

Professor Li Yao

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Professor Li Yao by the Chancellor Belinda Hutchinson AM at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences graduation ceremony held in the Great Hall at 11.30am on Friday 4 April 2014.

Li Yao has been Professor of English at the Training Center of the Ministry of Commerce, Beijing, since 1992 and is currently also Visiting Professor of Translation at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Professor Li has made a sustained contribution to scholarly and cultural links between Australia and China, and to Australian literature and literary translation into Chinese. He is the pre-eminent translator of Australian literature into Chinese, including the works of Patrick White, Peter Carey, Ethel Turner and Thomas Keneally.



The Chancellor conferring the honorary doctorate upon Professor Li, *photo*, copyright Memento Photography.

Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Professor Li Yao to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*). He has distinguished himself through his outstanding contribution to literary translation and Australian Studies in China. He has translated many Australian authors into Chinese, including Patrick White, Tom Keneally, Peter Carey and Alexis Wright, providing Chinese readers with a rich resource for better understanding of Australia and Australians.

After graduating from Inner Mongolian Normal University in 1966, Li Yao worked as a writer and editor at journals in Inner Mongolia until his appointment as Professor of English at the Training Center of the Ministry of Commerce, Beijing, in 1992. He became a member of the Chinese Writers' Association in 1986, specialising in literary translation. At that time he started collaborating with Prof Hu Wenzhong at Beijing Foreign Studies University on translating Australian literature.

Prof Hu is a graduate of the University of Sydney, a member of the so-called 'Gang of Nine' who were among the first group of students from China to undertake graduate study in Australia after the Cultural Revolution. This 'Gang of Nine' proved influential in developing Australian Studies in China on their return, none more so than Prof Hu, who was recognised with an honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Sydney in 1990. Li Yao follows in his footsteps and continues that enduring tradition. Together they translated Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* (published in China in 1991). Li Yao then continued on his own with two more works by White and a staggering thirty or more Australian titles since. The list includes work by Brian Castro, Colleen McCullough, Richard Flanagan, Alex Miller, Kim Scott and Anita Heiss, as well as history and non-fiction, and under Prof Li's guidance, key works of children's literature such as *Blinky Bill*, *Dot* and the *Kangaroo* and *Seven Little Australians*.

Li Yao has served as a council member of the Australian Studies Association of China since it began in

1988. He won the Australia-China Council's inaugural Translation Prize in 1996 for *The Ancestor Game* by Alex Miller, and won it again in 2012 for *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright, both Miles Franklin-winning novels. He was awarded the Council's Golden Medallion in 2008 for his distinguished contribution in the field of Australian literary translation in China.

The translation of *Carpentaria* deserves special comment as the culmination of a lifetime's work by Li Yao and some forty years of Australian cultural exchange with China, since 1972. The novel imagines Australian life from an Indigenous perspective in Alexis Wright's unique voice. Only Li Yao had the depth of experience to take on the challenging task of translating it into Chinese. He saw it through to publication with the prestigious People's Literature Publishing House and gathered support from leading Chinese writers, including Nobel literature laureate Mo Yan, who launched it at the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

Li Yao has shown extraordinary dedication in his sustained commitment to literary translation. No one in China knows more about Australian writing than Li Yao, who has many friends among authors and literary scholars in Australia.

It is a proud moment for the University that played so foundational a role in Australian literary studies, both in Australia and in China, to be able to honour Prof Li Yao for his great contribution to the creative and scholarly interaction between our two peoples.