

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa A Citation



Professor the Honourable Jao Tsung I, GBM

As we survey the world-wide academic community today for a scholar equally prominent in Chinese and Western studies, and learned in all the major disciplines ancient and modern, we will easily fulfil our mission in Professor Jao Tsung I. Professor Jao commands a vast academic repertoire covering Dunhuang studies, oracular bone inscriptions, the study of ci, historiography, bibliography, the study of *chu ci*, archaeology, epigraphy, regional folklore studies, historical musicology, comparative linguistics, comparative cultural studies, the history of exchange between China and the world, the history of religion, regional history, translation, and the history of painting and calligraphy. For lesser mortals each of these would take more than a lifetime; yet Professor Jao has pursued them all with distinction.

Professor Jao Tsung I, whose *zi* is Guan and *hao*, Xuantang, is a native of Chaoan in Guangdong. His father, Mr Jao E, a scholar in the grand tradition, lived in a residence where the library boasted tens of thousands of volumes. Brought up among these tomes, the young Jao Tsung I helped himself to all kinds of books and, by the tender age of fourteen, had completed *The Scholastic Journals of Gu Tinglin*, his first book. Later on, as he was transcribing his father's work, *The Travels of Faxian in the Kingdom of the Buddha*, he began to develop a lifelong interest in Buddhism and Indian culture, which in turn paved the way for his future travels to India and his Sanskrit studies. At eighteen he took up where his late father had left off and edited the *Literary Annals of Chaozhou*, later published in the *Lingnan Journal*. Shortly afterwards he accepted an appointment from the Zhongshan University to be a Specialist Editor at the Guangdong Historical Studies Institute.

When war started against Japanese aggression, Zhongshan University moved to Yunnan, but Jao Tsung I, detained by illness in Hong Kong, was unable to take up a research fellowship at the University. Thus began a tenacious association with Hong Kong that was to last for decades, spanning two centuries. While in Hong Kong Jao made the acquaintance of two eminent scholars, Wang Yunwu and Ye Gongchao. He was invited to contribute to the dictionary that Mr Wang was compiling, and to collect materials for a comprehensive anthology of Qing Dynasty ci for Mr Ye. These assignments helped to build up a solid foundation for his future research in palaeography, the study of ci, Chinese musicological studies and the history of religions.

In 1949 Professor Jao settled in Hong Kong, and taught in the Department of Chinese of the University of Hong Kong from 1952 to 1968. He entered into correspondence with many distinguished scholars, among them internationally known figures such as V V Paranjpe and Paul Demieville. Thus he broadened his perspective and elevated his standards, at the same time moving from specialization to a wide academic canvass. His major publications during this period number seventeen, including *Personages from Yin Dynasty Oracles*, *An Annotated Version of Lao Zi from Dunhuang*, *A Study of Ci*, *A Study of Chu Writing during the Period of the Warring*



Kingdoms, and *Chu Chi and Music for Ci and Qu*. These achievements impress with their quantity and their standard.

In 1963, Professor Jao accepted a Research Fellowship at the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute in Poona, India. At the time Leon Vandermeersch had come to Hong Kong to study with Professor Jao, and they went to India together for research on the *Rig-veda*. This became a major turning point in his career. Professor Jao pursued his studies, and also toured India extensively. His travels took him to Ceylon, Burma, Laos, and Siam, covering regions that illustrious Chinese monks such as Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing had not been able to reach in their travels to India. And apart from expressing himself in poetry wherever he went, Professor Jao also studied the history of the land and compared it with records and references in Chinese texts. He spared no effort in the search for information that would help to fill the lacunae in Indian studies. The collation of local literature and cultural relics with historical texts thus became his preferred mode of study, which brought him tremendous results.

West Asia is one of Professor Jao's many specialties, which came from meeting international scholars. While supervising the thesis of Leon Vandermeersch, Professor Jao came to know Professor Jean Bottéro, a noted palaeologist. He then went to Paris to study cuneiform philology and the history of West Asia with him. During the decade 1976 to 1986 he translated into Chinese the epic of the creation myth of the Akkadian, *E-nu-ma.E-lis*. Composed during the 21st to the 16th centuries BC, this is one of the earliest epics of the world, and the *Genesis* stories of the Hebrew *Bible* are derivatives. This epic had not been mentioned in Chinese works on mythologies, and Professor Jao's translation, in the style of the *Book of Odes*, elegant and refined, helped to fill a large gap in Chinese mythological studies and the study of the early history of West Asia in Chinese. Such is but an instance of Professor Jao's immense contribution to cultural cross-fertilisation.

Professor Jao was invited by the National University of Singapore to be its founding Chair of Chinese as well as Chairman of the Department in 1968, and stayed on until 1973. During that period he was Visiting Professor at the Graduate School of Yale University, and a Research Fellow at the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. In 1973 Professor Jao assumed the Chair of Chinese at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and also served as the Chairman of the Department. Under his leadership, research took on a new vitality, with remarkable results. Professor Jao retired from the Chinese University in 1978, and the third phase of his academic career began. He became a Visiting Professor at the Department of Religious Studies of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in France, and in 1980 he served as a Chair Professor at the Department of Literature and the Humanities Research Institute of the University of Kyoto. He travelled frequently to the Mainland for archaeological studies, which he augmented as with the vast overseas resources known to him. The application of Western and modern materials to the studies of the Chinese past opened up new vistas and broke new ground.



The breadth and profundity of Professor Jao's studies are such that it is hard for one to trace how he goes about the business of research. However, Professor Jao tells us that he would initially approach his subject by way of its linguistic structure, from which he would go step by step towards his objective. In his own words, he "employs bibliography as the guiding light and the philological sciences as his tools". Thus he solves inscrutable academic enigmas one by one, through a long career, until all within his purview are understood and displayed with precision and clarity. Mr Ikeda On, former Director of the Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, Japan, called Professor Jao one of the highest authorities among sinologists in the second half of the 20th century, while Professor David Hawkes, renowned British sinologist and a translator of *The Story of the Stone*, compared himself, drawing a parallel from ancient Chinese mythology, to the River God admiring the Eastern Sea, which to him represented the greatness of Professor Jao's learning. The high esteem in which Professor Jao has been held among his colleagues is thus evident to the worldwide academic community.

Professor Jao is also an artist of the first rank, and his talents are not confined to any single discipline. He is extremely erudite, and a most competent poet, calligrapher, painter, and performer on the *qin*. His literary creativity has brought forth writings of great refinement and intense intellectual interest, in all the major genres, including the poem, the essay, the *ci* and the *fu*, and many of these have been compiled into collections. During his extensive travels, Professor Jao would record the sights and his thoughts in essays and poems, memorializing the occasion and complementing scholarship with art. A fine example is his poem *Song of Cordoba*, in which he, using a rhyming scheme derived from the Tang Dynasty, narrated the conquest of Baghdad by the Mongolian Hulagu Khan in the 13th century to stop the eastward-bound invasion of Muslim forces. Professor Jao is also a calligrapher and painter of renown. In painting his specialties are landscapes, flowers and birds, and portraits, in which genres his achievements are remarkable. In the literati style, his paintings serve as the medium for the expression of feelings and sentiments, where the subject matter of the painting and the identity of the painter are secondary to the purity of mind and spirit. While his paintings are not bound by traditional stylistic considerations, he practises all the calligraphic styles, as he regards calligraphy as the essence of Chinese culture, as well as the expression of an individual's sentiments, character, learning and integrity. At age 86 Professor Jao still practises calligraphy ardently, especially the *kuangcao* style because he favours its myriad possibilities and the great vigour involved in its execution, which helps him to meditate and to maintain a balanced harmony. Professor Jao is a renowned expert on Chinese musicology and a *qin* player of high standing. He plays in his leisure to soothe his feelings and, through the complex tonality in *qin* music, he comes to a better understanding of the intricate mysticism that exists in the various schools of calligraphy. He once observed that "compared to music, the brush and the melody go together and complement each other so that music is created." Zhang Yanyuan, in his book *Famous Paintings in History*, quoted the idea of "transplanting the thought to achieve a fine and unexpected result" proposed by Gu Kaizhi, a master painter of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Professor Jao is deeply appreciative of this and applies it to both his academic and artistic



pursuits, so that in his works sensibility complements sensitivity, and theory fuses with practice. He regards the world as history and therefore always views it from a lofty vantage point, not encumbered by minutiae and details. Thus his heart is pure and his view unique, and serendipitous thoughts appear from time to time. Apart from publishing over twenty collections of his works in belles-lettres, he has also given painting and calligraphy exhibitions in Japan, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou and Beijing, and thirteen albums of his paintings are in print.

With a distinguished and renowned career in both scholarship and art Professor Jao has published over 70 books and more than 400 treatises to date. He has been honoured throughout the world for his distinguished contribution to scholarship, including the *Prix Stanislas Julien*, Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, Institute de France, Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters of the French Ministry of Culture (1993), and a life membership of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute in Poona, India. He was made an honorary Doctor of Letters of the University of Hong Kong in 1982, and in 1993 was awarded the first Honorary Doctor of Letters of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes of France in 120 years. In 1995 he received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Lingnan University and, in 1999, an Honorary Doctor of Human Letters from the Open University. In recent years he has been invited to assume Honorary Chairs or take up Honorary Research Fellowships at the University of Macau, Fudan University, Zhongshan University, Shenzhen University, Xiamen University, Nanjing University, Beijing Normal University, Wuhan University, Dunhuang Research Institute, the History Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Peking University. Since the 1980s he has been a Consultant to the Research Bureau of Ancient Scripts of the State Council and, in July 2000, he was awarded a special prize for special contributions to the protection of Dunhuang relics by the Cultural Heritage Bureau of the People's Republic of China and the People's Government of Gansu. In the same year, the Government of the Hong Kong SAR presented him with the Grand Bauhinia Medal.

Throughout his long career Professor Jao has insisted on basing his research on "proper sources and undisputed provenance", while avoiding "empty talk and thought without direction." With a wide perspective and meticulous analysis he approaches his subject matter and, at 86, is still keenly interested in his studies and full of intellectual curiosity. This is why Professor David Hawkes called him a very young elder. Professor Jao views Chinese characters as the muscles and bones of Chinese culture; he believes that if one is to seriously study Chinese culture and to derive benefit from it, then one must respect Chinese characters and understand them thoroughly. His decades of philological research finds expression in his book *Symbol, Early Language and the Alphabet - the Han Character Tree*, in which he combines the latest resources in archaeology and ethnology and, from a global perspective, comprehensively surveys the achievements of the Han language. In this book he also seeks to explain why Han characters can survive for several millenia without ideographical changes. Like an ancient banyan tree with its root deep in the soil of the Motherland, Professor Jao's work will stand firm through the ages, sharing the glory with the stars, as testimony to his greatness.



Professor Jao Tsung I is the Wei Lun Honorary Professor of Fine Arts and Professor Emeritus in Chinese Language and Literature of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Over the years he has donated a significant quantity of books, paintings and calligraphic works to the University, and continues to supervise doctoral candidates in the Fine Arts Department, teaching in class and in seminars. Furthermore, under his leadership, the Chinese Ancient Text Database project, launched at the University's Institute of Chinese Studies in 1988 with funding from the Research Grants Council, has set up the *Computerised Database of Excavated Wood/Bamboo and Silk Scripts of China* in 1994 and the *Computerised Database of Oracular Inscriptions on Tortoise Shells and Bones* in 1996. In 1993 he instituted the Centre for Dunhuang and Turfan Studies at New Asia College and the *Hong Kong Journal of Dunhuang and Turfan Studies*, both with remarkable success. He has indeed contributed significantly to the academic development of the University.

Professor Jao Tsung I is a scholar most erudite and profound, and his gifts to academic research, culture and the fine arts are so immense that they will benefit generations of students and researchers. Mr Chairman, I now present Professor Jao Tsung I for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*.