

Seminar 98.4.26 centers on prostitution

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Academics studying sex-related issues at a conference yesterday found it difficult to ignore the current controversy surrounding Taipei's formerly licensed sex workers.

At the Third International Conference on Sexuality Education, Sexology, (Trans)Gender Studies and LesBiGay Studies, researchers attacked each others' papers for not maintaining enough objectivity in researching the highly charged political issue.

Conference organizer Prof. Ning Yin-bin of National Central University said it was all part and parcel of academic sparring.

"The topics and issues discussed here are ground-breaking," he said.

"We don't have definite positions to take (on the issue of the formerly licensed sex workers). We've simply found that more discussion is needed to plot a more prudent policy," said Ning.

Sanctioned sex transactions were outlawed in the capital last December in a bid by Mayor Chen Shui-bian to clean up Taipei and break what he called the link between prostitution and organized crime.

The move immediately put more than 100 licensed sex workers out of a job, although a compensation package was offered. Campaigners say that forcing the sex trade underground exposes women to greater danger and exploitation from middlemen, and denies them the basic human right to work.

"In light of today's discussion, (Mayor) Chen's policy seems very simplistic. The question is much more complicated than the policymakers previously thought. Our papers today show the many dimensions of the issue." Ning told the *China News*.

The three-day confab at National Taiwan University is covering the latest research around the themes of homosexual identity, public sexual space, adolescent sexuality, homosexual literature and sexuality education.