

Prof. Lee Ming-huei Delivers a Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies at the Bavarian State Library

The seventh Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies of the year took place in a festive atmosphere at the Bavarian State Library in Munich on December 13, 2017. The NCL Center for Chinese Studies (CCS) invited Prof. Lee Ming-huei (李明輝), a distinguished research fellow of the Academia Sinica Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, to deliver the lecture. His lecture, entitled “Is Confucianism a Religion?” was moderated by Prof. Dr. Hans van Ess, vice-president for international affairs at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU Munich), and attended on behalf of the Center by Ms. Yen Hsiao-pei (嚴曉珮).

Director-general of the Bavarian State Library, Dr. Klaus Ceynowa, made a speech to open the proceedings, in which he made special mention of the friendly relations between his library and the NCL, thanked the NCL for organizing the lecture, and spoke about future plans for the two libraries to jointly host an exhibition. Next to make a speech was Dr. Hsieh Chih-wei (謝志偉), the ROC representative in Germany, who had rushed over from Berlin specially to take part in the lecture. Dr. Hsieh addressed the German audience with a relaxed and humorous introduction to Taiwan and its academic research, which was greeted with much applause. Lastly, moderator Prof. Dr. van Ess introduced Prof. Lee Ming-huei and his outstanding accomplishments in the field of modern Confucian Studies.

In his lecture Prof. Lee remarked that ever since Western and Eastern culture first came into direct contact at the end of the Ming dynasty, the question of whether Confucianism was in fact a religion has time and again proven a contentious one. Scholars around the world have offered their views on the subject, each according to the theoretical perspectives of their respective field. In Prof. Lee’s opinion, German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s concept of an “ethical religion,” originally suggested with respect to Christianity, offers an extremely worthwhile point of reference. In his work *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Kant explains that an

ethical religion is a religion within the bounds of reason. Kant argues that the operation of grace, miracles, mystery, and the means of grace, are all in fact supplementary to a religion bounded by reason. Kant then goes on to suggest that these “supplements” are a product of historical development; humanity will eventually discard them as it becomes more rational, because they contradict the essence of ethical religion.

Drawing upon his deep research of Kant and his philosophy, Prof. Lee suggested that Kant’s view of religion faces a dilemma. Either the postulation that god exists renders Kant’s basic view of moral autonomy a relative one, or absolute moral autonomy renders the postulation that god exists superfluous. For this reason, Prof. Lee used Kant’s view of ethical religion as a reference point to reflect on the questions of Confucianism as a religion, Pre-Qin Confucianism’s directional shift towards immanent transcendence, and the course of Song-Ming Confucianism’s continuing course of development. He explained how, even though Confucianism after Confucius gradually trod a path towards ethical religion, it followed a different course of development than Western thought, and so avoided the dilemma faced by Kant’s ethical religion.

The co-hosting institution for this lecture, the Bavarian State Library, is one of the overseas institutions that have partnered with the NCL to establish a Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies (TRCCS). This was the first Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies to be held at the Bavarian State Library. Almost 90 members of the public braved the biting wind to enthusiastically attend the lecture, which only goes to show how effective Taiwan’s promotion of its Chinese Studies research has been in Europe and Germany. Speaking German, Prof. Lee shared what he had learned from his many years of research on Confucianism in his lecture; after the lecture, there was an enthusiastic discussion and exchange of views. The director-general of the Bavarian State Library specially presented Prof. Lee with a book about his library’s 2008 special exhibition, “Kulturcosmos der Renaissance,” to thank him for being the facilitator of academic exchange between Taiwan and German on this occasion. The Center for Chinese Studies also distributed leaflets providing information about the Research Grant for Research on Chinese Studies and Taiwan Fellowship, to encourage more

outstanding foreign scholars to apply to conduct research in Taiwan, and help enhance Taiwan's research potential.



Lee Ming-huei delivers his lecture



Dr. Hsieh Chih-wei, ROC representative in Germany



The lecture's moderator, Prof. Dr. Hans van Ess, vice-president for international affairs at LMU Munich



A view of the audience