

“A New Perspective on *Dream of the Red Chamber*: The Concealed Aristocratic Culture of Traditional China”: Lecture by Prof. Li-chuan Ou at the University of Texas at Austin

The National Central Library (NCL) of Taiwan partnered with the University of Texas at Austin to hold the second Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies of 2016. Held in the university’s main library on the afternoon of April 8, the lecture was moderated by Mr. Huai-yin Li, Director of the Center for East Asian Studies. Ms. Lorraine Haricombe, Director of University of Texas Libraries, and Ms. Sophie Hui-yi Chou, Director of the Education Division, Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Houston, attended and gave introductory speeches.

The lecture, entitled “A New Perspective on *Dream of the Red Chamber*: The Concealed Aristocratic Culture of Traditional China,” was delivered by Prof. Li-chuan Ou of the Department of Chinese Literature at National Taiwan University (NTU). Prof. Ou’s main fields of research are poetry and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Her open class on *Dream of the Red Chamber* is one of the most accessed classes in NTU’s open curriculum, with over a million visitors.

The emphasis of Prof. Ou’s lecture was to take a cultural-historical perspective, returning to the original circumstances of the writing of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, in order to unravel some of the common modern misconceptions due to historical change and cultural discontinuities. In Prof. Ou’s opinion, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the only true aristocratic novel in Chinese literature, reflecting stories in the lives of aristocratic Manchu families. Prof. Ou began by using both Eastern and Western theories to analyze the specific class characteristics of noble families, emphasizing their cultural dimension and upbringing. She then briefly described the Qing dynasty institutions such as the Imperial Household Department, Eight Banners, and the imperial bondservants, and explained how the four great clans in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Jia, Shi, Wang, and Xue) were aristocratic families in the Imperial Household Department, belonging to the hierarchy of nobles. Besides this, Prof. Ou also interpreted the term *daguan*, believing it to be related to the imperial family and imperial

authority. This enabled her to rediscover the true significance of the people and events in the book. Affected by the reduced pension system of the Qing, the author's century-old family gradually withered and declined, and moreover none of its sons and grandsons took the imperial examinations to gain position and develop the family's interests. In the end, with a penitent heart, the author completed this monumental, classic work that recalls the good old times.

The University of Texas at Austin is also one of the institutions worldwide to partner with the NCL to establish a Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies (TRCCS). Owing to the popularity of the speaker and the superb publicity by the lecture's sponsors, the lecture drew an audience of almost 100, some of whom had even driven three hours from Houston just to attend. The audience were captivated by Prof. Ou's lecture, and during refreshments at the conclusion of the talk, still wished to continue discussing with her.



Prof. Li-chuan Ou delivers a Taiwan Lecture on Chinese Studies



All seats are taken, with almost 100 people in the room. Some are standing or sitting on the floor



Mr. Huai-yin Li, Director of the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Texas, moderates the lecture



Ms. Lorraine Haricombe, Director of University of Texas Libraries, gives an introductory speech



Ms. Sophie Hui-yi Chou, Director of the Education Division, Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Houston, gives an introductory speech



Prof. Li-chuan Ou lectures on *Dream of the Red Chamber*



Prof. Li-chuan Ou (3rd from left) and Ms Keng Li-chun (3rd from right) with UT Austin teaching staff