



NEW ACADEMY TO BOOST PROFILE OF THE HUMANITIES

Research success in the humanities can be a difficult thing for others to understand. Unlike science-oriented subjects, it is not based on citations or funding, but rather on the ideas and interpretations generated by individual scholars. How, then, to communicate its impact?

A new initiative hopes to offer some measure of guidance. The Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities (HKAH), founded in April this year, has members from all of Hong Kong's universities and promises to be a collective voice for promoting and recognizing excellence in the humanities in the city.

A major driver behind the Academy has been the Dean of Arts, Professor Kam Louie, who started discussions on the matter after arriving here from Australia six years ago. He was elected as the Academy's first President at its inaugural meeting on April 18, 2011.

"All the people involved in the Academy say they have wanted this for a long time – a group where they can talk to each other and work together, and where the rivalry between universities disappears. Most areas of the world have national academics backed by the government but Hong Kong doesn't, and for a long time the humanities have not been very prominent here," he says.

The Academy aims to change that. It will offer a platform to promote collaboration among researchers, and a formal recognition of excellence.

Thirty-nine Fellows, including Professor Louie and nine other HKU scholars, have been elected to the Academy by a founding committee composed of their peers. These 39 will in future elect two or three new Fellows each year.

They have started to identify events in which humanities can contribute to wider debates in Hong Kong. Later this year, for instance, they plan to organize a public forum on Humanities and the Knowledge Economy, and next year one on the Creative and Cultural Industries in Hong Kong.

Bringing humanities scholars together will also give them a collective voice in dealing with the government, in particular the University Grants Committee (UGC), on funding and other issues of concern, without the risk of accusations of bias that would attach to a single university or scholar.

This united voice is particularly important in helping others to understand the importance and quality of humanities research – a crucial goal given frustrations about funding levels.

"Everybody has become frustrated – individuals, department heads, the UGC, are all frustrated. The UGC says, we don't know how you do your research, tell us. If we can advise them based on a territory-wide perspective, it will be much better," Professor Louie says.

Concerns about funding also extend to the Academy itself. It is now largely operated by the Fellows, but they hope to secure funding for secretarial and other support and eventually a permanent home. Professor Louie is hopeful that society will see the value of valuing humanities.

"Now that Hong Kong is no longer dominated by a refugee mentality, many people are looking for a good quality of life. I don't think other discipline areas can provide as much enjoyment or meaning from life as the humanities," he says.



Prof Louie (third from right) with members of the HKAH's Founding Executive

In addition to Professor Louie, the following nine distinguished academics from the University of Hong Kong have been voted Foundation Fellows of the newly formed Academy of the Humanities:

Professor John Burns - *Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences*
 Professor Daniel Chua - *Head, School of Humanities*
 Professor Frank Dikötter - *Chair Professor of Humanities*
 Professor Louise Edwards - *Professor of Modern China Studies*
 Professor Elaine Ho - *Professor of English*
 Professor Chris Hutton - *Chair Professor of English*
 Professor Ken Hyland -
Director of the Centre for Applied English Studies
 Professor Douglas Kerr - *Professor of English*
 Professor Maureen Sabine - *Professor of History*