

Citation for Pai Hsien-yung

Since his tender years, Pai Hsien-yung had been leading a drifting life. Born in Guangxi, he would soon have to 'dislocate' himself to various places: first to Chongqing (the then auxiliary capital), thence to the former capital Nanjing, and then he moved to Hong Kong to continue his primary education. Many years after, he would become a noted writer. He is not only a novelist well-known to Taiwan, the place where he would finally settle down, but also his fame radiates well into the Chinese communities of distant shores. With his drifting life having been as such, Pai's works are very much like the wandering wisps of clouds cascading out of his homeland soothing the heart of every Chinese, far and near, and serve as the harbinger of hope. His writings constitute an oeuvre *sans frontier*. Pai is indisputably a Chinese literature magnate.

Bearing the childhood painful memories of his war-ravaged country, Pai portrays powerfully in his novels the Guilin landscapes that witnessed the vicissitudes of human lots; the war time Chongqing around which battles were fiercely fought; the Shanghai vibes which were still veiling thinly the sorrows of a wounded nation, and the Taipei in the 50s when the new Chinese diaspora expressed a profound sense of nostalgia. Plus the fate of individuals who were languishing in one way or the other: the sighs of opera actors, the tears of *filles de joie*, the ennui of travelers in their peregrinations across the modern waste lands heading for nowhere. In sum, the protagonists of all manner in his stories parade, silhouetted against their historical backdrops, to tell us their tales about themselves, about the time they were in. The *tristesse* of a charming but fast fading age, the Beauty and Truth of humanity, Pai's works capture them all.

Pai's novels are well plotted and the characters vividly portrayed. The plots are not those that would send your heart pounding, yet the powerful narrative wheel spins the stories that move you by their extraordinary lyrical qualities. His writing may not be of the style that awes you with flamboyance, but it certainly charms you with an elegance and richness that he hones from Chinese classics. His aim is to get down to the heart of Life and explore and feel the very essence of it: the beauty and pulsation of human emotions. As simple as that. He does not pretend to write to shock you, nor to sport razzle-dazzle, but nevertheless there is a kind of splendor suffusing his works. If we say that his canon captures the dying lights of a bygone era, his characters therein are then like the swallows fluttering out of a deserted old grand house, glowing for the last time against the setting sun.

Literature aside, Pai also has a childlike passion for other aspects of Chinese traditional culture and arts – a rich source for his literary inspiration. In an age when appreciation of great arts has given way to commercialization of art, he with unwavering dedication and against all odds, took upon himself the task of resuscitating the Kun Opera and, in particular, admirably re-rendered one of its

titles into a 'youth' version for youngsters. Thanks to his relentless efforts, the Opera was restored to its gloss and shines once again as a sparkling jewel of Chinese cultural heritage.

Spanning over more than half a century, Pai's literary career can be described as one infused with a melancholy amidst the slings and arrows of the intervening years: political turbulences and the civil war that sadly leaves the nation divided. If he had to pay a steep cost for his literary voice, he was ready to pay for it. And he did. A drifting life. Having been misunderstood. Having been called names. Even his solitude, the only oasis into which he could retreat for solace, has been at risk of being violated. Nothing, though, would have stopped him from his literary quest: whether it is an elegy to existential malaise, or a hymn to the greatness of human nature. This is an epic-like task indeed but he pulls it through with his awesome language skills and extraordinary literary prowess. His works are truly timeless and they go beyond borders.

A true literary eminence, Pai deserves our praise for the thematic profundity and the exquisiteness that his canon displays. He also wins our admiration not least because what he writes is what he experienced and what he felt.

The University of Macau would therefore like to confer upon Pai Hsien-yung the Doctor of Letters *honoris causa* to recognize his extraordinary achievements in Chinese literature and culture.