

## Professor Leo Ou-Fan LEE

### Citation

Professor Leo Ou-Fan LEE was given the Chinese name Ou-Fan, after Orphée, the legendary Greek god of music who played a lyre and was reputed to have made trees follow his singing. His parents, who were both musicians, apparently wanted their son to pursue a career in music too. Professor Lee indeed fell madly in love with western classical music in high school and dreamed of becoming a great maestro. Growing up in Hsinchu, a windy and desolate town miles away from Taipei, he however never had a chance. But he did the next best thing. He went to Taiwan University in Taipei to major in a different branch of western art—western literature. And he began to branch into still another art form in his undergraduate days, freelancing as a reviewer of western films.

His world continued to broaden when he went to Harvard University to pursue his graduate studies. The broadening of vision was now coupled with reflections. In the US he began to look back at China. From a distance, China looked quite different. As a way of coming to grips with a modern, nominally republican China that had been under relentless pounding by western culture, Professor Lee chose to focus on a generation of Chinese creative writers that emerged in the 1920s under the influence of European romanticism. Professor Lee's first piece of serious scholarship, which made him a star in the field of intellectual-cum-literary history, perhaps took him beyond his parents' expectation, for he had become a connoisseur of both the west and the east. In this first book of his, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, he told a fascinating story of how an

entirely western concept of romanticism was absorbed and transformed in a turbulent China desperately searching for solutions.

After studying the rebellious individualism of this group of Chinese writers, Professor Lee moved on to Lu Xun, an even more rebellious figure, and usually considered an intellectual giant of the modern era, whose iconoclastic spirit had long been shrouded in partisanship and propaganda. By placing Lu Xun in his own social, cultural and historical contexts, Professor Lee cut him down to size, but along the way also recovered Lu Xun's Promethean spirit and redeemed his name from incessant mythologizing. The study of Lu Xun prompted Professor Lee to visit Shanghai, a city with which Lu Xun had a love-hate relationship. But unlike Lu Xun, Professor Lee was enamored of the sophistication of Shanghai. The infrastructural modernization and intellectual westernization of Shanghai were the basis of its enticing sophistication. What began as an investigation of western creative influence on Shanghai literati resulted in a pioneering study of the material culture of a city that was once the most cosmopolitan in Asia.

As the most cosmopolitan Asian city in the second half of the 20th century, Hong Kong naturally became Professor Lee's next focus of attention. But this time the academic scrutiny has become passionate commitment. He has served repeatedly on the Research Grants Council, written weekly columns for local publications, adjudicated literary awards, published extensively in Hong Kong, taught at HKUST as

adjunct faculty, and served on the advisory committee of the School of Humanities and Social Science since its founding.

Professor Lee received his BA from Taiwan University in 1961 and his PhD in history and Far Eastern languages from Harvard University in 1970. He taught at Princeton University, Chicago University and University of California, Los Angeles before returning to Harvard in 1994. Among his numerous publications that include two novels, three books of essays, seven books of literary and cultural criticism, and many articles on Chinese film, modern Chinese literature and Chinese-Western comparative literature, his most seminal and influential works are: *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*, and *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, I have the honor to present to you, on behalf of the University, Professor Leo Ou-Fan Lee, Professor of Chinese Literature at Harvard University, for the degree of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.

Written by Professor William Tay of the School of Humanities and Social Science.