

PROF CHENG Pei Kai:

Thank you, Dr Ma. He said I'm very mysterious, I am the black hand behind the scene, I'm the mastermind. It sounds very daunting, but I'm a very simple person and so is the topic of my talk today.

Cultural heritage and modernity. From this morning to just now, just now Professor Shih talked about the modernity of cultural heritage, in particular the anxiety over modernisation of historical culture.

On the word "modernity", I want to mainly talk about issues facing cultural metamorphosis in the changing historical, social background. I want to emphasise the nonphysical ethereal cultural heritage. Just now Professor Shih shared with you the heritage in physical form such as paintings and some physical objects. But I want to talk about nonphysical.

For example, in 2001 Qing Zhu, the opera format in Xio Xiang area was named by UNESCO as "invisible world heritage". So that's what I'm going to talk about, performing art, for example, and some challenges are facing these art forms and these challenges are related to the social transformation, the change of humanity. These changes are set in the context of modernity.

Speaking of modernity, I have an outline. I don't think you have the handout yet. I will just briefly talk about it.

Chinese culture is very fine and has a long history. It has its own unique structure. For millenia it has produced its own ramifications at the aesthetic levels. What we consider fine and high quality is very unique.

Since 19th century, these values have been changed greatly because of the Western influence. The Eurocentric world structure came into being. The strong artillery and gun boats of the West brought the strong culture from the west, which time and time again butted against the Chinese traditional culture. And in the face of that, China repeated -- experienced repeated failures.

So the question arose how this great nation with such a long history and great culture and heart could survive in this world. I'm going to cite four examples. The first example is that of Huang Tau. Why did I pick him? Because Huang Tau was the member of the literati community in

Shanghai. Then he came to Hong Kong in his escape from persecution by the Tsing dynasty.

So after 1862 he started writing essays in the newspapers. He wrote, among other things, that world transformation has come to an extreme. All the 3,000-year history in China all the codes and laws will be obliterated at this point and that is indeed dreadful. His observation was that the whole world had been turned upsidedown. The three millenia long culture of China will vanish overnight. You can see he was very, very anxious. And he was forced to change.

Then let's look at the second person, Lian Chi Chow. He was a reformist at the end of Tsing dynasty. He was among the reformists, radical reformists. After he visited Japan, after the 1898 revolution failed he went to Japan and he wrote a lot of literature about the future of China.

Now I'm going to share with you what he wrote about China being a young child. In this poem he says an old man is like is sunset, a young person is like sunrise. An old man is like a very thin cow, a young person is like a young tiger. An old man is like an old monk, a young person is like Peter Pan. An old person is like a dictionary, a young person is like a drama play. An old person is like opium, a young better than is like brandy.

This is a very interesting comparison because brandy has nothing to do with China. An old person is like a comic, a young person is like a coral reef in the ocean.

I think those of you who are from Hong Kong will be able to appreciate this because in coral reef there will be a very delicious dish.

An old person is like a pyramid in the desert of Egypt, a young person is like a railway in Siberia. An old is like fallen leaves in the late autumn, a young person is like young grass in the early spring. An old person is like a pool of dead water, a young person is like the spring of the long river.

So Lian Chi Chow was using this comparison, telling people the new things were much better than the old things, because old things were dying and

young things were full of life, full of vitality. So he was chasing after new things, foreign things.

The next one is Chong Long. He wrote a book and the revolution and in the forward of this he wrote something very interesting. He says we have to forget rid of the totalitarian regime that had been ruling China for thousands of years. Chinese people should get rid of their slavery mentality, and we should also kick out the Manchu who ruled China in the Tsing dynasty, because the Tsing they were from the Manchu ethnic group ruling the Han ethnic group.

So that after doing all these things, the land of China can be purified. The land can be clean. and Chinese people can become George Washington. It's a very interesting comparison.

This guy was not telling people that we should all be saint, instead he was encouraging Chinese people to become George Washington.

And the spirits of Chinese people can leave hell and go up to the heaven. Revolution rules, revolution is the greatest.

This is a very interesting creation. I think this is something very subconscious, getting rid of everything old and traditional. And even in Luo Shih, you can still smell evolution in his works. And he was encouraging Chinese young people not to read books published in China. He said young people in China need to read books from foreign country. And that was the mainstream during that time.

So you can imagine the pressure that the ethnic group of the Chinese people had during this time. Luo Shih was in Hong Kong and he gave a public lecture in February of 1927. In this public lecture, he said every old tone would have to end, anyone with a conscience need to get rid of the old tone. And also the ruling class, the intellectual, should seek the betterment of the whole instead of the individual. We cannot carry on singing the old tone.

Now, he was here in Hong Kong. He realised that there were some people in Hong Kong talking about China. To him, these people were out of date already. For instance, Lai Tai Shih at the Hong Kong University started

to teach about Chinese literature and Chinese culture and Luo Shih was not very happy about this.

And then in the same public lecture, Luo Shih was talking about the Hong Kong British government. At that time the governor was Sir Clement, and he was a Sinologist and he even encouraged people here in Hong Kong to learn from Confucius' thoughts, in order to create a harmonic society so that Hong Kong can develop.

So Luo Shih in this public lecture, said that these British colonies actually did not respect China, they are very smart indeed, and now they are promoting Chinese tradition. The reason why they are doing it is because they realise there are a lot of rotten things about Chinese culture and they want our youngsters to embrace these rotten things so that they can continue to rule us.

And so you can see even Luo Shih was in total denial of traditional Chinese culture, arts, literature, everything Chinese.

And so when we talk about modernisation, we spend a lot of time talking about politics. We want democracy, we want to have a Westernised economy, we want to embrace science and scientific development.

So for a long time here in China or in Hong Kong, when we talk about modernisation, we're actually talking about Westernisation. In the 19th century and in the 20th century, we wanted to become another Great Britain or another United States or we wanted to become another Germany or we wanted to transform China into another France.

However, this cannot be done. Can we really build another culture, another art form, after getting rid of all our traditions?

Well, look at China's cultural revolution. Chairman Mao tried his best to get rid of everything traditional and Chinese, and in his dream he wanted to have this very clear piece of paper after getting rid of everything.

Could it be done, though?

Well, let's look at an example. Now this example is the modern Chinese dictionary. This modern Chinese dictionary was prescribed by the ministry

of education in China. That means everyone who has been educated, who is studying in school, you have to use this particular dictionary. And this really has become a textbook, even though it is a reference book, a dictionary, it has become a textbook.

Now, according to this dictionary, modernisation means to turn into a very modernised stage.

Another dictionary. The 1989 version as well as the 1999 version. The definition of modernisation is to process from a non-developed world to become a developed world. And it's a process improving the production and consumption, and modernisation is also democracy, rational development, scientific development, social mobility and modern personification.

I don't quite understand what it means by "modern personification".

Modernisation started at the end of the Second World War. And of course we know it's not as simple. It only came to Asia after the Second World War. As far as the China context is concerned, modernisation means a modernised socialist system with Chinese characteristic.

But this definition doesn't really talk about art form or intangible art.

I spent a lot of time on this area and recently we published a book. This book talks about two particular forms of art. The first one is Qing Zhu. The other one is Guo Tsing.

Now, the UNESCO named Qing Zhu as the "Masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage".

We don't quite understand what Qing Zhu really is. A lot of people in the media don't really understand it and therefore it's become very problematic.

Now the Chinese translation of "Masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage" is very problematic, it's not very specific. Because in Chinese it means representative, and UNESCO never said it's representative, and therefore the Chinese translation of the term "Masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage" is very problematic.

These are some of the pictures taken from the performance of Qing Zhu here in Hong Kong. Mr Bai Sen Yeung has also written a lot about Qing Zhu, trying to promote it. Now Qing Zhu is only appropriate to be performed in a very localised small stage. However, when we want to promote it, especially to the West, inevitably we have to put some Western element into it. For instance, the musical arrangement. Are we going to use a whole orchestra? If we are going to use a whole orchestra, then it would become a musical.

We are also using some Westernised music arrangement techniques into Qing Zhu. Is it appropriate? We are still in the debate. There's been a lot of dialogue which is a very good sign; because Qing Zhu is a very refined performing art. And in the 20th century it almost disappeared and some Chinese people thought it was an irony that we had to use UNESCO, a Western organisation, to revitalise such a refined Chinese art form.

Now the second batch of Masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage is Guo Tsing. You can see on the screen is Ju Shau Wan Pei being kept at the Palace Museum.

Two weeks ago at the city museum we organised a seminar and art performance of Guo Tsing. At the performance we invited a couple of collectors who shared their Guo Tsing and some of the Guo Tsing were as old as Tang dynasty.

Now Guo Tsing has a lot to do with being cultured in Chinese. However, nowadays when we want to promote Guo Tsing, we have to move it to a theatre or a concert hall and use it as a tool for performance. It's become a form of entertainment.

And so the way to play Guo Tsing is very different from the old age, because in the old age people were playing Guo Tsing in order to become more culture. And nowadays people play Guo Tsing or at least we try to play Guo Tsing in order to promote Guo Tsing. Therefore we are trying to use it to entertain people and the way to play nowadays is very different from how it was played in the past.

So how do we promote culture then? Now, some people are promoting the notion of using culture as a tool to promote economic development. For instance, the great wall in China, very old historical site, people are

trying to promote heritage tours to these areas and believe that by promoting heritage tourism, economic development can be promoted.

However, this is lacking the realisation of the true meaning of modernisation. From the overall cultural policies, we can see that economy is still sitting at the very core.

They were using the term "cultural heritage" or Patrimoine in Paris. However, the way it's being translated into Chinese literally means "cultural inheritance".

How do we use cultural heritage or cultural inheritance and transform it and modernise it? This has become the major role that Chinese leaders in China have chosen.

This is a very problematic issue. This is a very important issue and a lot of people become very anxious about it.

This is the end of my presentation. Thank you.