

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



Nils Göran David Malmqvist, Fil. lic., DLitt

Born in 1924 into an artistic family in Stockholm, Sweden, Göran Malmqvist grew up with a mother who read poetry and a father who was a painter. A keen interest in poetry and painting is a legacy that has sustained him all his life. Their apartment in Stockholm, in the heart of the old city, commands views of an environment full of intriguing architecture: the classical and heroic bulk of the royal palace but a stone's throw away; the humane urbanity of the Academy buildings almost next door.

After his army service, he entered the ancient University of Uppsala to study Classics and Roman Law, a good preparation for a well-paid legal career. Such is the winding path of human fate that after two years he abandoned Law for Anthropology and Chinese. Paradoxically, he found his true way by entering the thickets, with much bewilderment, of Daoist philosophy in translation. Fortunately, he asked the great Swedish Sinologist, Karlgren, for help. Karlgren not only lent the young man his personal translation of the *Dao De Jing* but took him on as a student, an experience that gave him the feeling that he was working at the forefront of research. After two years he could read Classical Chinese with, as he says, "some competence", winning a Rockefeller scholarship to study in China in 1948. He lived in a Buddhist monastery at the foot of Mt. Emei, where his love of rambling through the countryside doubtless proved useful for his field work on local dialects. This visit to China produced in him a life-long passion for Chinese culture. He also taught English to a very original young woman, the individualistic Ningtsu, later to become his warm and courageous wife.

Leaving China in 1950, he graduated from Stockholm in Chinese in 1951. His university teaching career started with a lectureship at Uppsala. He was soon invited to join the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, thus further broadening his knowledge and making new scholarly contacts. He left London, however, for Beijing in 1956, as Swedish Cultural Attaché and Interpreter. Although his time at the Embassy suggests he contemplated a career as a diplomat, he in fact secured another academic post, in the Australian National University, Canberra, rapidly gaining the rank of Professor. He became Head of Chinese and then Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies. Malmqvist had gained Australian, indeed international, academic recognition. After his return to Sweden, he became in 1965 Professor and Head of the Chinese Department at the University of Stockholm, remaining there until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1990.

His scholarly works of literary history, linguistic analysis, and translation, marked by that particular sensitivity to languages and literatures that is a requirement of first-rate literary translators, have enabled him to produce an impressive record of publications, with an extraordinary range of interest, from classical to contemporary Chinese. His translations of



more than thirty books and some two hundred shorter works help to confirm his place among the greatest sinologists the west has produced. As a founding member of the Academia Europaea, dedicated to the preservation of academic standards, he is a general editor of the four volume *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature (1900-1949)*, covering novel, drama, poetry, and short fiction. The quality of his work has attracted many honours and prizes internationally and at home: honorary degrees from Prague and Stockholm, an Honorary Fellowship of SOAS in London, membership of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, the chairing of the Scandinavian (now Nordic) Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen, and many purely Swedish honours that include his Knighthood of the Northern Star for Government work, a Gold Medal of Merit for services on a Royal Tour of China, and top translation prizes, such as the Elsa Thulin Medal, as well as the most prestigious of Swedish academic prizes, the Royal Prize. There can, perhaps, be no greater mark of confidence in his qualities and capacity for intellectual work than his election, years ago, to the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, and also that of Sciences. He is a member, too, of "The Eighteen", those trusted so highly as to be life members of the Swedish Academy, directly responsible for the selection of the Nobel prizewinners in Literature.

We are therefore proud that Professor Malmqvist has been a Renditions Fellow (1990-91) in The Chinese University of Hong Kong and has always been available for help and advice. His brilliant work and genial presence, especially as a catalyst for academic enterprises and exchanges, are truly inspiring. We at the Chinese University benefit from his experience on the Advisory Boards both of *Renditions* and the *Journal of Translation Studies*.

The essence of his work, I believe, is that he unmaskes what was hidden, bringing the neglected to light, as with his work, to give just one example, on the writer Yang Jifu. As a translator he insists on trying to render at once a service and an emotional impact, by finding not only the voice but the breath and pulse of the writer, by many re-readings; as a scholar he seeks the most objectivity possible, based on evidence; as a linguist he knows that what at first seems dry and unpromising may release fascinating results, as in his work on epistemic modality in archaic Chinese. The discovery that the third person pronoun may be used as a modal verb means that certain texts have been misconstrued and we now need to recognize different meanings in such texts. This is invaluable for all future readers.

Here is a man whose work, scholarly and creative, is the product of a remarkably elegant, practical, generous, and surprising mind. Many years ago, he and his late wife surprisingly decided to spend their honeymoon in a small house on Lantau. To get there involved a strenuous hike. The rightness of their choice is proven by the fact that the house is, astonishingly, modestly, beautifully, still there.

Mr. Chancellor, I present a man of sure spiritual strength and generosity of mind, one of the greatest sinologists of our century, Professor Nils Göran David Malmqvist, for the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*.