

Celebrating and fostering research excellence in Hong Kong

As a world-class city and a regional education hub, Hong Kong is internationally renowned for its outstanding track record in conducting research of the highest caliber. Over the years, the city's thriving research scene has been continuously nurtured by the University Grants Committee (UGC) and its Research Grants Council (RGC) through research funding and fellowship schemes.



▲ Professor Yuk-shan WONG, Chairman of RGC, delivered a speech at the 2021/22 RGC Award Presentation Ceremony

The Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme (HSSPFS), launched in 2012/13, aims at granting extended time-off and supporting funds to the outstanding investigators in the humanities and social sciences disciplines from UGC-funded universities to enable them to focus on research work and writing. Each year, following a highly competitive and rigorous selection process, up to 10 investigators are awarded fellowship with a maximum of HK\$1 million each. Each awardee will receive support for a period of 12 months in the manner of relief from teaching and administrative duties as well as research funding support.



To further strengthen the research capacity and nurture promising research talents in Hong Kong, the RGC has recently introduced the coveted Senior Research Fellow Scheme (SRFS) and Research Fellow Scheme (RFS). With the dual objectives of facilitating the endeavours of illustrious researchers across all disciplines from UGC-funded universities as well as developing and retaining the next generation of Hong Kong research community members, the two schemes operate on a yearly basis to provide awardees with sustained financial support and relief from teaching and administrative duties for a period of 60 months.

In each round, 10 SRFS awardees at full Professor rank are conferred the title 'RGC Senior Research Fellow', with each of their supporting university receiving a fellowship grant of around HK\$7.8 million, while 10 RFS awardees at Associate Professor rank are conferred the title 'RGC Research Fellow', with each of their supporting university receiving a fellowship grant of around HK\$5.2 million. Through the two schemes, academics can fully dedicate themselves to research and mentoring young researchers, thus bolstering Hong Kong's competitiveness and development for research excellence.



Professor David Carless

Improving learning processes

One of the recipients of the HSSPFS award this year is Professor David Carless, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU). His project, 'Feedback Literacy for Lifelong Learning: New Pathways for Research and Practice', will examine how feedback processes are implemented in higher education to facilitate effective learning.

"I am grateful to the RGC for honoring me with this award," Carless states. "I am very pleased because it is a great recognition of my research effort."

Carless is deeply appreciative of the extended time-off for collecting data and writing up quality outputs. "Additionally, it provides me with the space to think deeper and conceptualise my project more rigorously in order to produce insightful research."

With the support of the HSSPFS, Carless' research will create a significant impact within the academic community by helping educators manage feedback processes better and improve student learning at the university level. At the same time, the project may have broader impacts on society as feedback is crucial for self-improvement and supporting the development of good human relationships.

"People all benefit from feedback literacy because we all need to be able to interact, build relationships and negotiate feedback with people in our daily lives," Carless explains. "And so I hope that over the medium term, we can gradually transform the reputation of feedback and develop an encouraging, critical and supportive feedback atmosphere that would be helpful in many walks of life."

Reflecting on his career in research in Hong Kong, Carless expresses his pleasure working in an environment where research and education are valued. He is also optimistic about the future of research in Hong Kong. "I think the prospects for doing high quality research here are promising because of the encouraging support we have from the university, the UGC and the government."



Dr Yunya Song

Furthering discourse on climate change

Another recipient of the HSSPFS award this year is Dr Yunya Song, an Associate Professor from Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). Her project, titled 'Networked Framing in the Age of Hybrid Media: Legacy Media Coverage of and Social Media Conversations about Climate Change in the US, UK, and China', will compare how climate change is presented by media platforms in these three countries and explore how different

portrayals of the issue shape public opinion.

"I would like to express my gratitude to the RGC for giving me this award. I have been longing to launch this project for a long time and the support of the HSSPFS means that I can finally embark on my research," says Song.

Since her project deals with big data analytics, the one year of teaching relief granted by the HSSPFS will allow her to work with different machine learning approaches to analyse and evaluate the data she has collected, and to engage in fieldwork and conduct in-depth interviews with people from the three countries to expand the scope of her project.

Song further explains that operating under the HSSPFS has helped her obtain a larger sample of interviewees and connect with policy makers, NGO leaders, other international scholars, as well as leaders from the International Communication Association (ICA) which makes publications more visible to the public.

By adopting a comparative approach, Song's project will extend existing scholarly discussions on media and climate change beyond a national context and provide a more comprehensive analysis on the relationship between hybrid media, climate change and public opinion. At the same time, her research will also benefit the wider community by helping different parties, especially NGOs, communicate their message on climate change more effectively to the public.

As a scholar interested in global communications, Song candidly admits that Hong Kong has always been her favorite place for doing research. "You can always meet different people from around the world, which broadens your worldview and allows you to incorporate various perspectives in your research. There is also a vibrant research community here that is conducive to the exchange of ideas."



Professor Catherine McBride

Mitigating difficulties in language and literacy learning

Professor Catherine McBride, a developmental psychologist at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, is awarded the SRFS fellowship for her project 'Optimizing Predictions of Dyslexia Cross-Culturally: Chinese and English Compared'. Her research will seek to understand how children learn to read and write in Chinese and English, with the goal of developing resources to identify and remediate those at-risk for reading and writing difficulties early.

"This award is incredibly meaningful to me," expresses McBride. "I could not be more grateful as the RGC has been rendering very kind and generous support to me."

One aspect that McBride appreciates the most about the RGC is their openness to funding research which may not be fully Hong Kong-based but involve cross-boundary collaboration. "This is particularly important to me because some of the work for this project will require input from researchers in Beijing and Taipei. The SRFS funding allows us to expand the scope of our project to explore how children learn Chinese across different Chinese-speaking societies."

As such, McBride's project will have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it will contribute to a broader discussion among the research community of what it means to read at the word level, and specifically, whether learning to read Chinese is the same or different in various regions.

Practically, it will lead to the development of a universal battery of tests for early Chinese reading that could be applied across Chinese societies globally. A single universal English word reading test will also be established as a measure of English word reading performance to benefit children learning English worldwide.

In addition, McBride's RGC-funded project will be instrumental in nurturing young research talents. As the project comprises elements of collaboration with researchers outside Hong Kong, the students will be provided with valuable exposure opportunities. The funding will also allow for more mentoring of individual students of all levels, especially those who are interested in a research career. "And perhaps most importantly, we will be able to provide more support for postdocs – this is essential for preparing them for a thriving research career," McBride explains.

Aside from the HSSPFS and SRFS, all awardees are also deeply appreciative that the RGC has offered a wide range of funding schemes, such as the General Research Fund, to support researchers in Hong Kong in conducting meaningful research across all spectrum over the years.



Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship Scheme



RGC Research Fellow Scheme/RGC Senior Research Fellow Scheme