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Elder Statesman Remembered **By Michael C. H. Jones**

On the 25th of April 1983 Mr William J. Liu OBE, passed away at the age of 91.

Liu was born in Sydney in 1893, to a Chinese father and Scots mother. At the age of seven he was sent to his ancestral village in Toishan County, Guangdong Province, only returning to Australia when he was sixteen in 1909. Liu gained an English education by attending a number of business colleges.

At 19, in 1912, Liu became an English-speaking secretary to the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne. The Consulate had been founded in March 1909 as the first direct diplomatic contact between Australia and China.

In the 1982 New Year's Honours List, William Liu was awarded the OBE, the Order of the British Empire, 'for services to the Chinese community'. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* dated 31 December 1981 referred to Liu as 'a man who has been described as the "elder statesman" and "father of the Chinese community in Australia"'.



Pictured from the left: Richard Liu, William Liu, Air Marshal Sir James Anthony Rowland, AC, KBE, DFC, AFC Governor of New South Wales from 1981 to 1989 and Bo Liu. The photo was taken after the OBE Award Presentation at Government House in 1982.

In the 70 years from 1912 to 1982, William Liu dedicated his life to both the integration of Chinese people into Australian society and gaining recognition for their contribution to Australia's growth. As a social activist, uncommitted to any political party, but devoted to improving the lot of humanity, especially his fellow Australians of non-European heritage. William Liu was a 'true pathfinder' for mutual respect and understanding between the various ethnic groups that today we recognise as multicultural Australia. He was a tireless fighter for the abolition of the White Australia Policy.

Just as important through his life and example, Liu became a beacon for many Anglo-Saxon Australians in the areas of cross-cultural trade between Australia and China. Highlights of his pioneering career include:

- 1917 - the founding Managing Director for the China Australia Mail Steamship Line, operating three ships on the Hong Kong route until 1924.
- 1921 - the English Secretary for the Chinese Nationalist Party, Kuomintang, in Sydney which caused him to meet in Canton (Guangzhou) Dr Sun Yat-Sen, President of the Republic of China following the revolution of 1912.
- 1927 - the Vice President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Sydney, a position held until 1933, which enabled Liu to promote trade and diplomatic relations with China and visit Hong Kong and Shanghai.
- 1933 - the publication of *White China: an Austral-Asian Sensation* by J.H.C. Sleeman, a Sydney journalist and writer. The book was based on conversations with William Liu concerning the situation of China and its importance for Australia.
- 1936 - an adviser to the SUN Company Ltd which built the largest Chinese department store in Shanghai on the intersection of Nanjing and Tibet roads and is now the Number One Department Store.
- 1952 - an early member of the NSW branch of the Australia China Society (later called the Australia China Friendship Society) which sought to extend cultural and trade relations with China and especially the diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China. In 1959 he was invited to China by the Shanghai Returned Overseas Chinese Association and attended the National Day celebrations in Beijing.
- 1976 - the first Governor of the Australia China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, William Liu was an inspiration to the founding President D.C.Carter and his successors, R.J.Torrington and M.C.H.Jones, as well as the current ACCCI Life Governors, Arthur Chang, Harry Pang and King Fong.

On the 10th of April 1997, the W.J. Liu OBE Memorial Prize for Chinese Studies at the University of NSW was presented for the 14th year to Ms Hillary Murray, a student in the School of History. Established in 1983 on the death of Liu, it is awarded to an undergraduate student for best performance in a subject related to Chinese matters in either the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences or the Faculty of Commerce and Economics.

The winner receives a cash payment, a copy of the 1991 60-page four-colour publication *William J. Liu OBE 1893-1983 Pathfinder* and assistance for further study or employment in China through the Chamber's 31 cooperative agreements with Chinese cities.

The publication is a reproduction of 26 scroll paintings in the Gongbi style commissioned by the Chamber in 1989 to commemorate the life and times of William Liu. As an exhibition they were officially launched by the then Governor General, Bill Hayden, on the 10th of September 1993 at the State Library of NSW. Subsequently the exhibition was opened by the then Minister for Trade, Senator Bob McMullan, at the High Court in Canberra on August the 30th, 1994.