

RGC Ref. No.:

UGC/FDS14/H15/19

(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**

Postcritique and Joseph Conrad

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

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Jay Parker/Assistant Professor	Department of English/The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Joyce Wexler/Professor	Department of English/Loyola University Chicago
Others		

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	01/01/2020		
Project Completion Date	31/12/2021		
Duration <i>(in month)</i>	24		
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31/12/2022		

**Part B: The Final Report**

**5. Project Objectives**

5.1 Objectives as per original application

- Strand 1**
- 1) Build on preliminary research on Conrad’s understanding of conversion to establish its relevance across Conrad’s oeuvre.
  - 2) Identify how conversion changes our understanding of politics and related social and ethical issues in Conrad’s writing.

- Strand 2**
- 1) Determine the relevance of postcritique to Conrad’s writing on politics and related social and ethical issues.
  - 2) Evaluate the effectiveness of postcritique in producing readings of Conrad.
  - 3) Evaluate the relevance of these readings to political, social and ethical issues today

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change:

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- 1.
- 2.
3. ....

### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

- 1.1 Build on preliminary research on Conrad's understanding of conversion to establish its relevance across Conrad's oeuvre.

This project resulted in the publication of "Quixotic Conrad: Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight". The essay establishes the basis for the interpretation of "conversion" in Conrad, via its analysis of "A Happy Wanderer". It theorises Conrad's unconventional approach to conversion and establishes its connection to key Conradian concepts, "betrayal" (see Hampson, 1992). This essay was evaluated as of "the highest international standard" at peer review.

- 1.2 Identify how conversion changes our understanding of politics and related social and ethical issues in Conrad's writing.

The essay establishes how "conversion" adds to our understanding Conrad, arguing that for Conrad it is a form of positive "betrayal". It demonstrates how betrayal and conversion for Conrad are different ways of thinking about changes of affiliation, but that they also relate intimately to Conrad's own conversion from a merchant mariner to a novelist, and from a Polish *szlachta* to one of the world's foremost novelists in English. Also, by connecting Conrad's "conversion" to a Deleuze's concepts of "flight" and "betrayal", "Quixotic Conrad: Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight" demonstrates the relevance to social and political issues. Conrad's exploration of these concepts resonates with elements of Deleuze's "line of flight", which underpins his understanding of change and marks new forms of social and political engagement.

- 2.1 Determine the relevance of postcritique to Conrad's writing on politics and related social and ethical issues.

The edited collection, *Joseph Conrad and Postcritique: Politics of Hope, Politics of Fear*, establishes postcritical approaches are relevant to Conrad. All chapters explicitly engage with postcritique. Examples of chapters with explicit relevance to politics include "Doubling Down on the Politics of Fear, Opening Up the Politics of Hope", Joseph Conrad's "Strange Air of Finality": Negative Affect and the Politics of Fear in "The Tale", and "Cross-cultural Accord in the Malay Fiction: The Performative Politics of Conrad's Eastern World". "Some Knowledge of Yourself": "Heart of Darkness" in the Twenty-First-Century Literature Classroom—An Ethical Approach" focuses explicitly on ethics. "The new sun is rising": Conrad, Women, and Hope" engages with social as well as political issues.

- 2.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of postcritique in producing readings of Conrad.

The whole collection demonstrates the relevance of postcritique to Conrad, whilst the Introduction (written by Parker & Wexler) evaluates this relevance and identifies directions for further development of postcritical work on Conrad, especially in the engagement with his later fiction. The edited collection was evaluated as constituting "a paradigm shift in Conrad studies" at peer review.

- 2.3 Evaluate the relevance of these readings to political, social and ethical issues today

A number of the essays included presentist readings, including "Quixotic Conrad: Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight", "Doubling Down on the Politics of Fear, Opening Up the Politics of Hope", "Heart of Darkness" and the Memory of the Holocaust", and "Heart of Darkness" in the Twenty-First-Century Literature Classroom—An Ethical Approach". These essays all demonstrated that postcritical reading of Conrad's writing are highly relevant to thinking about social, political and ethical issues in the present.

## 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	<b>Addressed</b> <i>(please tick)</i>	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> <i>(please estimate)</i>
1.1 Build on preliminary research on Conrad's understanding of conversion to establish its relevance across Conrad's oeuvre.	✓	100%
1.2 Identify how conversion changes our understanding of politics and related social and ethical issues in Conrad's writing.	✓	100%
2.1 Determine the relevance of postcritique to Conrad's writing on politics and related social and ethical issues.	✓	100%
2.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of postcritique in producing readings of Conrad.	✓	100%
2.3 Evaluate the relevance of these readings to political, social and ethical issues today	✓	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

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

This project has produced an edited collection, *Joseph Conrad and Postcritique: Politics of Hope, Politics of Fear*, which takes a postcritical perspective on Joseph Conrad's writing, including central texts *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, and *Lord Jim*. The essays in the collection recognize the dark elements in Conrad's fiction—deceit, vanity, avarice, lust, cynicism, and cruelty—yet they perceive hopefulness as well. Conrad's skepticism unveils the dark heart of politics, and his critical heritage can feed our fear that humanity is incapable of improving. This Conrad is a well-known figure, but there is another, neglected Conrad that the book brings to light, one who delves into the politics of hope as well as the politics of fear.

The collection as a whole clearly demonstrates the significance of postcritique as an approach to Conrad, examining a range of Conrad's novels and short fiction. It engages postcritically with issues including gender, fear and terrorism, negative affect, cliché, Conrad's influence on Holocaust narrative, the sublime, performative politics, and the teaching of texts that do not live up to contemporary standards in terms of the representation of others (especially regarding race). In all these instances, it finds that Conrad's writing encourages a nuanced form of postcritical reading, where critique is never neglected, but always supplemented with more hopeful, less suspicious forms of reading.

#### Strand 1

In *Notes on Life and Letters*, Conrad develops an idiosyncratic definition of conversion as an ironic double of betrayal. The strand 1 essay, "Quixotic Conrad: Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight", connects betrayal (particularly as unmasking) to critique, and conversion (as a form of positive transformation) to postcritique, and explores how conversion reveals a potentially postcritical Conrad. Secondly, through a reading practice structured by Gilles Deleuze's thinking on betrayal and lines of flight, it makes a series of leaps, or flights, to show how Conrad's ironic narrative in *Lord Jim* explores hopeful possibilities of affiliation and conversion. In so doing, it conducts a postcritical reparative reading that recuperates irony, which emerges not only as the signature style of destabilizing and deconstructing, but also as a means hopefully to maintain or create solidarity and commitment across classes and cultures.

#### Strand 2

Postcritical interpretations of Joseph Conrad's political fiction look beyond the literary themes that so many critics have examined. Notwithstanding the ambiguity and irony in his work, postcritique accepts the paradoxical possibility that fiction can give rise to knowledge, that some passages are factual, accurate, and sincere. The introduction to the collection outlines postcritical theory and summarises its relevance to Conrad, as demonstrated by the collection. It then goes on to evaluate these postcritical approaches to Conrad, identifying their common features, especially their combinations of critical and postcritical reading, their demonstration of Conrad's continuing relevance today (for example, in the contexts of international conflict, terrorism, and global pandemic). Finally it identifies an area for further development in postcritical Conrad studies. It argues that the still-prevalent sense of Conrad's decline in his later work should be re-evaluated in the light of postcritical priorities. It suggests that the value ascribed to his early work reflects the critical biases of twentieth century literary studies, and proposes that postcritical approaches will open up new understanding of Conrad's late work and new assessments of its quality.

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

There is immense potential for future research, using postcritical reading to examine the full range of Conrad's fiction. There are two key areas for further research: (1) Expansion of the analysis of Conrad's hopeful elements. As identified during peer review, the collection "constitutes a paradigm shift in Conrad studies". The implications of this shift are potentially far reaching, and open the possibility for a re-evaluation of Conrad's entire oeuvre as well as our understanding of his personal views, politics, and sensibilities. The PI of this project is currently completing a monograph on *Conrad's Liberalism*. This forms the next stage of his research into a more hopeful Conrad. I will argue that far from being a skeptical conservative through and through, Conrad is better thought of as a liberal. This new project builds on the research conducted for this grant, because it also suggests that Conrad needs to be understood as combining critical and hopeful impulses. In the case of his politics, this manifests in his anticipation of Amanda Anderson's conception of "bleak liberalism". Whilst liberalism is a progressive politics, bleak liberalism maintains this hope alongside an abiding sense of the limits and challenges of liberalism. (2) As detailed above, examination of Conrad (from *Chance*, 1913, onwards) would particularly benefit from postcritical reading analysing and re-evaluating the still influential Twentieth Century paradigm of Conrad's fiction as characterised by "achievement and decline" (Moser). Whilst single author studies have challenged this view (for example Donovan 2005, Jones, 2012), as the collection demonstrates, the "achievement and decline" paradigm persists within Conradian circles, but it is even more dominant in the broader scholarly community. The edited collection, *Joseph Conrad and Postcritique*, intervenes in debates about theory that are controversial outside of Conrad studies, and is thus a first step in reorienting wider understandings of Conrad. The most effective way of building on this work will be to develop postcritical readings of Conrad's later fiction in multi-author studies. This will broaden the audience of this new paradigm in Conrad criticism, and create the opportunity to change the conversation about Conrad in wider literary circles. Michaela Bronstein's analysis of Conrad in *Out of Context: The Uses of Modernist Fiction* (2018) begins to use postcritical approaches in a multi-author study that includes Conrad, but Bronstein focuses on the canonical pre-*Chance* works "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*. As a result, whilst using methods influenced by postcritique, Bronstein does not move beyond the broad scholarly bias towards Conrad's earlier writing.

## 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 project conclusively challenges the dominant view of Conrad as a thoroughgoing skeptic. It demonstrates how hope and fear coexist in Conrad, showing how Conrad's critical tendencies combine with impulses towards commitment and positive change. These impulses are highlighted by postcritical theory. This theory argues when we read literature, especially in the university classroom, we need to go beyond critique, which looks for hidden meanings, ulterior motives, and ideological effects. Postcritical reading focuses on the knowledge we can gain from literature, and attempts to examine how literature can do more than criticize society or politics. Literature makes emotional connections, educates, and helps us to imagine different, perhaps better, ways of living. This project uses this theory to provide new ways of understanding Conrad, and in so doing, demonstrates his ongoing relevance politically, ethically, and in the literature classroom today.

**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				Jay Parker	Quixotic Conrad: Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight. In Parker, J., Wexler, J. (Eds), <i>Joseph Conrad and Postcritique: Politics of Hope, Politics of Fear</i> (pp. 19-41). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72499-3_2">https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72499-3_2</a> .		Yes (Annex I)	Yes	Yes ( <a href="https://researchhdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100116">https://researchhdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100116</a> )
2021				Jay Parker*, Joyce Wexler	Introduction / <i>Joseph Conrad and Postcritique: Politics of Hope, Politics of Fear</i> (pp. 1-16). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72499-3_1">https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72499-3_1</a> .		Yes (Annex II)	Yes	Yes ( <a href="https://researchhdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100185">https://researchhdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100185</a> )

2021				Jay Parker*, Joyce Wexler	Joseph Conrad and Postcritique: Politics of Hope, Politics of Fear. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72499-3		Yes (Annex III)	Yes	Yes (https://researchdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100115)

**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>
2021	Conrad, Betrayal, Conversion, and Flight	The 48 <sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, The Joseph Conrad Society (UK)		Yes (Annex IV)	Yes	Yes (https://researchdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202100246)

**10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning**

*(Please elaborate)*

The PI has incorporated postcritical approaches to teaching into his modules. This includes approaches to literature in the module ENG4326 Literature and Environment and ENG2101 Exploring English Novels. The main change is the inclusion of postcritical attitudes to knowledge in fictional texts. In addition to traditional critical questions regarding representation (and its limits), students explore what fictional texts might help us to know? For example, the final assignment for ENG4326 includes the question ““The artwork lets us know what [things] in truth are” (Heidegger). Discuss.”



**11. Student(s) Trained***(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Degree Registered for</b>	<b>Date of Registration</b>	<b>Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation</b>
N/A			

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

The project included collaboration between the PI (The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong) and Co-I (Loyola University Chicago), as well as with contributors to the edited collection, working in universities in Asia, Europe, and the USA.

**13. Statistics on Research Outputs**

	<b>Peer-reviewed Journal Publications</b>	<b>Conference Papers</b>	<b>Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters</b>	<b>Patents Awarded</b>	<b>Other Research Outputs (please specify)</b>	
<b>No. of outputs arising directly from this research project</b>		1	3 (1 edited book & 2 chapters written by the PI/Co-I.)		Type	No.

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report***(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

<b>Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
N/A	