Religions and ceremonial rites in Taiwan’s folk culture are characterized by simple charms and interesting tidbits, making these colorful folk customs extremely research – and preservation-worthy. The City of Taipei, where the cultural elites assemble, is the stronghold where Taiwan’s diverse cultures converge. The unique traditions, rites and beliefs of various ethnic groups are celebrated here in the Taipei basin in the form of many festivals; other than the outward manifestations of fascinating ritual elements, these traditions, rites and beliefs have helped preserve cultural conventions while successfully reinventing themselves to redefine Taipei’s unique cultural outlook. Both the government and the private sectors are jointly endeavoring to preserve these religious celebrations and rites in hopes of enriching Taipei’s cityscape.
Chapter 13

Religious Ceremonies

With continued progress in Taiwan’s social and economic development, lifestyles and religious celebrations also undergo transitions and changes. Taipei City, as the forefront of multicultural interplays, continues to preserve the best of traditional religious cultures and folk customs, while giving them a modern spin that innovates religious and cultural conventions to manifest the mutual respect, tolerance and appreciation among diverse ethnic cultures. Also, folk customs and folk festivities are the most important seasonal rituals for the people. They represent an ancestral legacy that is intimately connected to agricultural activities of the four seasons. The heritage continues up to this day and prospers with the lively pulse of a changing lifestyle; it also integrates a new facet of modernity to reflect the kaleidoscopic cultures of different ethnicities, offering a fresh take on a cultural and humanistic perspective.

Part 1 Colorful and Dynamic Ceremonial Gatherings

1. The Taipei Lantern Festival

Since its inauguration in 1995, the Taipei Lantern Festival has become one of the must-visits for Taipei citizens after 15 years of history. The scale of the event rivals other major international festivals. Between February 11 and 20, “the 2011 Taipei Lantern festival –Celebrating the Year of the Rabbit and a Leaping Taipei” was held at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall and areas surrounding the Civic Plaza. The activity featured many modern technological innovations to create a “Landscape Taipei Interactive Area” that highlighted the city’s centennial history, and the impressive “rally of 100 rabbits” to complement the centerpiece lantern, “Baby Rabbit,” in the park. “Lucky rabbit” mini lanterns were given away to visitors to the festival to heighten the festivity of the holiday and Taiwan’s centennial.

“The 2011 Taipei Lantern Festival” combined the remarkable works of many renowned lantern makers and young designers from Taiwan. Their works were featured in “the Light Lantern Area,” “the Traffic Circle Area,” “the Themed Tale Area,” “the Praying for Blessings Area,” “the Creative Lantern Area in Southern Plaza,” “Traditional Lanterns,” “International Lanterns,” “Interschool Lantern Competitions,” and “the Tunnel of Lanterns.” Visitors could also check out the amazing Valentine’s Day event, the Lantern Festival celebrations, DIY lantern-making, Yoyo Children’s Activity, riddles, and the-year-of-the-rabbit-event. All the celebrations were fun and educational activities for the whole family, attracting throngs of visitors to stop by the park and be awed by the amazing lantern works. The brightly-lit lanterns and the slews of visitors made the event all the more memorable.

2. Chungyuan Pu Tu in Taipei City and the Prayer for Peace Ritual

According to an account in “The History of the Taiwan Prefecture,” “government agencies of county and city levels present sacrificial offerings on tomb-sweeping day, and on July 15, and October 1 on the lunar calendar.” In keeping with the Confucian spirit of familial piety that honors funeral rites and mercy for all, the Taipei City Government, the Department of Civil Affairs and the juridical Taiwan Provincial City God Temple organized the “2011 Taipei City Chungyuan Pu Tu Prayer for Peace Ritual” on August 24 (July 25 on lunar calendar) in the juridical Taiwan Provincial
City God Temple. The ritual was presided over by Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin and conducted in the Confucian tradition, preceded by the ritual three offerings to invite the spirits, calling on the ghosts, and the opening of the roster. The City God Temple invited veteran Buddhist masters to lecture on the Buddhist Scriptures, and pray to release souls from purgatory and blessings for the country through the rites of traditional music. Also, in a move to reach out to underprivileged groups, artifacts and food used in the ceremony donated by temples and district representatives were given to orphanages and charity organizations in a simple, solemn presentation ceremony.

3. Confucius Temple Ceremony and Cultural Activities

In celebrating Taiwan’s centennial and “the Taipei Confucius Temple Historical Area Tourism Rehabilitation Plan,” the cultural activities for 2011 included: “Confucius’ 2,561st Birthday Celebration and Shidian Ceremony.” At 6:00am on the morning of September 28, the Shidian Ceremony for Confucius’ 2,561st Birthday was hosted, preceded in the manner of the 37 solemn ancient rituals. Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin served as the chief presenter of sacrifices. The Department of Civil Affairs Commissioner – also the Executive Commissioner of the Taipei Confucius Temple Commission - Huang Lu, Ching-Ju served as the “Ceremonial Officer.” The delegation of nine representatives from different sectors were appointed as officers of sacrificial offerings, including: the Department of Education Commissioner, Ya-Wen Ding, the then-Director of Culture Commissioner, Zheng Mei-Hua, the Confucius Temple Commissioners, Gu Hong-yi and Chen Zhi-xiu, Datong District Office Director, Xie Zheng-jun, and international organizations seeking to promote Confucianism, including the juridical Confucius Study Group director, Lee Yu-yuan, Confucius Analects Promotion Society chief from Japan, Meguro Taizen, and Ethical Science Research Institute director, Takada Yoshitaka. Kong Chuichang - the 79th-generation descendent of Confucius’ lineal descent – served as the Offering Presenter. 30 accompanying presenters of offerings consisted of Outstanding Teachers of 2011, directors of the borough chiefs association, outstanding citizens, the headmaster from the Taipei European schools and representatives from different communities.
108 Students from Taipei Municipal Minglun High School and local gentry were appointed Li apprentices to be in charge of the ceremonial preceding of the Shidian Ceremony. 65 middle students from Taipei Municipal Chengyuan High School were appointed Yue apprentices, and 12 students from the hospitality section of Kaiping Hospitality Vocational School were in charge of preparing offerings (Zhuan); finally, students from Dalong Elementary School in Datong District were appointed Yi apprentices. Bayi Wu (Eight Row Dance) was a combination of slow-motion dance moves and the manifestation of physical strength. Other than the conventional Shidian Ceremony, on the evening of December 4, the Taipei Confucius Temple officially kicked off “Nighttime Garden at the Taipei Confucius Temple.” The decorative lighting ceremony of the evening featured power-saving LED bulbs and fun ornamental lights in the shape of traditional top-ranking scholar. Li, Yue, Yi and Zhuan rituals were solemnly reenacted by the joint efforts of private sector representatives and students to honor the Confucian legacy. The ritual was rich with humanistic and ceremonial elements. Shidian Ceremony attracts domestic and international tourists alike annually to celebrate this ancient rite. The Department of Civil Affairs Commissioner – also the Executive Commissioner of the Taipei Confucius Temple Commission - Huang Lu, Ching-Ju showed up to deliver the opening speech. Visitors to the Confucius Temple had the chance to experience the beautiful temple in the nighttime in the company of delighting illumination arrangement.

4. Aboriginal Cultural Exchange Activities

With the changes in lifestyle and the relocation to new living arrangements, many aborigines have left their homes to seek better living in the cities. Though their connection with the traditions has gradually weakened, their respect for the religious faiths and rites prompt the aborigines living in the cities to continue their cultural rituals.

Traditional rites are one of the most significant assets of the aboriginal culture, and they differ among various tribes. The focuses of the rites sometimes are built on their beliefs in ancestral spirits, their respect for Mother Nature, their gratitude for a bountiful harvest, or the prayers for peace before the hunt. To help the aborigines living in the city restore their traditions and encourage more intertribal exchanges, the Taipei City Government supports a variety of aboriginal activities, so that the vibrant aboriginal flair can be reflected in Taipei's cityscape.

“Ilisin” (the Festival of Harvest) is one of the most important events for the tribal Amis. The tribesmen leave their work temporarily, and change into their traditional costumes, which they only wear once a year. At the calling of their chieftain, the tribesmen gather at the opening to sing and dance, presenting their heartfelt gratitude with their best songs to the bestowment of the gods, and praying for peace and a plentiful harvest in the year to come. With the relocation of the Amis to Taipei City, the Indigenous Peoples Commission of the Taipei City Government and the Donghu Den of Wellness Kinsmen's Association organized a cultural event on November 5. They also hosted a joint Ilisin with the Balang Cultural Exchange Association in Taipei on November 26 at the Taipei Municipal Nangang Elementary School.

To ensure the opportunity to organize cultural ceremonies for the aboriginal Rukais living in the city so that they can carry on their ceremonial conventions and meet fellow tribesmen, “the 2011 Taipei City/Taoyuan County Rukai Reunion of Glory” was held on October 10 at the Aborigines Cultural Center in Taoyuan County, allowing Rukais living in the two administrations to honor the traditions of their ancestors, and letting the tribal spirit and culture take root in the cities. Of the 510,000 aborigines living across the country, only 14,000 live in Taipei City; in other words,
the passing-on of aboriginal traditions and the preservation of aboriginal cultures still need much more social support and endorsements. The hosting of these events helped carry out the aboriginal spirit and manifest the content of their culture. It also adds a humanistic boost to Taipei City's cultural elements.

5. The Matsu Cultural Festival of Northern Taiwan

Xinzhu County Government, Zhubei City Hall, and Zhubei Matsu Temple were appointed the status holder for the 2011 Matsu Cultural Festival of Northern Taiwan, with the Department of Civil Affairs as the co-host. Little Keelung Fucheng Temple, the juristic person Jiayi Xingang Fengtian Temple of Taiwan Province, and the Taiwan Provincial City God Temple were the co-organizers. The juristic person Songshan Ciuy Temple in Taipei City, the juristic person Guandu Temple of Taipei City, Taipei Matsu Temple, Nanfu Temple, Shilin Cicheng Temple, Nanfangau Nantian Temple, Keelung Qingan Temple, Tao yuan Cihu Temple, Xiangshan Matsu Temple, Changho Temple of Xinzhu City, Beihai Shengyun Temple of Sanzhi, Sanxia Xinglong Temple, Banqiao Cihui Temple, Gongliao Dexin Temple, Shifenliao Chengan Temple, Wanli Yuau Shuntian Temple, Zhunan Houcuo Longfeng Temple, and Neimen Shunxian Temple...
of Kaohsiung participated in the event. On November 5, the Matsu statue first arrived in Taipei, along with a delegation of representatives. The procession returned to the former address of the Taipei Prefecture Matsu Temple, built in the Qing Dynasty; the statue then was carried to the Taiwan Provincial City God Temple for a three-day stay. During the event, experts were consulted for the organization of the demonstrative “Matsu Reception and stomp-the-street” performance. Young scholars were invited to join the cultural procession, the designation of ceremony-watching seats, and the repertoire of the parade. Their participation reflected a new boost of energy in the old convention. “A Demonstration of Sophisticated Ritual Feasts” and a prayer for peace were hosted for worshippers from across the country. All the co-organizing and co-hosting temples left with the Matsu statue to Zhubei to be received by worshippers on November 7. Between November 7 and 12, during the statue’s stay in Zhubei Matsu Temple, “the prayer for peace ceremony” and “cultural and artistic exhibitions” were held. A large-scale “stomp-the-street” for worshippers kicked off on November 12, which was attended by over 5,000.

On November 23, “Praying for Blessings for the Centennial” was hosted in the auditorium of the National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. The seminar focused on experience-sharing of the Matsu Cultural Festival of Northern Taiwan, and hosted a themed discussion on “Belief – a Centennial of Pilgrimage” hosted by juristic person Xingang Fengtian Temple of Jiayi County. The convention addressed the possible incorporation of eco-friendliness, upgraded worship services and the creative elements into traditional temple festivals to highlight the ever-progressing artistic elements in religious beliefs. Experts hoped to elevate the Matsu belief into a paragon of sophisticated, improved religious ceremonies for the country through the organization of this event.

6. Joint Commendation Rallies of Religious Organizations

The Department of Civil Affairs, Taipei City Government organized “the 2010 Joint Commendation Rallies for Organizations Seeking to Improve Folk Customs, Religious Fellowships and the Awards of Familial Piety Excellence” on August 31, 2011 at the International Convention Center at the NTU Hospital. Award-winning organizations and individuals were publicly commended. The Department of Civil Affairs hosted the event in hopes of expressing its sincerest gratitude to religious and social groups, and the Good Samaritans in a ceremonious setting. All the award winners are longstanding philanthropists committed to a variety of public charity causes, including: outreach to the poor, disaster relief efforts, providing scholarships to underprivileged students, community environment upkeeps and volunteer corps. 47 religious groups were publicly commended, with donation money totaling NT$872,796,982. 21 organizations donated over NT$10 million. Among these, juristic-person Xintian Temple in Taipei, and juristic-person Lungshan Temple in Mengjia donated over NT$100 million to different causes. Religious groups nowadays have included children’s education and protection, subsidies to youth counseling, women’s welfare services, wellness development of the disabled, and a community construction project into their outreach activities; they have also dissolved barriers between races and boundaries across nations to honor the spirit of goodwill and charity. In addition, they have thus inspired other groups to join social causes, welfare issues and the improvement of folk customs, reinventing Taipei City into a dynamic metropolis of kindness and outreach.
1. Hakka Culture in Taipei

Taipei City is an archetypical immigrant city. In terms of Hakka residents in Taipei, a great majority of them migrated from Hakka villages from Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Miaoli, Taichung, Kaohsiung, and Pingtung. Hakka's unique religious beliefs and customs and lifestyles have also been introduced into Taiwan's capital.

According to statistics tallied between 2010 and 2011 by the Council of Hakka Affairs under the Executive Yuan, and in keeping with the definition of “the Hakka Basic Act,” Hakkas accounts for 18.1% of the population in Taiwan, at about 4.197 million. 16.4% of Taipei City's citizens – about 68.8 people – are Hakkas. The earliest Hakka settlers in Taipei City lived mostly in Sanzhangli, Shilin, Shipai, Nanchang Road, Taishun Street, Tonghua Street, and south of the airport. Hakka immigrants to Taipei City in recent years set up their homes here for their jobs or schooling. Overall, they are distributed across Daan, Shilin and Neihu Districts.

For Hakka residents in Taipei City, the year 2011 was great for heightened visibility of Hakka beliefs and culture. In particular, Taiwan's first “Taipei City Hakka Cultural Park" was inaugurated amid much fanfare. The establishment was in the planning for years; it is characterized by the colorful Hakka culture, art and spirit as a concrete embodiment of Hakka traditions and religious beliefs. A greater variety of activities – with Hakka religious beliefs, rites and culture as the centerpiece – will be hosted here in the Park in the near future, thanks to the joint efforts of the Hakka kinsmen, so that the Hakka legacy can be extended and celebrated in Taipei City, and that the Park will be Taiwan's Mecca of Hakka culture.
2. The Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Ceremony in Taipei

The Righteous People Lords religion is ever-present in every Hakka community throughout Taiwan. The history of Righteous People Lords – or Yi-min gods - was almost exclusively connected to the emotional folk tales of Hakka ancestors who gave up their lives to protect the country and townspeople. “Yi-min” refers to the Yi-min militia formed by the Hakka people and enlisted by the authorities during troubled times. At the end of the Qing dynasty, the country was embroiled in a series of mutinies. At the time, the Hakkas were easily outnumbered by the bandits, and they needed the support of the authorities to defend themselves and protect their villages. These people hence formed bands of Yi-min militias. In fact, “Yi-min” is not a Hakka-exclusive term; many of them were “Hoklos.” In Taiwan, a series of revolts, started by the likes of Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun, broke out in succession. Hakka ancestors who sacrificed their lives to protect their homelands were knighted by the emperor as “Yi-min,” “Bao-zhong” and “Officers of Faith and Courage,” and were enshrined for worship. “My life for yours” was the spirit of these Yi-Mins for the greater good. Even if they move elsewhere, Hakkas in Taiwan would always take a symbol of the Yi-min spirit with them from Fangliao Yi-Min Temple in Xinpú, to build Yi-min temples, Bao-zhong pavilions and Zhong-yi Pavilions, and organize worship ceremonies in places where they live. “Yi-min” and “Bao-zhong” temples therefore become the symbol of the Hakka people, who also call themselves the offspring of the God of Righteous People. The God of Righteous People faith therefore became the center of Hakka’s folk religion.

The Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Ceremony began in the Qing Dynasty. It was a unique religious belief created by the Hakka residents in Taiwan. In 1955, the government officially designated the 20 of July on the lunar calendar the annual “Yi-min Festival.” The Hakka ancestors expressed their appreciation for the hardships that the Yi-Mins endured, and for their sacrifices on the battlefield through the Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Ceremony. When organizing the Memorial Ceremony, the Hakkas would set up a pu-tu altar, where they presented their offerings to those who died for the Hakka tribes, the communities, and the country. The Hakkas in Taipei City would invite the Yi-Min god enshrined in Fangliao Yi-Min Temple in Xinpú to travel north for the prayer of blessings for the Hakka kinsmen living afar. It has been 24 years since the ceremony began in 1988, and the Ceremony is growing thanks to the increasing number of Hakka participants over the years. The Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Ceremony is now one of the major folk religious activities in Northern Taiwan. Numerous Hakka kinsmen in Taipei City now faithfully join efforts behind the planning and running of the annual event in earnest.

The 2011 Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Ceremony in Taipei was held between October 15 and 17 at the Taipei City Hakka Cultural Park. The event coincided with Taiwan's centennial, and in celebrating the inauguration of the Park, 25 Yi-Min Temples around the country - and their service staffs – were invited north to partake in the event. Hakka kinsmen from across Taiwan converged on Taipei to pool their endeavors in carrying on the Hakka legacy, honoring the celebrated Hakka spirit of unity to the hilt. The Park was unveiled in a historic moment under the watchful eyes of many distinguished Hakka kinsmen.

The year’s Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Festival was rich with many fun activities. Other than the solemn pilgrimage ceremony – characterized by colorful folk customs – and the traditional parade performances common during Hakka temple festivals, the carrying of the shoulder pole and the offering of rice, plus the classical Hakka drama
for the gods, the 2011 Hakka Yi-Min Memorial Festival was underscored by a grand evening performance on the first evening of the Park’s inauguration. Interactive games were staged to entertain visitors to the Park. Legendary Hakka drama theaters, renowned Hakka celebrities and performance troupes were invited to regale audiences with a fun-filled repertoire. The shows were complemented by an amazing fireworks display, making the Hakka extravaganza unforgettable. On the closing night, popular Hakka art groups and troupes at the education center took turns to perform for the audience. Every performance was underpinned by the best of the Hakka cultural spirit.

During the event, visitors could pick up uniquely Hakka gift packages and sample the amazing Hakka treats in different booths at the Park. The Hakka “stomp the street” parade, the DIY family activities, bazaars, and workshops that taught the making of sky lanterns with flower prints, oiled paper umbrellas, Tung blossom brooches and Tung blossom pouches were also available. Additionally, a multimedia exhibition was staged on the third floor of the Cultural Center. These activities aimed at impressing tourists with the multifaceted Hakka culture and art, and helping them get a glimpse of the Yi-Min religious belief. The event attracted about 60,000 attendees.

3. Hakka Three Mountain Kings Ceremony

In contrast to Taiwan’s indigenous Righteous People Lords, the Three Mountain Kings were regarded as local deities to the Hakka community. Taiwan’s Three Mountain Kings are the patron gods of the Hakka immigrants from Chaozhou. The religion began to spread throughout Taiwan along with the immigrants who built settlements; it also spread among other ethnic groups. The 2011 Three Mountain Kings' birthday festival was celebrated in Taipei City's Hakka Cultural Center, featuring festive events like “seating the gods” and ceremonial rituals. There were Hakka concerts, Three Mountain Kings cultural exhibitions and Hakka cuisine tastings. About 500 people participated in the event.

4. The Hakka “Bag Gung” Ceremony

Chang Qing Temple, located in Taipei City's Jinjiang Street in Guting District, is now over 210 years old since it was first erected. In 1983, local residents from both Hakka and Taiwan communities pooled their funds to expand the temple, thus its present-day glory and magnificence. In recent decades, thanks to respected Hakka elders' longstanding devotion to temple affairs, Chang Qing Temple has become a stronghold for the Hakka Bag Gung faith in greater Taipei. In a gesture to express their appreciation to their Hakka kinsmen in the area, the Council of Hakka Affairs of the Taipei City Government began organizing celebrations for the “Birth of Bag Gung” on the second day of the second lunar calendar month, starting in 2004; many Hakka townspeople and local residents came together to celebrate Bag Gung's birthday. Other than the traditional birthday ceremony for Bag Gung, the celebration featured an amazing array of ethnic performances by Hokkien and Hakka residents and new immigrants; visitors could also take part in the tasting of Hakka cuisine. The event was driven by the promotion of Hakka activities and expanded accordingly to include many festive events to highlight the many facets of a multicultural Taipei.
1. Diversified Programs to Encourage Childbirths: Happy Maternity

The Department of Civil Affairs, Taipei City Government pioneered the country in setting up the Population Policy Division as the liaison platform for cross-departmental population policymaking and the designated one-stop contact for the Central Government. To encourage childbirths, the City combined resources from the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Department of Labor to launch “Happy Maternity.” On January 1, 2011, the distribution of childbirth bonuses and child-rearing allowances kicked off. These various incentive measures have begun to bear fruit: by the end of December, 2011, the number of births reached 25,132, registering an increase of 36.45%, compared with that of the same period over 2010. The number of registered marriages reached 21,373 by the end of December, 2011, factoring in a growth of 28.4% over of the same period of 2010. The “Happy Maternity” package includes NT$20,000 in allowance for every child born, and 21,473 cases of childbirth allowances have been issued. These packaged measures have effectively mitigated the burden of childrearing for young couples living in Taipei City; the measures help to free the couples from the anxiety of not being able to raise children, encouraging them to be fruitful and to build a fulfilling family life in Taipei.

2. The Coming of Age Ceremony

Year 2011 celebrated Taipei City's fourth “Joint Coming of Age Ceremony,” which was held on December 4 at the Taipei Confucius Temple, themed, “Give ‘the Coming of Age Ceremony’ a ‘Like!’ ” Mayor Hau Lung-bin presided over the ceremony by observing the dictates of the ancient rites, and presented incense offerings to Chinese ancestors, Confucius and virtuous figures. Mr. Peng Zhengmin, a very popular pro-baseball player from the Brother Elephants team, was invited to observe the ceremony as distinguished guest, bearing witness to a total of 120 young adults as they celebrated their adulthood. The rite was held as a way to encourage youths to face every challenge in life. With the Coming of Age Ceremony, the Taipei City Government hoped to remind the public that “adulthood” represented more than just the beginning for every 18-year-old to bear personal responsibilities for all one's decision-making; it is a milestone for one's relationship with the family and the community. The City Government also hopes to help all the attendees get a special insight about themselves, embrace the future head-on, and author a brand-new page for their fresh beginning of life.

3. The Taipei Joint Matrimonial Ceremonies

Two joint matrimonial ceremonies were held in Taipei City in 2011. The first one was held on May 15 – International Family Day - at the Taipei Gymnasium to heighten awareness about the importance of families. The second one was hosted on October 10 at the Taipei Arena, and themed, “A Hundred Years of Blissful Union, the Centennial of Perfection,” with Mayor Hau Lung-bin as witness to bless 429 newlywed couples as they exchanged vows. The Department of Civil Affairs also incorporated traditional rituals – “a gesture of appreciation to the parents” and “the presenting of tea in gratitude” – into the matrimonial ceremonies. The newlyweds got on their knees to thank their parents; the newlyweds also presented tea to the parents of the grooms. Many newlyweds and parents welled up in tears, and all the participants were touched by the heartfelt emotions of the parents – expressed by their blessings – to their young.

4. Enrichment Activities for New Immigrants

Since the launch of the New Immigrant Courses in year 2000, 255 workshops have been held and attended by 8,087 people by the end of 2011. All the new immigrant students looked forward to the commencement ceremony, where they could share the fruits of their hard-earned efforts with their loved ones. In 2011, the Department of Civil Affairs, Taipei City Government and various district centers
hosted life-enrichment camps, Taiwanese dialog learning camps, Vietnamese and cultural study groups, Indonesian and cultural study groups, Thai and cultural study groups, computer classes, new immigrant performance workshops and new immigrant culinary classes.

To help the new immigrants and their families better understand the significance of the commencement ceremony, the Department of Civil Affairs hosted the “2011 Joint New Immigrant Graduation Ceremony” on October 29, 2011 at the Taipei Minsheng Community Center. The ceremony began with several famous folk songs, and the melodious presentation was complemented by “sand painting,” allowing participants a chance to enjoy a feast of art. All the new immigrant students donned graduation gowns; outstanding students were presented with a crystal trophy, engraved with their names, in a gesture of affirmation.

New immigrants are a vital part of Taipei City, and Taiwan as a country is a melting pot of immigrants. Thanks to the joint efforts of both the new immigrants and the pioneering settlers, Taipei has grown better than before. The diverse cultural sparks will empower more learning, creativity and sympathy. In her speech given during the ceremony, the Department of Civil Affairs Commissioner Huang Lu, Ching-Ju reminded the attendees to take advantage of a multicultural family when raising their young, and provide bilingual training to help their children acquire a competitive edge.

In the ceremony to express their gratitude to their instructors, new immigrant students provided traditional presents – the national flowers of different countries – to their beloved lecturers. These flowers included: the lotus of Vietnam, the jasmine of the Philippines, and the scarlet glorybower of Burma. The presentation of flowers manifested the highest of respect to the instructors. In addition, Liu Na, a mainland Chinese bride who married into a Taiwanese family and participated in the new immigrant life enrichment camp (the camp for mainland Chinese spouses) hosted by the Songshan District Center, represented the body of graduates to give her thanks. She recalled her unease, confusion, boredom, and anxiety when she first arrived in Taiwan, and how the classes helped her step out of her home and guided her into a fulfilling learning environment. She spoke of how happy she was to meet her fellow sisters from different countries, and how her learning of the Taiwanese dialect and handicrafts improved the harmony of her family. This was exactly what inspired the new immigrants to sign up for the classes.

Other than the speeches of thankfulness by the graduates, all the attendees gathered at the end of the ceremony for a joint photo to celebrate these sweet memories. The 2011 Joint New Immigrant Graduation Ceremony was a wonderful, supportive platform for the new immigrants to proudly share the fruits of their learning. 700 new immigrant attendees and their families took part in the event. At the end of the ceremony was a prize drawing: a washing machine, valued at NT$10,000, was the grand prize. Other great prizes were also available. The participating new immigrants and their families spent a memorable and joyous weekend together. The works of the new immigrants were on display during the event. The exhibits included handicrafts, assignments and records of class curricula. Performances by the new immigrants were arranged at different intervals to fully highlight the diverse cultures and traditions.
Part 4 Eco-friendly Ceremonial Innovations

1. Promotion of Centralized Collection and Burning of Paper Money

The burning of incense sticks and paper money have always been the centerpiece of the traditional religious rites in temples. Yet, in the 21 century, environmental issues are now at the forefront of many global concerns. As people's lifestyle quality improves, they begin to demand better health protection and a safer and better living environment. The burning of paper money can cause serious environmental problems and downgrade lifestyle quality; it also goes against the modern trend in environmental protection and resource stewardship. With that in mind, the City Government began to encourage centralized collection and the burning of paper money. According to statistics, the amount of centralized burning of paper money over year 2010 has reached 941.12 metric tons, indicating that worshippers and temples have begun to take note of the environmental hazard caused by the burning of paper money; they have therefore begun to support the policy. Also, many temples have adopted the policy, and purchased eco-friendly kilns to reduce the amount of incense sticks and paper money burned. Xingtian Temple and Lungshan in Taipei City have stopped the burning of paper money altogether to support and promote the measure, so as to do their share in protecting the environment.

Chungyuan Pu Tu in July on the lunar calendar is the focus of many folk religions. The burning of incense sticks and paper money also reaches its peak during this time. Other than encouraging temples and government agencies to centralize the use of paper money for burning, the Taipei City Government created “designated bags for paper money for centralized burning during Chungyuan Pu Tu.” The practice was inspired by respect for religions and a goal to protect the environment. The designated vehicles to collect paper money were decorated in a gesture of respect for the centralized burning of paper money. The Taipei City Government also installed an online Pu Tu donation website, encouraging worshippers to donate money originally designated for deities to social welfare or charity organizations, translating the respect for the spirits into greater love for those in need. It also successfully fulfilled the goal of cutting down the burning of incense sticks and paper money.

Chungyuan Pu Tu is a vital religious rite in folk religions. Custom makes it inevitable that worshippers burn paper money to express their sincere regard to those who have passed on, and to the god of Pu Tu. However, the burning of paper money has caused serious air pollution in densely populated cities. In a move to promote the building of an eco-city and a religion of humanistic interest, the City Government began to encourage the centralized collection and the burning of paper money in 2000. In addition to promoting the initiative among temples and religious organizations, the City Government created “designated bags for paper money,” encouraging worshippers and temples to centralize the paper money in incinerators for processing. To ensure peace of mind for worshippers, the City Government conducted the annual “Cleaning of the Incinerators” on July 26 at Beitou Incinerator, to honor the rituals that honor Chungyuan Pu Tu with different religious interpretations.

2. Thoughtful Mortuary Services and Posthumous Life Education

The Taipei City Government has always striven to provide its citizens the most convenient services; thoughtful and convenient mortuary arrangements are definitely a must for citizens. To that end, the Taipei Mortuary Services Office began to promote “Convenient Over-the-Counter Services” and “Online Reservations” in 2011, so that citizens are spared the need to commute between the Taipei Municipal First/Second Funeral Parlors; citizens are also allowed to complete application for the 17 mortuary services provided by the funeral parlors. Meanwhile, the Office has launched “Online Reservations” so that the bereft families would not have to visit the service center after the body is placed in the First or Second Funeral Parlor. They can now simply make reservations for the auditorium and a time for the cremation. People can also pay mortuary service charges at an ATM. The measure is both user-friendly, and ultra convenient.
Part 5 Taipei's Culturally Multifaceted Cityscape

1. Xikou Cultural Festival

“Love in Songshan, Art in the Fun House” was the theme of the 2011 Xikou Cultural Festival which took place between April 15 and 30. A series of fun-filled activities lit up the 15-day event. The festival began with “Xikou Cultural Lecture,” and it ran five times in a row. The second program to take place was the lively “Xikou Cultural Camp,” which was a hit with many visitors. Next, the heavenly saint mother Matsu from Songshan Ciyu Temple appeared for the parade; and the traditional artistic extravaganza took to the stage. The whole event began to peak as visitors joined the Matsu worship ceremony in earnest, and it reached its climax during the finale in the afternoon on April 30 at the Chengmei Left Bank riverside Park. The day's event included: “Matsu in Songshan – the Sedan of Good Fortune,” where visitors prayed for blessings; the “Art in the Fun House” fair and “Xikou Art and Concert” were graced by many local bands in Songshan, as they regaled the audience with enchanting songs by the Rainbow Bridge across the Keelung River. Xikou Cultural Festival has become one of the priority cultural events in Songshan, with the goal to enhance public participation in – and identity with – the area’s folk culture through engaging events; also, the host hoped to encourage the public to view the area's cultural assets with a fresh perspective, and heighten support for their living space.

2. Party with the Matchmaker from the Moon

“The 2011 Feel Datong – Party with the Matchmaker from the Moon in Datong” was hosted by the Datong District Office with the goal to develop local tourism. The year's event was an extension of the “Feel Datong” theme, and it integrated the unique “Matchmaker from the Moon” folktale element – indigenous to the area's Xiahai City God Temple – plus local specialties, to market Datong's local industries, culture, economy, and tourism high spots. On the day of the event, “the Ten Drum Percussion Group” and “Children of the Sun Dance Troupe” prepared an amazing repertoire. The tossing of the embroidered ball and the ride up the flower bridge were organized at the Xiahai City God Temple. The day of the event happened to coincide with Chinese Valentine's Day, and throngs of visitors spilled into the area. Other than many performances at Dalong Night Market, Yansan Night Market, Ningxia Night Market, the Grassroots art and culture activity in Songshan District – the Xikou Cultural Festival.
pedestrian walkway on Huayin Street, and the Underground Mall in Taipei, the host also worked to integrate the City Government's childbirth support program to organize “Joy Ride on the Matchmaker's Bus,” encouraging singles to saunter around Datong District and get to know each other better. The occasion befitted the area's “Matchmaker” folklore.

3. The Union under the Autumn Moon

“The Union under the Autumn Moon in Xinyi District” was a combination of the area's most distinguished highlights, including the community of servicemen's families, the Xinyi commercial district, new immigrant cultures and eco-awareness. “Mid-Autumn Festival Soiree,” “Splashing the Village of Servicemen's Families with Colors,” and “DIY Handicrafts” were the centerpieces of the event, which took place from 17:30pm to 20:30pm on Saturday, September 3 at the Xinyi Smoke-Free Plaza by the Taipei 101 skyscraper. The weather was pleasantly cool on the weekend before the Mid-Autumn Festival, and visitors enjoyed the great performances by the art groups and sampled a variety of food. During the event, winners of the “Splashing the Village of Servicemen's Families with Colors” sketch contest were publicly commended at the Xinyi Citizen Hostel.

4. The Wander in the Reminiscence

“The 2011 Wander in the Reminiscence” in Zhongzheng District was held between May 1 and July 2; it combined museum resources to offer guided tours, seminars, drawing and photography contests in hopes of promoting the area's distinguished personalities.

5. Beauty of Dahu – the Cultural Feast

Dahu Park is the backbone of the event: a series of cultural activities was staged, including movie showings by “the Mosquito Theater” on the Sunlight Meadow on July 1 and 2, offering a wonderful place for leisure and family bonding; it also enhanced cultural development and atmosphere in the area and allowed the public to partake in the fun of an outdoor cinema. On August 10, “Watching over the Children – a Safety Promotion Exhibition and a Concert” was co-hosted by the Taipei National Tax Administration and the Community Safety and Health Promotion Society in Neihu. The event was graced by the Taipei Symphony Orchestra and song performances. Booths offering obstacle races – set up by the various departments of the Taipei City Government – were installed to give away goodie bags and food coupons. The purpose of the event was to showcase the successful efforts of the community to increase schoolchildren's safety, raise awareness for an
International School of Safety and help promote the Safe Community initiative, thus enhancing the public's understanding of traffic, security, fire control, and home safety. On September 3, “a Feast under the Moon” Mid-Autumn party was organized, featuring magic, stunt performances and music. Child’s play at the night market and the joint promotion of social welfare causes were included to reach out to the disadvantaged.

6. Shilin International Cultural Festival

The 2011 Shilin International Cultural Festival – A Leisurely Tour around Shilin was based on the sharing of cultures to combine resources from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and six other famous cultural high spots in Shilin, including the former residence of Lin Yutang, and the former residence of Qian Mu, plus the Shilin Elementary School and schools of foreign expats. Starting from September 1 through October 9, the Cultural Festival kicked off to include a string of cultural visits for sharing and hands-on experience.

Ten ambassadors’ offices stationed in Taiwan and 12 exotic food and cultural displays were invited to set up booths at the festival. The event also included performances by students from the Taipei American School and the Taipei Japanese School, plus traditional Taiwanese acrobatic presentations. The Shilin District Office installed a “Traveling down Memory Lane” and featured ancient children's playthings, such as prize drawings, pop sodas, and ancient toys, allowing visitors to experience memorable tidbits from the golden age and their childhood past. Fine food, fun, and great performances enriched the festival with an international cultural fair that was unique to Shilin.

7. Daan Flower Feast

“The 2011 Daan Flower Feast” was hosted at the No.6 Plaza at the Jianguo Holiday Flower Market on May 14 in Daan District. The Feast aimed at promoting the District's diverse floricultural offerings and potential, and marketing a combination of flowers, music and art to various communities. Families were welcomed to enjoy the aromatically floral and cultural atmosphere that only flowers can offer, and local residents were given a chance to embrace Daan's upscale urbainity. The high point of the event was a creative culinary feast, featuring different flowers as main ingredients. Professional judges were invited to give their critiques. The host hoped to fulfill Daan's community vision – “a wealthy and refined Daan Homestead” for the spirit of lohas living.

8. When Zhongshan Meets Zhongshan

The grassroots art and culture activities in Zhongshan District, “When Zhongshan Meets Zhongshan – Zhongshan Schools and Campuses in Taipei Celebrate Taiwan's Centennial,” kicked off at Qingguan Park in Zhongshan District on May 28. The year happened to be Taiwan's centennial, and the event incorporated “Zhongshan” into a nationwide centennial celebration to pay homage to Dr. Sun Yat-sen's feat in founding the republic.

All the schools in the District with "Zhongshan " in the name were invited to partake in the celebration. Students and faculty from the Taipei Municipal Zhongshan Elementary School, Zhongshan Private Primary School of Taipei City, Jhong-shan Elementary School Banqiao District, New Taipei City, Taipei Municipal Zhongshan Junior High School and the Taipei Municipal Grassroots art and culture activity in Zhongshan District - When Zhongshan Meets Zhongshan.
Zhongshan Girls High School prepared a joint performance, and their youthfulness and energy were contagious – students also took the chance to become better acquainted with their campuses. These schools – with a similar history and backgrounds – gave their unique interpretation of “Zhongshan” with dynamic presentations. The event also encouraged interschool bonding and exchange activities between cities and counties.

Art and culture groups, and teams of handicraftsmen from the district brought a remarkable array of performances and exquisite works to celebrate “Zhongshan” and Taiwan's centennial. “Drum Roll for Centennial” by Boling Drums, “The New-Generation Taiwanese Drama” by Zhengming Song of Dragon Theater Troupe, “I Love My Country” – a song about patriotism by RA, ink rubbings of Taiwan's national flag by a hundred participants for the Centennial, and DIY workshops that taught visitors how to make paper umbrellas with plum blossom prints, puppets made of socks to celebrate the year of the rabbit, photo frames made of hydrangea, cards imbedded with a photo of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in potpourri, penholders made of non-woven fabric with the national flag print, and handmade soaps with essential oils. Zhongshan's diverse culture was expressed through different activities, and the host hoped to enhance citizens' identification with the Zhongshan community, and thus solidify a local consensus to ensure robust community development.

9. Sweet Osmanthus in Nangang – the Osmanthus Festival

People of Nangang had already begun the importation of tea trees and used osmanthus for scenting purposes as early as Emperor Guangxu's reign back in the Qing Dynasty. Nangang is the birthplace of baozhong tea in Northern Taiwan. In line with the Taipei City Government's tourism policies in recent years, the Nangang District Office introduced “the Osmanthus Festival” back in 2003 to highlight the historic significance of the fragrant flowers and tea to Nangang, making the festival a priority event. The festival celebrated its 9th anniversary in 2011.

20 borough offices in the district, representatives of different local farm produce, and famous shops known for making delicious culinary fares with osmanthus were invited to set up booths at the venue, so that visitors could get to know the community and its specialty farm products, and see the osmanthus be put to diverse use. To promote extensive application of osmanthus in one's daily life, bring attention to the economic potential and cultural value of the flower, while promoting cooperative efforts among the industry, academia and government agencies, the year's festival - for the first time - consisted of a “Practicum on the Creative and Cultural Application of Osmanthus” with help from the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management of the China University of Science and Technology and Nangang Community College: The practicum included five different workshops – all free of charge – to showcase the preparation of Chinese food, western fare, and the making of creative drinks, osmanthus soaps and osmanthus candles. These workshops strengthened residents' identification with the district and helped them make osmanthus part of their lives. To promote Nangang's unique personality and boost exchange activities among neighborhoods, the festival featured professional performance troupes, and presentations by winners of the 5 Osmanthus Singing Contest, the District Health Service Center, colleges and various community development associations. It was a fun event for all participating citizens.

10. Wenshan Tea Bamboo Shoot Fair

The fair was held between May 20 and June 10th that featured tieguanyin tea and green bamboo shoots – native to Muzha – as its centerpiece. A press conference for the fair, “fragrant tea, great food and culture – a varsity community art exhibition,” “fragrant tea, great food and culture – Wenshan Teahouse,” “fragrant
tea, great food and culture – art in motion,” “the 2011 feat of green bamboo shoots in Muzha” were hosted to promote Wenshan's cultural personality and farm produce. The showpiece of the fair – “Wenshan Teahouse” – was a cocktail of teahouse culture and tieguanyin tea. The National Taiwan College of Performing Arts, Hanlin Arts Company, and Wenshan Community College also gave performances that integrated the conventional teahouse culture into the repertoire. Visitors could therefore “feast on cups of tea and lots of art.”

Many community arts groups, the Muzha Farmers Co-op, migrant workers' groups in Wenshan, Hakka associations and the aboriginal community in the area came together for the fair. Other than drawing attention to Wenshan's diverse culture and fine food, the event successfully marketed the area's famous tieguanyin tea and tea bamboo shoots. In addition to strong participation by visitors, the event also encouraged them to check out the scenic spots in the neighborhood and promoted tourism.

11. Taipei Hot Spring Festival

The Taipei Hot Spring Development Association, the Beitou District Office and the Department of Information and Tourism hosted “the 2011 Taipei Hot Spring Festival” between November 4 and 7. The event has become a priority every fall in Beitou. Beitou is known for its celebrated history of hot springs, and it continued the legacy by combining the input and efforts from Beitou residents. Among the programs were: the boisterous “a prayer for blessing ceremony for the hot spring resort,” the popular “classic hand puppet show by Liao Wenho,” the internationally storied “Ming Hwa Yuan Arts & Cultural Group,” “the Musical of Witches” that spotlighted Taiwanese history, “cultural experiences” that showcased traditional acrobats, the fun and lively “Beitou Tavern” and “a night of karaoke,” plus rides on “the hot spring shuttle,” and a tour on “Love in Beitou Guided Tour” for exploring Beitou and getting immersed in the area's rich culture to piece together Beitou's centennial memories. “The 2011 Taipei Hot Spring Festival” promoted citizen participation to investigate

An exchange activity performance that defines the hot spring cultural offerings in Beitou and Japan – the ceremony was awe-inspiring.
and explore the local specialties; it encouraged interdepartmental resource integration, supported local development, strengthened the utilization of borough resources, took advantage of the natural resources to build consensus, while fashioning a quality, cultural space with many activities that accentuate the area’s festivals and market Beitou's industries, in hopes of building a healthy and dynamic cityscape and thus improving Taipei's international image.

12. Wanhua Cultural Carnival

“Wanhua Cultural Carnival” consisted of two programs: the Jiarui and Ximen Cultural Fairs. The former was an annual folk celebration unique to southern Wanhua. To complement the circuit procession of local deities, the fair was held between April 14 and 16 at the plaza in front of Yangsheng Temple. The fair constituted traditional operas, the picking of green bean sprouts, a spread of dishes featuring green bean sprouts, marketing events for farm produces and seafood, community cultural activities, performances by aborigines, Hakkas, and disadvantaged groups. “Ximen Cultural Fair” was held between July 20 and September 30 that included five events: a “Charmed by Mengjia” photography contest, “a treasure hunt and obstacle race,” “a tour around the historic site in Wanhua,” “art and culture exhibitions” and “handicraft workshops.” The photography contest was further divided into two events: “I have a date with Ximen” was a collection of photos and “Blink – Wanhua So Lovely.” The treasure hunt and obstacle race was first launched in 2010 to encourage visitors to explore Ximen. “A tour around the historic site in Wanhua” was centered at Lungshan Temple to spotlight the night market, Qingshan Temple, Zushi Temple, and the Green Grass Lane, helping tourists to better know Mengjia as a history-rich town.

Conclusion

Religious ceremonials and ritual services have transcended spans of time through vicissitudes and evolution to become a natural part of modern lifestyles. They also indirectly represent a silent force to solidify the community. The Taipei City Government continues to honor the changes of the seasons by hosting an array of religious rituals now and in the future, while translating innovative thinking into traditional beliefs in addressing urban transformations to promote sophisticated religious cultures, revive these rituals and temple festivals with new ideas, and enrich these ceremonies with distinctive social influences and a cultural flair that is unique to Taipei.