

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*
A Citation



Fei Xiaotong, BA, MA, PhD

Professor Fei Xiaotong is a sociologist and anthropologist of international renown and a pioneer and champion in China for the two disciplines he professes. He is a native of Wujiang in Jiangsu province. His father, Mr Fei Puan, once served as the Provincial Inspector of Schools of Jiangsu, and established secondary schools on modern lines in his home town. Madam Yang Renlan, Professor Fei's mother, was an early advocate of women's rights and had shelters built for women and young girls in distress. With such learned and progressive-minded parents the young Fei Xiaotong had the foundation for his academic calling laid early. He grew up to be a scholar of the first order, admired and esteemed by all in academe and beyond.

Professor Fei Xiaotong attended the Dongwu University, Yenching University and the Graduate School of Tsinghua University. In 1935 Professor Fei, at the request of the provincial authorities in Guangxi, undertook research on the special ethnic groups at Dayaoshan, and the findings were published as *The Social Structure of the People of Flower Basket Yao* which he co-authored with Wang Tonghui. In 1936 he went to Britain for further studies, and became a student under Malinowski. On the findings of his research at the Kai Xiangong Village on the southeast bank of Lake Taihu he wrote a dissertation which, when published, was widely known under its title, *Peasant Life in China*. Professor Fei received his PhD from the University of London in 1938, and returned to China immediately afterwards to become the professor of sociology at the University of Yunnan. He set up a sociology research workshop with colleagues at Yenching University where he, leading a group of young scholars of promise, engaged in fieldwork on specific social entities such as rural communities, factories, and ethnic minorities. Their research often proceeded in the harshest conditions, and yet Professor Fei did not allow himself to be distracted by material discomfort. He concentrated on the work he was engaged in and this yielded fruit: *Earthbound China* was published in 1990 and remains an invaluable source of information on the subject.

In 1943, Professor Fei made his first visit to the United States, at the invitation of President Roosevelt. He returned to China and resumed his academic duties in 1944, and his two masterpieces, *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society* and *Family Planning System*, date from this period. While *From the Soil* reviews a profound subject in layman's terms and is therefore admired by both the specialist and the general reader, *Family Planning System* contains significant viewpoints of long-lasting effect. Both books have been popular since they were first published, and are still essential reading for those interested in Chinese economics, society and culture. From 1950 Professor Fei concentrated on the study of the ethnic minorities in China, and became Deputy President and Professor of Anthropology of



the Institute of Central Nationalities in 1952. In 1957 he re-visited the region near Kai Xiangong Village, and repeated his views that industries in the rural setting were an important complement to agriculture. Such views were to exercise tremendous influence in the economic development of New China, and provided a highly workable blueprint for the country's reconstruction.

In 1978, when the Cultural Revolution came to an end, Professor Fei was appointed Deputy Director of the Institute of Nationalities of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In 1979 he became the President of the Chinese Sociological Association and was appointed Professor of Sociology at Peking University. In 1980, Professor Fei became the Director of the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and devoted all his time and energy to the rebuilding of Chinese sociological research. He visited the United States again in 1980 and, received at Denver, the Malinowski Prize of the International Applied Anthropology Association. Numerous honours have been bestowed on him, including the Huxley Memorial Medal of the Royal Anthropological Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the Encyclopaedia Britannica Prize of the United States, the Asian Cultural Prize of Fukuoka, Japan, the Henry Fok Prize, and the special honour of the National Foundation for the Social Sciences. He holds an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Hong Kong and an honorary degree of Doctor of Social Science from the University of East Asia, Macau, and is a Fellow of the London School of Economics and Political Science. His contribution to sociology and anthropology is universally recognised, and the accolades he has received during his long academic career speak well for the great esteem in which he is held in the world of higher learning.

Professor Fei has a lifelong dedication to the well-being of the people. His colourful and fruitful academic career spanned over 60 years, during which he produced research covering a broad range of subjects. Since his pioneer work on the people of *Flower Basket Yao*, he has spared no effort in promoting industries, in villages and small towns. His research took him from farming communities to small towns, from small towns to medium sized cities, and from that on to economic entities centred in large cities. On another plane he specialises in the study of ethnic minorities and champions ethnic minorities in a unified country, a striking characteristic of the Chinese nation. A practical person who never loses sight of the whole, he advocates co-existence and co-prosperity among different races and different nations and, on such a premise, delineates an optimistic picture of Universal Harmony for the world in the 21st Century.

At the age of seventeen, Professor Fei made a promise to himself that he would record anything worth being written down for as long as he would live, and that for the benefit of those who would come after him. Now Professor Fei has celebrated his 90th birthday, and he has indeed lived up to his early promise of committing his knowledge and experience to



writing. Over the years he has travelled far and wide, and his writings are commensurate with his peregrinations. There is much in his large corpus of works that is inspired by his travels. It can also be said of Professor Fei's literary and scholastic output that, whether it is a light-hearted piece written as his mood directs him, or a learned work in which some exalted theories are propounded, there is always flair, style and wit. He makes no secret of how he can achieve such distinction: academic research is never a dull thing, and originality is all important in writing. Indeed Professor Fei writes with a natural elegance, and his vivid style is very close to that of the Song Dynasty scholar and poet Su Shi.

Professor Fei is much loved for his sincerity and affable manners. A grand old man in national affairs and full of years and honours, he has held many important appointments. He was Vice-President of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and Vice-Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. At present he is the Honorary Chairman of the Central Committee of the China Democratic League. Yet he is a modest, approachable person, who claims that his learning has come from the grass-roots and the soil. All his life he has sought to contribute to the motherland by offering his utmost in "passion, wisdom, responsibility and diligence". His aim is prosperity for the country and its people. With neither reproach nor regret he makes a lifelong journey towards that lofty goal. While he started on an uneasy path, the way has gradually become smooth for him, one that eventually leads on to a broad highway of success.

What really distinguishes Professor Fei from ordinary men is his vitality and creativity which, like a living fountain, flows abundantly. It is his opinion that everyone must set his goal in life and strive vigorously for its attainment. Otherwise, one would be wasting one's life. It is with this disposition that Professor Fei pursues his studies. He has a genuine love for truth and seeks it diligently and courageously. His relentless effort in dedicating his wisdom and knowledge to the cause of national prosperity is much admired by all who know him. Professor Fei, acknowledging that life is limited but culture is everlasting, puts it succinctly in his *New Words at Ninety*. He says that new thoughts and ideas should be encouraged and that a new orientation must be found for our cultural development.

Professor Fei has a long association with The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has visited the University many times since the 1980's to preside at seminars and to take part in other events for cultural exchange. In 1983, he spoke at the Conference on Modernization and Chinese Culture which marked the University's 20th anniversary. Then in 1988, when the University celebrated its 25th anniversary, he gave a public lecture in the Tanner Series. In 1994, Professor Fei came to Shaw College as the Sir Run Run Shaw Distinguished Visiting Scholar of the year. In 1998, at the invitation of Chung Chi College and the Sociology



Department, he gave lectures on campus as a Visiting Scholar to the College sponsored by the K C Wong Foundation. In all these years Professor Fei has been a tower of strength helping to advance the study of sociology and anthropology at this University. Mr Vice-Chancellor, Professor Fei Xiaotong has travelled the globe, the benefit of his writings has been felt throughout the academic world, and the purity of his heart illuminates the hearts of multitudes of lesser mortals. He is a pillar of our society, a great scholar, and one whose achievements contribute tremendously to the common good. May I therefore present Professor Fei Xiaotong to you, Mr Vice-Chancellor, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*.