

Learning Report

I attended the World Universities Debating Championships 2019 (WUDC). It took place in Cape Town, South Africa. Composed of a preliminary round of 9 rounds, with a maximum of 3 points attainable per round, and a total of 300 teams applying, WUDC is the largest tournament for debate in the world. WUDC was an immense learning experience for me, not just in the depth of knowledge I was able to access but also in the learning of organizational structures and debate related initiatives, that inspired me to do many of the things I learned there, to do here in Hong Kong.

At the tournament, I debated on a variety of topics, ranging from how to deal with the aftermath of civil wars, to whether megacities should be allowed greater autonomy in deciding political and economic issues. Many of the topics were new to me, and during the debate, listening to some of the smartest people in the world, I was able to formulate new ideas and theories based on the information offered therein. My time there allowed me to come up with better answers to questions I previously had, and encouraged me to spend a greater amount of time reading the news and pondering different social issues that we face today.

My learning was not just constrained to that of different information. I also gained valuable knowledge of debating strategies of different countries. Many of the most prestigious debate clubs were there, and from them I was able to glean different information I could share back in Hong Kong. Already, I have held several lectures for the debate team in HKU about how to improve debating styles and how to become a more persuasive speaker. Currently I am planning to write a guidebook, so that debaters who join the team after me will be able to share in the knowledge I was fortunate to receive.

The third important thing I learned at WUDC was on organizational structure. Unlike Hong Kong, I noticed at the general assembly that most of the other regions there had their own administrative body for debate in that region. Inquiring as to what that body did, I was informed that each body organized tournaments, training sessions, and lectures for local university and secondary school students. I had always thought it odd that despite Hong Kong's sizable debate community, we never had such an organization ourselves here. That's why one of the first things I did after getting back to Hong Kong was calling a general meeting with the heads of the other university debate teams. Currently, we are forming the constitution for Hong Kong's first debate association, through which we hope to access funding and sponsorships, and be able to support regional tournaments and learning activities.

The final thing I learned from the tournament was to be mindful of others and be conscious of the immense privilege and good fortune I had to be attending the event. One of the most visible events at the tournament was at the closing ceremony, when a group of participants stormed the stage and held a protest, decrying the racism and unfairness at the tournament. Being predominantly a "white" event, WUDC did have room to improve, unfortunately, at this particular event, they ended up angering many of the participants there. Instead of a closing ceremony, we had a long forum about organizational racism and various ways we could resolve some of the grievances of the participants. While we weren't able to reach an absolute consensus, it did remind me that I was very fortunate to have been able to attend the event, with less financial stress because of this scholarship. In running the Hong Kong Debate Association, I resolved to always be mindful of how other individuals may perceive the well-meaning projects we are running, and always attempt to reduce participation costs and other barriers to entry.

