

Induction ceremony for Professor Jao Tsung-I
Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Institut de France
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 19 September 2013

Professor the Honourable Jao Tsung-I,
Vice-Chancellor,
Monsieur le Secrétaire perpétuel,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and an exceptional honour to offer these remarks about the life and work of Professor the Honourable Jao Tsung-I, recently elected an Associate Foreign Member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Institut de France. Born on August 9, 1917, in Chaozhou, Guangdong, Professor Jao is today revered as the pre-eminent Chinese scholar within the intellectual circles of Mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as Taiwan and the Overseas Chinese community at large. His sinological oeuvre is immense. The Beijing edition of his collected works republished in 2009 – and their number has never stopped growing since – comprised more than 10 000 pages in twenty volumes, corresponding to more than 80 book titles and some 900 academic articles. These publications cover all fields of classical Chinese studies, from palaeography to research in Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts, from Daoism to Buddhism, from art and archaeology to history, literature and geography. As if this were not enough, Professor Jao's intellectual curiosity also led him into a sustained study of the literary remains of the ancient Near East and India, and engendered a lifelong passion for French culture.

Beginning at age sixteen, Jao Tsung-I turned to research in the local history of his native Chaozhou. His erudition and methodological rigour earned him an appointment at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou to work on the Local Gazetteer of Guangdong Province. In 1941, at the approach of the invading Japanese, Jao found refuge at the Institute of Historical Studies in Wuxi, which offered him employment and, when Guilin was also occupied by the Japanese, the relative security of its retreat to the Yaoshan mountains. After the end of the war, Jao Tsung-I regained his native region in 1947 and became editor of the *Annales of Chaozhou* as well as Chair of the Department of History and Literature in the Huanan University of South China.

In the summer of 1949, in the wake of the revolution in Mainland China, Professor Jao moved to Hong Kong, which remained his regular place of residence to this day.

Initially appointed to teach in the Department of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong, he left that position to become Professor and Chair of the Department of Chinese Literature at the National University of Singapore in 1968. In 1971 he was appointed Chairman of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), a post he held until his retirement in 1978. Thereafter, he travelled and lectured widely in France, Japan, Mainland China, Taiwan and Macau. He is currently Wei Lun Honorary Professor of Fine Arts and Emeritus Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at CUHK.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me as a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, whose Permanent Secretary Professor Michel Zink will presently confer the insignia of Academician on Professor Jao, to dwell for a moment on the way Jao Tsung-I's unique personality and achievements are perceived in Europe and in France. And I will conclude with a word on the influence of Professor Jao's research and teaching on the development of Chinese studies in France and the West, and his role as an ambassador of Chinese civilization in the world.

Academic exchanges with France and the United Kingdom

Professor Jao Tsung-I's special relationship with France and the United Kingdom began with his participation in the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists organized by the Royal Asiatic Society in Cambridge in 1954. The paper presented by Professor Jao on this occasion caused quite a stir. It addressed the subject of the hitherto unknown Xiang'er Commentary on the Scripture of the Way and its Power, one of the earliest glosses on the *Daode jing* 道德經 that was discovered among the Dunhuang manuscripts in the British Museum. Jao's critical edition and study of this commentary, titled *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian* 老子想爾注校箋, published two years later in 1956, was to exert great influence on the development of Daoist studies for decades to come. The 1954 conference paper, meanwhile, caught the attention of the eminent French sinologist Paul Demiéville, known in China as Dai Miwei 戴密微, who promptly invited Jao Tsung-I to visit Paris and join his research project on the Dunhuang manuscripts in the Pelliot Collection of the French National Library, Bibliothèque Nationale. The two scholars formed a profound friendship and mutual esteem. Jao harbored similar admiration for other early French masters of sinology, especially Chavannes (Sha Wan 沙畹), Pelliot (Bo Xihe 伯希和), Granet (Ge Lanyan 葛蘭言) and Maspero (Ma Bole 馬伯樂). In the spirit of these great precursors, Jao himself was to extend his generous guidance to the younger generation of French scholars whom he regularly received to his home in Hong Kong, beginning with

Léon Vandermeersch (Wang Demai 汪德邁), who later served as director of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (1989-1993).

In 1965-1966, Professor Jao spent a further year in Paris, working on the catalogue of Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings in the Pelliot Collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale and of the Guimet and Cernuschi Museums of Asian art. He also prepared the publication of the 26 fragments of oracle bone inscriptions 甲骨文 of the Yin period (14th-11th century BC) preserved at the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises of the Collège de France, and the collection of rubbings of nearly 400 tomb inscriptions 墓誌銘 of the Six Dynasties (220–589) and Tang (618–907) periods that were brought to Paris by Maurice Courant at the end of the 19th century and are preserved at the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*.

After Professor Jao Tsung-I had left the National University of Singapore in 1971 and before taking up his duties at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as mentioned earlier, he spent a year as Visiting Professor at Yale University in the United States and another as Visiting Scholar at the Academia Sinica in Taipei. In 1974 the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* offered him a position as Research Fellow and regular academic staff member in Paris which he held until his return to Hong Kong as Chair of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at CUHK in 1976. It was during his time at the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* that Jao Tsung-I became acquainted with the great assyriologist Jean Bottéro, who initiated him into the Babylonian cuneiform script and the Gilgamesh epic, of which Jao was to render Bottéro's classic French translation into Chinese. Inspired by this experience, Jao later published the first translation into Chinese of *Enuma Elish*, the Sumerian epic of creation. Meanwhile, he returned to Paris once again, this time as Visiting Professor at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in 1978-1979.

After many years of short-term visits by French sinologists to Hong Kong, encouraged by Professor Jao Tsung-I's scholarship and hospitality, the EFEO established a permanent Center in Hong Kong in 1994. It is located in the Institute for Chinese Studies (ICS) at this University. The hosting of the EFEO Centre by that distinguished Institute was warmly facilitated by Jao Tsung-I who was then a Professor and Senior Fellow at ICS.

Influences in French and international academic circles

Dunhuang and Turfan studies, as pioneered by Professor Jao, transformed our understanding in the 20th century of the social, religious, economic, and cultural history of medieval China. French and British scholars made significant contributions

to this field of research, based on the rich collections of Dunhuang materials in Paris and London. However, it was the influence of Professor Jao Tsung-I's work beginning in the 1950s that transformed the early exploration of Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings into a major discipline of modern sinology. Among his most influential works published in France are *Airs de Touen-Houang / Dunhuang qu* 敦煌曲 (CNRS 1971) in collaboration with Paul Demiéville, on the origins of lyric *ci*-poetry in the Tang Dynasty, and *Peintures monochromes de Dunhuang / Dunhuang baihua* 敦煌白畫 (EFEO 1978), on the iconography, techniques and social context of Dunhuang pictorial art ranging from mural paintings to banners and manuscript illustrations.

Jiaguwen 甲骨文 or the study of Oracle Bone Divination in early China (Yin-Shang Dynasties) represents another fundamental sinological discipline. The *jiaguwen* inscriptions are among the earliest historical sources on the political, religious and social organization of ancient China and constitute an invaluable record on the origins of the Chinese writing system. This field of research is also well developed in France, thanks largely to Professor Jao Tsung-I's influence and his long-standing collaboration with Léon Vandermeersch.

Art and archaeology, epigraphy and manuscript studies, ancient literature and religion. Professor Jao's contributions to the history of art, archaeology, and philology of ancient China, especially his research on the bamboo and silk manuscripts 簡帛 discovered in Chinese tombs, as well as tomb epitaphs 墓誌銘, have been equally influential, just as his groundbreaking work on the Songs of the South, *Chu ci* 楚辭 (4th century BC), and on the history of Daoism and Buddhism, has helped shape these academic fields in France and the West.

Contribution to the global perception of Chinese civilization

Professor Jao's characteristic approach to the enormous range of specialist sinological disciplines that he made his own, was to place China in the wider context of the great civilizations of the ancient world. I have mentioned his abiding interest in the Babylonian epics. In the 1960s, Jao Tsung-I visited the EFEO indological Research Centre in Pondicherry and became a permanent member of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune. This led to a lifelong interest in Sanskrit studies, especially the Vedic hymns of ancient Hinduism (Rig Veda), and the publication in 1990 of a seminal work on the history of cultural interactions between India and China, including the influence of Sanskrit on Chinese phonology, titled *Zhong-Yin wenhua guanxi shi lunji. Yu wen pian* 中印文化關係史論集 語文篇.

From 1954 to this day, throughout an international career spanning almost 60 years, Professor Jao has been an eminent ambassador of Chinese culture in the world, thanks to his prolific and authoritative publications and through a series of distinguished teaching and research appointments in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, the United States, and France. In each of these places he gathered large circles of friends and disciples. I should like to add that, beyond the unique scholarship of Professor Jao, and the great civilization that is its object, the admiration of those privileged to know him also extends to his generous personality and, certainly not least, his celebrated gifts as a painter, calligrapher, and musician.

Awards and honors received from France

A highly respected scholar in France since the 1950s, Jao Tsung-I received the 1962 Stanislas Julien Prize of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, a prestigious award for sinological excellence, for his monumental work *Oracle Bone Diviners of the Yin Dynasty / Yin dai zhenbu renwu tongkao* 殷代貞卜人物通考 (HKU 1959).

Since 1980, Professor Jao is an honorary member of the Société Asiatique, one of the oldest European learned societies in Oriental Studies, founded in 1822.

In 1993, Professor Jao received the degree of Doctor *honoris causa* from the École Pratique des Hautes Études. The same year, he was made an Officer in the French national Order of Arts and Letters.

In 2012, culminating many years of profound interaction with the French academic community, and in recognition of his lifetime achievements, Professor Jao Tsung-I was elected Associate Foreign Member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres. I cannot presume in the space of these brief comments to do justice to Professor Jao Tsung-I's incalculable contributions to our understanding of the history of Chinese civilization and the exploits of the human spirit, East and West. I venture, however, that Jao Gong's brightest distinction, in the eyes of many of his admirers, is that of being an exemplary *shiyou* 師友, i.e. a true teacher as well as the best of friends.

Franciscus Verellen

Member, Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Institut de France

Professor in the History of Daoism and
Director, École française d'Extrême-Orient