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A Bottom-Up Approach to Introduce Geo-Informatics to Junior Geography Education of Hong Kong

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1. Background

For Hong Kong, a geo-informatics skill has finally being put into the senior secondary geography curriculum in 2009 (CDC-HKEAA, 2007). The teaching schedule for the new secondary 1 to 3 geography curriculum has reserved 8 to 10 or 10 to 12 hours for one teaching module on this aspect. (The Curriculum Development Council, 2011).

In some countries, having tight teaching schedule may be an obstacle for geography teachers even if they have acquired sufficient skills and materials. An example is a study in the US, despite the improvement of GIS skills is shown in the study, the teachers commented that there is no curriculum space to add new activities (Kolvoord, Charles, Purcell, 2012). On the other hand, for Hong Kong, there is going to be a favourable teaching atmosphere for geo-informatics to be practiced in geography.

Despite the supports from the curriculum designs, frontline geography teachers face many challenges in its classroom implementation, including:-

- Professional GIS software like ArcGIS required computers with high performance to make the software usable. It is not possible to have computers with high performance available for most of the schools.
- According to the successful incorporation of GIS in teaching in Denmark, a platform with all the high quality data gathered is an essential part for the success (Jensen, 2012). Lacking proper ways to acquire data would lose much time ending with no outcome, which would discourage teachers from incorporating geo-informatics in teaching.
- The lack of competence may be possible since GIS is a new technology in recent decades that geography teachers with 37 years old or above would not have learnt GIS in their undergraduate courses (Lam, Lai, Wong, 2009). Moreover, the nature of GIS is for professional use and necessitates intensively trained professional peoples (National Research Council, 2006). It is widely viewed that traditional GIS software has a steep learning curve that is not easily to be handled (Deckelbaum, 1999; Meyer, Butterick, Olkin, Zack, 1999; Smith, 2005).
- Student's ability to employ GIS may not be proficient in handling new software. The learning curve for teachers is already steep, not to mention students.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objective of the research is to equip teachers with a new way to use geo-informatics in their teaching. It should be able to solve current problems of geo-informatics aforementioned, which include the requirement of hardware with high performance, scattered data, steep learning curve of professional GIS software which make time to prepare materials and learning tight.

According to Kolvoord (2012), not only should the teachers know the device, but also the ways to utilize them in lessons for students to inquire, engage, collaborate and solve problems. This means that the teachers' curriculum knowledge is more important than technical skills by knowing the way to make use of the skills in helping with the curriculum implementation. The new approach will be carried out in the same concept, which requires less GIS skills and knowledge, but much more about the teachers' own application of curriculum knowledge (Figure 1). Through this approach, teachers are able to make use of their professional knowledge to create materials that really suit their needs.

Through the study, it is hoped that advantages of GIS in teaching can be shown to raise teachers' willingness to use the skills. Their competence level of GIS can also be raised through introducing them other useful skills in geo-informatics learning and teaching, for instance, ease to acquire data online, ways to incorporate geo-informatics in teaching and learning should also be taught.

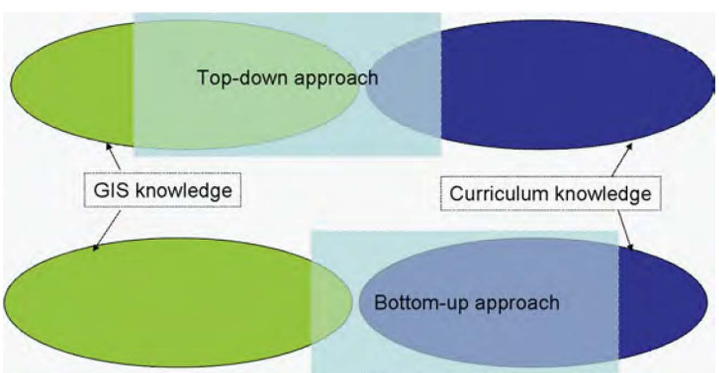


Figure 1: Illustration of the concept of top-down approach and bottom-up approach.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

The whole process was carried out within the 2-day workshop.
The workshops have been held twice in 21 & 28 March, and 12 & 13 April, 2012. Geography teachers of secondary schools were invited to participate.

Assessments were done before and after the workshops to assess the change of the perception and preparedness of using geo-informatics in geography teaching by introducing bottom-up approach and related materials.

2.2 Workshop content

Introduction about geo-informatics was taught during the first day of the workshop to give some basic ideas to the teachers. 5 sample lessons involving core modules and elective module that suit the new secondary 1-3 geography curriculum in the upcoming 2012 school year were demonstrated with handouts and practices. Apart from the content of the sample, main objectives and important skills were highlighted. Teachers learnt the way to acquire data, incorporate data in teaching, analysis as well as discussion.

Software and useful websites introduced in this course are user-friendly with lower demand of the system requirement of hardware. For instance, Google Earth was chosen as the major learning platform for students to visualize the outcome of the lesson. Several websites with free data were recommended for the teachers to acquire their required data in just a few steps. By introducing these kinds of software and websites, it helps lowering the barrier of teachers to incorporate geo-informatics in teaching. With handy software and websites, a bottom-up approach with teachers to make their own materials become more possible.

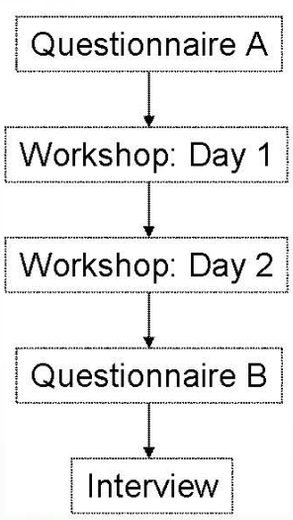
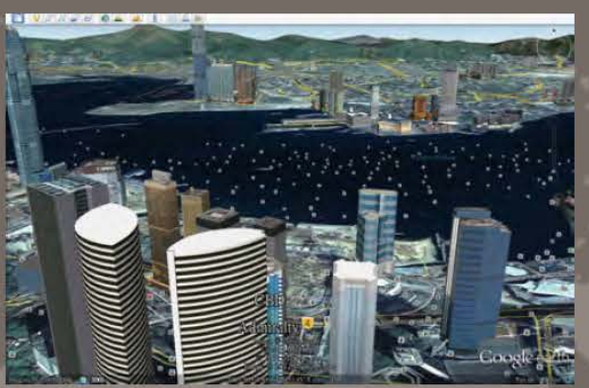


Figure 2: Research Methodology

To elaborate how the bottom-up approach can be integrated to the Junior Geography Curriculum, four detailed lesson examples were developed. Although participating teachers can use the sample lesson right away, they were encouraged to modify the lessons and even develop new materials to suit the actual needs of their students.

Four detailed lesson examples:

1. Using Space Wisely – Can we maintain a sustainable urban environment? Hands-on practice of making a virtual tour: A case study: Hong Kong Vs Helsinki



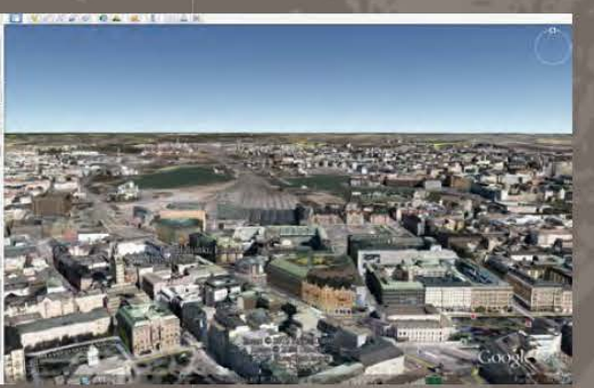


Figure 2 & 3: lesson materials for module 1

The lesson target is to let students assess the level of sustainability through observing the physical and human landscape of Hong Kong and Helsinki. Students can also learn the way to maintain a sustainable urban environment and study the sustainability level of other cities.

2. Living with Natural Hazard – Are we better equipped than the others? Hands-on practice of making a student self learning activity: Landslide in Hong Kong

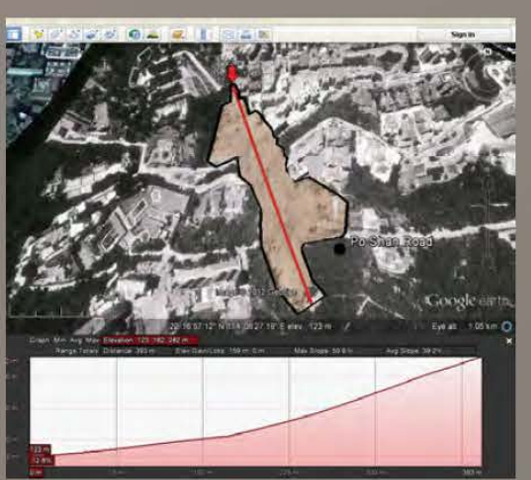


Figure 4 & 5: lesson materials for module 2

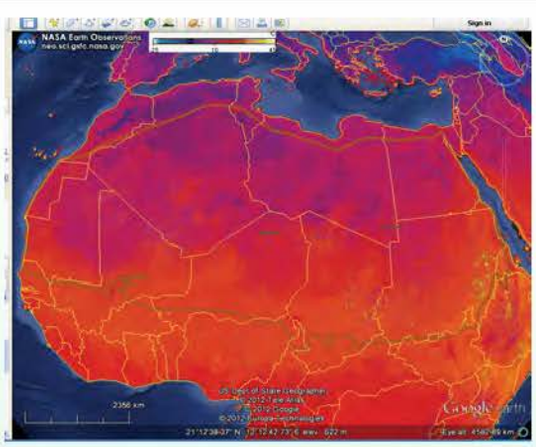
Students can learn the relationship between environment and people living nearby the slopes. Precautionary measures of landslide can also be assessed. Through the classroom activities, students will be able to study the causes, nature, mitigating measures of landslide

3. Living with hazard – Are we better equipped than the others? Hands-on practice of making a self learning activity: Earthquake – Christchurch Vs Qinghai

Figure 6 & 7: lesson materials for module 3

The aim of the lesson is to teach students about distribution of earthquake and plate tectonics. Difference in the level of destruction of earthquake will be examined. Reasons for people to stay in the earthquake-prone area will also be discussed.

4. Taming the sand – A long lasting combat against desertification and sandstorms. Sahara Desert



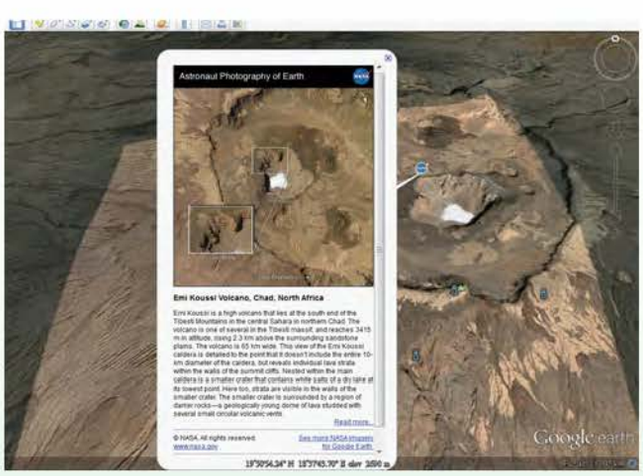


Figure 8 & 9: lesson materials for module 4

Through the lesson activities, information about Sahara desert, desert landscape, landforms and the tracks of sandstorm will be examined. Students can also learn the reasons for the less developed economy.

One detailed example of enquiry-based fieldwork:

Enquiry-based fieldwork in Yaumatei: How to conduct a virtual field study before field trip
The fieldwork can equip students with the basic skills to carry out an enquiry-based fieldwork. It includes identifying land use, studying renewal projects, produce a 3D ideal city plan and a field report with GPS device in Google Earth.

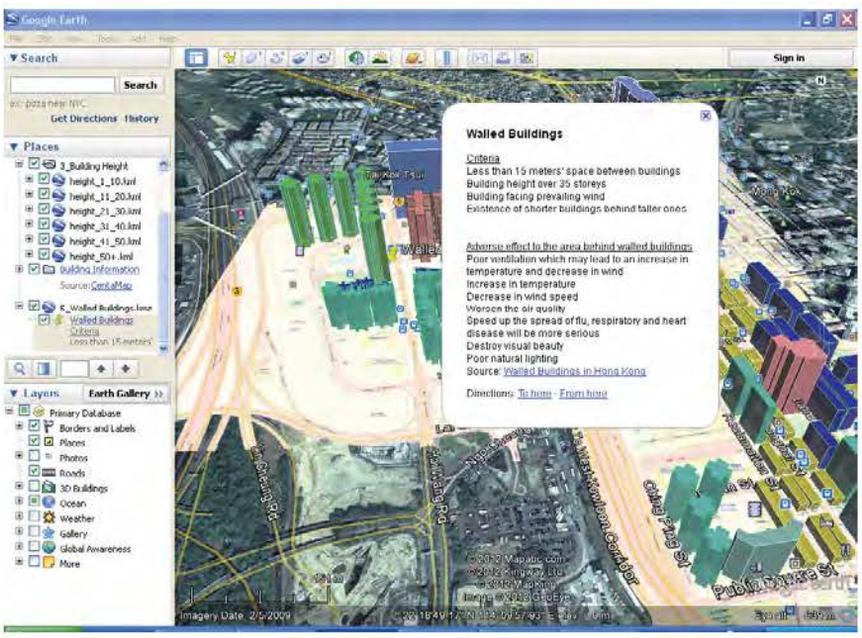


Figure 10: lesson material for module 5

A discussion was held after the 5 sample lessons for teachers to conduct a geography lesson. Teachers were divided into small groups of 3-4 people to discuss and create a lesson with the aid of geo-informatics. Suggestions and useful materials were recommended afterwards. Teachers from different schools could exchange ideas on incorporating geo-informatics in teaching and learning.

Throughout the whole workshop, encouragement was given to teachers to incorporate GIS in their teaching. Teaching students the skills to help acquiring most updated and suitable data for use was also encouraged. Through teaching students the skills, it is recommended that it can help students to achieve 'enquiry-based learning'.

3. Analysis

Analysis of this part is based on the result of questionnaire and interview. 32 teachers have to complete questionnaire A and B before and after the workshop. The result of questionnaire A and B were compared and analysed. Among all participating teachers, 84% of them had received training or teaching on GIS before. Anonymous interviews were conducted with four teachers from different schools individually as reference for the analysis.

3.1 Hardware and software

Teachers are not confident with the hardware and software in school. Before the workshop, only 19% of teachers thought the computers in their schools were capable for using GIS software. Another reason which might affect the use of geo-informatics in teaching and learning was that the computer room(s) in schools was/were always/ often booked, which happened in more than 90% of the schools.

To deal with the problem of system requirement of the computer in school, GIS software that require lower system requirement were introduced, a question about the capability of computer resources in school was therefore asked. Although 50% of teachers expressed that the capability of computer to teach GIS was the same after the workshop, more than 40% of teachers showed that they thought the computer resources were more capable to teach geography with GIS (Table 1).

After a general evaluation of their confidence in three main aspects of teaching, three questions were asked to find out the details of teachers' confidence in the three aspects.

Question 1:

Do you think the computer resources in your school are capable for geography teaching with GIS?

Very incapable---------- Very capable (after-before)								
-4	-3	-2	-1	+/- 0	+1	+2	+3	+4
			3(10%)	15(50%)	9(30%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	

*Data missing: 2

Table 1: Result of the question about computer resources

A point to note is that there were two worrying teachers who commented in the questionnaire that a lack of technical support or computer room in school would discourage them to use GIS. It shows that hardware was still a worry for the teacher. Also, the level of computer skills would also hinder the use of GIS in teaching.

Some user-friendly software that are different from the traditional GIS software which are designed for professionals were introduced to the teachers. Teacher A commented on the traditional GIS software as expensive and difficult, and IT support was required. The software introduced in this workshop, on the other hand, make incorporating geo-informatics in teaching easier, where as teacher B commented on the free software introduced were good since they were free. Most teachers commented that the software Google Earth and FKML were more user-friendly than the other software introduced. And Google Earth, FKML and EDUGIS are helpful in teaching and learning.

The five samples demonstrated in the workshop are also very helpful for teaching as rated in the questionnaire. Among all the samples, the topics about landslide and earthquake were rated as the most useful.

Previous limitations of the hardware have been lowered by introducing other software which required less skill than ordinary GIS software. There will be no more problem concerning the license fee for GIS software, and the requirement of professional GIS skills. The remaining question is about the computer skills of teacher himself/herself. This is because basic computer skills are still required for performing simple functions of the software.

Question 2:
Do you think your GIS knowledge is sufficient to incorporate GIS into teaching?

Insufficient ---------- Sufficient (after-before)								
-4	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**+/- 0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**
			1(3.6%)	4(14.3%)	15(53.6%)	8(28.6%)		

***Data missing: 4**

Table 2: Result of question about GIS knowledge

By summing up the overall increase in the confidence to teach geography in the three aspects, over 50% of teachers were more confident in teaching in 'classroom' and 'field work' with GIS, while over 40% of teachers had more confidence in teaching 'study project' with GIS. It shows that the workshop has posed similar impacts in teachers' confidence in teaching in the three aspects.

Question 3: Do you have confidence to teach geography with GIS in the following aspects?

No confidence ---------- Full of confidence (after-before)									
	-4	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**+/- 0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**
Classroom			1(3.1%)	2(6.3%)	13(40.6%)	12(37.5%)	3(9.4%)	1(3.1%)	
Field work *Data missing:1		1(3.2%)	1(3.2%)	1(3.2%)	11(35.5%)	13(41.9%)	3(9.7%)	1(3.2%)	
Study project			1(3.1%)		17(53.1%)	10(31.3%)	3(9.4%)	1(3.1%)	

Table 3: Result of question about confidence in teaching with GIS in different aspects

In the field of teaching GIS in 'classroom', the preparedness in 'preparing teaching materials', 'encourage discussion' and 'encourage self-learning' were asked. For 'preparing teaching materials', 37.5% of teachers commented that there was no increase in confidence and 1 teacher showed a decrease of preparedness. For 'encouraging discussion' and 'encourage self-learning', more than 40% of teachers reviewed that their preparedness had been raised by 1 point. In general, over 60% of teachers showed that their preparedness had been raised in all aspects.

Question 4: Are you prepared to use GIS for teaching in the classroom in the following aspects?

Unprepared ---------- Well-prepared (after-before)									
	-4	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**+/- 0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**
Preparing teaching materials				1(3.1%)	12(37.5%)	11(34.3%)	8(25%)		
Encourage discussion				3(9.4%)	10(31.3%)	13(40.6%)	5(15.6%)	1(3.1%)	
Encourage self-learning				2(6.3%)	10(31.3%)	14(43.8%)	5(15.6%)	1(3.1%)	

Table 4: Result of question about teaching with GIS in classroom

In the aspect of teaching GIS in 'field work', whether teachers are prepared under the category of 'define problem', 'data analysis' and 'report' were examined. The majority of them were more prepared in terms of 'define problem' and 'data analysis'. Only 12.5% of teachers were less prepared in defining problem; and 6.3% in 'data analysis' and 'report' in teaching with 'field work'. Overall, more than 50% of teachers were more prepared to conduct field work with GIS after the workshop.

Question 5: Are you prepared to use GIS for data collection in conducting field work in the following aspects?

Unprepared ---------- Well-prepared (after-before)									
	-4	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**+/- 0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**
Define problem				4(12.5%)	10(31.3%)	12(37.5%)	5(15.6%)		1(3.1%)
Data analysis				2(6.3%)	11(34.3%)	13(40.6%)	4(12.5%)	1(3.1%)	1(3.1%)
Report				2(6.3%)	13(40.6%)	12(37.5%)	3(9.4%)	1(3.1%)	1(3.1%)

Table 5: Result of question about conducting field work with the use of GIS

For the category of 'study project', their preparedness in 'define problem', 'data analysis' and 'report' were also asked. The majority of teachers showed they were more prepared when defining problem after the workshop. In terms of 'data analysis' and 'report', the majority of teachers commented that there was no change in their preparedness. Only 2 teachers were less prepared after the workshop in all three aspects. In general, there were still more than 50% of teachers showing that there was an increase of their preparedness in teaching study project with the aid of GIS.

Question 6: Are you prepared to use GIS for data collection in study project in the following aspects?

Unprepared ---------- Well-prepared (after-before)									
	-4	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**+/- 0**	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**
Define problem				2(6.3%)	11(34.3%)	13(40.6%)	6(18.8%)		
Data analysis				2(6.3%)	12(37.5%)	10(31.3%)	7(21.9%)	1(3.1%)	
Report				2(6.3%)	12(37.5%)	12(37.5%)	5(15.6%)	1(3.1%)	

Table 6: Result of question about use of GIS in study project

Some teachers showed some worry in using geo-informatics in teaching. For instance, some were not confident in making their own materials because of the lack of skills to use computer. Despite the fact Teacher B admitted that she had learnt different ways to acquire data, she did not have enough confident to make home-made materials due to two reasons – lack of time and competence of computer skills that she would like to have pause between every steps when teaching the practical part by using computer in the workshop. Teacher B also mentioned that as some geography teachers who teach S1-3 were not major in geography, therefore, incorporating geo-informatics in teaching maybe difficult for them.

Summary

The present level of geography teaching with geo-informatics is low. Through the workshop, the barriers were lowered through introducing different software and ways of use based on the concept of bottom-up approach. It is observed that the practicability of geo-informatics was recognized and teachers were more prepared to use geo-informatics. In terms of hardware support, more than 40% believed that their school computer resources were more capable. Teachers also thought that the software were easy to use. They were also gaining more evidence in using geo-informatics in teaching, the mean point of their confidence had raise 1 point (out of 5). More than 50% of teachers had gained more confidence in teaching in classroom and conducting fieldwork. And more than 40% of them were more confident to use geo-informatics in study project. Discouraging factors for teachers to use GIS in teaching had also been mitigated that there is a 20% drop in terms of acquiring data and not familiar with GIS. 75% of teachers also had more confidence by getting direction to develop GIS teaching materials.

4. Conclusion

Geo-informatics is useful in geography teaching such that more and more teachers are getting to know the benefits of incorporating it in their teaching. It is now a growing trend and many favourable circumstances have appeared in Hong Kong for schools to start practice teaching with geo-informatics.

Based on the concept of bottom-up approach, there is lower requirement of the GIS skills but more on the curriculum knowledge. Bottom-up approach confirms the focus to learn geo-informatics: to 'do geography' but not the technology (Meyer, et al. 1999). The skills introduced in this study for using software in this workshop like Google Earth, are simpler than the traditional GIS software. It reduced the barriers of top-down approach. Not only did the approach help increasing the confidence of teachers, but also letting teachers recognize the practicability of incorporating geo-informatics in geography teaching in their school that the willingness of teachers to practice has been increased.

Despite the fact that the improvement being made in the workshop was not significant, it was the first step for the geography teachers to start knowing the benefits of bottom-up approach to incorporate geo-informatics in their teaching. With different follow-up activities and more study about students' response, it is hoped that bottom-up approach will make the level of incorporating geo-informatics in geography teaching higher, and students can be benefited with the use of geo-informatics in their learning.
Note: please check the consistency of tense used.

Acknowledgement

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第2屆香港地理奧林匹克大賽

第2屆香港地理奧林匹克已於2012年4月21日假香港浸會大學舉行。賽事共吸引了越700名、來自68所中學的同學參加。

比賽形式以國際地理奧林匹克為藍本，同學需在55分鐘內完成50題多項選擇題。

比賽中得分最高的12位同學，已獲邀參加於5月16日舉行的第二輪筆試和面試。經本會主席王冬根教授（香港浸會大學地理系）、司庫鄒倩賢博士（香港教育學院社會科學系）及其面試團隊甄選後，最終選出四位同學代表香港參與8月21日至27日假德國科隆舉辦的第九屆國際地理奧林匹克，與各國選手一較高下。

為準備國際賽，本會為代表隊成員提供一系列地理進深訓練，亦獲市區重建局和明愛陳震夏郊野學園支持，提供有關最新市區更新策略和野外考察技巧的訓練。

自本屆起，國際地理奧林匹克將每年舉辦一次。為配合有關變動，本會將於2012/2013年度舉行本地賽，敬請密切留意本會網頁公布之詳情。

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CHINA
HONG KONG

Field trip to Pearl River Delta, Field Trip Committee

香港地理學會與新界校長會於2011年12月29日至30日合辦地理考察團，參觀廣東省的中、大型企業，認識國內不同類型企業的管理和運作模式。
首天上午參觀了深圳的「光明農場」，農場擁有全國最大的牛奶生產基地。下午往中山，認識生產北京奧運火炬及廣州亞運火炬的「華帝燃具股份有限公司」，了解家用燃氣爐具的生產過程。
次天早上遊覽江門「五邑華僑華人博物館」，認識華僑華人的重要歷史，順道到2011珠中江進出口商品展銷會一遊。下午參觀新會「現代農業發展有限公司」，了解農業科技的運用。兩天的行程中，各人也滿載而歸。

深圳光明農場

華帝燃具的勞工密集式生產廠

2011珠中江進出口商品展銷會：江門五邑文化廣場

江門五邑華僑華人博物館，展現宏大華僑歷史

新會現代農業發展有限公司

Hong Kong Geographical Association
Results Announcement for the First Hong Kong Postgraduate Student Research Paper Competition 2011

Zhang Yueming, Department of Geography, The University of Hong Kong, was awarded top honor (First Prize) for his/her outstanding paper 'Emerging Geography of Land-driven Urbanization in China: A Study of Land Development and Local Economic Growth in Prefecture-level Cities, 2002 - 2008'.

Abstract:

Urban land development has become one of the main driving forces of China's accelerate urbanization. This paper examines the relationship between China's urbanization, land development and local public finance. Special attention is paid to the changing role of land leasing in local economic development. The research analyses the nature and dynamics of China's emerging land markets and evaluates the relationships between land-based municipal finance and the level of economic growth as well as the degree of openness. Attempts are also made to probe into the social and political origins of China's land-centered urbanization. The research raises significant theoretical questions concerning the changing nature and dynamics of China's phenomenal urbanization.

Leung Chiuyin, Department of Geography and Resource Management, The Chinese University of Hong Kong was awarded a Merit Award for his paper 'Embedding Hong Kong Enterprises in the Pearl River Delta from the Social Capital Perspective'.

Abstract:

The notion of social capital as a valuable asset in the economic landscape of China is discussed. In the contemporary West, scholars have been conceptualizing social capital for its role in cooperation and innovation in the knowledge economy. However, its empirical reference to the developing economies is particularly missing, which fails to compromise the imperatives of personal network (guanxi) in China. This paper attempts to synthesize the dynamics of social capital in shaping enterprise development within the specified context. In-depth interviews with a dozen of Hong Kong enterprises operated in Pearl River Delta and some other involved officials have been conducted. By taking the egocentric network of the entrepreneurs into investigation, the respective roles of personal guanxi and impersonal institutions as the constituents of enterprise social capital are assessed along different stages.

In the early reform era, establishing good guanxi with local cadres was found crucial to firm development since neither market nor institutional governance was effective. Network typology and nature of reciprocity, meanwhile, determine the resilience and convertibility and thus the efficaciousness of enterprise social capital in long term. While China now enters another stage of marketization, stiff guanxi bonding may however restrain these old-fashioned enterprises from optimizing operation and thus hinder the state's intention towards techno-economic restructuring. Alternatively, recent institutional breakthrough across the border has boosted the significance of entrepreneurial attention to formal coordinating channels in future. Inferred from the real-life observation, the author suggests a revised perspective in studying the unique firm-environment nexus in China, which sheds some light on a new research agenda.

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