

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

THIRTY-THIRD CONGREGATION

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

A Citation

Mr. Lü Shuxiang

Mr. Chancellor, I am reading this citation with trepidation, for the man we are honouring today is an expert on language structure and common errors in writing. In the English speaking world, the authority of Fowler is often invoked in resolving arguments that originate from the use of or the structure of the English language. In the Chinese language, the authority to whom we turn for enlightenment is Lu Shu-xiang.

A native of Danyang xian in Jiangsu Province, Mr. Lü was born in China in 1904. As with many linguists and grammarians, his first love was not language but literature, not just contemporary literature but also classical, and not just Chinese literature but also the literature of the West. In fact, his first degree was in Western Literature and was awarded by the Foreign Language Department of China's Southeast University in 1926. Only when he was asked to teach Chinese as well as English in a middle school in his native xian did Lü Shu-xiang take an active interest in the grammar and structure of his mother tongue. This interest quickly consumed him, however, as he became involved in a major debate with the celebrated Zhu Zi-qing (朱自清) over the place of the Subject in the Chinese language. Zhu maintained that the Subject is absolutely necessary. Lü said it is not. Mr. Chancellor, as a linguist yourself and one who is conversant in many Chinese dialects, you will know that usage is on the side of Mr. Lü.

This famous war of words led to the writing of his first major work on the grammatical structure of the Chinese language. Entitled *The Essence of Chinese Grammar*, the book by Lü Shu-xiang is generally considered an important ground-breaking work. Other books, papers and treatises followed. In a career spanning over 60 years, Lü Shu-xiang has produced over 20 books and more than a hundred major papers and articles. Like Fowler, he has also edited a dictionary dealing exclusively with usage, the first of its kind in the Chinese language. He had taught at five major universities in China and was the architect of the simplified Chinese characters. He is, even today at the age of 83, an adviser of the National Committee on the Reform of Chinese

Characters and an honorary director of the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

It would be wrong to surmise from the above that Mr. Lü's interests are confined to language, linguistics and literature, broad as those subjects may be, for he also studied history, chemistry, geology, biology and psychology. Between 1936 and 1938 he read anthropology at Oxford University and library science in the University of London. His acquaintance with science has made him not just a theorist in the study of languages but also an empiricist. In a passage which Professor Ting Chao Chung will find ready agreement with, Lü Shu-xiang had this to say of theoreticians whose work is not grounded in factual observation and experiment:

" I have an impression that a great many people are interested in working with theories, but not so many of them are quite as ready to spend time on observation and experimentation. ...The late Professor Rao Yu-tai of Beijing University once lamented the fact that nine out of ten physics students have their minds set on theoretical physics; they do not realize that if experimental physics is wanting, theoretical physics will also lag behind."

Being an empiricist, Mr. Lü also supports the idea of learning from the West, but in taking such an attitude, he has said, "the important thing is to learn the methodology of Western scholars in the study of language, we should not simply accept their research results."

Mr. Chancellor, my own humble command of the English language cannot convey to you the wisdom, the sophistication, and the nuance in Mr. Lü's words. They have been distilled, no doubt, from a life-time of learning, of observation, of empirical research and, at the end of it, of theorising. This is a man who has applied the rigour of scientific enquiry to the study of a discipline which belongs in the humanities. His encyclopaedic mind, his painstaking, methodical approach through over 60 years have produced for us a wealth of information and explanation now generally taken for granted in the study of the Chinese language.

Going through some of this work myself, I found Mr. Lü has written books and chapters of books in the classical Chinese style, in the modern Chinese style, as well as in the English language - excelling, needless to say, in all three. Mr. Chancellor, the Chinese University has as its ideal the fusion of the Chinese culture and that of the West. We are also committed to a bilingual education. That being the case, we can find no more shining

embodiment of our own ideal than in the person of Mr. Lü Shu-xiang.

Mr. Chancellor, for his immense contribution to the study of the Chinese language, for his many pioneering works which are impossible to list in a citation, for his advocacy of the scientific approach in language studies, and no less for his advocacy of learning from the West and thereby keeping the universality of universities a living ideal, I present to you Mr. Lü Shu-xiang for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*.

March 26, 1987