

Taiwan Aboriginals Celebrate Dance, Song in New Home

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Aboriginal people who live in a new village built by Tzu Chi celebrated their traditional culture. Their songs and dances were a way to show the revival of their heritage after the terrible blow of [Typhoon Morakot](#).

The typhoon, which hit southern Taiwan on August 8 last year, devastated many indigenous communities who lived in the mountains, such as the Bunun villages in Namaxia and Taoyuan townships in Kaohsiung county. Tzu Chi Foundation built the Shanlin Da Ai (Great Love) community outside Kaohsiung. In their new life, they are determined to maintain their heritage and customs. So they held the traditional "Ear-shooting" festival in Shanlin on July 18, to celebrate a good harvest and give thanks to the ancestors. They prepared intensively, with rehearsals in the community square in the village. One of the items was a dance performed by the New Taoyuan Culture and Art troupe, led by Xie Mingju; his wife and daughter are also members. He worked as a police officer in his tribal community for 25 years. After Typhoon Morakot, his family took refuge in a military barracks for more than three months before they were finally reunited with their people.



"We came to the Da Ai Community from the mountains," Xie said. "As elders in our community, we would like our future generations to learn and speak our mother tongue." His troupe delivered a beautiful performance on the day of the festival; through it, they seek to communicate with their ancestors.

Another item in the festivities was songs performed by the Yuan Yuan Indigenous Culture and Art Troupe. It is led by Ke Limei, a Bunun and retired teacher from Jiashian Junior High School. She lost many of her family members and students when the floods caused by Morakot demolished her hometown of Namaxia. Now, music is the best therapy for her. "People are still feeling lost and bitter about what happened," she said. "I believe that it is only through music and dance, through the voices that God has given us, that we can revitalize our community."

Performing together were Bunun people who used to live in the two townships of Namaxia and Taoyuan; they merged for the celebration. Among them was elder Zhang Yizhi, who led his people in a traditional war cry. "The two townships came together in the Ear-shooting festival," he said. "It is an opportunity for us to know more about one another and consider a possible merger into one clan in the future."



The festival was organized by Zhang Ruixiong, the former director of Taiwan Indigenous

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Television, an island-wide cable station. Six years ago, he resigned from his post to return to his home in Taoyuan township to help document the culture and traditions of the Bunun people. "We must protect our traditions and culture, no matter what kinds of disaster or migrations we face," he said. "We should never forget who we are and work to preserve our roots." Around half of the young people in the Bunun community have never been taught archery, one of the traditional sports of their community; so Zhang coaches them individually.

The Bunun people are united by the common spirit and comradeship of their tribe. Wherever they are, their hearts are made stronger by the undying commemoration of their ancestral lineage.

※Shanlin Great Love Community: [Foundation Opens Village for Morakot Survivors](#)