

Prof. Lee Ming-huei Delivers a Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies in the Czech Republic

On December 15, 2017, the National Central Library's Center for Chinese Studies (CCS) partnered with the Czech Academy of Sciences' (CAS) Oriental Institute to organize the eighth Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies of the year, which took place at Charles University's Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center. Prof. Lee Ming-huei (李銘輝), a distinguished research fellow of the Academia Sinica Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, was invited to deliver the lecture, entitled "Confucian Humanism and Religion."

The National Central Library (NCL) has always enjoyed very friendly relations with the CAS Oriental Institute, which is also one of the overseas institutions the NCL has previously worked with to establish a Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies (TRCCS). The lecture on this occasion was moderated by Ondřej Klimeš, a CAS Oriental Institute research fellow, and attended on behalf of the CCS by Yen Hsiao-pei (嚴曉珮). Also accepting invitations to attend were internationally-renowned sinologist Prof. Olga Lomova, director of both Charles University's Institute of East Asian Studies and the university's Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center, and Secretary Liao Yung-tai (廖永泰) of the Prague TECO.

In his lecture, Prof. Lee made the point that many Confucian scholars argue Confucianism is a form of humanism, hence the term 'Confucian Humanism.' Pre-Qin Confucianism was born out of the primitive religion of the Shang period, and gradually became more humanistic, while retaining some religious characteristics. Modern Western humanism, however, originated as a rejection of god-centered medieval Christian culture, and so from the beginning the relationship between humanism and religion was a tense, even antagonistic one. This, according to Prof. Lee, is the point where so-called Confucian humanism and Western humanism diverge.

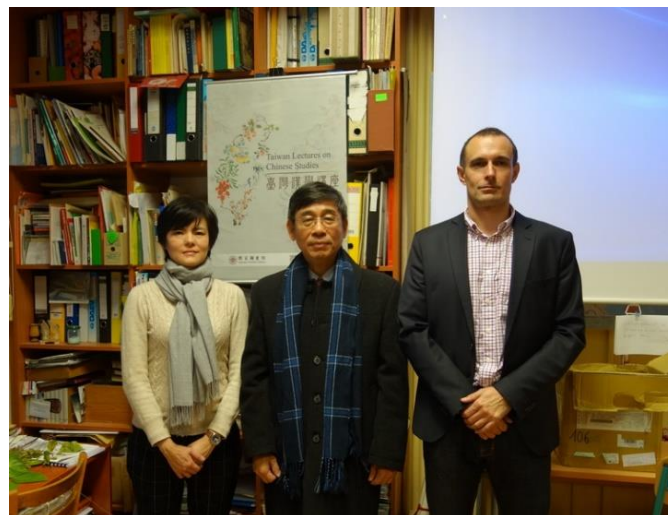
Prof. Lee went on to explain that the term 'Confucian Humanism' is a commonly acknowledged one in contemporary New Confucianism, but views differ as to the

characteristics of this form of humanism. In Xu Fuguan's (徐復觀) view, Confucianism is one hundred percent humanism; its religious aspects are merely a historical leftover. But for Tang Junyi (唐君毅) and Mou Zongsan (牟宗三), despite great social and cultural change, religiousness still lies at the essence of Confucianism. Put another way, the tension between religion and humanism forms the very essence of Confucianism. This kind of humanism does not stand in opposition to religion: Mou Zongsan calls it 'humanistic religion' or 'ethical religion.' This form of religion lacks the structures commonly associated with a religion, and is what Thomas Luckmann refers to as an 'invisible religion.' Luckmann theorizes that one of the characteristics of modern society is the privatization of religion: 'visible religion,' based on systems and institutions, has gradually been replaced by 'invisible religion' based on individual religiosity. In the late Qing, Kang Youwei (康有為), and in more recent times, Jiang Qing (蔣慶), advocated instituting Confucianism as the national religion, but according to Luckmann's argument, such a goal is neither desirable nor attainable.

The lecture attracted an audience of around 40, many of whom were faculty and students from Charles University's Institute of East Asian Studies. There were many questions from the audience at the end of the lecture. There was a great interest in topics such as Confucianism's changing system of thought through history, its relation to religion, and the present state of its development in Chinese and Taiwanese society. Prof. Lee responded to each question from the audience by sharing what he had learned. Using Taiwan as an example, he explained how Confucian thought and moral standards influence society at a grass roots level through folk religion, for example Yiguandao's Confucian classics reading classes. The CCS also distributed leaflets among the audience about the Research Grant for Foreign Scholars in Chinese Studies and Taiwan Fellowship. It is hoped this will encourage more foreign scholars to apply to carry out research in Taiwan, and thereby enhance Taiwan's research strengths. The lecture was the perfect ending to another successful year for the Taiwan Lectures on Chinese Studies series.



Prof. Lee Ming-huei delivers his lecture



L to R: NCL Editor Yen Hsiao-pei, Prof. Lee Ming-huei, and CAS Oriental Institute research fellow Ondřej Klimeš.



Prof. Olga Lomová



A view of the lecture room