‘China’s renaissance man’ to be honoured

World renowned Chinese scholar Professor Jao Tsung-i will be honoured at a University of Tasmania ceremony in Hong Kong later this month.

Professor Jao will have an honorary Doctor of Letters conferred on him at the University of Hong Kong’s Wang Gungwu Theatre on Monday, May 23.

Known as one of China’s most outstanding scholars, Professor Jao is expert in many fields in the arts and has helped established China’s rightful place in the global cultural pantheon by bringing to the attention of the world at large the richness of Chinese literature, history and art.

He is also renowned in his own right as an artist, calligrapher and poet, and has been the inspiration for the establishment of a new style of Chinese art, the North West School, informed by the famous Dunhuang Buddhist frescoes.

Professor Jao has variously taught at the University of Hong Kong, the National University of Singapore, Yale University and the University of Tasmania, and has lectured in France, Japan, mainland China, Taiwan and Macau.

Now 95 years old, Professor Jao has an impressive record of achievement to his name; along with publishing more than 80 books and 500 papers, he is currently Wei Lun Honorary Professor of Fine Arts and Emeritus Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

UTAS Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen described Professor Jao as a “renaissance man” and said he was regarded as “a living treasure” in China.

“Through his work as an artist, poet, calligrapher and scholar Professor Jao has given China two great gifts,” Professor Rathjen said.

“He has given the Chinese people a sense of who they are and confidence in the worth of the rich and diverse tapestry that is their history and culture, helping shape China’s sense of nationhood in the twentieth century.

“He has also given those of other cultures a deep and abiding appreciation of China’s place in the world and contribution to global heritage.”

Professor Rathjen said Professor Jao’s scholarship had covered archaeology, religion, literature, music, palaeography, historiography, etymology, bibliography, epigraphy and art.
His work would continue to have a strong and abiding impact throughout the world for many years to come,” Professor Rathjen added.

“We in Tasmania have been humbled by the extent to which Professor Jao has extended the hand of friendship to the people of our island, graciously agreeing to exhibit his works in Tasmania in 2009 and embracing intercultural dialogue by visiting us, teaching us and, in turn, taking a strong interest in our society and the art that is the product of it,” Professor Rathjen said.

“We are proud of our bond with Professor Jao and with China, and with the richness that it has brought to our lives.

“We look forward to the fruits that the relationship will bring in the future.”

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