

Professor Elizabeth J PERRY

Citation

It is one of life's fascinating symmetries that by studying protests and grassroots political behavior, Prof Elizabeth J Perry, Henry Rosovsky Professor of Government at Harvard University and Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, has contributed in a unique way to greater peace and global understanding.

Through deep resonance with Asia and a pace-setting combination of political science and history, Prof Perry's influential research and professional service has opened up significant new insights on the region, in particular modern and contemporary China and the country's place in the world. China's rebels, strikers, revolutionaries, along with workers' rights and reforms have all come within her purview. She has provided fresh light on the Chinese revolution, the Chinese state and its relationship with those it governs, and the country's spectacular rise in recent decades, a change she has viewed with amazement and often at first hand. She has worked tirelessly on forums and publications that bring together humanities and social scientists from a range of fields and locales to augment perspectives on Asia. She has inspired the next generation of East-West researchers through her teaching and writing, bold inclusion of often sensitive subjects, and dedication to objectivity and truly informed knowledge.

Prof Perry's affiliation with the Asian region is life-long. She was born in Shanghai in 1948

to missionary academics working at St John's University, just prior to the Communist Party's civil war victory. She grew up in 1950s Japan, listening to in-depth discussions on China between her parents and visiting family friends. She came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, amid the upsurge of social protest and anti-Vietnam War rallies on US campuses and during China's Cultural Revolution, which drew worldwide attention to the then isolationist country.

That the present and future are more clearly illuminated when fresh data on the past is collected and uncovered has been a cornerstone of her work. It has led to enlightening and thought-provoking empirical studies, taking her into villages and cities, factories, companies and homes across China. It has motivated authorship and co-authorship of more than 15 books and an extensive list of journal articles and book chapters.

Prof Perry's language skills – classical and contemporary Mandarin, Japanese and French as well as English – have contributed substantially to the breadth of her worldview and intercultural awareness. She completed her bachelor studies in political science at William Smith College, a US liberal arts school, graduating *summa cum laude* and half a year early so she could go to Taiwan to learn Chinese. After receiving her master's degree from the University of Washington and a PhD from the University of Michigan, both in political science, she was among the first group of

American visiting scholars to head for open-door China in 1979.

The eminence of her scholarship in the subsequent three decades has been recognized at the highest levels by both historians and political scientists. In 1993, she received the prestigious John King Fairbank prize from the American Historical Association for her book, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*. The article “*Chinese Conceptions of Rights*” received the Heinz Eulau Award in 2008 from the American Political Science Association.

Prof Perry currently sits on the editorial boards of over a dozen major scholarly journals. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the British Academy and a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. She has served as President of the Association for Asian Studies and on the board of the National Committee on US-China Relations. The regard for Pei Yili, as she is known in China, is evident from her eight honorary professorships at Chinese universities. She has also shared her expertise and experience as a member of the Advisory Committee of HKUST’s School of Humanities and Social Science.

In 1998, Prof Perry became the first woman director of the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University’s research institute on Chinese studies. In 2008, Prof Perry became the first woman director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, regarded among the very top independent foundations advancing humanities and social science higher education in Asia. She has since sought to widen the organization’s

reach and impact by connecting up more Asian studies scholars globally. The Institute now has partnerships with over 50 universities and research centers in East and Southeast Asia and supports new programs from India to North Korea. In an increasingly dangerous age of sound-bites and instant labels, where ever-more public debate comes in at-a-glance form and unfiltered “comment”, Prof Perry has made it her life’s work to originate and foster balanced scholarship and to raise discussion on China and Asia to a new level.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Prof Elizabeth J Perry, Henry Rosovsky Professor of Government at Harvard University for the award of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.