In March, we represented our university in participating at the Hult Prize Regional Finals in Shanghai, competing against 45 international teams from universities like Imperial College and University College London. The people we have met as well as the opportunities we were fortunately offered from the event all proved that it was a highly rewarding experience.

This is the first time the University of Hong Kong sent out a team to represent the University on an international stage for the biggest social enterprise competition in the world. We have set ourselves ambitious yet tangible goals to be achieved in the next few months to prepare ourselves for this prestigious competition. The social innovative initiative we are working on is called “Pay It Forward”, which harnesses the latent capacity of a mobile population to bring kindness and efficiency to all. It is a platform that allows one to exchange favours by sharing the residual energy along his/her daily commutes and we empower people by increasing mobility and thus accessibility of resources, while building a socially thriving community. More information on our start-up project can be found on our website.

On the first day, we arrived at Hult Business School with 45 other teams from over 20 countries. We were there to celebrate social justice and a passion for positive changes in the world. There was a networking session where we got to learn about each other’s start-ups and initiatives in utilising energy to transform 10M lives by 2023. We befriended teams from mainland China, the UK, Vietnam and Greece. They were all generous with sharing their knowledge and experience and keen to make friendships that would last longer than a weekend. We attended a short training with past Hult Prize winner and gained great insight into effective pitching and the journey of establishing a social enterprise. The night ended with an intense practice session on our pitch to get ourselves ready for the actual competition the following day.
The next day started early. We had two rounds of pitching and only six teams from the morning round would be promoted to the evening grand round at Mercedes Benz Arena to compete for the prize. Our morning began with sitting in for pitches from other teams. We got the opportunity to listen to teams from University of British Columbia and Imperial College pitch and were amazed by their creative initiatives in creating clean fuel and purifying water for underprivileged areas. We also got to chip in our thoughts in a debriefing session with the judges.

Soon after a quick lunch, it was our turn to pitch. We received encouraging feedback from other teams upon finishing our pitch. And after a nervous wait, we were called back to the judges, where we received constructive feedback on how to improve our pitch and questions-answering. We were thrilled by how inspiring the ideas they raised were as well as by the chance were promoted to the evening round. At the end, we came second and while we were delighted by the result, the more exciting opportunities were offered afterwards. We approached the judges and moderators at the competition for feedback, and were stunned by how supportive and kind they were. Many offered mentoring and networking opportunities to help us further develop our platform – one of them was Ms Peggy Liu, the chairperson of JUCCCE China and a huge inspiration. She kindly agreed to be our mentor and motivated us to go further with our initiative. We are currently working on the Wildcard round at Hult Prize to compete for a spot at the accelerator in summer for more mentorship and business training opportunities. We are extremely grateful for this experience and are very excited about the journey ahead of us for it will be full of challenges and opportunities to learn and grow from.