrelated enterprises. The chaebols were to decentralize their management and encourage the hiring of professional managers. Accounting regulations were strengthened to limit the ability of chaebols to hide losses and debt at underperforming subsidiaries. A crackdown on antitrust laws and inheritance taxes would impede the ability of families to retain control over their chaebol. Both Kim and his successor, Roh Moo-hyun, had mixed success. The chaebols continue to dominate South Korea’s economy. Hyundai and SK Group have been implicated in separate scandals involving both presidents.
South Korea has come to a new era, will the new president do something to improve the situation?

Park Geun-hye (朴槿惠) met the small and medium enterprises responsible persons and said, "I want to become a SME President, that save SMEs as the economic core topics.” That means to directly support the economic base structure, in order to lay a solid economic foundation, rather than the pursuit of economic growth rate. Park Geun-hye stressed that economic democratization and spontaneous social contribution of large enterprises was very important for South Korea. She will be in close cooperation with Congress to pass substantial amendments to the Fair Trade Act, Subcontracting Law, the National Pension Act, the Banking Act, the Commercial Code and other laws. Park Geun-hye hopes that the new policies can relief the fund from the big businesses and by this way to protect small and medium enterprises as well as small private industry interests temporarily.

However, since Park Geun-hye is the daughter of Park Chung-hee (朴正熙). The latter served as South Korean President to give vigorous support to domestic enterprises, and gradually evolved into today's chaebols, the total assets of the top five chaebols are even more than half of the national GDP in South Korea. Although she promises a lot to improve the lives of lower and middle classes, she has not done anything directly to reduce the influence of big businesses in South Korea and her party Saenuri Party (新國家黨) has always been widely known as pro-business community.

In future, will Park take drastic measures to reform?

I believe that the perspective of South Korea’s economy is very blurry.
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