

Temple disruptions a matter of selfishness

Written by Jeremy Wang 王傑

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A temple festival held by the Monga Qingshan Temple (龍山寺) in Taipei's Wanhua District (萬華) this month went on for three days, with firecrackers being set off even in the middle of the night.

Noisy crowds, street pollution, bloody fights, a building set alight by fireworks and even an alleged kidnapping caused a great deal of resentment among locals who were not among the worshipers.

More than 200 complaints were lodged about the pollution and noise, while most people just put up with it or complained about it online.

Even Minister of the Interior Hsu Kuo-yung (徐國元) and independent Legislator Freddy Lim (林錫山), who is seen as a leading sponsor of the festival, felt compelled to make statements, while writers and historians also aired their views.

Problems concerning folk beliefs and religion have come to the fore all over Taiwan in the past few years.

They have become mixed up with gangsters, entertainment and politics.

Temple festivals take up road space as marquees are set up. They hold up traffic, attract noisy crowds and cause pollution. Rival gangs often fight over who gets to carry the idols around on palanquins.

Religion is essentially about urging people to do good, so it is a matter of individual freedom, but it is also a private affair that should not affect other people.

However, it would be hard to find anywhere else like Taiwan, where temples great and small

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hold ceremonies at all times of the year with *din tao* (醮) religious performances, incense burning, fireworks and amplified sutra recitals, forcing their beliefs down other people's throats.

This kind of culture is simply selfish.

The essence of Western civilization is unselfishness, law abidance and respect for others.

In a civilized society, the most important thing is to not inconvenience others.

That is why people say sorry if they accidentally touch someone and why they speak in hushed tones in public places. Such restraint is rare in our culture.

The idea in Taiwan is that I must let you know which god or gods I believe in. You have to know when my family is mourning the dead, and you have to hear whatever music I am listening to.

The illegal structures I build, the car I park anywhere I like, the banned substances I add to foods — as long as I can make money or gain some other benefit, I do not care whether it has a negative effect on you.

Taiwan suffers from selfishness and a lack of public ethics. Laws are badly formulated and poorly enforced, and many people knowingly break them.

The lawless temple culture only encourages this mentality.

Government officials imagine that all religions are the same. They do not understand this kind of selfish temple festival culture or seek to guide folk culture in a better direction. They only know how to curry favor with the masses.

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That would explain why President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Dec. 6 went to the Monga Qingshan Temple to pray and help carry a palanquin, apparently unaware of the controversy.

A legislator performed songs in the procession, but later said that he did not set off any firecrackers.

It brings to mind how a Democratic Progressive Party legislator and a Cabinet minister voiced their support for migrant workers' Sunday Mass gatherings at Taipei Railway Station, apparently unaware that they are blocking Taiwan's progress toward civilization.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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