

# Designers unveil new clothes for god statues

## 設計師為神衣注入新意



Embroidered garments for god statues are to have their own seasonal collections, no different from fashion models on the catwalk. Taiwanese producers of these embroidered clothes, in the face of cheap imports from China, have gone the way of haute couture, incorporating crystals and laser technology in their designs, and entering the tourist industry, creating mini costume talismans as souvenirs of Taiwan.

The embroidery trade in Puzih, Chiayi, has a long history, and embroidered clothes for god statuary is something of a local specialty. Unfortunately, the industry, and in fact the culture that supports it, has fallen a bit by the wayside. The three brothers of the Chou family, which has been in the business for three generations, have over the past few years, tried to break out of the traditional industry and make a name for themselves for more creative religious clothing, under the Taiwan Shenfu Creative Embroidery brand. In so doing, they have breathed new life into the embroidery trade.

Chou Jang-ting, born in 1984, and his two brothers, are putting their youthful creativity to good use, not only re-inventing the divine statue clothing business but also finding out how they can tap into the lucrative tourist dollar. According to Chou, your basic made-in-Taiwan statue costume goes for about NT\$500, but their Chinese counterparts will copy the design and turf them out for NT\$100 a pop. The Chinese producers can undercut them on almost all of their products, by at least 50 percent. Going the branded route really is their only chance of keeping their heads above water.

In addition to developing new designs for clothes for god statues, the embroidered altar table covers and decoration used in inauguration ceremonies, and tapestries of the Eight Immortals, Shenfu Creative Embroidery has also released a new range of mini costumes that go for NT\$150 each, small

costumes roughly 5cm high that you can put your incense pouches and peace talismans inside, warding off evil and ensuring peace and happiness in your life. Different costumes have different meanings. Shen Nung Tati, the god of farmers, for example, will protect your business affairs, whilst the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra will help you in your studies. They have done pretty well, too, selling over 10,000 in two months. The most popular design at the moment is the mini Matsu, the sea goddess, which tourists from Japan, Singapore and China are buying as souvenirs of Taiwan.

But the three brothers have other plans, too. Recently Shenfu has opened a tourist center in the former Suantou Sugar factory in Chiayi, with visual and textual introductions to the background and production process of the embroidered costumes. Visitors can also wear some of these costumes and have their photos taken with them on, or even try their own hand at a bit of DIY, for the price of NT\$100.

According to Jang-ting, this year the company's goal is to promote lesser known gods so, in addition to Guanyin and Matsu, who most people are familiar with, they also want to include General Qianliyan, who can see for a thousand miles, and General Shunfenger, known for his powerful hearing. They also want to expand the market of all-year round designs to incorporate seasonal differences, and hold a fashion show to launch new designs to get people interested.

(LIBERTY TIMES, TRANSLATED BY PAUL COOPER)

神明也要分春夏秋冬換季，還要比照時尚界模特兒走秀發表新裝！國內生產刺繡神衣的業者，為迎戰廉價中國貨，以水晶、雷射等高品質走出品牌路，現在更跨足觀光產業，入手一個保平安的小神衣，推廣國際成為台灣伴手禮。

刺繡產業在嘉義朴子具有悠久歷史，造就當地生產刺繡神衣的特色，但產業價值及文化背景逐漸沒落。其中傳承到第三代的周家三兄弟，近年來以「台灣神斧」宗教創意刺繡品牌走出傳統、

打出名號，成功為刺繡產業找到新生命。

七十三年次的周讓廷和兩個哥哥發揮年輕人的創意，不僅重新炒熱神衣生意，也學以致用加入觀光市場。周讓廷說，一件基本款的台灣製神衣五百元，中國馬上模仿製作，只賣一百元，幾乎各式神衣，中國都可以低於一半的價格搶生意，不走品牌路，根本活不下去。

除研發神明穿戴的神衣、宅第落成啓用的繡彩神圍、八仙彩等傳統用品新設計，神斧也開發出小神衣的新產品，一個一百五十元，約五公分高的小神衣內放入香火袋、平安符，可以避邪保平安。不同神明還有不同意義，像神農大帝可以保事業，普賢菩薩可以保學業，創下兩個月銷售一萬多件的好成績。現在媽祖小神衣最受歡迎，成為觀光客喜愛的伴手禮，還有日本、新加坡、中國等旅客特地來採購。

但周家三兄弟的點子還沒完，最近神斧在嘉義縣蒜頭糖廠開了觀光工廠，圖文並茂介紹神明衣的由來、製作流程，現場還可試穿與拍照各種神明服飾，或是花一百元自己動手DIY體驗，已成為新興觀光景點。

周讓廷說，今年的目標是開發「冷門神明」，除大家熟知的觀音、媽祖外，千里眼、順風耳等都加入，還要把一年到頭穿同一件神衣的市場，擴大為四季各有特色，並舉辦一場神衣走秀發表新裝，讓大家刮目相看。

(自由時報記者李文儀攝)

Left: A god statue sports one of Shenfu's new embroidered costume designs, all ready for the divine catwalk.

Top right: Chou Jang-ting of Shenfu Creative Embroidery holds up some new tourist-oriented designs that he has come up with together with his two brothers.

Bottom right: Some of Shenfu Creative Embroidery's mini costume incense pouches on display.

PHOTOS: LI WEN-YI, LIBERTY TIMES

左圖：神像穿戴神斧生產的刺繡神衣，準備走秀發表新裝。

右圖上：神斧創意刺繡的周讓廷手持三兄弟一起設計開發的新款伴手禮。

右圖下：神斧創意刺繡推出的多款小神衣香火袋。 照片：自由時報記者李文儀攝