

# Professor Joseph LAU Shiu-Ming

## Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*

### Citation

Professor Joseph LAU Shiu-Ming was born in Hong Kong. Graduating from the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures at National Taiwan University in 1960 with a BA in English, he was awarded a scholarship in the following year to study comparative literature at Indiana University, where he earned his PhD in 1966. Prof Lau is known for multiple achievements: as a scholar in modern & contemporary Chinese literature, as a writer, and as a translator.

Prof Lau is not a typical top-notch student; his early life and path to learning was not a smooth ride. His parents passed away when he was young, and his education came to a halt after primary school, where he worked as a printing shop apprentice. He also worked as a bookstore assistant for a living. Yet his yearning for study persisted amid adversity, and the young Prof Lau used his spare time to learn Chinese and English. He studied at an English language school, sat for the secondary school Certificate of Education Examination as a private candidate, eventually finding his way to academic research, teaching and translation.

Prof Lau had taught at Miami University, the University of Wisconsin (Madison), The Chinese University of Hong Kong, National University of Singapore and University of Hawaii, and had also been a visiting scholar at the University of British Columbia and Freie Universität Berlin. In 1995, his identity changed from Visiting Professor of Chinese to a formal appointment as Chair Professor of Translation at the then Lingnan College, becoming Dean of the Arts Faculty as well. Subsequently he also served as Head of the Chinese Department at Lingnan University. Prof Lau retired in 2004 as Emeritus Professor of Chinese.

A scholar in modern Chinese drama early in his career, Prof Lau had published a book on CAO Yu, and co-translated Cao's play *Yuanye* into English (*The Wilderness*). Yet it was on the cross-cultural transmission of Chinese literature that his efforts focused. Prof Lau is undoubtedly one of the pilots in the transmission and spread of Chinese literature in the American undergraduate curriculum. He was co-editor of *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes & Variations* (with Y W MA, 1978) and *Modern Chinese Stories & Novellas: 1919-1949* (with C T HSIA and Leo LEE, 1981); both anthologies have been widely recognised in the past three decades or so, and are among the most widely adopted "standard textbooks" in Chinese literature courses in the US undergraduate curriculum. In addition, Prof Lau edited two anthologies of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Taiwan fiction (1976, 1983). His academic editing further extended in scale with the growth of his scholarship, as seen in co-editing *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature* (with Howard GOLDBLATT, 1995) and *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations, vol. I: from Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty* (with John MINFORD, 2000); each ranks, in its own domain, among the most thorough and comprehensive English-language anthologies of Chinese literature in Western academia. All these anthologies aided the teaching and research of Chinese literature in the English-language academic world. In addition, Prof Lau edited various book series in "modern Chinese prose", "contemporary Chinese prose" and "contemporary Chinese fiction", contributing tirelessly to the preservation and study of modern Chinese literature.

In the journey of Prof Lau's life, what began earlier than academic work was his writing career. An independent mind, a touch for language and the practical needs of livelihood turned him into

a freelance writer since the age of 16, earning self-supporting writer's fees from newspapers such as *New Life Evening News*, *Hong Kong Times* (HK), *United Daily News* and *Central Daily News* (Taiwan). Under the pen-name "Er Can" (Second Wreck), Prof Lau has published *The Travels of Er Can* fiction series, and collections of miscellaneous essays like *Potato-Eating Days* and *Miscellanea by Er Can*. These recall the late Qing writer LIU E's *The Travels of Lao Can* (Old Wreck). No doubt inspired by the talent, spirit and experiences of the "manifold-tempered scholar" with the same surname, Prof Lau's pen-name may also allude to his deficient life resources and diligent struggle for self-reliant survival while he was growing up; the tinge of self-mockery is at once self-affirmation and self-encouragement. Spanning a period of over 60 years, his miscellaneous writings and critical essays amount to over 30 books, the former marked by a relaxed and often humorous style. During his undergraduate days in Taiwan, he founded the literary magazine *Modern Literature* along with schoolmates like PAI Hsien-Yung, CHEN Ruoxi, OUYANG Zi, YEH Wei-Lien and Leo LEE; but apart from this singular instance, Prof Lau has never joined any literary society, testimony to his preference for independent thinking, writing and living.

With the start of his academic career in the US, Prof Lau also actively embraced translation work. Beginning in the late 1960s, he rendered works by well-known writers like Bernard MALAMUD, Saul BELLOW, Isaac SINGER and George ORWELL into Chinese over a decade and a half. During this period he also engaged in academic translation, rendering Prof C T HSIA's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* into Chinese in collaboration with others.

Over the years, Prof Lau's academic research and cultural transmission work have won awards from various institutions, including the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), Social Science Research Council, Rockefeller Foundation (US), Pacific Cultural Foundation, Council for Cultural Planning & Development (under Executive Yuan), Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation (Taiwan). He is an editorial board member of *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, and an advisory board member of *Renditions* and *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*. He was a member of the ACLS and China Times Foundation (Washington, DC) fellowship selection committees, and of the Fulbright Advisory Committee (US) and Research Grants Council (HK).

Over a full sixty-year cycle in traditional Chinese chronology, Prof Lau has been an industrious scholar, educator, translator and writer, devoted to the academic labour of cultural exchange. Honourable Chancellor, in recognition of his academic achievement and distinguished contributions to the field of translation and to cross-cultural transmission, may I present Prof Joseph LAU Shiu-Ming to you for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*.

*Citation written and delivered by Professor Charles KWONG*