

## Visual Identity Design in Taiwan's Religious Branding Events: An Analysis of Place Branding Strategies

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### Abstract

Design plays a significant role in shaping national economies, cultures, and societies. Local governments worldwide are increasingly leveraging design to establish distinctive values and reinforce cultural identity. This study examines the visual identity of major Taiwanese folk religious events through literature review, case analysis, and expert interviews, with the aim of exploring branding and promotional models for cultural activities. The research analyzed five cases designated as “Important Traditional Folk Customs” under Taiwan’s National Intangible Cultural Heritage, along with one general folk custom. These cases were assessed in terms of brand visual identity and integrated marketing communication. Findings show that the general folk custom Daxi Daxi performed strongest across five indicators—basic identity system, visual extensions, brand strength, IP development, and integrated marketing communication—demonstrating a comprehensive structure and international potential. Among the heritage cases, the Donggang King Boat Ceremony revealed strong local symbolism and emerging IP development. Expert interviews emphasized that local brand construction requires early strategic planning, leadership by key figures, institutional organization, and continuity of identity systems. Sustainable development further depends on balancing local distinctiveness, narrative storytelling, and visual IP strategies. To ensure long-term success, political interference should be minimized while collaboration between public and private sectors should be promoted. These findings provide insights into strengthening local culture, advancing place marketing, and enhancing the enduring impact of cultural branding.

*Keywords:* brand identity, local revitalization, religious festivals, visual design

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## Introduction

Taiwan regards design as a core competitive force for advancing national economic, cultural, and social development. Within the policy framework of “Design-Driven Local Revitalization,” the government has sought to employ design as a strategic intervention tool to systematically examine and integrate local resources, including land, industry, and people. By identifying core values and reinforcing local spirit, this approach aims to shape distinctive regional characteristics and enhance place-based competitive advantages (Chen, 2018).

Under this policy orientation, religious culture serving as a crucial mechanism of social cohesion and a form of cultural identity in Taiwanese society has demonstrated significant cultural vitality and developmental potential. Religious events not only function as expressions of faith but also operate as culturally embedded platforms through which local identity, collective memory, and place meaning are communicated and reinforced. Consequently, religious branding events have become an important context in which visual identity design contributes to place branding strategies, mediating between tradition, contemporary design practices, and regional development.

Taiwan is home to more than 12,000 existing temples, and its dense and diverse religious festivals are not only deeply embedded in everyday life but have also gradually become important resources for government initiatives in cultural industries and local tourism development (Chang & Chuang, 2021). These religious celebrations serve as vital cultural practices that sustain community bonds and local traditions while simultaneously contributing to regional economic and cultural value.

However, with the rapid advancement of information technology and shifts in contemporary lifestyles, religious festivals that rely solely on conventional rituals and traditional modes of expression may struggle to effectively engage younger generations and participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Under these circumstances, a critical challenge emerges: how to introduce branding thinking and design strategies while preserving the uniqueness and sacredness of religious culture in order to strengthen cultural communication and visual identity. Addressing this issue is essential for facilitating intergenerational transmission and expanding the cultural reach of religious events in an increasingly globalized and media-saturated environment.

A review of prior practices in place brand management and visual identity design reveals that most initiatives have been confined to single events or short-term, marketing-oriented objectives. Such approaches often lack holistic and long-term branding strategies and fail to fully leverage the potential of visual design in cross-media extension and the construction of cultural meaning. As a result, visual identity is frequently treated as a supplementary promotional tool rather than as a strategic mechanism for sustaining place-based cultural value.

In response to these limitations, this study adopts a design-centered perspective to examine the branding processes and visual design implementation models of major folk religious events in Taiwan. Methodologically, the research integrates a theoretical review of relevant literature with case studies and expert interviews to identify key dimensions and influencing factors in local cultural brand design. Through this approach, the study seeks to address gaps in existing scholarship on place-based cultural branding and to provide local governments and related industries with concrete and actionable strategic references for advancing place marketing and brand development initiatives.

## Literature Review

### Local Culture

Culture refers to the totality of human ways of life and encompasses the beliefs, values, behaviors, and material expressions of a particular social group. It is not a static entity but a continuously generated process—one that is socially constructed through interaction, acquired through learning, and sustained as a mechanism for maintaining group boundaries. Culture exists through people and evolves alongside human society; it is collectively created through long-term social interaction among members of a community (Lan & Chiu, 2008). As such, culture functions as a vital medium through which meaning is produced, shared, and negotiated within society.

In recent years, social challenges such as population aging, negative population growth, labor force decline, excessive concentration of populations in metropolitan areas, uneven distribution of human resources, and stagnation in local economic development have brought renewed attention to the concept of place or region. The notion of place encompasses multiple dimensions, including geography, culture, nationhood, ethnicity, and historical context (Chung et al., 2013). Over time, the infrastructure and economic development of a city or region interact with social and historical processes to shape distinctive regional characteristics. These characteristics gradually form what is referred to as local culture—a unique cultural identity embedded within a specific place (Tseng et al., 2014).

The elements and characteristics of culture contribute to the stability and predictability of social interaction, enabling social members to interpret the meanings behind others' speech and actions. In this sense, culture serves as a critical intermediary between individuals and society, facilitating mutual understanding and sustaining collective life.

Kunzmann (2004) emphasized the close relationship between culture and urban development and planning, arguing that culture—manifested through a city's history, architecture, infrastructure, and events—plays a critical role in shaping a distinctive urban image and functions as a key asset in city promotion. From this perspective, culture not only reflects a city's past but also actively contributes to the construction of its contemporary identity and future development strategies.

Similarly, Kavartzis (2005) asserted that culture strengthens urban distinctiveness and highlighted place identity as a crucial issue in the era of globalization. Beyond physical and geographical features, cultural content represents the final stronghold of place identity, while art is regarded as the only local asset capable of expressing such differentiation in a visible and communicable form. Culture thus serves as a fundamental force in sustaining collective cohesion and forming local networks that support social interaction and shared meaning.

In this context, culture can be defined as a system of meaning composed of symbols, rituals, values, and ideologies through which groups construct identity, reinforce social bonds, and articulate their sense of place.

### Religious Culture in Taiwan

Taiwan is an immigrant society predominantly composed of Han Chinese, characterized by a highly diverse ethnic structure. According to statistical data reported by Wang (2023), Minnan

people account for approximately 72% of the total population, followed by mainland Chinese descendants at 13%, Hakka people at 11%, Indigenous peoples at 3%, and new immigrant populations at around 1%. Through historical migration, everyday practices, and patterns of social interaction, these ethnic groups have gradually developed distinct belief systems and religious cultures.

Among them, the Minnan and Hakka groups—both belonging to the Han Chinese population—exhibit particularly frequent and diverse religious activities due to their large population bases. Temples associated with these traditions are widely distributed across Taiwan, functioning not only as primary sites for religious practice but also as central spaces for emotional bonding, community cohesion, and the transmission of collective cultural memory. As such, religious sites and activities play a pivotal role in sustaining local social networks and reinforcing place-based cultural identity within Taiwanese society.

Whether manifested through everyday rituals of prayer and blessing or through collective religious events such as deity birthdays and seasonal festivals, religious practices in Taiwan reflect the deep-rooted belief systems and shared value structures of local communities. For local societies, religious belief serves not only a spiritual function by providing emotional stability and psychological reassurance, but also operates as a driving force for local development, the preservation of cultural knowledge, and the integration of foundational community resources (Chang, 2013). Consequently, religious culture has become a critical element for understanding the social structure and cultural dynamics of local communities in Taiwan.

From a broader developmental perspective, Taiwan currently hosts approximately fifteen representative Minnan and Hakka religious folk events distributed from north to south across the island. Among these, five have been officially designated by the Ministry of Culture as National Important Intangible Cultural Heritage. These include the Keelung Ghost Festival, the Baishatun Mazu Pilgrimage, the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage, the Liufang Mazu Over-the-Fire Ritual in Yunlin, and the Donggang King Boat Festival (Network Temperature Index, 2023). Beyond their ritualistic and religious dimensions, these events embody the long-term cultural practices and collective memories accumulated by local communities, highlighting their significance as living cultural heritage within Taiwan's religious landscape.

In addition, although the Birthday Celebration of Guan Sheng Emperor at Daxi Puji Temple in the Taoyuan area is classified as a general folk religious event, it represents the largest Guan Gong procession festival in northern Taiwan. For decades, it has been regarded by local residents as one of the most important local festivities, second only to the Lunar New Year. Since 2018, the Daxi district has adopted "*Daxidaxi*" as its core conceptual framework, seeking to integrate traditional religious rituals with contemporary design language. Through the systematic application of visual identity design, event planning, and integrated brand communication strategies, the festival has gradually developed into a highly recognizable religious-based local cultural brand.

Positioned as "a city festival that traverses contemporary design and folk belief" (Taiwan Good News, 2016), this transformation has not only rearticulated religious folk practices through a contemporary visual and experiential form but has also successfully attracted the attention of younger generations and cross-disciplinary audiences. As a result, the *Daxidaxi* initiative has emerged as one of the most representative recent cases in Taiwan that demonstrates the integration of religious culture and design intervention. Its visual transformation and branding

strategies offer new perspectives and practical possibilities for the development of religious folk traditions in Taiwan, particularly in relation to place branding, cultural innovation, and sustainable cultural management.

## Methods

### Case Study Method

Patton (2002) argued that when a research topic concerns an emerging phenomenon within a society, case selection should prioritize information-rich cases that can provide substantial insight into the research problem. As this study focuses on the branding of religious culture—an emerging social phenomenon that has attracted increasing attention in recent years—a multiple case study approach is considered appropriate. Accordingly, purposeful sampling was adopted as the primary strategy for case selection.

In terms of selection criteria, this study considered whether the cases had accumulated a certain level of public recognition within local marketing practices and whether the associated religious folk events had been held continuously for more than five iterations. These criteria were applied to ensure that the branding practices under investigation exhibited relatively stable developmental trajectories and sufficient observational value. Based on these principles, six cases were selected, encompassing both general and significant folk religious events within the Minnan and Hakka cultural contexts in Taiwan.

The general folk religious event includes Case A: The Birthday Celebration of Guan Sheng Emperor at Daxi Puji Temple. The significant folk religious events comprise five cases that have been officially designated as National Important Intangible Cultural Heritage: Case B: The Keelung Ghost Festival, Case C: The Baishatun Mazu Pilgrimage, Case D: The Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage, Case E: The Liufang Mazu Over-the-Fire Ritual in Yunlin, and Case F: The Donggang King Boat Festival. A summary of the basic information for all six cases is presented in Table 1.

**Figure 1**

*Basic Information of the Selected Cases*



<p><b>Case C</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Important Intangible Cultural Asset</li> <li>● Baishatun Mazu Pilgrimage (“Pink Supercar”)</li> </ul>  <p>2020 2021</p> <p>2022 2023</p> <p>2024 2025</p>	<p><b>Case D</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Important Intangible Cultural Asset</li> <li>● Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage-one of Taiwan’s largest religious events.</li> </ul>  <p>2020 2022</p> <p>2021</p> <p>2023 2024 2025</p>
<p><b>Case E</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Important Intangible Cultural Asset</li> <li>● Liufang Mazu Pilgrimage</li> </ul>  <p>2020 2021 2022</p> <p>2023 2024 2025</p>	<p><b>Case F</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Important Intangible Cultural Asset</li> <li>● Held once every three years</li> <li>● King Boat Festival (Wangye Peace Ritual)</li> </ul>  <p>2018 2021</p> <p>2024</p>

**Expert Interviews**

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) conceptualized interviews as a specific form of conversation through which knowledge is generated via interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Similarly, Kumar (2014) highlighted several advantages of the interview method, including its flexibility, the researcher’s ability to control the interview context, a high response rate, and its effectiveness in supplementing data collection.

In this study, expert interviews were conducted with stakeholders possessing professional expertise in design and practical experience in local brand development. A total of three experts were interviewed, each of whom had been directly involved in local branding or place-based design projects. Through these interviews, the study sought to gain in-depth insights into the

branding operations, design strategies, and key factors involved in the construction of religious cultural brands.

## Results

### Visual Identity Analysis of the Case Events

The analytical framework adopted in this study was developed with reference to the theories proposed by Wang (2019) and Batra and Keller (2016) and was subsequently revised to suit the objectives of this research. The framework comprises two main dimensions: Brand Design Capability and Integrated Marketing Communication Capability.

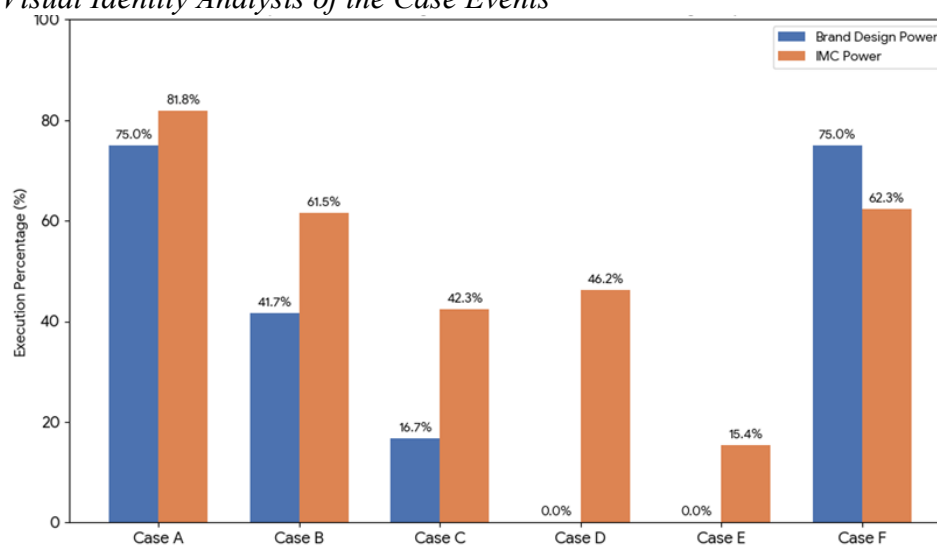
The analytical items under Brand Design Capability include the logo, logotype, color scheme, and the translation of symbolic imagery. The analytical items under Integrated Marketing Communication Capability encompass the official website, fan pages, cultural and creative products, offline events and online audiovisual content, as well as overall visual consistency.

Based on the execution ratio analysis of Brand Design Capability presented in Table 2, the execution ratios for Case A and Case F were both 75%, whereas no brand design execution was identified for Case D and Case E (both 0%). These results indicate that Case A and Case F place greater emphasis on constructing event brand images through systematic visual identity strategies, while Case D and Case E comparatively neglect the importance of Brand Design Capability in religious cultural events.

With regard to Integrated Marketing Communication Capability, the execution ratios of the cases were as follows: Case A (81.8%), Case F (62.3%), Case B (61.5%), Case D (46.2%), Case C (42.3%), and Case E (15.4%). Overall, most cases demonstrate an awareness of the use of integrated marketing communication tools; however, substantial differences remain in terms of design consistency and the degree of strategic integration. Among them, Case A exhibits a relatively high level of design integration and brand consistency across various communication media, indicating a comparatively mature application of Integrated Marketing Communication Capability.

**Figure 2**

*Visual Identity Analysis of the Case Events*



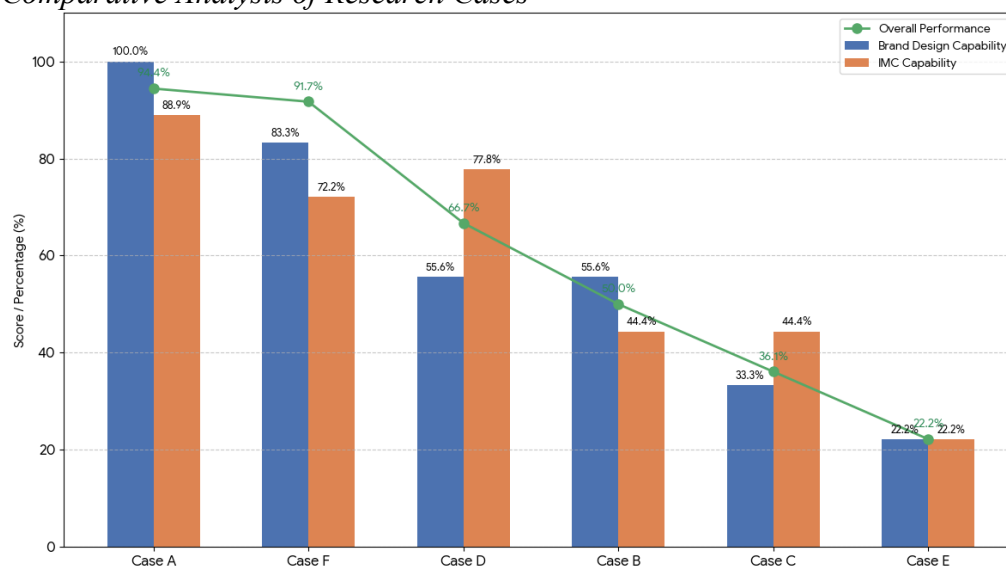
The six research cases were evaluated and ranked according to two dimensions: Brand Design Capability and Integrated Marketing Communication Capability. The scoring method assigned points from high to low, with higher scores indicating stronger performance in the respective dimension.

According to Table 3, for religious cultural events in Taiwan between 2020 and 2025, the ranking for Brand Design Capability from highest to lowest was as follows: Case A (18 points, 100%), Case F (15 points, 83.3%), Case B and Case D (10 points each, 55.6%), Case C (6 points, 33.3%), and Case E (4 points, 22.2%). These results indicate that the three experts considered Case A and Case F to have incorporated brand design thinking into their religious folk events and to have enhanced cultural recognizability through visual systems and overall design strategies.

With respect to Integrated Marketing Communication Capability, the cases were ranked from highest to lowest as follows: Case A (16 points, 88.9%), Case D (14 points, 77.8%), Case F (13 points, 72.2%), Case B and Case C (8 points each, 44.4%), and Case E (4 points, 22.2%). Compared with Brand Design Capability, the cases demonstrated more proactive performance in Integrated Marketing Communication Capability.

Based on the combined scores of Brand Design Capability and Integrated Marketing Communication Capability, the overall ranking of the six research cases was as follows: Case A (34 points, 94.4%), Case F (33 points, 91.7%), Case D (24 points, 66.7%), Case B (18 points, 50%), Case C (13 points, 36.1%), and Case E (8 points, 22.2%). These findings indicate that religious cultural events that balance design quality and integrated marketing communication capability exhibit a clear advantage in overall branding performance.

**Figure 3**  
*Comparative Analysis of Research Cases*



### Expert Interview Analysis

Expert A (1) brand construction should be continuous; (2) political discontinuity affects brand sustainability; (3) the sustained involvement of designers is crucial; and (4) cultural event brands should possess distinctiveness while avoiding excessive changes.

Expert B (1) brand construction should begin with storytelling based on “people, events, time, place, and objects”; (2) annual thematic narratives can be extended through a combination of key visuals and character IPs; (3) visual identity should balance continuity with thematic variation; and (4) branding mechanisms within the public sector remain insufficient.

Expert C (1) brand construction should be grounded in storytelling strategies; (2) cross-role collaboration is indispensable; (3) sustainability relies on the establishment of commercial mechanisms; (4) design packaging strategies function as instrumental tools; and (5) festival brands should differentiate their usage logics.

## Conclusion

From a design perspective, this study examined the visual design and promotional models adopted in the branding processes of major folk cultural events in Taiwan. Through a review of relevant literature, case analysis, and expert interviews, key factors of local cultural brand design were identified and synthesized. The research findings are summarized as follows:

1. All six research cases demonstrate a tendency toward brand-oriented design and integrated marketing communication. Among them, Case A, Case B, and Case F show the most significant outcomes. Through the introduction of design strategies, these cases effectively articulate the identities and distinctive characteristics of their respective religious cultures and event forms.
2. Case D has been recognized by the Discovery Channel as one of the world’s major religious events, possessing high international visibility and symbolic significance. However, the practical application of design capability in its branding process remains primarily focused on the development and design of cultural and creative products. Further integration and enhancement are needed in the construction and application of an overall festival identity system, including visual language consistency, brand narrative, and integrated communication.
3. The findings indicate that Case C and Case E have not yet clearly incorporated systematic brand design strategies into their events. Their visual and communication practices remain fragmented or function-oriented, limiting the role of brand design capability in image construction and cultural communication within religious cultural activities.
4. In the absence of comprehensive design planning, religious cultural events—despite possessing profound cultural foundations—may still face limitations in contemporary cultural dissemination and cross-generational communication.
5. From a practical perspective, experts suggest that branding construction should be strategy-driven. Even when visual expressions are refined, the lack of a clear cultural core and long-term planning makes it difficult to establish a stable and sustainable brand image.
6. The visual design of religious cultural brands should begin with a cultural perspective by first defining the core spirit, followed by visual translation and extension. In practice, the principle of “stable core, thematic variation” should be adopted to avoid identity disruption caused by annual changes, which may negatively affect audience familiarity and consistency in brand communication.
7. The primary obstacles to visual brand continuity do not necessarily stem from design-related issues, but rather from changes in local government leadership or insufficient institutional support. Without long-term budget allocation and dedicated permanent organizations responsible for brand management and maintenance, brand equity is difficult to accumulate.

8. Overall, branding provides religious cultural festivals with institutionalized and modernized visual and marketing tools, which help strengthen cultural identity, attract diverse resources, and generate economic value. Nevertheless, in promoting branding practices, careful consideration must be given to balancing commercial operations with the core values of cultural traditions, in order to preserve the fundamental spirit of religious festivals and the cultural significance of community participation.

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