

**2022 Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies**

***Religions in  
Contemporary Taiwan***

**Positioning the Sacred in a Secular Society**



佛光山佛陀紀念館 (source: FGS)

**Professor Philip Clart**  
**(University of Leipzig, Germany)**

In this year's series of two Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies, the speaker endeavours to provide insights into the role of religion in contemporary Taiwanese society. One lecture addresses the use of museums by religious organisations as interfaces with a secular public order and the state educational system, while the second lecture addresses the religious practices of individuals and small-scale temple-focused communities. It details the provision of ritual divination services by specialised temples ('spirit-writing cults', *luan-tang* 鸞堂), patterns of patron usage of these services, and the insights we can draw from them about the social dynamics of present-day popular religion in Taiwan.

## Speaker

**Philip Clart** is Professor of Chinese Culture and History at the University of Leipzig. He is the author and editor (or co-editor) of several books in the field of Chinese religions, including *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society* (2003); *Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007); *The People and the Dao: New Studies of Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer* (2009); *Chinese and European Perspectives on the Study of Chinese Popular Religions* (2012); *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800–2012* (2015); *Daoism and Local Cults: Rethinking the Paradigms* (2020); *Text and Context in the Modern History of Chinese Religions: Redemptive Societies and Their Sacred Texts* (2020); *Book Culture from China: Traces in Leipzig* (2021). He has served in various capacities as a leader in the scholarly research on Chinese religious life, most notably as a long-time book-review editor (2002–14) and then editor (since 2015) of the *Journal of Chinese Religions*, the flagship journal of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions (SSCR). During his stay as a Beaufort Visiting Fellow at St John's College during Michaelmas and Lent terms this academic year Professor Clart was working on completing a new book entitled *The Continuing Adventures of Han Xiangzi: Folk Literature and Religion in China (17th–20th c.)*. Professor Clart has been doing research on and in Taiwan for almost thirty years, starting with his doctoral research on spirit-writing cults in Taiwan. More recently he has been researching on religious museums in Taiwan.

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**Please scroll down for details on the two lectures (and note the different times and venues) and a list of Chuan Lyu speakers since 1991**



Spirit writing in action (source: LTN)



## Lecture 1

# *Religious Museums in Taiwan*

## Intermediate Spaces between Sacred and Secular Spheres?



佛光山佛陀紀念館 (source: FGS)

**5pm, 10 May (Tuesday), 2022**

**Rooms 8 & 9, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,  
Sidgwick Site, University of Cambridge (in-person)**

This lecture investigates the negotiation of sacred and secular spaces in present-day Taiwan, with ‘religious museums’ as its case-example. A religious museum is here defined as one designed, run, and managed by a religious organisation; such museums raise a number of interesting questions concerning the religious organisation’s rationale for and specific approach to setting up and running a museum (as a supposedly secular space). I focus on the strategic discourses within religious organisations concerning the aims and purposes of their museum projects, in particular with regard to the definition and differentiation of secular and sacred spaces and functions; furthermore, I examine the museums’ functionality within the sponsoring religious organisations’ ongoing negotiation of their relationship with secular institutions and agents (such as, for example, government agencies, educational institutions, commercial companies, etc.). The lecture addresses selected case-examples, including the Museum of World Religions (2001, New Taipei City), the Buddha Museum (2011, Kaohsiung), the Chung Tai World Museum (2016, Puli township, Nantou county); the Taiwan Soka Association art centre (Taipei), museums attached to Yiguandao temples (Tainan, Taichung, Hsinchu, Taoyuan), and a museum attached to a local temple (New Taipei City).

## Lecture 2

# *The Gods as Agony Aunts* Divination, Individual Problem-Solving, and Popular Religion in Contemporary Taiwan



南投市藍田書院濟化堂

**2pm, 12 May (Thursday), 2022**

**Room 1.02, Faculty of Classics, Sidgwick Site, University of  
Cambridge (in-person)**

One of the most fundamental questions in Religious Studies surely is: “What do people believe?” Yet it is also one of the trickier ones to answer. Two common methods are interviews and questionnaires. The former can chart a particular individual’s belief system; the results of a large number of interviews with a representative selection of individuals may be extrapolated and produce a picture of typical beliefs held in a larger population. This kind of survey can, of course, also be achieved by means of questionnaires, and social scientific studies of religious beliefs typically combine both methods by using a large number of questionnaires to gain an overview and identify key groups from which individuals need to be selected for in-depth interviews. These methods have one key problem: They are initiated by researchers and tend to emphasise notions and questions that are relevant first of all to them, and not necessarily to the research subjects. While this bias may be addressed by using unstructured or semi-structured interview formats, these tend to produce data that are not easily comparable and generalisable. The lecture introduces a different body of data that holds great promise for the study of popular beliefs, consisting of thousands of records of individual divination sessions published in the magazines of Taiwanese spirit-writing cults, so-called phoenix halls (*luan-tang* 鸞堂). These texts were initiated not by researchers, but by believers themselves in the form of questions posed to the presiding deities of the phoenix halls in question, and can thus be assumed to reflect faithfully the religious concerns of the individuals in question. At the same time, the large number of such records makes it possible to categorise and tabulate the questions (and their answers) and derive from them a general view of key notions and issues in popular belief in Taiwan, of the relative importance of particular beliefs, and of their changes over time in the recent past.

# Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies

The Chuan Lyu Foundation has been supporting an Annual Lecture Series in Taiwan Studies at Cambridge for over three decades. We are very grateful to the Foundation and its founder, Dr Lee Hwa-lin, for initiating the series and for its continuous support. Over the years, the lectures have attracted a very distinguished list of speakers. The Chuan Lyu lectures are held annually in May.

- 1991 Professor Stefan Feuchtwang (LSE)
- 1992 Professor Helen Siu (Yale University)
- 1993 Professor Charles Stafford (LSE)
- 1994 Professor TU Wei-ming (Harvard University)
- 1995 Professor Leo Ou-fan Lee (Harvard University)
- 1996 Professor SHIBA Yoshinobu (Osaka University)
- 1998 Dr David Landsborough IV
- 2000 Professor LIU Ts'ui-jung (National Taiwan University)
- 2001 Dr LEE Yuan-Tseh (Academia Sinica)
- 2002 Professor TU Cheng-sheng (Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica)
- 2003 Professor CHEN Jo-shui (National Taiwan University)
- 2004 Professor Steve Tsang (University of Oxford)
- 2005 Dr TSAI Ing-wen
- 2006 Lord Patten of Barnes (University of Oxford)
- 2007 Professor LUNG Ying-tai (National Tsing Hua University)
- 2008 Dr Margaret Hillenbrand (University of Oxford)
- 2009 Professor CHOU Wan-yao (Academia Sinica)
- 2010 Professor YEN Chuang-yin (Academia Sinica)
- 2011 Professor LIAO Ping-hui (UC San Diego)
- 2012 Professor Julia Huang (National Tsing Hua University)
- 2013 Professor Chen Kuo-Tung (Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica)
- 2014 Professor Leonard Blussé (Leiden University)
- 2015 Dr LAI Chi-Wan
- 2016 Dr WU Rwei-Ren (Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica)
- 2017 Professor CHANG Hsun (Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica)
- 2018 Professor Joseph Allen (University of Minnesota)
- 2019 Professor Paul R. Katz (Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica)
- 2020 Not held due to COVID pandemic
- 2021 Not held due to COVID pandemic
- 2022 Professor Philip Clart (University of Leipzig)