

MR LI Wen Ru:

Thank you, Mr Moderator, and thank the audience.

Culture is by definition quite esoteric. Just now Professor Lee talked about beyond tradition. In the palace museum, every day I have to pass through the ever more modernised Beijing, enter the Forbidden City, then at dusk I'll walk out of the Forbidden City. So I do go beyond tradition every day, as Professor Lee said.

The Forbidden City is a symbol. I would like to use the palace museum as an expedient to give my talk.

My name is also a symbol. As Mr A-cheng said, my name contains Confucian element, also contains an element from the King of Jobe that Confucius often dreamed of. And my surname is Lee, which happens to be the surname of the first emperor of Tang Dynasty who did not want to be named posthumously as martial.

The symbol of Imperial Palace or the Forbidden City of course attracts much, much more attention than my name. That said, is the Forbidden City a result of martialisation or civilisation, culturalisation

I think the answer is almost definitive. It's definitely a product of martial prowess. So how do we address this tradition? I think we need to trace the shadows of culture in this product of martial prowess and today we need to innovate culturally and invent a new life. I think that's the logical sequence. I think the Forbidden City, I would like to touch on a few points. Point one. The Imperial Palace, the Forbidden City, is this culture? Is it art? I think the answer is affirmative.

Second point. The culture and art of Asia or the culture and art of the world, the modernisation of culture and art, does it need the Imperial Palace? Again the answer is affirmative.

However, the Imperial Palace, the Forbidden City, the art and culture of the Forbidden City, are they modern art and culture? The answer is negative.

The modernity of Asian culture and art, does it need the culture and art of Forbidden City? As I said, the answer is affirmative.

So the Forbidden City's art and culture, what can it do for art and culture of Asia and the art and culture of mankind? There are many things which it can do.

I think the first two points are self-evident, self-explanatory. I would like to focus on the third point and the fourth point, i.e. the role that should be played by Forbidden City art and culture in Asia art and culture or in the world Asia culture.

For instance, after being in Hong Kong, a lot of friends asked me that there is this piece of news that the palace museum in Taiwan, together with the palace museum in Beijing, are going to hold -- jointly hold an exhibition here in Hong Kong. They were asking me to verify it. I told them it has not been confirmed, but this is something that we very wish to do. Everybody is very concerned if we are going to do it.

The palace museum has eight million visitors every year. However, this year so far we have had 7.9 million visit already, so this year we are going to exceed the 8 million visit.

Now of these 8 million, 1.5 million to 2 million are from outside of China. Therefore the Palace Museum is a museum of everybody, not just for the Chinese people. It is the museum of people around the world.

And some artists even want to have an exhibition in the Palace Museum, so as to build their reputation. Now, the admission to Palace Museum is 60 yuan. Right now renovation is going on in the Palace Museum preparing for the 2008 Olympic Games.

Now a lawyer is suing Palace Museum because his client pays 60 yuan for the admission to go into the Palace Museum, wanted to see different artefacts and the architects, but because of the renovation work his client was not able to see things that he wanted to see and therefore they took us to court. The court ruled in favour of his client.

We are now renovating the many different palaces within the Palace Museum.

Now, the Palace Museum, especially the Tai Her Palace, has always been there. It has been there for 300 years and people can go there, but not too many people can see Tai Her being renovated, because this renovation work is a major one and therefore the next renovation may not be needed in 300 years' time or 500 years' time and this is the rationale that we used to argue to court. Some people actually buy into it and they were rushing to buy tickets to see Tai Her Palace being renovated.

Every year we have some more than a dozen exhibitions touring around the world. In 1935 the Palace Museum had its first overseas visit, at the Royal Museum in the UK, and we sent some 700 different pieces. My gosh, it was a very, very successful event. It was not only very popular in the UK, it was very popular all over Europe.

When we were celebrating our 70th anniversary, we again had a tour to the Royal Museum in the UK. We sent some 400 different pieces. Even though the number was smaller than our visit in 1935, however the quality of the exhibit was very high.

Her Majesty the Queen also came to visit the exhibition and she was intending to spend only 30 minutes in the visit. However, she ended up spending two hours at that exhibition. Several million visitors went to see that exhibition.

And so I've been thinking, if our modern society needs a symbol of traditional culture, I think the answer again is affirmative.

Macau Museum, started in 1999 until now, we've been cooperating with them. Every year there's always been at least one or two Palace Museum exhibition in Macau. And the Palace Museum exhibition in Macau has become a major event in Macau, and I trust that many of you have been to the Palace Museum exhibition here in Hong Kong as well.

In Macau, when the Palace Museum exhibition takes place, a lot of people go visit the museum. The exhibition and gaming industry is very important in Macau. We believe that it was very important for us to have our exhibition.

Some people meant to go to Macau to go into the casinos, but perhaps they came into our museum, look at our exhibits, they give up the habit of gambling.

And the government in Macau also has been spending a lot of money on the organising of our exhibition.

Now this morning one of the speakers talked about martialisation. I think gambling is part of martialisation. However, we were trying to balance that out by providing gamblers in Macau with something that has to do with civility, civilisation.

Two months ago, I came to Hong Kong to visit the Hong Kong museum. I was talking to the curator of the Hong Kong museum. We had a meeting on an exhibition which is going to take place next year, celebrating the 10th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China. We have decided to ship many, many different artifacts to Hong Kong.

Whether or not we will be able to organise a joint exhibition together with the Palace Museum in Taipei, we are still thinking about it. We are very excited about it. We are also in close contact with the director of the Palace Museum Taipei as well.

They gave us very positive responses. However, we have not nailed down on anything yet. We are looking forward to the possibility of co-organising this exhibition with the Palace Museum Taiwan.

Now we have some very important objects. Some of these objects are being kept in Beijing, some of them are being kept in Taipei, and if we can jointly organise such an exhibition, cooperating between Beijing and Taiwan, it will be great. But certainly we will have a major exhibition here in Hong Kong. We will also want to build a branded exhibition here in Hong Kong which will continue year after year, and I hope that this will come true. Because we have so many, so many different objects. We have some 1.5 million pieces of objects, and people are complaining, how come they can't see everything? It's not that we don't want people to see everything, it's just we have very limited space.

Of the 8 million visitors who come visit the Palace Museum, they only spend two to four hours every visit. With two to four hours, what can you see, right?

So we are thinking about different ways to allow more people to see more things.

So these two examples of exhibition illustrate the importance of the Palace Museum and that it is needed. However, we need to do more.

Our collection, of course, is past. They are dead. What we need to do now is to revitalise these dead objects so that they will become relevant to people of the modern age. I think this is something that we need to do. But how do we do it?

I know there is a demand for it. What are the ways for us to make our collection more relevant to people of the modern age?

Of course, we need to be mindful of the market as well. If we cannot revitalise our collection, if we cannot make our collection relevant to the people of the modern age, then they really are dead. They are worthless.

Only by revitalising this collection, then they will become valuable.

Of course, for a collection that we keep in the museum, the older the better.

However, I think the key is for them to have vitality and to have relevance to our modern life, and this is the key. This is the key for the continuation of traditional arts and culture.

As far as the Palace Museum is concerned, of course on the one hand we need to take care of our visitors who come visit the Imperial Palace and Forbidden City. We also need to be creative.

For instance, last year we celebrated the Palace Museum's 80th anniversary, and very soon we will be celebrating the Forbidden City's 600th anniversary.

So what do I mean by "being creative"? I've been told that here in Hong Kong a good number of films have been made based on the Palace Museum.

Together with CCTV we've made a documentary, a 12-episode documentary and we are going to make 100-episode documentary and this whole series will be as long as 2,400 minutes.

Now the 12-episode documentary broke the record of rating, and the rating of this documentary was much higher than very popular TV programme. When it was in Beijing I tell people that we use modern broadcast technology to revitalise the Palace Museum. CCTV is China Central Television, of course it's very influential in China and it can reach so many audiences.

Some people said the Palace Museum doesn't need to make a movie or documentary. However, after launching this documentary, those who had never been to Palace Museum, they became more interested in visiting Palace Museum and those who have already visited Palace Museum, after watching this documentary, they became even more interested and they want to make a second visit to the Palace Museum, and therefore it is a very creative way to promote Palace Museum. And so this is a process. Modernisation is a process. And we are continuing to make even more efforts.

And we also are cooperating with a Japanese corporation how to come up with interactive games. For instance, you can go and sit on the emperor's chair and you can also go up to the roof of the palace.

We are also talking about coming up with a new project with an American partner. By using modern technology, we are also going to hold a photo exhibition. We've invited some 20 Chinese photographers and a dozen overseas photographers to come shoot photos at the Palace Museum.

Actually the photo exhibition held in 2004 in the Palace Museum and each photo was as large as two by four, and the exhibition title "Dialogue of Civilisation".

And during these three days, the photographers were given the liberty of shooting any way they wanted within the Palace Museum. And then some 300 different photos were in display.

I asked the photographers from Paris and from some other countries, "What's your biggest dream?" They said, "Our biggest dream is to go to Forbidden City and take photos". And the same comment came from an American photographer.

A Chinese photographer has taken more than 10,000 photos of the Forbidden City. He said each time he comes in, each time he takes up his camera, each time he shoot, he feels something new as if it's an inexhaustible reservoir of resources.

So this photo expedition entitled "Dialogue of Civilisation in the Forbidden City" and another exhibition is called "Impression of the Imperial Palace". These are the modern means we've employed to transmit and promote traditional Chinese culture and art, because Forbidden City is unique in the world that most representative of traditional Chinese architecture. There's no other architecture that can surpass the architecture of Forbidden City.

At lunchtime we talked about architecture and this critic slagged so many buildings around the world. The only architectural complex that was not criticised by him was Forbidden City.

Of course, it had something to do with -- well, sometimes I ask myself, "Why was Forbidden City built so well?" because basically it's to do with the system there. Whatever the emperor wanted, he could get it.

That's not the main reason. The fundamental reason is because it's got cultural, philosophical and artistic essence in the architecture.

For example, in August it was something new for Forbidden City, for the Imperial Palace. There was a small sensation going on in August this year. That is the Palace Museum accepted three masterpieces by Wu Guan Zhou, a modern Chinese artist of a Grand Master stature. There are a dozen or so works by Wu Guan Zhou in Hong Kong. I think at the turn of the century -- I think in Singapore you also have a collection of Wu Guan Zhou's works.

At the turn of the century he donated more than 100 pieces of his work to museums. He donated them and we accepted them.

There are 140,000 calligraphy and painting works in our collection, and the impact exerted by these calligraphy and paintings is very obvious, and I believe calligraphy and Chinese painting in some sense are more representative of traditional Chinese cultural spirit.

But how do we move towards modernity, towards the future? This is a question waiting to be answered. Do we only collect artistic works up to Tsing Dynasty? The answer is no. So we consciously, for the first time, officially accepted the works by a contemporary writer. And that is the rationale behind this gesture.

We held an exhibition of his works above the city gate -- the Meridian Gate. Above the Meridian Gate. Above the Meridian Gate there's a nice gallery which is totally modern galley, using glass, there's a glass box, 800 square metres, temperature climate controlled. In the future, the best art masterpieces can be displayed there.

At the moment, that gallery is showing the works from Kremlin palace.

So during that exhibition of Wu Guan Zhou's works, we had first rate scholars and experts from all over China holding seminars there, discuss Wu Guan Zhou's works and also the collection of the Imperial Palace.

Since then, many artists have approached us asking us, "Do you want my works?" Well, that puts some pressure on us. We cannot take whatever you want to give us, because we need to go by some criteria. What are the criteria? Criteria represented by Wu Guan Zhou and is it market value? I think Wu Guan Zhou is probably the high -- because one of his works was sold at 30.25 million RMB. So people ask me, "How much did you pay him?" Well, he gave us for free, and for us art has no price.

But actually this there is a price to it, because one of his works of the Yangtze River, 13 metres long, many auction companies were following him. The bidding price, the starting price is 50 million RMB. We don't know what the final bidding price will be.

In the past, Imperial Palace or Palace Museum never did anything like this but why are they doing it now? Well, that relates to modernity of Asian art and culture.

Now we are organising, we are still preparing another project in the Forbidden City, starting last year. We held some large scale events. Last year we held an evening event in front of the nine dragon wall in the park. Many VIPs and dignitaries came.



Also on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, we also held an event, with flood lighting. I don't think any of the emperors experienced that, because the palace lanterns were very small.

We asked the pianist from England to play the piano. He was attired in white. Then we had a local Chinese fiddle player dressed in red playing with him. Now the moon rose. It was a cloudy night so the moon didn't come up, but it doesn't matter, the moon is in the heart of everybody.

In the Forbidden City, within the cultural and artistic ambience of the Forbidden City, Western culture, Chinese culture were fused, were communicating with each other, were expressing together, expressing the third culture, and that is the new culture we need to develop.

For example, now just recently, a few months ago, the Imperial Palace and Forbidden City brand has been acknowledged by the state illustration of industry and commerce as a famous brand of China. People start scratching their head. What's that to do with brand?

Well, we are in an industry. Culture is a cultural industry, or creative industry. In the past we never thought that Imperial Palace and Forbidden City are brands. Are we going to sell them? No, we are not. We are promoting cultural industry. Before we register these trademarks, now in Beijing, in other places in China, the company name, product name, if they contain -- there are over 100 companies and products which contain the phrase "Imperial Palace" or "Forbidden City", but from now on this will not be the case.

What about the existing companies and brands? We don't know yet, but we'll definitely have a solution in the future.

I think Mr Cheng, there's Forbidden City audio video company. People ask me "is that your subsidiary"? We have no idea. So that's an example.

Something more preposterous. There's a marriage matrimonial agency called "Forbidden City matrimonial agency". I said if we go to France and there's a Louvre dating agency, it will be very laughable.

Also close to Wan Fu Jing, the commercial district of Beijing, there's a Forbidden City ramen restaurant, noodle shop. I wonder who the owner

is. Maybe the owner has been highly educated. If he had been highly educated, he would not have called his noodle shop "Forbidden City".

But why do we want to have our brands registered? We want to develop cultural industry.

Forbidden City is huge. After a visit you want to bring with you some souvenirs, but the choice is very appalling and that's our weakest link compared to our sibling in Taipei, the Taipei Palace Museum. They have done that very well, the souvenirs collection.

Our goal is that before the 2008 Olympics, when you visit the Palace Museum, apart from the exhibitions, the service for the visitors will be much improved. And that improvement will echo and offset the Imperial Palace culture and art. And the souvenirs will convey the message, communicate the spirit of Imperial Palace culture and art.

Like the photo exhibition, we'll try our best to leave a deepest impression on the visitors in order to achieve a dialogue of human civilisations. I think this is our historical mission. Here in Hong Kong, the Home Affairs Bureau gave us a book as a gift called "Hong Kong design". I read in that book that Hong Kong design is world class and this city should be turned into the city of design. If the design city of Hong Kong can draw some nutrients or assimilate nutrients and draw inspiration from the art and culture of Forbidden City, then our art and culture will have positive contribution to Hong Kong, to Asia and to the world.

That's only one aspect. That's one of the things we need to do, one of the many, many things we need to do. That's modernity and modernisation process. Thank you.