

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



### Professor Yu Kwang Chung, BA, MFA

Over half a century ago, in the summer of 1949, a youth from Xiamen left his homeland for Taiwan, the “Precious Island”, as it was called. On the foredeck, gazing backward, he was completely immersed in the beauty of Gu Lang Yu, yet looking forward, he felt totally lost in the uncertainty of the future. “When shall I ever return?” the lost youth mused in his melancholy. The stupendously magnificent land gradually faded away before him, and the Strait, like a blue sabre, ruthlessly cut off any hope of reunion of the people on both sides. It was this nostalgic sentiment that tenderly lingered in the youth’s heart that became the recurrent theme of his songs of nostalgia in his later literary life. Years later, Yu Kwang Chung won the acclaim of the “Nostalgic Poet”, the seed of which was actually sown already in the wide, wide sea on his journey to the “Precious Island”.

Yongchun, Fujian Province, is Professor Yu Kwang Chung’s ancestral homeland, but he spent his childhood days in Nanjing, the lovely southern Kiangsu province, after his birth there at the Double Ninth Festival. During the Japanese invasion in 1937, he fled in despair with his mother in quest of his far-away father, Mr Yu Cao-ying. After much hardship, the family was finally reunited in Chongqing. He was then enrolled at the YMCA Middle School in Yuelai, a small Sichuan town, where a rich literary atmosphere nurtured and inspired incessant streams of folklore and classical poetry, for which he developed a keen interest. At the Japanese surrender in 1945, Yu Kwang Chung bade farewell to Sichuan and returned to his long-lost birth place by the River Qinhuai. He enrolled in the Foreign Languages Department of Jinling University in the summer of 1947, yet unexpectedly war broke out again and his whole family had to move to Xiamen. He then enrolled in the Foreign Languages Department of Xiamen University in 1949. Within the short span of half a year, he had already published two translated texts, seven short critiques and seven “new poems” in the local *Jiang Sen Pao* and *Sing Kuang Daily*, including his first poem *Sappho’s Death*. Thus he set out on his literary pilgrimage of over half a century.

Yu Kwang Chung left the Mainland for Taiwan in the summer of 1949 and was admitted by the Foreign Languages Department of Taiwan University as a sophomore in the autumn of 1950. He studied hard and wrote with zeal. His first anthology, *Sailor’s Sad Songs*, was published in 1952. His translation of Hemingway’s renowned work, *The Old Man and the Sea* was serialized in *Da Hua Evening Post*. His prose appeared at rather a later stage, with his first piece, *A Visit to Stone City* in 1958. As for critiques, he started already in his Xiamen University days. In his article, *A Rabbit of Four Burrows*, the poet described his goal in the four domains of his literary career: poetry, prose, criticism, translation - “music in poetry, poetry in prose, prose in criticism and creativity in translation”.

Poetry are Professor Yu’s earliest and the most abundant of his literary genre. By now there are twenty collections, such as *A Youth of T’ang*, *Music Percussive*, *The White Jade Bitter*



*Gourd, Tug of War with Eternity, The Bauhinia, By All Five Elements, A High Window Overlooking the Sea*, totalling nearly one thousand poems, with a variety of themes such as affection among family members, love between man and woman, friendship, self portrayal, people, objects and events. A meticulous scholar and a loving poet, Professor Yu depicted his parents, wife, daughters and grandchildren in his gallery of poetry; among which *The Pearl Necklace* and *The Rock of Three Generations* that recapture nuptial love and *Mother in Throes* that reminisces about his late mother are the most tenderly touching. Poems about objects cover a wide variety: the lotus, cicada, pine nuts, terracotta, the white jade bitter melon and Yixing tea pot are all laudable topics. When Professor Yu portrays people, celebrities of any nationality, living or dead, and friends as well, are all his protagonists. *Associations of the Lotus* is the most widely-acclaimed among his love poems, while his mythological poems praise Nuwa, Kuafu, Houyi and Venus. And the content of his poems, whose themes have been extended to music, dancing, painting and meditation, is so rich that one cannot but gape with admiration. However, among his poems, the theme most often touched on is nostalgia, seen in such poems as *Home Sickness, Home Sickness in Four Rhymes, A Folk Song*, which have become a popular series across the Taiwan Strait. This series did not only win the author the acclaim of the “Nostalgic Poet”, but over ten in the same series became the lyrics of songs, the composers of which include Yang Xian, Lee Tai-xiang, Luw Da-yiu, Ma Sui-long, Wang Luo-bin etc. And the song of *Home Sickness*, cited more than a thousand times, has been the most widely circulated. The verse form of his poems ranges from as short as ten odd lines to as long as over a hundred, either neatly rhymed or freely expressed. His style reveals his endless initiative and creativity. After the fermentation of modernization, his style changed from the regular metre of his early verses to the existential period, from the neo-classicism, to the ballad period, until the final period when he tried to probe into history and culture.

As for Professor Yu Kwang Chung’s prose, there are more than ten collections, such as *The Left-Handed Muse, Look Homeward Satyr, Listen to the Cold Rain, Homesick Border Blues*. Though his prose-writing started ten years later than his verse, he admitted that “Unexpectedly, I now make progress sooner in prose than in poetry.” His style is brilliant and spectacular, like the palette of a master of impressionism, on which are shown Monet’s iridescence and van Gogh’s ecstatic passion. His topics are kaleidoscopic: besides miscellanies of a few hundred words, there are also essays of over ten thousand words. With his pen, he gives vent to both feelings and goals, mingling sense and sensibility; he is now humorous and witty, like his true self, then bold and passionate, giving magnificence to his works. From factual description to soaring imagination: his topics are indeed indescribably comprehensive. From the early left-handed works written at “times not occupied by verse” to *Haunted by the Rain, The Untrammelled Traveller* and *April on a Deserted Battlefield* in the mid-sixties, his skills matured in all aspects, be it pace, density or flexibility. He has a total mastery of language and wants to “cut off the pigtail of prose”, put “the square bricks of Cangjie” into “the oven of Yin-Yang” and melt them into “the colourful stones of Nuwa” in the furnace. Yu Kwang Chung’s more recent works, such as *Memory is where the Railway Reaches, All by a Map, Calling for the Ferry Boat*, and *A Family on which the Sun Never Sets*, are just like the lushest of wine at its maturity, mellow and lucid.



In the domain of literary criticism, Professor Yu Kwang Chung excels in the critiques of literary history, genres, authors etc, where he discusses mainly poetry, but also prose, translation, language and painting. When he writes about the past and the present, our native country and foreign lands, with poetic sensitivity and historical awareness, his originality is indeed impressive. Past the middle age, he was frequently invited to write forewords for his friends, which almost invariably became book reviews as he would view the genres of such books, which were categorized in a comprehensive way and he would probe into their very origin. In his critiques, not only are his opinions precise and profound but his style is also excellent, never avishing stock jargons or translationese as many other academics are wont to do. Yu's published critiques include *Rain on the Cactus*, *On the Watershed*, *From Hsu Hsia-ke to van Gogh*, *The Lower Reaches of Blue Ink*, *To Chew English with Chinese* and the others, while *Prefaces in Order* published in 1996 is a special collection of forewords.

Professor Yu Kwang Chung also translates. Although he modestly says that "translation is only my sideline", his performance in this "sideline" is actually better than that of many professionals. In his opinion, an outstanding translator should have both the erudition of a scholar and the talent of a writer. Throughout his life he has been doing creative writing industriously. On the other hand, he also started his translation very early, and in his literary career for over half a century, translation and creative writing are like two resilient silk threads, mingling to make a dazzling embroidery. His translation covers an extremely wide area: those from Chinese to English include *Anthology of Modern English and American Poetry*, *Anthology of Modern Turkish Poetry* etc; those from Chinese to English include *New Chinese Poetry*, *Acres of Barbed Wire*, *The Night Watchman* etc; translated novels include *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, *Lust for Life*; as for plays, he has translated Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *An Ideal Husband*. The novels and plays Yu Kwang Chung has translated have become the two newly acquired domains in his literary empire, stretching its boundaries even farther. Professor Yu has a meticulous attitude to and an exceptional understanding of translation, and feels himself responsible for the dissemination of culture and the translation of world classics. He has an elaborate style of his own, which usually shows a brilliant representation of the form and the essence of the source language. He is forever alert to the sense of rhyme and rhythm and the beauty of colours, always maintaining the charm of the "mingling of east and west, infusion of the vernacular and the classic".

Professor Yu Kwang Chung holds a BA degree from Foreign Languages Department of Taiwan University and an MFA from Iowa State University, USA, and taught in the universities in Taiwan, Hong Kong and USA. From 1985 to 1991, he was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts of Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung and Director of the Institute of Foreign Languages and Literature; he also became Kung Hua Chair Professor of the same university. From 1995 to date, he has also been Visiting Professor in ten odd universities in China such as Suzhou University, Xiamen University, Shandong University and Nanjing University. Professor Yu is highly acclaimed in both the tertiary education sector and literary circles, and his prizes and academic honours include the National Award for Literature in Poetry, the Wu San-lian Award in prose,



the Wu Lu Qin Award in prose, the China Times Award in Poetry, the Literary Achievement Award, Kaohsiung, Fok Ying-tung Achievement Prize etc. His books were four times awarded the “Best Book of the Year” by the United Daily of Taiwan. There are also as many as fifteen books written about his work all life in Taiwan and Mainland China.

Professor Yu Kwang Chung’s Hong Kong period lasted from 1974 to 1985 when he was Reader in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. This was at the climax of his literary career, yielding a profusion of creative literary works. Besides, Professor Yu laid equal emphasis on teaching and research, and during his eleven years at The Chinese University of Hong Kong he nurtured many up-coming writers in the literary circles in Hong Kong. In the nineties, Professor Yu rejoined the Chinese University as a Visiting Scholar and keynote speaker in international conferences. Then in the 21st century, he was chief adjudicator on the panel of the first and second Global Youth Chinese Literary Award for the New Century, organized by the Arts Faculty of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Great indeed is his contribution to the promotion of Chinese culture and literature for youth.

To sum up Professor Yu Kwang Chung’s life achievement, it may be seen that his birth at the Double Ninth Festival as the “Child of Dogwood”, spurred himself on as the “Phoenix Reborn from the Ashes” and set him soaring with agility in the sky of Chinese culture with the “Dragon’s Chanting in the Fire”. For years and years, the Master of Literature has sewn his loving thoughts and affectionate sentiments into the creased and pleated waves which, blown by the wind, glide to both shores across the Taiwan Strait and even farther to the opposite shore of the ocean wherever the Chinese reside. The poet once said, “Whatever I write, I write out of respect and responsibility to the Chinese language.” We should indeed be grateful to such a well-versed and versatile master. Let us thank him for his incessant endeavours to enrich and enhance the Chinese language in his brilliant style, so that it becomes truly dynamic. Let us thank him for his tireless efforts to display the precision and elegance of the Chinese language in his countless works, so as to counter those who say that the Chinese language should be discarded because it is obsolete and outdated. Let us thank him for defending the essence and quintessence of the Cangjie words, the Chinese characters, so that “the soul that chants” in our beautiful mother tongue is consoled. For Professor Yu’s contribution to and achievement in Chinese culture and his integration and development of modern literature, I present to you, Mr Chairman, Professor Yu Kwang Chung for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*.