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Singapore

## S\$21 million awarded to 12 research projects on issues affecting Singapore society



File photo of crowds in Singapore. (Photo: TODAY)

SINGAPORE: Twelve research projects that look into issues affecting Singapore society have been selected to receive a total funding of S\$21 million from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).

The list of projects covering a range of issues was announced on Thursday (Apr 27). They include a study on how Singaporean pre-schoolers develop race preferences, as well as a study on the different aspects of household saving decisions - a project whose findings can facilitate further refinement of existing CPF policies, said researchers.

Other research subjects touch on low-income families, social integration, productivity and innovation, religion, and the environment.

The 12 projects, chosen from a total of 70 proposals, are the first batch which sought funding from the SSRC after it was set up by the Government in January last year to strengthen social science and humanities research here.

It is also part of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) S\$350 million drive over five years to boost research in those fields.

In a press release on Thursday, SSRC said the 12 projects were "selected on the basis of intellectual merit and their potential impact on and contribution to society and the economy."

It added that social science and humanities research helps to generate "important insights and practical applications to enable Singapore to navigate a fast-changing and more complex world."

SSRC said it received proposals from seven institutions - National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore University of Social Sciences and ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

One of the successful proposals from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute is described as "the first of its kind" to involve a comprehensive survey of contemporary Christianity in Southeast Asia. The study seeks to understand the religion's growth specifically in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam and the impact it has on Singapore's multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

Led by Dr Terence Chong, a senior fellow with the institute's Regional Social and Cultural Studies Programme, the project received Type A funding, which is valued at S\$100,000 to S\$1 million for up to three years. This category supports smaller-scale research and encourages broad-based participation in research in areas of strategic relevance, according to MOE.

Another Type A proposal, from the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Associate Professor Liu Haoming, touches on Singapore's ageing population and how the country can overcome the issue of labour force participation rate among the elderly.

A project led by NUS Professor Ivan Png, aims to "advance new scientific knowledge" in various disciplines and "develop cost-effective and scalable strategies to raise productivity across multiple industries". Professor Png's work was awarded Type B funding - S\$1 million to S\$10 million over three to five years - for larger-scale research. The category encourages research institutes to collaborate to pursue more inter-disciplinary research.

SSRC chairman Peter Ho said the number of submissions "exceeded expectations" and the quality of the proposals was also "impressive".

"It is a very good start ... I hope that in the next few years, we will be able to build a strong social science research eco-system in Singapore, which can then play a significant role in helping to understand and address the big societal challenges ahead," he said.

SSRC is making another call for proposals this year, which will open on May 8 and close on Jul 28. A fourth research theme "Understanding Society in the Digital Age" was added in recognition of the significance and impact of new digital technologies and media on society, said SSRC.