

20 Religion



At a Glance

- High degree of religious tolerance
- Syncretic religious observances by majority of believers
- Ubiquity of religious symbols and practices in everyday life

The people of Taiwan enjoy complete freedom of religion, a right guaranteed by Articles 7 and 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of China and a fact confirmed by numerous outside observers, including the U.S. Department of State in its annual Report on International Religious Freedom. Taiwan today has one of the most religiously harmonious societies in the world.

Taiwan embraces a wide diversity of religious faiths. It is home to traditional beliefs, established religious traditions from other parts of the world as well as recently developed religions. The island has one of the world's highest densities of temples, and the majority of people—even those not formally subscribing to a religious belief or worshipping regularly at a particular temple—engage in spiritual practices originating from one or a number of faiths. Religious observances are not confined to temples in Taiwan; everyday life is peppered with religious customs, icons and rituals.

☉ A woman offers prayers at a temple in Taiwan. The nation is home to a wide variety of faiths, with Buddhism and Taoism claiming the most adherents.

Spiritual Landscape

Religious Pluralism

Taiwan's religious landscape is richly variegated. According to the Ministry of the Interior, as of December 2009, 1,684 religious and social associations were registered in Taiwan, of which 827 were registered at the central level and 857 listed at the local level. They belonged to 27 registered religions or religious groups (see table). While religious groups are not required to register with the government, those that do and also meet relevant regulations enjoy tax-exempt status.

The religious traditions that claim the most adherents in Taiwan—various Buddhist sects, folk religions, Taoism and other faiths that originated in mainland China—are largely polytheistic and syncretic. For example, the Bodhisattva Guan Yin 觀音 (see “Popular Deities” section), while originally a Buddhist deity, is also worshiped by Taoists and followers of folk religion. Followers of I-Kuan Tao 一貫道, meanwhile, revere Guan Yin as well as Jesus Christ and Mohammed.

As of December 2009, 15,118 places of worship were registered in Taiwan. Comparative figures for the number of followers of each of the various traditions are difficult to compile with accuracy, as many people customarily worship at the sanctuaries of several religions.

Nevertheless, a sizeable minority of people in Taiwan adhere to monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity, although Islam also has a following. Ancestor worship consonant with Confucian values remains widely observed in Taiwan.

Spiritual pursuits in Taiwan can also take the form of meditation and exercise. For example, Falun Dafa 法輪大法 (literally, “Dharma Wheel Great Law,” popularly known as Falun Gong 法輪功, or “Dharma

Wheel Discipline”), which is registered in Taiwan as a civic association, claims thousands of practitioners. *Qigong* 氣功, a set of exercises featuring slow, graceful martial arts movements and breathing techniques that are said to promote the circulation of *qi* 氣 (pneuma) in the body, is practiced by the group.

Historical Overview

Until four centuries ago, Taiwan was inhabited mainly by Austronesian peoples, whose religious beliefs consisted of a combination of animism and ancestor worship.

Registered Religious Groups and Categories

Baha'i Faith
 Buddhism
 Roman Catholicism
 Chinese Heritage and Moral Sources 玄門真宗
 Chinese Holy Religion 中華聖教
 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 Church of Scientology
 Confucianism 中國儒教會
 Hai Tze Tao 亥子道
 Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (or Unification Church)
 Huang Chung 黃中
 I-Kuan Tao 一貫道
 Islam
 Ism 太易教
 Li-ism 理教
 Maitreya Great Tao 彌勒大道
 Pre-cosmic Salvationism 先天救教
 Protestantism
 Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyodan (World Divine Light Organization) 世界真光文明教
 Taoism
 Tibetan Buddhism
 Tiender 天德教
 Tienti Teachings 天帝教
 Tien Tao 天道
 Tenrikyo
 Universe Mealler Faith 宇宙彌勒皇教
 Xuan Yuan Jiao 軒轅教

Source: Ministry of the Interior



Ornate Buddhist scriptures such as these give guidance on how to conduct oneself in life while also being beautiful works of art.

Non-indigenous religions were first introduced to Taiwan with the immigration of Han peoples from the southeastern provinces of the Chinese mainland (see Chapter 2, “People and Language”). European traders also brought new religions to Taiwan. Protestant missionaries accompanying the Dutch East India Company—which established posts in southwestern Taiwan beginning in 1624—proselytized to the Han and indigenous peoples they employed or encountered.

Catholic missionaries made their first appearance in 1626 on Taiwan’s northern shores when a Spanish expedition founded settlements in the vicinity of today’s Keelung City 基隆市 and Danshui Township 淡水鎮 in Taipei County 臺北縣. Associated with Spanish holdings in the Philippines, these settlements flourished until the Dutch drove the Spanish off the island in 1642.

Other forms of religion, including I-Kuan Tao and Islam, were introduced over the next three and a half centuries. The period after the end of World War II saw a new wave of religions arriving in Taiwan along with mainland immigrants who relocated to Taiwan with the Kuomintang

(KMT) 中國國民黨 government. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987, more religious groups emerged.

Major Religions

Buddhism

Immigrants from the Chinese coastal provinces of Fujian 福建 and Guangdong 廣東 brought Buddhism to Taiwan. One early version was *zhaijiao* 齋教 (vegetarian teaching), a form of lay Buddhism comprising several different sects dating back to the Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644). Each comprised its own mixture of elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Neo-Confucianism and folk religion, but all shared adherence to a vegetarian diet. In the latter half of the 17th century, Buddhist monks first arrived from Fujian. Temple construction began in Tainan 臺南 and progressed northward after the Ching 清 dynasty (1644-1912) took control of western Taiwan in 1683.

During the Japanese colonial era (1895-1945), Japanese Buddhist sects methodically disseminated their teachings among the Taiwanese people. Nevertheless, monks from the Chinese mainland

succeeded in establishing distinct ordination lineages in Taiwan. Their example inspired Taiwanese Buddhist organizations to engage more actively in the publication and distribution of religious tracts, establishment of schools and provision of social services.

Buddhism in Taiwan was further vitalized by the arrival of dharma masters among the wave of refugees who relocated to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s. During the period of martial law (1949-1987), Buddhist temples were urged to join the Buddhist Association of the ROC 中國佛教會—the authorized national organization for Buddhism in Taiwan—as the KMT government sought to re-establish Chinese Buddhist practices (such as celibacy and vegetarian diets) not required of monks following Japanese Buddhist traditions.

Vajrayāna Buddhism (commonly referred to as “Tantric Buddhism” by non-practitioners) is an esoteric sect that emphasizes the practice of meditation and other spiritual disciplines under the direction of a spiritual master. The earliest masters of Vajrayāna Buddhism to arrive in Taiwan were Zhangjia 章嘉 Khutughtu (the Mongolian term *khutughtu* signifies a reincarnated bodhisattva; for more on bodhisattvas, see “Popular Deities” section) and Kanjurwa Khutughtu, who had fled the violence of the Chinese Civil War. In 1959, Vajrayāna Buddhist masters Gelek Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche (the Tibetan term *rinpoche* refers to a highly revered teacher believed to be a reincarnated monastery abbot) came to Taiwan, where they have been teaching ever since.

Vajrayāna Buddhist practices gained popularity in Taiwan in the 1980s with the arrival of lamas who fled a crackdown by the Beijing authorities in Tibet. These individuals have since set up teaching

centers in Taiwan. In 1997, the Tibet Religious Foundation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 達賴喇嘛西藏宗教基金會 was established in Taipei.

Since the advent of democracy, the number of Buddhist organizations has multiplied rapidly, and the scope of their activities has grown. The following people have been especially influential in Taiwan’s Buddhist community. They are known for placing emphasis on service to humanity as well as on personal spiritual discipline:

- Master Cheng Yen 證嚴法師 (1937-) founded the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation 佛教慈濟慈善事業基金會 in Hualien 花蓮 in 1966. Her foundation focuses on humanitarian, educational, cultural and medical activities. Popularly known as Tzu Chi, the organization has been internationally lauded for its ability to mobilize volunteers and funds and for distributing relief supplies and aid to victims of natural disasters worldwide. Buddhist Tzu Chi General Hospital 佛教慈濟綜合醫院, Tzu Chi University 慈濟大學, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Stem Cells Center 佛教慈濟骨髓幹細胞中心和 Da Ai Television 大愛電視 are among the institutions operated by Tzu Chi in Taiwan.
- Master Hsing Yun 星雲法師 (1927-) established the Fo Guang Shan (FGS) Monastery 佛光山 and the Buddha’s Light International Association 國際佛教會世界總會 in Kaohsiung 高雄 in 1967. Since then, the order has founded educational institutions and more than 200 temples across the country. In addition to setting up Fo Guang University 佛光大學 in Yilan County 宜蘭縣 and Nanhua University 南華大學 in Chiayi County 嘉義縣, the order has set up the online FGS Tienyen Buddhist eCollege 佛光山天眼網路佛學院 and community colleges islandwide that offer continuing education in a variety of fields. It also reaches the

wider public through its Beautiful Life Television 人間衛視 and a newspaper, the *Merit Times* 人間福報.

- Master Sheng Yen 聖嚴法師 (1931-2009) founded the organization Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) 法鼓山 in Taipei County. DDM has since established many chapters in Taiwan and around the world. A founding member and the first chair of the World Council of Religious Leaders, Master Sheng Yen also established Buddhist educational institutions and published over a hundred books on Buddhist doctrines.
- Master Wei Chueh 惟覺法師 (1928-) started out by teaching Zen (*chan* 禪) Buddhism to a small group of people at his retreat in Wanli Township 萬里鄉, Taipei County. As his teachings drew more attention and followers, Master Wei Chueh built his first missionary base, the Ling Quan Chan Monastery 靈泉寺, near his retreat. Later, he built a larger temple, the Chung Tai Chan Monastery 中台禪寺, in Nantou County 南投縣 to accommodate his growing number of followers and to serve as the mission's headquarters. The monastery has over 90 meditation centers in Taiwan and about a dozen abroad.
- Master Hsin Tao 心道法師 (1948-) founded the Ling Jiou Mountain Buddhist Society 靈鷲山佛教教團, which has branches in countries across Asia. He is most famous for establishing the Museum of World Religions 世界宗教博物館 in Taipei County in 2001. He is also the founder of the Global Family for Love and Peace 愛與和平地球家, an international nongovernmental organization that promotes inter-religious cooperation and engages in humanitarian relief efforts.

Taoism

“Taoism” can refer both to religious Taoism (*daojiao* 道教) and philosophical Taoism (*daoia* 道家). Philosophical

Taoism is an exegesis of the origins of the cosmos and humanity's place in it, based primarily on *Tao Te Ching* 道德經 (teachings of Lao Tzu 老子, who lived during the sixth century B.C. and was a contemporary of Confucius 孔子) and the writings of Chuang Tzu 莊子 (who lived in the fourth century B.C.).

The *Tao* (often written *Dao*) 道, literally meaning “way” or “path,” is generally seen as a vital, primordial force that flows through the entire universe. Taoist thought emphasizes *wu wei* 無為 (meaning “non-doing” or action that does not involve struggle), spontaneity, individual freedom, mystical experience and living in harmony with nature and the *Tao*.

Religious Taoism, on the other hand, is a polytheistic tradition with a corpus of scriptures and lively, colorful rituals that began taking shape in China around the first century A.D. It combines elements of Lao Tzu's philosophy with ideas from other schools of thought that emphasize the attainment of immortality. Lao Tzu and other sages are honored as deities. Since its introduction to Taiwan in the 17th century, religious Taoism has assimilated many folk deities and traditions.

In modern times, Taoism in Taiwan was invigorated by the arrival of Taoist priests from China following World War II. Among them was 63rd-generation leader Zhang Enpu 張恩溥 of Tianshi Jiao 天師教 (also called Zhengyi Jiao 正一教), which has become one of the most popular Taoist sects. The founder, Zhang Daoling 張道陵, who lived during the Eastern Han 東漢 dynasty (25-220), is worshiped as the Heavenly Teacher 天師.

With the establishment by Zhang Enpu of a Taoist fellowship in 1950 and the founding of the Taoism Society of the ROC 中華民國道教會 in 1966, Taoism became a more organized religion in Taiwan. As with Buddhism, over the past several decades, some Taoist groups have



Believers gather on a Sunday morning in a Catholic church in Taipei to celebrate Mass. Catholicism has a history of nearly 400 years in Taiwan, having been brought to the island by the Spanish in the 17th century.

become increasingly involved in social service and dedicated to conveying a more sophisticated understanding of Taoism’s philosophical underpinnings and of various disciplines aimed at promoting health and enlightenment.

I-Kuan Tao

I-Kuan Tao, which might be translated as the “all-encompassing way,” evolved from Xiantian Tao 先天道 founded by Huang De-hui 黃德輝 in 17th-century China. First brought to Taiwan by adherents after World War II, I-Kuan Tao quickly attracted a substantial following.

I-Kuan Tao teaches that one *Tao* underlies every religion. Its followers revere a number of personages and deities, including Lao Tzu, Confucius, Sakyamuni Buddha, Jesus Christ and Mohammed—above all of whom is Ming Ming Shang Di 明明上帝 (God of Clarity). Adherents also practice various Confucian rituals and hold small group services at family shrines. Personal sublimation and a

life of service are key tenets in the moral philosophy of this religion, which teaches the principles underlying popular religious practices.

Like Buddhism, I-Kuan Tao advocates a vegetarian diet, and many vegetarian restaurants in Taiwan are run by its followers. The faith is active across the globe, with I-Kuan Tao’s world headquarters having been established in 1996 in El Monte, California.

Christianity

The first Spanish Dominican missionaries came to Taiwan in 1619. But Catholic and Protestant missionary work did not begin in earnest until the middle of the 19th century during the waning years of Ching rule. Today, a high proportion of indigenous people are Catholic, thanks to missionaries’ strong focus on their communities.

In 1952, the Holy See’s envoy to the ROC moved from Hong Kong to Taiwan, after which point he helped to establish churches and attract followers. In 1967,

the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference 天主教會臺灣地區主教團, the highest managing body for Catholic affairs in Taiwan, was established in Taipei. The conference is currently presided over by Archbishop John Hung 洪山川.

Among Protestant denominations, the Presbyterian Church has attained prominence in Taiwan in part due to the early work of such missionaries as Canadian physician-cum-pastor George L. MacKay. Rev. MacKay arrived in Taiwan in 1871 and devoted the rest of his life to improving the lives of the island's inhabitants. In 1879, he set up Taiwan's first hospital of Western medicine in Danshui, where he also founded Oxford College 牛津學堂 to train local missionaries.

In 1884, Rev. MacKay established Taiwan's first modern all-girls' school, the Danshui Girls' School 淡水女學堂. A year later, the Presbyterian Church established Taiwan's first Western-style middle school in Tainan, present-day Chang Jung Senior High School 長榮高級中學.

During the early years of the Japanese occupation, the colonial government adopted a laissez-faire policy toward Christianity and allowed Japanese Protestant denominations to establish churches in Taiwan. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), more control over religious groups was exercised and the colonial government put Western Catholic missionaries under strict surveillance, forbidding them from carrying out missionary work in local communities.

Christianity developed in new directions after World War II, with an influx of Christian clergy and believers, both Protestant and Catholic, arriving from mainland China. By providing various social services (with aid from Christian churches abroad) such as distributing relief supplies, Christianity spread rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s,

with the number of Catholic believers growing over tenfold and Protestant denominations increasing from three to around 40. Besides Christian denominations originating in the West, Protestant churches in Taiwan include "independent churches," either founded in mainland China before 1949 by Chinese Christians (such as True Jesus Church 真耶穌教會) or established in Taiwan after 1949 (such as Bread of Life Christian Church 靈糧堂).

Islam

Islam first came to Taiwan about 300 years ago with migrants from Quanzhou 泉州 in mainland China's Fujian Province. Over the years, up to the period of Japanese colonial rule, this community gradually shrank through intermarriage or the adoption of other customs. World War II and the colonial government's strict control over religious activities resulted in the severing of ties between Muslims across the Taiwan Strait, leading to the shrinking of the island's Muslim population.

The second wave of Muslim immigration took place following the war. First were those who came to Taiwan for business, followed by those who relocated with the KMT government. During the 1960s and 1970s, the government brought to Taiwan groups of soldiers, many of them Muslim, who had continued fighting Chinese Communist forces after 1949 from bases in Myanmar.

In recent years, the Muslim community has expanded with the arrival of thousands of Indonesian guest workers and foreign students studying in Taiwan.

Muslims have formed several organizations to help resolve issues resulting from the needs of religious practice. Primary among these is the Chinese Muslim Association (CMA) 中國回教協會, which oversees halal food certification. The



The Taipei Grand Mosque is the largest mosque in Taiwan. It opened its doors in 1960 with the financial backing of the ROC and Saudi governments as well as funding from Muslims around the world.

CMA has also played a supporting role in the nation's diplomacy with Muslim countries. Its headquarters is located at the Taipei Grand Mosque (TGM) 臺北清真寺, which was built in 1960 and has been designated a religious heritage site. Besides the TGM, Taiwan's Muslim community is also served by the Taipei Cultural Mosque 臺北文化清真寺 as well as by mosques in Taoyuan 桃園, Taichung 臺中, Tainan and Kaohsiung.

Folk Religion

Folk religion, or popular religion, plays a prominent role in religious life. Its roots are in traditional Chinese religious beliefs that are polytheistic and honor various seasonal customs and festivals. When Han peoples from southeastern China began to migrate to Taiwan during the 17th century, they brought with them their beliefs, which spread gradually, evolved into a unique form and became an important part of people's lives.

The vast array of deities traditionally worshiped in Taiwan forms a system that resembles the political structure and government bureaucracy of imperial China. It consists of hundreds of male and female deities from the Taoist and Buddhist pantheons and Chinese legends as well as apotheosized historical figures noted for their bravery or virtue. Related practices are a syncretistic combination of Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian ceremonies, as well as ancestor worship. While many adherents of folk religions may consider themselves primarily Taoist or Buddhist, the worship of deities outside their chosen religion is consistent with the traditional cultural understanding of "religion" in Taiwan that does not demand exclusive adherence to a single set of traditions.

Tradition has it that the universe is divided into three realms: deities; humans and deities sent to protect humans; and spirits and ghosts. The supreme deity is the Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝, who presides over a deistic hierarchy similar to a traditional Chinese bureaucracy. There are many deities under him, who manage various affairs in the universe. At the central level, for instance, Confucius and Wen-chang Di 文昌帝 (Emperor of Prospering Culture) are in charge of education, Shen-nong 神農 manages agriculture and medicine, Ma Zu 媽祖 looks after maritime

affairs, Taizi Ye 太子爺 (Lord Prince) wards off evil and Wang Ye 王爺 keeps away pestilence. At the local level, Cheng Huang 城隍 and the tutelary deity Tudi Gong 土地公 administer justice. Certain communities also honor local patron deities. For example, Lord Kaizhang 開漳聖王 is mostly worshiped by Holo immigrants from Fujian's Zhangzhou 漳州 area, while the Hakkas honor the Lords of the Three Mountains 三山國王.

Popular Deities

The following are some of the most popular deities in Taiwan, as evidenced by their icons' presence in many temples:

Jade Emperor

The supreme ruler of heaven in Chinese tradition, popularly called the Jade Emperor, has the power to grant titles to the spirits of outstanding individuals and elevate them to the status of deity. Under his direction, a legion of deities manages the affairs of heaven and all realms of existence below it. His image and those of the deities under his direction can be found in many Taoist temples.

Ma Zu

Ma Zu (Maternal Ancestor) is the deified spirit of Lin Mo-niang 林默娘, a woman reputed to have lived on Meizhou Island 湄州島 off the coast of Fujian Province sometime during the Sung 宋 dynasty (960-1279). She is believed to have employed supernatural powers during and after her lifetime to cure the ill and save people from imminent danger, especially sailors and fishermen at sea. Accordingly, she is also known as the Sea Goddess.

The enormous popularity of Ma Zu in Taiwan is evidenced by the more than 400 temples dedicated to her and by processions in which her icon is carried

on a palanquin to spread her blessings. Such spectacles are seen all over the island, and the largest is the Dajia Ma Zu Pilgrimage 大甲媽祖遶境, which snakes through several counties in central and southern Taiwan for eight or nine days in the third lunar month, which usually begins in March or April.

Tudi Gong

Ubiquitous in Taiwan—along pathways in the countryside and down side streets in cities—are relatively small temples and shrines (some standing less than half a meter high) that house icons depicting a smiling, bearded old man, typically seated and holding a staff. This is the tutelary or earth deity known as Tudi Gong.

A single deity in essence, he has myriad spirit avatars whose mission is to look after local tracts of land and the people residing on them. Though occupying a low position in the divine bureaucracy, this guardian spirit is one of the most popular divinities and his likeness occupies an honored place on many a family altar.

Cheng Huang

Another being said to have multiple avatars is Cheng Huang, the City Deity, who is mandated by the Jade Emperor to guard particular cities against attack and protect their inhabitants from evil. Legend has it that the city deity avatars were demigods who served the people during their lifetimes, had compassion for those in danger and protected people from being dragged into the underworld by evil ghosts. It was for this demonstration of kindness that such righteous individuals were ultimately deified.

Zhu Sheng Niang-niang

When souls are ready for reincarnation, it is up to Zhu Sheng Niang-niang

註生娘娘 (Birth Registry Matron) to decide who their parents will be and register the event. She is commonly depicted as a woman holding an open book in one hand and a calligraphy brush in the other. Couples pray to her in the hope that they will have gifted and healthy children.

Guan Gong

Guan Yu 關羽, a legendary general in the Three Kingdoms 三國 period (221-280), is popularly known and worshiped by more than one sect as Guan Gong. According to legend, he fought alongside two other heroic men to defend the Eastern Han dynasty. When captured by the enemy, he refused to defect and was beheaded.

Guan Gong is thus honored as a paragon of loyalty, righteousness and courage and is regarded as the patron deity of soldiers, policemen and businessmen. His image is easily recognizable for having a red face and flowing sable beard.

Wang Ye

In Taiwan, the name Wang Ye is a generic term denoting some 360 “lords of pestilence,” whose lives before obtaining immortality are recounted in hundreds of tales. The lords are generally described as having been people of great merit who, upon dying, were charged by the Jade Emperor with protecting mankind from evil spirits and epidemics.

Worship rituals for this celestial legion of guardians differ with locale and time of year. One of the best-known rites for driving away pestilence, usually held in spring and autumn, is called Burning Wang Ye’s Boat 燒王船. As an offering to the lords of pestilence, a life-size wood-and-paper boat is burned along with spirit money, which makes up the vessel’s cargo as well as the sea upon which it sails.

Guan Yin

Guan Yin is worshiped as the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is an enlightened being who refrains from entering nirvana and ending the painful cycle of rebirth, choosing instead to continue reincarnating in order to help others on the path to enlightenment. Indeed, Guan Yin’s full name (Guan Shiyin 觀世音) means “one who hears the cries of the world,” and this deity is often portrayed as having multiple eyes and a thousand arms with which to reach out to help all sentient beings. Buddhist deities such as Guan Yin are often perceived of as being a spiritual consciousness that can manifest in the form of human beings, animals and objects, rather than as a single soul bound to one body.

Guan Yin is conceived of as female in areas within the sphere of Chinese cultural influence, including mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, the Koreas and Vietnam. Scholars of Buddhism, however, generally agree that Guan Yin is the equivalent of Avalokitesvara (Sanskrit, “lord who looks in all directions”), a bodhisattva revered in the Indian Buddhist tradition before Buddhism was introduced to China in the first century, who is depicted as male, yet capable of assuming different forms. The male manifestations of Guan Yin symbolize wisdom of the Bodhisattva while the female aspect manifests motherly tenderness and mercy.

Temple Practices

Temples serve as both houses of worship as well as community centers, especially in rural areas. At most Taiwanese temples, an assemblage of deities from the Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and folk traditions is honored.

Special ceremonies are held on deities’ birthdays and apotheosis days, as

well as when prayers for a blessing are made on behalf of the community. Such carnival-like events are generally referred to as temple festivals, and often consist of welcoming the deities, an inspection tour by the divinities being honored, the chanting of sutras, street parades and outdoor stage performances of Taiwanese opera or glove puppet shows to entertain the deities (see Chapter 17, “Culture”). A parade usually comprises artistically decorated vehicles carrying people dressed as legendary characters, music troupes, traditional lion and dragon dances, stilt walking and displays by the Eight Generals 八家將 (men playing the role of deities dressed in fierce face paint; they patrol in front of higher-ranking deities to clear the road of wandering ghosts). Feasts are prepared in thanksgiving to deities for their blessing and protection and, during Ghost Month 鬼月 (the seventh lunar month), to appease wandering ghosts (see also Chapter 18, “Tourism”).

Many unique religious events organized by temples have become cultural and tourist attractions for their host cities. Such festivals include the Release of Water Lanterns 放水燈 in Keelung during Ghost Month, the Burning of Wang Ye’s Boat in Donggang 東港 and Xigang 西港, and the Bombing of Han Dan 炸寒單 with firecrackers in Taitung 臺東.

Rather than attending regular religious services at a set location, most people in Taiwan visit a temple whenever they feel the need to seek divine assistance. They may choose a temple that honors a favorite deity, or stop by a shrine that is close to home or on the way to work. Rituals common to most Taoist, Buddhist and folk religion temples include the following:

- Casting divination blocks 擲筊 is a ritual followed when seeking divine answers to questions. Kneeling in front of an altar, the supplicant drops a pair of

crescent-shaped wooden blocks on the temple floor. One side of each block is rounded, the other flat. An affirmative answer is indicated when the blocks land with one rounded and one flat side facing upward, while a negative answer is indicated when both rounded sides land face up. An “undecided” or “no answer” response is received when both flat sides land face up. According to common practice, an answer can only be considered definite when the same answer is indicated three times in a row.

- Drawing divination sticks 求籤 is another way of obtaining divine guidance. About 60 or 100 numbered sticks are placed in a cylindrical container and shaken. The stick that jumps out first or protrudes the most is selected. The supplicant then consults an oracular verse and commentary printed on a slip of paper bearing the same number as the stick. In some traditions, divination blocks are cast to confirm that the correct stick was selected.
- *Burning spirit money* 燒金紙 is a rite commonly performed when praying to or for the spirits of ancestors or others on special occasions, including funerals, festival days and days recommended in lunar calendar almanacs. The square-shaped paper money, usually with slips of thin gold- or silver-colored foil glued to the center, is folded in half before being burned. It is believed that money thus offered to the intended spirits will enhance the comfort of their afterlives and consequently secure their help as guardians or, at least, enable them to rest in peace so that they will not haunt the living.
- *Burning incense and making food offerings* to deities or ancestral spirits is another way of seeking their assistance. Devotees usually light joss sticks and place offerings of fresh fruit and other foods on an altar.

Religious Study

Several private institutions of higher learning affiliated with Christian or Buddhist organizations offer religious studies programs. These include Aletheia University 真理大學, Tunghai University 東海大學, Chung Yuan Christian University 中原大學 and Chang Jung Christian University 長榮大學, all of which are Protestant; Fu Jen Catholic University 輔仁大學; as well as Fo Guang University, Huafan University 華梵大學, Hsuan Chuang University 玄奘大學, Nanhua University and Tzu Chi

University, which are Buddhist. National Chengchi University 國立政治大學, a public institution, also offers a graduate program in religious studies and has a center for Islamic studies.

The Private Schools Act 私立學校法 was amended in 2004 to allow seminaries and monasteries whose educational programs meet Ministry of Education standards to apply for accreditation to grant officially recognized college degrees. This has enhanced their ability to attract students.

RELATED WEBSITES

- ➔ Ministry of the Interior: <http://www.moi.gov.tw>
- ➔ Ministry of Education: <http://www.moe.gov.tw>
- ➔ Museum of World Religions: <http://www.mwr.org.tw>
- ➔ Taoism Society of the ROC: <http://www.chinesetaoism.org>
- ➔ Buddhist Association of the ROC: <http://www.baroc.com.tw>
- ➔ Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation: <http://www.tzuchi.org>
- ➔ Fo Guang Shan Monastery: <http://www.fgs.org.tw>
- ➔ Dharma Drum Mountain: <http://www.ddm.org.tw>
- ➔ Chung Tai Chan Monastery: <http://www.ctworld.org.tw>
- ➔ Ling Jiou Mountain Buddhist Society: <http://www.093.org.tw>
- ➔ Tibet Religious Foundation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama: <http://www.tibet.org.tw>
- ➔ Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference: <http://www.catholic.org.tw>
- ➔ Presbyterian Church in Taiwan: <http://www.pct.org.tw>
- ➔ Taipei Grand Mosque: <http://www.taipeimosque.org.tw>
- ➔ Global Family for Love and Peace: <http://www.gflp.org>