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| RGC Ref. No.: |
| UGC/FDS14/H12/20 |
| (please insert ref. above) |

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

- Submission Deadlines:**
1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within **six** months of the approved project completion date.
 2. Completion report: within **12** months of the approved project completion date.

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Exploring the Idea of Public Reason: Studying the Later Rawls's Philosophy by the Archival Approach

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

| Research Team | Name / Post | Unit / Department / Institution |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Principal Investigator | LI Chris Man Kong/ Assistant Professor | Department of Social Science/ The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong |
| Co-Investigator(s) | 1. WONG Baldwin Bon Wah/ Assistant Professor 2. YEP Ray Kin-man / Research Director | 1. Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy/ Hong Kong Baptist University 2. Hong Kong History Centre/ University of Bristol |
| Others | N/A | N/A |

3. Project Duration

| | Original | Revised | Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted) |
|--|------------|------------|--|
| Project Start Date | 2021.01.01 | N/A | N/A |
| Project Completion Date | 2023.12.31 | 2024.06.30 | 2022.03.10 (HSUHK) |
| Duration (in month) | 36 | 42 | 2022.03.10 (HSUHK) |
| Deadline for Submission of Completion Report | 2024.12.31 | 2025.06.30 | 2022.03.10 (HSUHK) |

4.3 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities / equipment.

N/A.

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

- To make use of the Rawls archives to study the complementary relationship between political liberalism and other comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines
- To analyse how political developments in the U. S. influenced Rawls's philosophical work on the idea of public reason
- To explore the philosophical grounds for the standard of reasonableness in the philosophy of the later Rawls
- To discuss Rawls's justification of the priority of public reason over religious reason in the political activities of citizens
- To consider the division of labour between the government and civil society when it comes to the education of citizens about public reason

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change: N/A

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

Objective 1: Complementary Relationship Between Political Liberalism and Other Doctrines Objective 5: Division of Labour in Civic Education

The first objective aimed to utilize the Rawls archives to explore the interplay between political liberalism and other comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines. The fifth objective considered the division of labor between government and civil society in educating citizens about public reason. These were realized most prominently through “Let God and Rawls be Friends: On the Cooperation between the Political Liberal Government and Religious Schools in Civic Education” (2021) in *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. This article discusses how political liberalism can coexist with religious education. The complementary relationship between political liberalism and some religious practices, such as the Confucian method of deep reading, is also explored in the article “Careful, patient, and modest citizens: Facilitating civic education through Zhu Xi’s method of deep reading” (2025) in *Educational Philosophy and Practice*. Furthermore, this complementary relationship is also defended in the Chinese article “Yu Ying-shih and Rawls’s Political Liberalism” 〈余英時與羅爾斯的政治自由主義〉 (2022), published in the journal *Reflexion*.

Objective 2: Influence of U.S. Political Developments

The second objective focused on analyzing the impact of U.S. political developments on Rawls’s notion of public reason. The article “Talk May Be Cheap, but Deeds Seldom Cheat: On Political Liberalism and the Assurance Problem,” (2024) published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, examines the dynamics of political liberalism amid changing political landscapes from Rawls’s time and beyond. The findings also illustrate the practical implications of Rawls’s theories in response to contemporary political issues and shed light on the role of high officials like Supreme Court Justices in modern politics.

Objective 3: Philosophical Grounds for Reasonableness

Exploring the philosophical foundations of the standard of reasonableness in Rawls’s later work constituted the third objective. The article “Is it Sectarian for a Rawlsian State to Coerce Nozick? –On Political Liberalism and the Sectarian Critique”, published in *Philosophia*, explored how the idea of reasonableness can be justified on multiples grounds, facilitating reasonable citizens to offer arguments to convince those who are skeptical of this idea. Also, the book review of Andrius Galisanka’s recent book, *John Rawls: The Path to A Theory of Justice*, published in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* (2024) discusses the evolution of Rawls’s thought, particularly regarding how Rawls attempts to articulate the idea of reasonableness within a pluralistic society.

Objective 4: Priority of Public Reason Over Religious Reason

The fourth objective focuses on discussing Rawls’s rationale for prioritizing public reason in political discourse. We advocate for this prioritization in “Talk May Be Cheap, but Deeds Seldom Cheat: On Political Liberalism and the Assurance Problem” (2024), published in *American Journal of Political Science* and “The Welfare-Convergence Dilemma: Why Social Insurance is Objectionable in the Convergence Conception of Public Justification” (2025), published in the journal *Economics and Philosophy*. However, we acknowledge that some scholars criticize this prioritization, believing it diminishes the role of religion in politics. In response, the article “Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism–Exclusivism Debate,” published in *Religions*, argues that while religious reasons should be used judiciously in political discussions, religious behaviors can significantly contribute to modern politics. This work highlights the potential positive impact of religions in contemporary political contexts. In addition, Rawls’s discussion of anger in his unpublished paper from the Rawls archive has inspired us to use this concept to evaluate the challenges of Confucian meritocracy, a political theory that has gained recent popularity in comparative political theory. Our related research is published as “Trapped Between Anger and Apathy: On the Problem of Instability in Confucian Meritocracy” (2025) in the *Journal of Politics*.

Conclusion

Thus, the research objectives have been successfully realized through a combination of journal articles that collectively advance the understanding of John Rawls’s political philosophy. By engaging with the archives and contemporary political contexts, the research not only contributes to academic discourse but also provides practical insights for civic education and the functioning of democratic societies. The outputs reflect a comprehensive examination of the themes outlined in the research proposal, demonstrating the relevance and applicability of Rawls’s ideas in contemporary political philosophy.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

| Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i> | Addressed <i>(please tick)</i> | Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i> |
|---|--|--|
| 1. To make use of the Rawls archives to study the complementary relationship between political liberalism and other comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 100 |
| 2. To analyse how political developments in the U. S. influenced Rawls's philosophical work on the idea of public reason | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 100 |
| 3. To explore the philosophical grounds for the standard of reasonableness in the philosophy of the later Rawls | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 100 |
| 4. To discuss Rawls's justification of the priority of public reason over religious reason in the political activities of citizens | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 100 |
| 5. To consider the division of labour between the government and civil society when it comes to the education of citizens about public reason | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 100 |

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

The research project successfully addressed several key objectives, yielding significant findings:

1. Complementary Relationship Between Political Liberalism and Other Doctrines:

This objective utilized the Rawls archives to investigate how political liberalism interacts with various religious and philosophical doctrines. The exploration was prominently featured in the article "Let God and Rawls be Friends: On the Cooperation between the Political Liberal Government and Religious Schools in Civic Education" (2021), published in the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles'). The article highlights the coexistence of political liberalism and religious education, further examined in the article "Careful, patient, and modest citizens: Facilitating civic education through Zhu Xi's method of deep reading" (2025) in *Educational Philosophy and Practice* (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles') and the Chinese article "Yu Ying-shih and Rawls's Political Liberalism" (2022) in *Reflexion* (see Part C, '8, Knowledge Transfer').

2. Influence of U.S. Political Developments:

The second objective analyzed the effects of U.S. political changes on Rawls's concept of public reason. The findings were articulated in "Talk May Be Cheap, but Deeds Seldom Cheat: On Political Liberalism and the Assurance Problem" (2024), published in the *American Journal of Political Science* (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles'). This work discusses the dynamics of political liberalism in the context of evolving political landscapes, illustrating the practical implications of Rawls's theories on contemporary issues.

3. Philosophical Grounds for Reasonableness:

The third objective explored the philosophical foundations of reasonableness in Rawls's later works. This can be seen in "Is it Sectarian for a Rawlsian State to Coerce Nozick? –On Political Liberalism and the Sectarian Critique", published in *Philosophia*. A review of Andrius Galisanka's book, *John Rawls: The Path to A Theory of Justice*, published in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* (2024) (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles'), provides critical insights into the development of Rawls's thought, particularly regarding reasonableness in a pluralistic society.

4. Priority of Public Reason Over Religious Reason:

The fourth objective examined Rawls's rationale for prioritizing public reason in political discourse. This theme is explored in "Talk May Be Cheap, but Deeds Seldom Cheat" (2024) in *American Journal of Political Science* and "The welfare-convergence dilemma: why social insurance is objectionable in the convergence conception of public justification" (2025), published in *Economics and Philosophy* (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles'). These articles present arguments supporting public reason's precedence over religious reasoning. The article "Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism–Exclusivism Debate," published in *Religions*, and "Trapped Between Anger and Apathy: On the Problem of Instability in Confucian Meritocracy" (2025) in the *Journal of Politics*, also discuss what role religions could play in modern politics (see Part C, '8, Peer-reviewed Journal Articles').

Conclusion

Overall, the research objectives were effectively met through a series of journal articles that enhance the understanding of John Rawls's political philosophy. By engaging with both historical archives and contemporary political contexts, the research contributes to academic discourse and offers practical insights into civic education and democratic functioning. The outputs reflect a thorough examination of the proposed themes, underscoring the relevance and applicability of Rawls's ideas in modern political philosophy.

**6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action
(Maximum half a page)**

The research project opens several avenues for further development:

1. Expanded Comparative Studies:

Future research could compare Rawls's ideas with those of other political philosophers across different cultures. This would enhance understanding of how political liberalism relates to diverse religious and philosophical doctrines globally.

2. Practical Applications in Education:

Investigating how civic education programs can be designed to incorporate Rawls's principles could provide valuable insights. This might involve case studies of successful programs that balance respect for religious beliefs with the teaching of public reason.

3. Impact of Social Media:

Analyzing how social media influences public discourse and civic engagement in light of Rawls's theories could reveal new challenges and opportunities in contemporary society.

4. Longitudinal Studies:

Conducting longitudinal studies to assess how political developments over time affect interpretations of public reason would contribute to a deeper understanding of its evolving role in democracy.

5. Cross-Disciplinary Approaches:

Engaging with fields like psychology and sociology could enrich the research by exploring how individual beliefs shape civic engagement and the acceptance of political liberalism.

These directions could significantly enhance the research's impact and relevance in today's political landscape.

7 Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

The research project evaluates and responds to various critiques of the philosopher John Rawls's political liberalism, a theory that explores how free individuals with diverse religious and philosophical beliefs can live together justly rather than in conflict. This project advocates for a "division model," which posits that political liberalism is not a self-sufficient theory but rather a component of a broader theory of justice. The questions of justice and legitimacy can be fully addressed only when political liberalism is complemented by other comprehensive religious and philosophical theories, such as Confucianism and Christianity. Political liberalism offers public reasons for citizens to make political decisions, whereas comprehensive doctrines provide religious or ethical reasons for citizens to affirm public reasons. In other words, there is a division of philosophical labor between political liberalism and comprehensive doctrines. This model helps us understand how public education and associations in civil society can teach citizens about civic responsibilities while respecting diverse beliefs. Overall, this project contributes valuable insights to discussions about democracy, religion, and civic education, illustrating how Rawls's theories can guide us in creating a fair and inclusive society.

Part C: Research Output

8 Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

| The Latest Status of Publications | | | | Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*) | Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified) | Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report) | Attached to this Report (Yes or No) | Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No) | Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Year of Publication | Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published) | Under Review | Under Preparation (optional) | | | | | | |
| 2021 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | "Let God and Rawls be Friends: On the Cooperation between the Political Liberal Government and Religious Schools in Civic Education", <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> , Vol. 38, No. 5, 774-789 | No | Yes (Annex I) | Yes | Yes https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/japp.12514 |
| 2023 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | "Is it Sectarian for a Rawlsian State to Coerce Nozick? – On Political Liberalism and the Sectarian Critique", <i>Philosophia</i> Vol. 51: 367-387 | No | Yes (Annex II) | Yes | Yes https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11406-021-00351-5 |
| 2024 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah*, LI Chris Man Kong | "Talk May Be Cheap, but Deeds Seldom Cheat: On Political Liberalism and the Assurance Problem", <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , Vol. 68, No. 4, 1353-1365. | No | Yes (Annex III) | Yes | Yes https://scholars.hsu.edu.hk/en/publications/talk-may-be-cheap-but-deeds-seldom-cheat-on-political-liberalism- |
| 2024 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | "Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism–Exclusivism Debate", <i>Religions</i> Vol. 15: 1234-1248 | No | Yes (Annex IV) | Yes | Yes https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/15/10/1234 |

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|------|-----|-----|-----|--|--|----|------------------|-----|--|
| 2024 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | Review of Andrius Galisanka: John Rawls: <i>The Path to A Theory of Justice, The Journal of Value Inquiry</i> , Vol. 58:175–177 | No | Yes (Annex V) | Yes | Yes https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10790-021-09852-8 |
| 2025 | N/A | N/A | N/A | LI Chris Man Kong, WONG Baldwin Bon Wah* | ‘The welfare-convergence dilemma: why social insurance is objectionable in the convergence conception of public justification’, <i>Economics and Philosophy, First View</i> . DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267124000440 | No | Yes (Annex VI) | Yes | Yes https://scholars.hsu.edu.hk/en/publications/the-welfare-convergence-dilemma-why-social-insurance-is-objection |
| 2025 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | “Trapped Between Anger and Apathy: On the Problem of Instability in Confucian Meritocracy”, <i>Journal of Politics</i> Vol. 87 (1): 205-215 | No | Yes (Annex VII) | Yes | Yes https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/730724 |
| 2025 | N/A | N/A | N/A | WONG Baldwin Bon Wah | “Careful, patient, and modest citizens: Facilitating civic education through Zhu Xi’s method of deep reading”, <i>Educational Philosophy and Theory</i> Vol. 57 (4): 374-384 | No | Yes (Annex VIII) | Yes | Yes https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rept20?src=pdf |

9 Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered
(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

| Month / Year / Place | Title | Conference Name | Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i> | Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i> |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| September/ 2023/ Manchester, UK | The Eye of a Needle: On how the convergence conception of public justification upsets social insurance | MANCEPT Workshop 2023 | No | Yes (Annex IX) | Yes | No |
| March/ 2023/ Toronto, Canada | Careful, patient, and modest citizens: Facilitating civic education through Zhu Xi's method of deep reading | 17th Annual Midwest Conference on Chinese Thought | No | Yes (Annex X) | Yes | No |
| June/2024/ Oxford, UK | Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism-Exclusivism debate | “Religion, Freedom, Equality”, Hosted by University of Texas Magdalen College, University of Oxford | No | Yes (Annex XI) | Yes | No |

10 Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning (Please elaborate)

Dr. Wong Baldwin Bon Wah presented some of the findings to of the research project in a talk given to the public in the YouTube channel ‘School of Somewhere’, in 2023 which could be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXampSMwB9A&t=5s>.

Dr. Wong Baldwin Bon Wah also presented some of the findings to of the research project in a Chinese article published in *Reflexion*: 〈余英時與羅爾斯的政治自由主義〉，《思想》45期 (2022/07) Pp. 213-231, which is a well-regarded journal aimed at public audience. (Annex XII)

11 Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

| Name | Degree Registered for | Date of Registration | Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

12 Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

N/A

13 Statistics on Research Outputs

| | Peer-reviewed Journal Publications | Conference Papers | Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters | Patents Awarded | Other Research Outputs (please specify) | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------|---|-----|
| No. of outputs arising directly from this research project | 8 | 3 | N/A | N/A | Type | No. |
| | | | | | N/A | N/A |

14 Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

| Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access | Reasons |
|---|---------|
| N/A | N/A |