

**Living with the Hakka spirit and
creating new possibilities**

Fulong Community

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After almost being destroyed by the 921 Earthquake in 1999 and floods in 2004, Fulong community's residents have never given up hope, believing that they can overcome all difficulties with their tough Hakka spirit.



Fulong Community Building Association Director-General Ceng Guang-ming considers this cloth book a community treasure.

"I am an old tree. I wear orange clothes in the autumn. Although all my leaves have fallen off during the winter, I shall wear another soft green outfit come next spring and say hello to all the kids." In the spring of 2010, a play produced by local adults and children was staged in the Fulong community vegetable garden. In the story, a century-old tree can feel and talk, and recounted to an audience of over 200 its story and that of the community.



This book is about the old chief of the village telling the story of Fulong community.

The power of storytelling discovered

Located in Dongshi district, Fulong community (formerly Shijiao village) is a traditional rural community with 4,300 residents, over 80% of them from being from farming families that go back generations. In addition, because most of them are Hakka people, the best way of describing them is diligent, practical and dutiful. Although the concept of "storytelling" was once unfamiliar to Fulong residents, a succession of natural disasters left them attempting to rediscover the place they lived in and retelling these stories. In the process, they accidentally discovered a new hope for their hometown.

Back in 1999, the 921 Earthquake was an unprecedented disaster that greatly influenced every corner of Taiwan, especially the central region. Located in what was once Taichung county, the Fulong community could not escape from the disaster. Brick farmhouses collapsed, schools were damaged, and even the farms that residents earned a living from were destroyed.

After the quake, people really wanted to resume their lives as soon as possible. Besides government assistance, many charities and religious groups also sent help to the victims. As adults were busy rebuilding their homes and there was no one to take care of their children, the community library became a temporary daycare center for most parents. Over time, the library started to play a bigger role in community redevelopment. Moms would bring kids to the family book club and parents took turns telling stories to the children. There were various activities such as music lessons, parent and child dance lessons, and kids' painting lessons to comfort children after the terrible disaster. Thanks to its promotion of so many book clubs regarding issues like life, family and marriage, the community library became a key element in Fulong community rebuilding efforts.

Growing hometown love

Unfortunately, as if local residents hadn't already been through enough trials, the floods of 2004 destroyed redevelopment results. In the midst of this series of misfortunes, the descendants of tough Hakka immigrants pulled themselves together and rebuilt their community a second time. To start off, they rented a pear farm that was destroyed by the floods. After cleaning and preparing the land, the messy, sometimes snake-infested area became a community vegetable farm that also served as a performing stage and helped restore damaged vegetation. The residents only grew organic, pesticide-free vegetables and fruit on the farm, and the volunteers taught the local children how to cultivate local wild plants.

"The only way to make the children love and be responsible for their hometown was to have them join the process of community building. These children will be the next generation of our community volunteers," said Ms. Wu, one of the first volunteers to join community-building work.

During this period, Fulong community residents positively participated in the "Rural Area Innovative Development Program" promoted by the Executive Yuan's Council of Agriculture, a three-year program dealing with the community's culture, living environment and industry. In the first year, residents noted down, took photos and did research into community culture, and created an illustrated book called "The Home Under Yuanzui Mountain". These were distributed free to the community's 1,300 households, helping



1. The warm-hearted housewives often offer their own homes as community gathering places.
2. The flood-prevention barrier, constructed after the 2004 floods, has become a good place for bicyclists.
3. Fulong community building could never have been achieved without these generous housewives.



1. Fulong community produces an abundance of pears, which also allows the woodworking class to make many fine crafts from pruned pear tree branches.
2. These are very Hakka-style community publications.
3. The Hakka printed cloth handicrafts class uses exquisite techniques that highlight the beauty of these fabrics.

people to better understand their hometown and encouraging their participation in community building. In the following year, various community reconstruction took place, such as the reinforcing of flood-prevention channels. To prepare for the third year of this effort, many classes opened for community members with topics such as woodworking, Hakka Zidi Opera, traditional Hakka printed cloth handicrafts, and creative Hakka cuisine.

Cloth book tells community story

After three years of hard work, Fulong community not only became a better place to live in, but it also gained enormous "soft power". Because the community produced an abundance of pears, persimmons and oranges, the woodworking class created a wide range of handicrafts for everyday use using branches pruned from fruit trees. The Hakka printed cloth handicrafts class was created with the support of Yi-li, a toy company in the community. The company dispatched one of its design experts to direct the class, which explains the professional quality of the produced items like door curtains, handbags and puppets.

The most impressive work from the class was a book made of cloth which contained stories of the community. As this book was a product resulting from the combined efforts of community residents, it has officially become a treasure of the Fulong community. "It is priceless," proudly declares Ceng Guang-ming, director-general of the Fulong Community Building Association.

Moreover, as the oldest Hakka Zidi Opera group, the legendary Shi Jiao Fu Xing Xuan Troupe has been able to continue in its mission thanks to the community building association, and is now directed by the only Hakka Zidi Opera teacher--80-plus-year-old Liu Tian-zhi.

Developing agricultural products to create benefits

According to Ceng, today the most important mission of the community building association is to develop diverse community industries. This, for example, includes the making of Hakka pastries, which have become well-known gifts that represent the community. Similarly, there is the sale of agricultural products such as preserved bamboo shoots, preserved ginger, pear jam and persimmon jam. Together with works produced by the Hakka printed cloth and woodworking classes, such products are proving helpful to community building. In addition to agricultural products, association members have come up with other community promotional ideas such as finger puppets and Hakka china dolls.

The community building association has been through a lot of difficulties and there is a general consensus among the members that--in order to prevent unnecessary rumors--no one with a political background can serve as an association supervisor.

"Doing community building is never an easy task and we are prepared for that. We try our best to listen to different opinions, and we believe teamwork is the only way of building a better home. Just like those bees," says Ceng, pointing at a painting on the flood-prevention barrier that shows bees and a teapot. This painting, created by Wang Feng-sheng, reminds Fulong residents that despite a series of natural disasters their community can only move in a positive direction if they are united. 🐝