

# Wang Gungwu honoured for work on Chinese overseas

Eminent historian Wang Gungwu has been awarded the Tang Prize for Sinology for his work on the history of China and, in particular, the history of Chinese overseas.

Professor Wang, 89, who is University Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS), was awarded the prize for his “trailblazing and dissecting insights on the history of the Chinese world order, Chinese overseas and Chinese migratory experience”, said the citation of the award which was announced last Saturday at a press conference in Taipei.

He was lauded for his “unique approach to understanding China by scrutinising its long and complex relation with its southern neighbours”.

His work has “significantly enriched the explanation of the Chinese people’s changing place in the world, traditionally developed from an internalist perspective or relation to the West”, said the Taiwan-based Tang Prize Foundation, which runs the biennial awards that also cover areas such as sustainable development and rule of law.

In explaining the significance of awarding the prize to a scholar known for his study of the history of Chinese overseas, Professor Chen Kuo-tung of Taiwan’s top think-tank Academia Sinica said Prof Wang’s research filled a gap in sinology, which is the study of Chinese overseas. The other two areas are the study of Han Chinese and non-Han ethnic groups, he said.

Other recipients of the sinology award include American historian Yu Ying-shih.

Prof Wang was born in Surabaya, Indonesia, and grew up and received his education in Malaysia and Singapore. He later pursued further studies in London.

Among the books he wrote is *Re-*



Professor Wang Gungwu was lauded for his “unique approach to understanding China”.

*newal: The Chinese State And The New Global History* (2013). He was director and then chairman of NUS’ East Asian Institute until 2018.

In his acceptance remarks, he said sinology is not just the study of China’s ancient past, although its foundation is the classical Chinese language, the mastery of which helps one to understand the roots of Chinese civilisation and Chinese history that is important to that civilisation.

“Sinology includes what has happened to China in the past couple of hundred years and how China has reconnected with that past but also made advances or made efforts to advance and progress towards mechanising the other great things that have happened about the world,” he said.

“In other words, the world outside is now very important to China and it is important for the study of China to recognise that China’s position in the world is a major part of modern sinology today,” he added.

He exhorted young people aspiring to be sinologists to master the foundations of sinology but “be prepared to go forward and focus on one particular aspect, one particular area and go further in that”.

“In my case, it was history but it doesn’t have to be history. In the end, what happens is that you enrich and broaden the field and make China studies far more important than it is recognised today,” he said.

---

**Goh Sui Noi**