Chung, a blind social worker, expressing his satisfaction with the wedding ceremony held on March 4, 2006, which was also Chinese Valentine’s day (January 15 in Lunar calendar), “but, when we got married, we took the tram to climb up the hill together.”

Chung proposed to Law in 2006 when they joined a game show, called Deaf or No Deaf, broadcast in the Jade channel of Television Broadcasts Limited. Their love story was disclosed in the show, by the end of which, Law accepted the proposal.

“I dreamed of a simple but solemn wedding,” said Chung. He said his dream wedding ceremony should also satisfy both the couple and guests attending the ceremony.

“It is boring to hold the wedding ceremony at the Marriage Registry,” added Law, a cartoonist. “The room (of the marriage registry) is too small to accommodate a large number of guests. It is extremely difficult to take beautiful pictures,” Law showed her great pleasure in taking pictures at the Peak with the sea view of the Victoria Harbour as the backdrop.

Another couple arranged their wedding in accordance to their symbol of love, “11”.

Augustine Chan and Elaine Lam got married in 2007, 11 years after they began to date with each other in the University of Hong Kong (HKU). The couple started their romance when they, as students, worked closely for the Campus TV in the university. Their wedding ceremony was held at 11 am on November 11 in the Rayson Huang Theatre of HKU.

Lam said it was meaningful for them to revisit the campus and take wedding photos there 11 years after they fell in love. She added that 11 also had another meaning which represents ‘one life, one love’.

Lam said the civil celebrants of marriage scheme provided them with greater flexibility in choosing the time for the wedding. “We don’t have to be worried about the booking of the register time. This enabled us to make well planning before our marriage,” she explained.

Couples are required to make an appointment at the marriage registry three months before the date of wedding, if they want to hold the wedding there.

Another couple capitalised on the scheme’s flexibility in venues for wedding by tying the knot at a lecture hall of their alma mater, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

The campus has a special meaning to the couple, Felix Yu Lap-yan and Fiona Hui Min-sze. They both came from the same department, same college and same dormitory. Furthermore, they worked together in organising the orientation camp and other student activities.

They organised their wedding ceremony in a way similar to what they did during their school days. They decided to use “cinema” as the theme of their ceremony.

They decorated the venue, a lecture hall in the United College of CUHK as a cinema. They had also prepared tickets for the guests, video clips and slide shows for more than half a year beforehand. “It’s just like what we did in the past when our classmates, my wife and I organised activities together in the campus,” said Yu.

Unlike the marriage registry, there was no time limit for the ceremony. The couple did not have to run the ceremony in haste. They stayed in the venue for more than six hours for the wedding ceremony and took photos with 170 guests.

Yu was satisfied with the civil celebrant officiating at their wedding. “With his professional opinion, we can have greater flexibility in the way we hold the ceremony,” he said.

Practising solicitors and notaries public who have valid professional licences and seven years of experience may be appointed as civil celebrants of marriage after passing a training course organised by the Registrar of Marriage.

Up to March 28, the government has already appointed around 1,380 civil celebrants of marriage and all their names are posted on the Immigration Department’s website.

A civil celebrant, Ivy Cheng Chan Sau-ching, who is also a solicitor specialising in real estate said it usually takes a three-month notice before she would officiate a wedding ceremony. Cheng said she enjoys being a civil celebrant of marriage. “Unlike other legal cases, wedding is a happy event and I am willing to engage in it,” Mrs Cheng said.

The Immigration Department’s figure showed that marriage solemnisation service taken up by civil celebrants is popular. 30,020 couples’ marriages were celebrated by civil celebrants, increased by 14 per cent from 2006 to about one-third of the total marriage registrations by March of 2008.

Some civil celebrants and wedding planners see it as a growing business opportunity.
“Wedding ceremony is not as simple as finishing a legal procedure but also an experience,” said Michael Lai Yiu, a civil celebrant and executive celebrant of An Oath Celebrant Service. “A civil celebrant should be able to run the wedding smoothly and solemnly,” he said.

He provides different service plans that meet couples’ preferences at an average price from HK$3,000 to HK$5,000.

Recently Lai has co-organised a Hello Kitty-theme wedding held in a Mass Transit Railway station, with wedding planners from ESD Services Limited.

“After the operation of Civil Celebrants of Marriages Scheme, all couples want a unique wedding, instead of having an ordinary one at the marriage registry,” said Desiree Lam Ki-wann, content manager of ESD Services Limited.

She added that she would consider about the venues where wedding ceremony has not been held before. “More couples are eager to hold their wedding at a special wedding venue instead of the conventional marriage venues,” she said.

To meet the demand, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has opened six new wedding venues, including the Assembly Hall in Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, Repulse Bay Beach, Sai Kung and Tai Po Waterfront Park, Six Ars Terrace at Kowloon Walled City Park and Bauhinia Garden at Kowloon Tsai Park.

Among the six, Assembly Hall in Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village is the most popular as it is a graded historical building converted from a chapel, according to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

Two theme parks in Hong Kong also joined in the business by providing special venues for wedding.

Ocean Park has provided seven attractions as wedding venues since 2006. More than 100 couples have held their wedding in the park. Ocean Theatre and Atoll Reef, an aquarium, are the couples’ favourite choices among the seven venues, banquet manager of Ocean Park, Jessica Yan Suet-ye said.

She said couples like taking photos in Ocean Theatre with dolphins and sea lions. At the Atoll Reef, couples can dive into the water and exchange rings, accompanied by colourful coral fish and the witness of all their friends and relatives.

The Hong Kong Disneyland provides wedding venues for couples who want a fairy tale wedding. The Outdoor Wedding Garden with an elegant setting is provided. Couples can invite their favourite Disney characters, like Mickey and Minnie Mouse, to dress up with ceremonial clothes and take photos.