

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

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Climate Change
Is this Hong Kong's Future?



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Adam Luck has been the freelance writer for *The Bulletin* since 2002. This is his last issue as he will be leaving Hong Kong soon to return to UK with his wife and young family. We wish him every success in London.



2003 Hong Kong Eco-Business Awards
香港環保企業獎

Gold Award (Best Environmental Reporting)
金獎 (最佳環保報告)

Vice-Chancellor's Research Contribution Honoured

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lap-Chee Tsui has become the first person in Hong Kong to be elected a Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Science (NAS) in the United States.

Professor Tsui joins previously-elected NAS members like Former President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Zhou Guangzhou; Vice-President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Chen Zhu and Nobel laureate and chemist Yuan-Tseh Lee from Taiwan's Academia Sinica.

Other past elected members include noted



economist Milton Friedman and Nobel laureate and mathematician John F. Nash.

Professor Tsui was elected as one of 18 foreign associates from 13 countries in recognition of his distinguished and continuing achievements in original research.

He discovered the first DNA marker linked to the disease locus for cystic fibrosis in 1985.

In 1989, Professor Tsui and his colleagues painstakingly identified the gene and the major mutation causing this disorder. His pioneering research has opened up a new approach to tracing the source of the genetic diseases.

The Vice-Chancellor said: "I am very honoured ...I hope my election will spur others in my field to vigorously continue their scientific research."

A Breath of Fresh Air

A mathematician who turned actor-director is the latest international artist-in-residence to enrich hall life on campus.

Jean-Luc Bonefacino recently stayed at Graduate House where he gave workshops to students on presentation skills in between rehearsals for the play, *The Man, the Chair and the Turtle*, on which he collaborated with local director Tang Shu-wing.

"I used French acting skills to teach students how to control their voice and breathing," he said. "Breathing has a lot to do with theatre, it drives your emotions. If your breathing speeds up, it can be related to high tension and fear.

"We also worked on the body because whatever fears or emotions you have can be seen in your body – in the way you stand and move. I tried to make the students aware of that."

Mr Bonefacino has had plenty of practice in controlling his breathing and movement. He began at age six, singing and performing with his father's French opera troupe. Yet he also performed well academically and studied mathematics at university, going on to work with a French bank and with the French consulate in Hong Kong in 1996. But his heart lay with the theatre and he has set up his own company in Paris and returns periodically to Hong Kong and Beijing for special performances.

He is the latest in a string of artists to join the artist-in-residence programme, which began three years ago under the guidance of the Graduate House Master, Dr Desmond Hui.

"We started this programme because we believe that having

someone with international exposure and experience in various disciplines in the arts as a resident for a short period of time, will enrich campus life," he said.

The first artist-in-residence was a kunqu opera singer and a variety of artists have stayed since then, from a Japanese percussionist to an Australian video artist. Their stays last from a few days to about six weeks.

Apart from contributing to campus life, the artists also gain from the exchange. Mr Bonefacino said his visit gave him the opportunity to meet students and learn more about Hong Kong society and culture – to the benefit of his craft.

"I met a graduate student who was doing Buddhism studies and we talked about how meditation can help with concentration. The most difficult thing to act is stillness, you have to concentrate all your energies. So I find there is a link between Buddhist meditation and my work," he added.



Putonghua Triumph

Arts student Daniel Lam Ming Kei put on a dramatic performance as a grief-stricken bereaved boyfriend to help the University win a prestigious Hong Kong Putonghua speaking competition.

Lam won the non-native prose section of the Sixth Hong Kong Inter-tertiary Institutions Putonghua Recitation Contest and fellow first year student Nancy Zhu triumphed in the native prose section.

Their victory represents ample return for the Chinese Language Division of the Department of Chinese, which has been working hard to help Hong Kong improve its Putonghua skills.

Lam said: "I was very pleased to win the competition and I am very grateful to my teacher Xie Wei Hua and the Department for inviting me to take part.

"Putonghua is becoming more important since the 1997 handover and whether I eventually work in the Mainland or stay in Hong Kong it is a language I will do business in.

"So for me this is a very practical exercise."

Lam chose to play a boyfriend coming to terms with witnessing the death

of his girlfriend in a car accident.

He said: "It was kind of like acting. It was really emotional."

The competition – held in March – is just one of many methods that the Department uses to encourage students to upgrade their linguistic skills and have fun in the process.

Course co-ordinator Sue Meng, believes that the University's long term investment in Putonghua is paying dividends and that the numbers of students signing on is increasing year-on-year.

She said: "It was very pleasing to do so well in the competition. We have so many people learning Chinese – both Cantonese and Putonghua – and they come from all over the world."

But it was not always so.

She said: "I came to Hong Kong 13 years ago from the Mainland and at the time felt some resistance in accepting the fact that Hong Kong was going to be handed back to China.

"It was more a political attitude than anything and that was why people did not want to speak Putonghua.

"But after the handover that attitude started to change and now everybody wants to speak a bit of it."

The Chinese Language Division offers four courses: Putonghua voluntary courses for undergraduates; Chinese language courses for international and visiting students; Certificate in Chinese Language Course for foreigners; and commissioned courses.

As Lam is only too willing to admit there is a bottom line to learning Putonghua: future job prospects.

For graduates and undergraduates the *lingua franca* of China is no longer a luxury for students or for the University.

Meng said: "The University's mission and vision of the future is that Chinese language is most important if we are to keep HKU at the top of international schools.

"Putonghua is also important for graduates to develop and get into the world market and not just China. If you want to get a job it is a must."



Daniel Lam with his award.

First WTO Regional Trade Policy Course Opens

The official opening ceremony of the first Asia-Pacific Regional Trade Policy Course was held on June 9, 2004.

The course will be attended by government officials from 32 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The programme aims to address the need for developing countries to strengthen the skills and knowledge of their government officials to meet the challenges of the Doha

Development Agenda.

The University was chosen in November 2003, after a rigorous selection process, by the World Trade Organization to become the Asia-Pacific training centre, and to offer trade training programmes for government officials in the region.



The Benefits of Going Underground

New MTR links on the West Island and South Island – running past the University – would save \$23 million in health costs each year and more than \$1 billion in time and safety costs, and lead to a 12 – 17 per cent increase in property values, according to a University-led study.

The study, funded by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation, aims for the first time in Hong Kong to measure the direct external benefits of rail versus road transport in detail.

Dr Bill Barron, Associate Professor of the Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management led the study, together with Civic Exchange and PlanArch Consultants Ltd. The government's Environmental Protection Department and our Department of Community Medicine provided the input.

"This has not been done before in Hong Kong at this level of detail," Dr Barron said. "The important thing is that this (MTR project) is a test case for the way we finance public transport in Hong Kong. We've been extremely modest in our assumptions to show that our numbers are robust."

The MTR is hoping the government will provide one-third to one-half of the capital costs of the West Island Line and South Island Line, something it has not done before. Dr Barron earlier did an international survey that found most countries subsidised an average two-thirds of capital rail costs.

The general benefits of building rail over roads are that it reduces road congestion, offers shorter journeys, and produces less roadside noise and air pollution. The study aimed to quantify aspects of those benefits for the two proposed rail lines.

In terms of health benefits, the savings would amount to \$23 million in fewer health care costs and

lost productivity. This was based on emissions information from the Environmental Protection Department and analysis by the Department of Community Medicine.

An \$18.7 billion to \$22.7 billion increase in property values was estimated by comparing similar properties in areas which have no direct rail link and over that with. For example, Whampoa Garden was compared with Taikoo Shing. Although on average the properties with and without rail had a 20 per cent difference in value, the team chose 12 – 17 per cent to be conservative.

Dr Barron said they also did not include private property owners when assessing time savings, assuming that people had already paid more money to live near a railway line.

"Double counting was an issue that was really driving us crazy. We spent a lot of time on the methodology to find ways to avoid this, because we expected a critical response to this study," he said.

Only people living in public housing estates within 400 metres of a proposed railway station were included in the assessment of time and safety savings. These are standard measures of the economic benefit of railways, given that faster journeys offer greater time for productivity and leisure and railways experience fewer accidents than roads. Some \$1.016 billion a year was expected to be saved through the two rail lines.

Dr Barron said it was hoped the study, along with another by Civic Exchange on employment benefits from the proposed rail lines, will help policy-makers have a clearer idea of the benefits of rail over road.

"Times are changing. If Hong Kong is going to function well, if we are going to get to the position where we're not trying to fill in the harbour every few years and build more roads, we need to get more people on railways. And to do that, we need to fundamentally change the way we fund railways," he said.



Climate Change – A Walk Across Victoria Harbour



Hong Kong's reclamation and other coastal engineering projects have come under considerable flak for their environmental impacts. But in the study of climate change, they have been an unlikely blessing.

Dr Wyss Yim, Associate Professor of the Department of Earth Sciences has 'piggy-backed' on coastal engineering projects over the past 30 years to drill into the sea floor to reveal evidence that helps to explain climate change over the past 500,000 years.

From the airport site at Chek Lap Kok to High Island Reservoir, he has been able to collect sediment and other material that shows there have been five cold and five warm periods over the past half million years, with the cold periods ending rather abruptly.

"This research has arisen thanks to all the coastal engineering construction in Hong Kong. Because there are so many projects here, I can do my work at a very low cost," he said.

Dr Yim's findings have been supported by international researchers, who drilled through the Antarctica ice sheet and reached similar conclusions on the frequency of climate change. His research also forms the basis of a display on the subject at the Science Museum's Science Corner that runs from mid-July until mid-November.

"Climate change and sea-level change are closely linked," he said. "During ice ages, the sea level would drop below present levels by roughly 130 metres, and the existing continental shelf would be exposed. You could walk across Victoria Harbour and that is possibly when Asians migrated to North America. During warm periods, the sea level was roughly as high as the present day."

Temperatures were about 7 – 9°C colder than today's mean annual temperature of 24°C and highland areas commonly saw frost in winter months. But the cold periods would end relatively abruptly, a phenomenon that Dr Yim attributed to the sudden increase in carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere.

These greenhouse gases formed when marine mud was

exposed to air because of lower sea levels, he said. The mud contained pyrite, which formed sulphuric acid on oxidation. The sulphuric acid reacted with marine shells and coral skeletons to produce carbon dioxide. Methane was released from plant matter on the now-exposed sea floor.

"Both carbon dioxide and methane trapped in air bubbles in Antarctica ice show a very steep rise at the end of ice ages. The continental shelf is ideal for explaining why this happened because we know it was exposed," he said.

As for the formation of ice ages, Milankovitch suggested it may be related to Earth's orbit of the sun and the fact it moves away from the sun every 100,000 years or so, he said.

His exhibition – which was selected through a ballot on the Science Museum's website – will feature evidence from Hong Kong's ancient past, including a piece of wood more than 130,000 years old that was discovered while dredging for sand off Castle Peak. The wood was part of a submerged forest and had a v-shaped cut that may possibly have been made by humans.

What Dr Yim's work cannot explain, however, is the current state of climate change. Debate on global warming has heated up recently with the release of the Hollywood movie, *The Day After Tomorrow*, which sensationalizes the worst-case effects of rapid warming.

"There's a lot of uncertainty over what will happen in future.

Based on the last 500,000 years, if there were fewer people in the world we should go back into an ice age. But with the unprecedented amounts of greenhouse gases being pumped out through the burning of fossil fuels, nobody knows what is going to happen," he said.

Except, perhaps, that Hong Kong is likely to grow further into the sea. Dr Yim's research has also helped to provide engineers with better information about the deposits on the sea floor – information they can use when deciding where to put the next reclamation.



Let the Sun Shine In

'Green' electricity and a glass roof that provides shade have been injected into the design of a new primary school in Ma Wan, in a Department of Architecture-led project to test and promote solar-powered energy in Hong Kong.

The school, Church of Christ in China Kei Wai Primary School, has been fitted with solar panels on its roof that are expected to generate nine per cent of its annual electricity needs and save 179 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

Three kinds of panels are being tested, a lightweight panel that also provides shade, a heavier panel and a panel that is integrated into the design of a glass roof. The glass roof panels do not entirely cover the glass, so light is let in.

In addition, University researchers have devised a system to get the highest 'yield' of sunshine from the panels and meet the strict demands of CLP Power for integrating the solar-powered energy with CLP's grid system. CLP needs to provide back-up power on cloudy days and in late autumn and early spring, when there is less direct sunlight.

"People tend to think solar energy is a great deal simpler to provide than it really is," Dr Josie Close, Research Assistant Professor of the Department of Architecture, who is leading the project, said.

"It's really just in this last year that we have been making major headway with CLP in terms of grid integration of renewable-generated energy. They have acknowledged that small green projects of community benefit will have cross-subsidy charges waived for providing back-up electricity. We're only the second installation of this size to be grid-connected, after the Science Park."

Dr Close said they would collect data from the school project over the next year to analyse which solar technology works best in Hong Kong. Researchers are also helping to prepare teaching materials on solar power for the coming academic year.

The project has been funded with an Innovation and Technology Fund grant of \$5.8 million and a matching grant from the CLP Research Institute, which was set up in 1999 to explore renewable energies and support sustainable projects in the community.

In addition, the Hong Kong Photovoltaic Consortium has been set up to promote solar energy. Photovoltaics generate electricity from the lightwaves in sunlight. A course on building applications for photovoltaics is being offered to the construction trade through HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education.

Back Pain

For Kenneth Cheung the revelation that one-fifth of Hong Kong's population carries a mutated gene responsible for back pain has taken an agonizing three years of research.

So the news that the Genome Research Centre (GRC) will allow his Department of Orthopaedic and Traumatology team to compress another three-year's research into one week is sweet relief.

The GRC will allow, Cheung – an Associate Professor in the Department – and his colleagues Danny Chan, Jeff Jim, Keith Luk, Y.Q. Song, Kathryn Cheah to build on their pioneering work on the origin of one of man's greatest enemies: back pain.

Their preliminary studies have shown that two mutated genes are believed responsible for a condition traditionally associated with the degenerating effects of wear and tear.

But the mutated gene collagen IX – which the team believes maybe carried by as many as 20 per cent of the local population – can affect even younger generations.

People carrying this gene are 2.4 times more likely to develop degenerative disc disease.

The second mutation is a vitamin D receptor, which, although only three per cent of the local population are thought to carry, has a 4 times higher chance of disc degeneration.

He said: "Up until now we have had to make do with a shoestring. Although we were grateful for the University Grants Committee's (UGC's) \$1.5 million grant it has taken us three years to reach this stage.

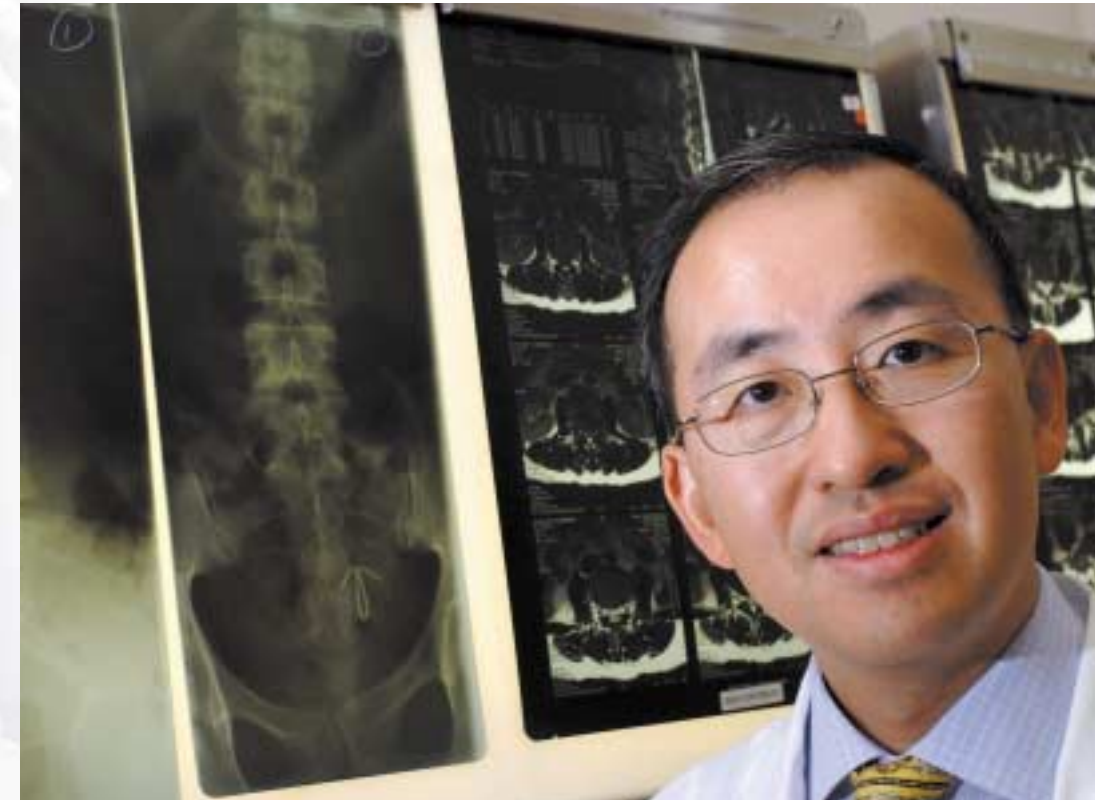
"Because genome research is so expensive you can only do so much with a limited budget. So that is why we took three years to get to this point.

"With GRC we could have completed this work in one week. That gives you an idea of how powerful this Centre and its facilities are."

Cheung's work now comes under the umbrella of a UGC Areas of Excellence \$50 million grant, which is being used to underwrite a multi-disciplinary approach to solve problems of the skeleton.

Led by Professor Kathryn Cheah, Professor: Chair of Biochemistry, the 18-strong team of scientists and doctors will focus on the relation between genes and skeletal disorders.

Cheung admits that the discovery of the two key genes in their part of the equation involved a good degree of guessing the



'candidate gene'.

He said: "This is relatively easy to do but the problem is that if you guess wrong you get nothing."

The other approach, however, is linkage analysis where you look at families with a number of members who look as if they have a genetic origin in their back condition.

Cheung said: "The GRC will enable us to focus on linkage analysis and perhaps find an unknown or unpredictable gene.

"With the Centre we will be able to use both approaches."

Two Projects One Lethal Illness

Two revolutionary projects from the University's medical scientists have received \$3.5 million of government funding to help them tackle one of liver cancer – one of China's most lethal illnesses.

Dr He Ming Liang, Research Assistant Professor and Professor Kung Hsiang-fu, Professor: Chair of Molecular Biology, both of the Institute of Molecular Biology are running the parallel projects that are using state of the art biotechnology to tackle the hepatitis B virus and the host of liver conditions that follow in its wake.

Much of their work has its origins in the Department of Microbiology's pioneering work on SARS and drew the attention of the Innovation and Technology Fund, which has now backed the projects.

Both ventures use viruses to deliver genetic material designed to destroy HBV and the liver cancer that often stems from it.

The first \$1.5 million project – Gene therapy for the Treatment of HBV infection and HKV-Induced Liver Cancer – is headed by He and uses RNA interference to stop the replication of HBV.

RNA – which makes up the genome of SARS and HIV/AIDS – is the material that helps transform DNA's instructions – which determine our genetic identity – into the proteins that actually shape our body.

He said: "The RNA stops viral replication and reproduction.

"Our research is looking at the major problem related to RNA and that is that synthetic RNA – which is used for research – is very expensive and so unsuitable for clinical trials.

"We will create RNA using human cells. We will do this by using viruses to deliver RNA, which will then be created in the patient's own body."

He will be aided by Dr Zheng Bojian, Associate Professor of the Department of Microbiology and Kung of the Institute of Molecular Biology and is currently in the process of recruiting several more members of the team.

With the second project – Development of Novel Adeno-associated Viral (AAV) Based Anti-Angiogenesis Gene Therapy for the Treatment of Liver Cancer – it is Kung's turn to become the leader.

Liver cancer, which is also known as Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC), is marked by its poor survival rate and a lack of treatment options for doctors.

Like the first project this \$2 million-research venture will use viruses to deliver the cure but this time for Vastatin, a protein which was identified by a group of scientists in Shanghai. This group will collaborate with the University team that will include He and Dr Marie Lin Chia-Mi, Investigator.

He said: "Vastatin can inhibit a tumour's growth because it stops blood vessel formation. Tumours need a lot of nutrition but this protein can block this.

"The problem is that Vastatin is expensive and its efficacy is relatively low. We want to use gene delivery and the genes to get to these tumour cells where they can stimulate these proteins.

"Effectively these proteins will help the tumour to kill itself."

He believes that when the projects draw to a close in Summer 2005 they will have helped 'develop a delivery system' for the RNA and Vastatin but that is only the end of the beginning because next will come clinical trials.

With a smile, He said: "A lot of other parties will start to become involved: lawyers, regulatory authorities, physicians and so on.

"But thankfully that is not my problem!"

Professor Kung Hsiang-fu (left) with Dr He Ming Liang.

SARS Killer

A team of University engineers and scientists are aiming to develop the world's first easy to use anti-SARS technology with the help of a revolutionary air disinfection system.

By combining two chemicals – titanium dioxide (TiO₂) and chromium ion – the team believes they can create a reaction under sunlight that will destroy many harmful airborne microbes.

Dr Michael Leung, Research Assistant Professor from the Department of Mechanical Engineering, believes that their project will not just help create commercial spin-offs but also help set global test standards for air purification systems.

Leung said: "Without question SARS is one of the driving forces behind this research.

"During the outbreak we found that a lot of air purifiers became available and that they would claim 99 per cent disinfection efficiency but there is no standard test for evaluating these air cleaners."

To the astonishment of the team they discovered that not even the US – usually the leader in imposing exacting standards – had no accepted test procedures in place.

No surprise then that the challenge of defining standards for the industry helped them win a \$1.6 million grant from the government's Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF).

But their 18 month project has a twin tracked approach because they believe they can also define the technology used to design future generations of air purifiers.

Photocatalytic oxidation happens when titanium dioxide is irradiated with ultra-violet light. This reaction creates hydroxyl radicals which in turn decompose organic compounds and destroy micro-organisms.

These could include diseases as diverse as tuberculosis, influenza and Legionnaires Disease.

Although this technology is not new, the University team wants to go one stage better by adding chromium ion, which means that purification would rely on visible light and remove the need for UV.

What is additionally environmental and people-friendly about this system is that it draws in air, which will run over surfaces coated with the TiO₂ – visible only in the form of a fine light powder.

This is in sharp contrast to those small boxes that people began to wear around their necks at the height of SARS. These emit ozone, which can kill the germs but also can damage your respiratory tract.

Leung and his team, which includes departmental colleague Associate Professor Dr Dennis Leung, Clinical Bacteriologist Yam Wing Cheong from the Department of Microbiology and Professor Lilian Vrijmoed – a biochemist from the City University of Hong Kong – are confident patents will follow.

He said: "We will have one patentable item. Either a test standard or photocatalytic oxidation process. At the moment we have not decided which."

For manufacturers there will be the added bonus of being able to set the machines against the standards Leung and his team will develop in the coming months.

He said: "We will not only develop test standards but test facilities. After the project is finished we will offer these facilities to industry so if a company wants to test their new products, bring them to us.

"It will be a commercial service but the main purpose is not making money but to support the industry and develop new technologies."

Genetic Key to Mental Illness

Sham Pak Chung has taken 33 years to return to Hong Kong but the Visiting Professor in Psychiatry is determined to make up for lost time by finding the genetic key to mental illness.

The Hong Kong-born but British bred academic has arrived at the University to help set up an ambitious research programme to find the genes responsible for causing schizophrenia and other mental disorders.

Sham is in the vanguard of medical science's drive to find out the missing link between our genetic make-up and mental health as the first step to finding a long-term genetic cure.

He said: "If you can find out the genetic differences that are responsible for why some people develop disorders then you can work backwards from the function of those genes to find out what's going wrong in the disorders.

"Genetics is a shortcut to understanding the illness."

With 500 schizophrenic patients and 500 control subjects, Sham has already got a number of candidate genes lined up for study.

But the Cambridge and Oxford educated and Maudsley trained psychiatrist admits that they have a long way to go.

He said: "Our knowledge of the patho-physiology of mental illness is rather limited: in part perhaps because it is not a glamorous subject but also because it is so complex.

"You might be able to compare a pig and human heart but the brain is more difficult.

"With a condition like anxiety you can see that in an animal but schizophrenia is at an altogether higher level of brain function."

Sham, however, is not satisfied with one project alone.

Along with his involvement in the large Areas of Excellence study on the genetics of skeletal development, Sham has his fingers in many research pies across many different fields.

You can best understand his popularity among his colleagues by studying his title at King's College, London: Professor of Psychiatric and Statistical Genetics.

As a number cruncher, Sham provides the methodology, or framework, within which to analyze data. This gives him the chance to straddle any number of medical research projects.

But these factors alone were not the only reasons why Sham is back in Hong Kong.

He said: "It is a great honour to be a Visiting Professor in the place I was born, also to have the chance to do research with lots of potential and in conjunction with the new Genome Research Centre.

"But it also represents an opportunity to bring my family back and show them Hong Kong, live in this part of the world and let my children brush up on their Chinese."

This blend of the private and professional even extends to Sham's wife, who was also born in Hong Kong.

They met in the UK while she was doing her PhD research project.

Sham said: "We are looking forward to spending some extended time in our birthplace and I am really looking forward to the challenge of new projects.

"I am sure that genetic research at The University of Hong Kong will pave the way for other scientists to find some kind of treatment or cure for many serious illnesses."



Professor Gets Top Honours from Engineering Fraternity

The Hong Kong Institution of Engineering (HKIE) has named Professor Cheung Yau Kai as its first Gold Medal winner in recognition of his outstanding contributions and achievements in the field of engineering. The award was presented on March 9, 2004 at the HKIE's 29th annual dinner held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.



Royal Society of Chemistry Honour

Professor Vivian Yam Wing Wah is the first Chinese academic to be awarded a Centenary Lectureship by the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Professor Yam, Head of the Department of Chemistry and Chair of Chemistry, has been offered an endowed lectureship in recognition of her research contributions to inorganic chemistry.

Professor Yam was the youngest scientist to be elected to the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2002 when she was 38 years old. She is researching novel organometallic compounds which could eventually lead to new types of luminescent materials. Luminescence is a general term for light emission, including photoluminescence, electroluminescence and others. She and her team have synthesized many new molecular materials that have promising optical and light-emitting properties. They may find interesting applications in materials science.

The Royal Society of Chemistry is one of the largest organizations in Europe for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of 45,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, its activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

The Centenary aims to promote the interchange of chemists between the United Kingdom and other countries. With the financial support of the fund, three Centenary Lecturers from all areas of Chemistry are appointed annually.



The Voice of the University Health Service



Brenda Wong Law Yu Ping's cheerful voice is probably as familiar as her friendly face because for 39 years this grandmother has taken her place at the University Health Service.

Now contemplating retirement Wong believes that her long service has been well rewarded by helping patients as they contemplate a visit to the doctor's.

Wong said: "I have known three generations of the same family come through here. I like meeting people and they are all my friends."

"When I arrived I was single and now I have grandchildren. My son thinks that it is incredible that I have always worked at the same place and in the same job."

Only a brief job with an accountancy firm kept Wong from her calling at the University but she had to rely on a friend's introduction to push her in the right direction.

Now facing retirement, Wong is not entirely sure what to do with her new found free-time but she has three grown up children and a retired husband to offer plenty of advice.

She said: "I think I will learn more cooking and do lots of exercise because work doesn't give me enough time for keeping fit."

"My children tell me that I should travel. I feel pretty young so my age should be no barrier to travelling abroad. I quite like the idea of a round the world trip."

"I would also like to return to Phuket in Thailand. I've already been there twice and really enjoyed the sunshine, beach and peace."

But moving on does not mean that Wong will not be looking backwards every now and again.

She said: "My message to my patients is 'Goodbye, I will miss you all and I wish you all the best in the future.'"

Memories from the Print Room

So Wing Cheong is old enough to remember the Japanese troops torturing civilians on the streets of Wan Chai so it should come as no surprise that he is probably the oldest member of staff at the University.

The 75-year-old has been with the University since 1964 and in the Registry's Printing Unit since 1967 where he was Senior Printing Officer from 1979 until 1991, so his retirement is well deserved.

So will have time to reflect on a lifetime of dedicated personal achievement.

Coming from abject poverty the Guangdong-born grandfather has seen his three sons transform into a consultant surgeon and two banking executives.

He said: "I am very proud of their success."

So is quick to acknowledge the transformation in his life. When his civil servant father died the six-year-old So was one of five children brought up by their mother through the 1930s.

In 1937 the family moved from Guangzhou to Hong Kong in search of a better life but fled back to Mainland China in 1942, but not before they had experienced extreme hardship.

So recalled: "After the British surrender on Christmas Eve 1941 I saw the military trucks driving along Hennessy Road. The next morning the Japanese come in riding their horses."

"All we had to eat was sweet potatoes and sweet potato leaves. Life was very hard."

"I saw the Japanese torture people on the streets. It is buried deep in my memory but I prefer to forget the details."

So only returned to Hong Kong in 1951 on the invitation of his relatives and a series of odd jobs followed during the day while at night he went to evening classes to get his qualifications.

After a job in Grantham Hospital, So managed to secure a job at the University and then a print apprenticeship three years later. He has stayed with the unit ever since.

He said: "I have really enjoyed it so why move? I will retire this summer so I am only 15 years too late! I was meant to retire in 1989 but they kept me on."

"I have been thinking about what I will do. I am very involved with the church these days so I think I will spend most of my time helping them."

