

Dr Facil Tesfaye, the Programme Director of African Studies who comes to HKU via Ethiopia, Berlin and Montreal, has ambitious goals to expand his programme and deepen his students' understanding of this vast continent.

Plans are being mooted to turn the current minor in African Studies into a major, which would make it the first in southern China.

Dr Tesfaye wants to bring a deeper understanding of Africa to students who may never have met an African person before and may totally be unaware of the long relationship between the African continent and China. The first documented exchanges date back more than 1,000 years, and China today is a major investor in the continent.

"Our work here is about opening up the minds of students who have very little information about Africa, and sensitising them to the diversity, the complexities and the problems of the continent as well as the opportunities it currently represents," Dr Tesfaye said.

He explained, "The students will be our ambassadors. When they go back to their families and society at large, they will be explaining what they see on the street. For example, they will be able to explain that the reason why there are so many black people in Chungking Mansions is because of trade. It's a good way to fight against stereotypes."

"And since HKU is an elite university creating tomorrow's leaders, the impact is going to be important at that level."

Since arriving last summer, Dr Tesfaye has taken several initial steps towards his lofty goals. A part-time teacher who researches Africans in China has been recruited. Courses have been revised to give students a stronger "hook" into African cultures. For instance, the new course on African music was designed to be used as a way of introducing students to African societies and to highlight the intermixing of cultures that can be observed on the continent.

Feelers have also been put out to African universities in order to set up and develop exchange programmes. Dr Tesfaye stated that attempts are underway to create working relations with non-academic institutions and to facilitate the internship component of the programme. He indicated that the African office of a multinational firm has been in touch with him to see how it can work with the programme.

"The possibility of an exchange with a company would be a way of ensuring that our programme is not what

<http://www.african.hku.hk/>

the Germans call a breadless art," he said. "I hope we can create opportunities for Arts students to become cultural translators between their country of origin and any African country they will be working in."

"Africa Week" has also been shaken up and replaced by a new concept: Africa@HKU. According to Dr Tesfaye, a series of "Africa Days" will be interspersed through the year to emphasise the diversity of the continent. Two such events have been organised since he joined HKU. The event in November 2014 featured Angola and included an exhibition of cultural products, Angolan coffee and beer, and a talk about Chinese investment in the country. The second event held in March 2015 featured Ethiopia and included a lunchtime dance performance for the HKU community by an Ethiopian cultural group.

China's impact in Africa was in fact what attracted Dr Tesfaye to HKU. He has a cross-cultural, multi-disciplinary background – growing up in Ethiopia and educated in Germany and Canada. He did his PhD on German colonial medical history in Africa covering history, political science and African Studies.

"Coming to Hong Kong was an opportunity for me. When you go to Africa every year or two as we diaspora people do, one of the things you witness is the growth of Chinese activity there. I can now be in the middle of where this is coming from," he said.



Dr Facil Tesfaye (fourth from right) with his students at the Africa@HKU – Ethiopia Today event

### **JUNE LEUNG SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ARTS STUDENTS**

Ms June Leung, an Arts alumna and one of the co-founders of Beacon College, has generously donated the sum of HK\$200,000 in support of scholarships for Arts students. Ms Leung established the scholarships with the aim of encouraging Arts students to attain all-round development and inculcate them with a sense of service to society.

The Scholarship will be awarded annually to a full-time, non-first-year undergraduate Arts student primarily on the basis of academic merit and holistic development.