A Resurgent Temple and Community Development: The Roles of the Temple Manager, Local Elite and Entrepreneurs

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This paper will focus on a local community temple in southern Taiwan — Fengtian Temple (奉天宮) in Xingang (Hsinkang), Jiayi County (嘉義縣新港鄉), in southern Taiwan — where the author has engaged in fieldwork since 2010. The author has maintained contact with temple committee members and continues to observe the temple’s new transformations. Fengtian Temple re-emerged in 1988 as a destination for approximately one hundred thousand Mazu pilgrims from around the island each year. It successfully transformed itself into a temple associated with a strong sense of environmental protection and prosperous cultural industries. While bringing together local businesspeople, entrepreneurs and traditional intellectuals, the temple committee has worked together to further the goal of “comprehensive community development.” As a result, the temple has not only attracted and maintained an annual flow of pilgrims from all of Taiwan but also helped regenerate traditional industries. Many traditional artists and craftsmen have found successors, and new opportunities have emerged for young people to stay in their hometown. This temple has adapted to the many political, social and economic changes since martial law was lifted in 1987, something not all the temples in Taiwan have been able to do effectively. Most successful have been the Mazu temples that have been able to create similar connections with NGOs. The Fengtian Temple is a successful case that is studied and admired by many other temples, and is thus particularly worthy of research.
Hsingkang Fengtiangong Mazu Temple, southern Taiwan
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