Jacques Derrida: We Never Give Enough, We Never Forgive Enough

Distinguished French philosopher, Prof. Jacques Derrida, professor emeritus of the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, Paris, gave a lecture and a seminar on the campus last month at the invitation of Chung Chi College and the Department of Philosophy.

One of the most productive and influential living philosophers in the contemporary international academic arena, Prof. Derrida’s works number over 60 volumes, ranging from philosophy to literary criticism, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, architecture, the fine arts, and legal studies. They have been translated into over 10 languages. His characteristic approach to reading — deconstruction — has produced widespread impact for three decades on nearly every discipline in the humanities and the social sciences, and continues to nourish discussions and studies across the globe.

In his public lecture entitled ‘Globalization and Capital Punishment’, delivered on 17th September in the overcrowded Li Koon Chan Hall, Prof. Derrida drew attention to the potential danger of comprehending the so-called globalization process merely in the technological and economic sense. After analysing the present global condition with reference to the terrorist acts which happened just a few days earlier in New York, Prof. Derrida said: ‘We are in front of a theatrical demonstration and embodiment of an event in which the enemy is faceless, stateless, but nevertheless, the United States declare war. This situation is indissociable from the tele-technology, digital communication, and air communication surrounding us today.’

The lecture was attended by an audience of some 300, with students and teachers from CUHK and other local universities lining up at the entrance of the lecture hall one hour before the official opening. Many guests and senior staff sat on the staircase or stood at the back of the lecture hall for two hours, listening attentively and waiting for the opportunity to raise questions. There were some one hundred disappointed latecomers, many of whom made subsequent phone calls and sent e-mail to request the retransmission of the event online.

A similar commotion was seen in the seminar session conducted by Prof. Derrida on 18th September. Initially scheduled to take place at the Fung King Hey Building with 39 participants, the seminar was finally moved to the Cho Yiu Conference Hall to accommodate an audience of 150. In his speech entitled ‘Deconstruction and Ethical Concern’, Prof. Derrida urged people to think beyond conventional rules and norms in order to address ethical issues direct. Concrete ethical acts such as giving gifts, hospitality, and forgiveness are ethical, only in so far as they are unconditionally bestowed with the entire respect of the Other. ‘We never give enough, we never forgive enough, we are never conscious enough of others! It’s only in the name of the irreducible alterity of the Other that there is justice,’ he so concluded.

Eminent Historian Gives Three Lectures in Celebration of Chung Chi’s 50th Anniversary

Prof. Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, professor emeritus of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and an eminent scholar of modern Chinese history specializing in foreign relations, visited the University last month in his capacity as visiting scholar to the Department of History and Chung Chi College.

During his visit, Prof. Hsu delivered three Distinguished Historians’ Lectures. The first one, ‘The Teaching of Modern Chinese History, 1800–2000’, was held on 15th September at Hong Kong Central Library, Causeway Bay. The second lecture took place on 17th September in the Tin Ka Ping Building on the University campus. It was entitled ‘The Bush Administration’s China Policy’. And the third lecture, entitled ‘The Question of America’s Missile Defence Shield’, took place on 19th September at the Institute of Chinese Studies at the University.

Training Programme for Mainland Administrators

Close to 30 senior administrators of non-profit-making organizations from the mainland attended an intensive training programme organized by the Department of Social Work and the China Youth Development Foundation at the University from 10th to 29th September.

The programme, comprising lectures, seminars, and agency visits, aimed at equipping senior mainland administrators with knowledge and skills in human service management, agency finance, and the administration of charitable funds.

Occluding at the opening ceremony of the programme on 12th September were Prof. Kenneth Chau (right), dean of the Faculty of Social Science, Ms. Gu Xiaojin (left), secretary-general of the China Youth Development Foundation, Mr. Zhang Yinxin, vice-director of the Project Hope National Supervisory Committee, and Dr. Allen Choate, director of programme development of the Asia Foundation.

Anthropology Students Visit Guangxi

Nineteen students from the Department of Anthropology went to Guilin, Longsheng, and Nanning of the Guangxi Municipality from 27th May to 9th June to investigate ethnic cultures and tourism, and to visit archaeological caves and shell-midden sites. The annual summer study tour was organized by the department and partially sponsored by New Asia College.

The tour not only gave the students the opportunity to stay at the homes of four ethnic groups and examine how tourism has impacted the landscape and people’s culture, but also fostered academic exchange between Hong Kong and Guangxi students.

Information collected during the tour are on display from 21st September to 15th October at Hui’s Gallery in New Asia College.

Service to the Community and International Organizations

• Prof. Andrew Chan Chi Fai, professor in the Department of Marketing, has been appointed by the Chief Executive of the HKSAR as a panel member of the Telecommunications (Competition Provisions) Appeal Board for two years from 31st August 2001. He has also been re-appointed by the Chief Executive of the HKSAR as the chairman of the Consumer Council for two years from 16th September 2001.
• Prof. Ambrose King, pro-vice-chancellor, has been re-appointed by the Secretary for Education and Manpower as a member of the Research Grants Council for two years from 1st July 2001.
• Prof. Robert Jones, professor of pharmacology, has been appointed by the Secretary for Health and Welfare as a member of the Pharmacy and Poisons Appeal Tribunal for one year from 14th August 2001.
• Prof. Chau Kwai Cheong, associate professor in the Department of Geography, has been appointed by the Secretary for the Environment for two years from 1st September 2001.
• Prof. Yip Din Yan, assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, has been appointed by the Secretary for Education and Manpower as a member of the Curriculum Development Council for two years from 1st September 2001.

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Invigorating and Globalizing an Old Profession: CLC Keeps Up with the World’s Linguistic Trends

Dr. Wu Weiping, the new director of the Yale-in-China Chinese Language Centre (CLC), is a linguist with experience in Hong Kong, the US, and mainland China. A graduate of the Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages, he obtained his M.A. from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and his PhD in linguistics from Georgetown University in the US. Before coming to Hong Kong, he spent 10 years of his career conducting research at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC, and teaching at Georgetown. Dr. Wu served as assistant director of the CLC for two years, working closely with Prof. John Jamieson, former director of the centre, before being chosen to be the centre’s new director through an international search.

What would having a linguist with multi-cultural experience in the director’s seat entail for the CLC? The answer is modernization and internationalization. Founded in 1963 under the auspices of New Asia College and the Yale-in-China Association, the centre has a long history. And though it has served its purposes well for close to 40 years, major changes are now needed for it to better cope with the challenges of the new century.

A Linguist’s Edge

Dr. Wu said being a linguist helps him to understand the trends in the language teaching field. ‘The world is getting smaller. Everywhere people are trying to understand what’s happening in other parts of the world by learning foreign languages. In the US, teaching Chinese — which is their foreign language — seems to be leading the trend, in some aspects at least. My past experience will certainly help me ensure that whatever we do here meets international standards,’ he explained.

One of the trends in language teaching is the proficiency movement. And Dr. Wu has in store for the CLC thorough curriculum restructuring along the lines advocated by this movement.

Proficiency Movement in Language Teaching

Language learning used to be a quest for knowledge about a language: the country, literature, history, linguistics, and culture related to that language. Most language learners were literature students. Back then, a student of Chinese may know quite a bit about China after years of learning, but may not be able to communicate in the language. Since the mid-80s, however, there has been a growing emphasis on learning language for the sake of communication. This echoes talks of globalization and a more open socio-political and economic climate worldwide. It was then that proficiency came into the spotlight in language teaching and learning.

Modernization for CLC means curricular adjustments. Currently the CLC runs a two-year programme for international students of the University, which intends to be a research speciality of Dr. Chinese language. In the coming three years, the programme will be modularized in stages to ensure it meets proficiency needs and to allow for greater flexibility. When the new system is in place, there will be a module to cater to students a level of Chinese language, but they will be evaluated mainly on how they use the language, or, to borrow Dr. Wu’s metaphor, on the house they build, not on the building materials.

Curriculum modularization calls for a matching set of teaching materials, which is a huge undertaking as the centre’s teaching materials are designed for the whole approach system. Dr. Wu’s ideal scenario is to prepare materials with the help of IT, which is to have lessons stored in a computer database under different themes. Instructors can simply pull out lessons under the desired themes according to the needs of their students and put them together as loose leaves. While the centre is heading towards that direction, it is a long process that requires the joint efforts of all of its teaching staff,’ Dr. Wu said.

Standardizing Language Testing

One cannot talk about language teaching without language testing. This happens to be a research speciality of Dr. Wu, and is also the area where the CLC is hoping to introduce a new system of test for the centre’s students. The new system will yield a score based on the proficiency level of the examinee’s oral language. The programme is run by the US Department of Education, the CST was a project that Dr. Wu undertook for almost a decade while working at the Center for Applied Linguistics. COPA is a step forward for the CST in using IT in language testing, and is designed to cater to the special needs of language learners in Hong Kong. If all goes according to schedule, students admitted to the University in 2003 will be able to assess their own oral proficiency using COPA, with a standardized rating scale that is recognized by many institutions worldwide.

Staff Restructuring and Training

The structure of the teaching staff also needs to be reorganized to tie in with CLC’s modernization. Efforts to this end have already begun and will continue. The aim of restructuring is to keep a reasonable ratio between full-time and part-time instructors and between senior and junior teaching staff. Dr. Wu pointed out that to help staff meet the needs of internationalization, the centre has been running an in-service training programme. This includes inviting experts in language-teaching methodology to give talks and seminars to discuss the work of language teachers and the difficulties involved, and workshops covering topics such as language assessment and materials preparation. Meantime, new part-time instructors have also been given training with the aim of making them more versatile.

Some of the instructors are good with international students, some with local students, and others with students of the special service programmes we run at the request of faculties or departments. We hope to train them to be more all-rounded so that they feel more comfortable while teaching different types of students,’ said Dr. Wu.

More Efforts at Internationalization

The centre’s other efforts to increase internationalization includes collaboration with the Office of Academic Links (OAL) to recruit more international students. Currently the centre’s international students fall into two categories: exchange students at CUHK and direct applicants, some of whom are recommended by agencies. The centre enjoys connections with three or four agencies from Japan and South Korea. Dr. Wu hopes to establish a working relationship with more agencies from more parts of the world. He will also use his links in the US to contact universities directly to promote the CLC’s programmes. Having a more flexible and practical new curriculum will definitely give the centre a push in the right directions, with some help, Dr. Wu hopes, from the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Other Programmes Continue Unabated

Reforms aside, the centre will continue to teach putonghua to local students of the University and Cantonese to students from mainland China. And since 1999, it has been teaching Cantonese to students recruited from the mainland. It will continue to offer tailor-made courses, such as in-service language training for professionals from the fields of health, law, and religion, and proficiency courses for civil servants and employees of Hong Kong-based foreign companies.

One challenge faced by the centre is increasing competition from the mainland in putonghua-teaching. Programmes offered by mainland institutions are cheaper due to lower teaching costs. However, the centre enjoys an edge in the instruction of Cantonese, which has, since 1997, gained popularity among non-Chinese speaking students.

One of the largest institutions of its kind in the world, the CLC is also one of the oldest in Hong Kong, and has stood the test of time. With the improvements brought about by internationalization and modernization, it will continue to serve the University play a more active role internationally and to contribute its bit to global culture in the 21st century.
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The CUHK Newsletter is published 12 times a year and is available for subscription from:

P.O. Box 190, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Annual subscription rate:

- HK$700 for institutions
- HK$500 for individual subscribers

For further information, please contact the Publication Office, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, on fax 2609 5684 or e-mail pub2@uab.cuhk.edu.hk.
堅持文化使命
振興人文學科

文學院的學科組合有別於其他學院，多元而沒有「齊性」(homogeneity)。該院現在有文、史、哲方面的傳統主修學系；有師範科文、哲、歷史等的宗敘學科、藝術系和翻譯系；有文藝方面的音樂系、藝術系、中英文文學中的文科科系；此外還有現代語言、研究教學單位及崇基神學院等。學生可選擇多種不同的學科，甚至可以取得多元的學位。
法國哲學家解構全球化與倫理關懷

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德里達教授上月應邀訪問崇基學院及哲學系,並主持兩個講座,哄動學術界。第一場演講為崇基金禧院慶傑出學人講座,於九月十七日在李冠春堂舉行,座無虛設,聽眾塞滿了樓梯和通道,出席者超過三百人,另向隅者百餘人。有未能進場者事後致電哲學系,要求將講座錄像上網。

德里達教授以「全球化與死刑」為題,在講座上指出,若單從技術和經濟角度追逐全球化,會有潜在危險。他以日前美國遭受恐怖主義分子襲擊為例,分析人類當前身處的全球化境況。他說:「這個在我們面前戲劇性地展開的事件中,那些敵人是無法辨認的,無疆界的,但美國卻向他們宣戰。」

德里達教授的第二場演講集中探討「解構與倫理關懷」。他促請人們跨出僅僅是約定俗成的規範,直接思考倫理問題;並認為贈予、款待、寬恕等具體的倫理行為必須是無條件的,才具備真正的倫理意涵,亦即必須基於對他人的完全尊重,而不是作為交換的手段。他呼籲說:「我們永遠贈予得不夠,我們永遠寬恕得不夠,我們永遠未有充分地意識到他人!只有承認他人的不可化約性,才能成就公義。」

德里達教授是最多產、最具影響力的法國哲學家,著作超過六十種,更譯成中文等十多種語文,除哲學以外,主題廣及文學批評、精神分析、文化研究、建築、藝術、法學等。他開創了別具風格的「解構」閱讀法,三十多年來對人文學科和社會科學各領域都有廣泛的影響。

徐中約教授談中國近代史

美國聖巴巴拉加州大學歷史系榮休教授徐中約教授上月出任崇基學院及歷史系訪問學人,並主持崇基金禧院慶「傑出歷史學家講座」共三個。

徐中約教授是中國近代史研究的權威,專長中國近代外交史,享譽國際。其獨創編寫的《The Rise of Modern China》,自一九七零年出版以來,共有六個修訂版,銷售數十萬冊,是鑽研中國近代史必讀之選。

徐教授的首個講座於九月十五日在銅鑼灣中央圖書館舉行,題為「中國近代史的教學1600-2000」,向歷史科教師提供教學與研究的心得。第二個講座於九月十七日在田家炳樓八樓舉行,講題為「喬治布殊政府的對華政策」。第三講以「美國的導彈防禦系統計劃」為題,於九月十九日在中國文化研究所一二六室舉行。