

慈濟 Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action



Aid to Flood-Affected
Farmers in Laos

Share Your Love With Others

Translated by Teresa Chang



A villager waiting to receive relief goods at a Tzu Chi distribution in Sanasomboun, Champasak Province, Laos, shows her appreciation by giving a thumbs up. In her hand is a claim check for the distribution. The foundation distributed aid, including rice and rice seeds, to flood-affected farmers in Laos in November and December 2019.

WEI GUO-LIN

Each winter, my thoughts turn to those living in colder places. I'm concerned about how the less fortunate are coping: Do they have enough clothes to keep them warm or enough food to eat? Do they even have a roof over their heads? At the same time, I'm grateful for being blessed with everything I need, whether it is food, clothing, or shelter. How much do we need to have before we consider ourselves blessed? Contentment is the greatest blessing.

Those of us who are blessed with a well-provided life mustn't think only of our own comfort. We should look beyond our own lives and do whatever we can do for the less fortunate. In October 2019, three earthquakes over magnitude 6 rocked the island of Mindanao, southern Philippines, toppling houses and leaving many people homeless. Some families had to cobble together temporary shelters out of bamboo poles and betel nut tree leaves so that they could have a place to stay. The ground was wet, muddy, and uneven. It's hard to imagine how uncomfortable it was to live under such makeshift conditions. In response, our volunteers jumped into action to help. They distributed rice, blankets, folding beds, and emergency cash to those affected to help them through this rough patch in their lives.

Aid recipients said with emotion that they never dreamed they'd receive so much. Many quickly bought zinc sheets with the money they had received to fortify their damaged houses. The repairs might look crude but at least they were adequate to shield the survivors from the wind and rain. The beds we provided were put to good use, too. By putting several beds together, quake victims had a relatively comfortable space on which to sleep.

I was full of gratitude to see our volunteers using their own time and money to travel repeatedly to the disaster areas to help survivors. Every time I heard them share what they'd done for the needy, my heart went out to the less fortunate for their plight. At the same time, I felt comforted that we were able to reach those in need and do something for them.

Our foundation was also able to complete the work of aiding flood-affected farmers in southern Laos before the end of 2019. In addition to rice, which could be cooked right away, rice seeds were provided to help farming families rebuild their live-

lihoods. Many villagers thought before our distributions that they would be receiving only a few packages of token aid, so they were surprised when they received enough to last them several months. The givers were full of joy to give and the recipients full of appreciation for their help. It was very heart-warming indeed.

When we look around the world today, we see much evidence of the imbalance of the Four Elements of Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind. We see raging wildfires, severe droughts, and floods. Natural disasters seem to be happening one after another without a break. Our planet is sending out warning signals, and yet many people remain oblivious. It's time for everyone to awaken to the warnings sent by Mother Earth and each do their part to protect her. Not only should we love the Earth by leading an eco-friendly life—we should also love our fellow human beings by living a more economical life and sharing what we can with those in need. I learned just the other day that a cup of coffee in Taiwan sometimes costs as much as a hundred NT dollars (over three U.S. dollars). I'm not a coffee drinker, but when I learned that piece of information, my thoughts turned to those in need. If everyone could cut down a little on their coffee consumption, how many people would we be able to help?

Time flies by ever so relentlessly. Wise people know how to make the best of their time to do good for the world. They add meaning and value to their lives by putting their love and compassion into action. Since their lives aren't focused on personal gains, they are free of many worries and afflictions—worries and afflictions often arise from self-centeredness. These people live a fulfilling, peaceful life, and their existence contributes to the harmony of the world.

After spring comes summer, which gives way to autumn before winter is ushered in. In life too, we go through childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. Our life becomes shorter with each passing second, minute, and day. Now that I've entered my old age, I cherish my time even more. I'm determined to do my best to give until I no longer can. Let us all work compassionately for the good of others and create blessings for the benefit of this world. Let us be ever more mindful.



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Bimonthly

January 2020



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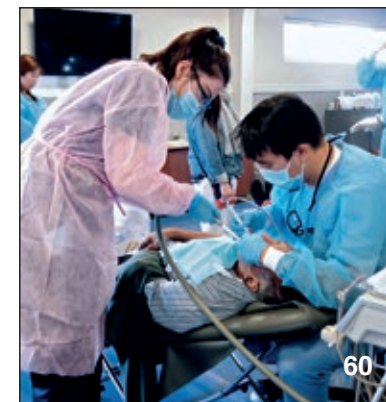
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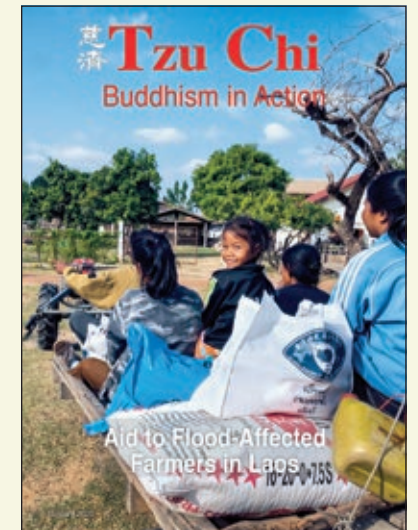
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
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For a free copy of the *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*, please contact your nearest Tzu Chi branch office (see inside back cover).

中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

Helping Flood-Affected Lao Farmers Get Back on Their Feet

By Chen Li-an

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

To farmers in Laos used to a quiet rural life, the large, impressive Tzu Chi distributions were a novelty. After the farmers had lost their crops to devastating floods, they received rice seeds and other aid from a group of strangers who bowed to them as they politely handed over the goods. In the process, the farmers glimpsed a world very different from theirs.


Flood victims, carrying relief items distributed by Tzu Chi on shoulder poles, return home through fields of dry rice stalks.

A wide river, likely the Mekong, flows under a twilight sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the water's surface. In the foreground, a small boat with three people is silhouetted against the shimmering water. The background features a range of dark mountains and some distant structures along the riverbank.

The River of Bounty —the Mekong

The Mekong River flows through China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, providing an important source of water. Of these nations, Laos is located almost entirely within the lower Mekong basin. The river has, as a result, greatly nurtured the country's agriculture. In recent years, Laos has invested copiously in hydroelectric power. There are nearly one hundred finished and ongoing dam construction projects in the nation. Most of the hydropower generated is exported to neighboring countries.

In August and September 2019, heavy rains pummeled Laos and caused the Mekong to burst its banks. More than 151,000 hectares (373,130 acres) of farmland in southern Laos were submerged in water. Farmers endured heavy losses.



The Granary of Laos Dealt a Hard Blow

A resident of Savannakhet Province tends to her kitchen garden. An important rice-growing district in Laos, Savannakhet was hit hard by flooding in the summer of 2019. Three months after the disaster, houses and schools were still in bad shape. Some areas still had standing water.

The light of dawn spread upward from the east, lighting up the pale blue sky and waking the birds in the trees. In contrast to this serenity, one small bus after another whizzed by on the uneven country roads, stirring up clouds of yellow dust.

May Kay Sa, from the village of Banla, Champasak Province, southwestern Laos, loaded the tools and ingredients she would need for the day onto her motor scooter and set off to where she would set up her food stall that day. She had decided on the spot two or three weeks before:

Sapay Temple, located near a tributary of the Mekong River.

At the same time, a team of Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam had arrived at Sapay Temple. They began methodically setting up the distribution venue. Cooking oil, salt, sugar, and other items that had arrived a few days earlier were being organized to make the distribution efficient. Near the riverbank, a dozen villagers were listening intently to Tzu Chi volunteers explain to them how they were expected to help

out during the event. A Tzu Chi distribution was gearing up to start.

The life force of the farmers

May Kay Sa had learned of the distribution beforehand and had intentionally arrived earlier than aid recipients. She began to set up her stall in the shade of some trees just outside the temple. She took out two flat, broom-like bamboo tools, each about 40 centimeters (16 inches) long, and used them to pick up a piece of thin, rolled-out dough. She began toasting the dough over a

stove. The dough expanded with the heat to form a large senbei-like *Kao Hu Sa*, a snack that is made from sticky rice, regular rice, eggs, and sugar.

The sticky rice May Kay Sa used was harvested from her family's farm the year before. The farm typically yields about a hundred 32-kilogram (70-pound) bags of sticky rice each year after the rainy season. Her family sells some of the rice for income.

However, floods had ravaged southern Laos three months before. Homes, possessions, and farmland were inundated with deep water. May Kay Sa's five-member family found their finances strained as they lost their rice crops to the deluge. To support themselves, they began running roadside stalls. They went to separate locations each day to set up their stands.

More stalls sprang up around the temple as the sun rose. Like May Kay Sa and her family, many people had turned to different kinds of work after losing their crops to the floods. They needed to earn money to carry them through until the next planting season.

May Kay Sa could usually bring in 100,000 to 120,000 kip (US\$11-14) a day when there were large crowds, like those at traditional festivals, but most of the time her income wasn't very stable. Even though she would be receiving aid the following day at another Tzu Chi distribution, held where she lived, she still came to the temple to take advantage of the opportunity to make money. Anything she could earn would help her family's income.

Stilt houses submerged

The rainy season in Laos starts in May. During this time, the amount of water in the Mekong River, which flows through several countries including Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, increases considerably. Most of the time, people get through this period safely, and the rice they plant at this time can produce enough to carry them through the year.

That wasn't the case in 2019, however. Tropical storm Podul hit Laos in late August, followed closely by tropical depression Kajiki in early

Tzu Chi volunteers, accompanied by Lao government officials, visit flood-affected villagers. The villagers recounted how panicked they had felt when they had to climb onto their roofs to escape the rising floodwaters.



September. The massive amounts of rain unleashed by the storms caused the Mekong River to swell and burst its banks. The resulting floods slammed six southern provinces in Laos, affecting as many as 160,000 families.

“The water rushed to us from the Mekong’s tributaries and from all over. It happened so fast it was impossible for us to make it to safety in time,” said Noudee, who was waiting in a line at Sapay Temple to receive her relief goods. Her uneasiness was obvious, revealed by her tightly clenched hands, as she recalled the flooding. The floodwaters destroyed large expanses of farmland that had been sown with rice over two months before. Even the stilt houses which most people in the countryside inhabited and which stood at an aver-

Tzu Chi volunteers, local helpers, and relief supplies travel on a tributary of the Mekong to a disaster area.

age height of two meters (seven feet) could not escape the ravages of the floods.

Continuous downpours prolonged the flooding. In some areas the water didn’t recede until two weeks later. The area impacted was huge and the devastation was worse than the government had expected. In badly hit regions, more than farmland was destroyed—houses, schools, roads, and bridges were hard-hit too. The situation was so bad it looked like Armageddon.

Some public welfare organizations distributed milk and cookies in the immediate aftermath of the disaster so that people wouldn’t go hungry. The Lao government’s agricultural sector also distributed three days’ worth of rice in some disaster areas. However, this aid could only last a short time. Ninety percent of the country’s population rely on farming for a living, with rice being the major crop. With vast swathes of rice paddies ruined, farmers lost not only their crops but the rice seeds that would be used for next year’s



planting. Their lives were plunged into distress.

Lao government officials wrote to Tzu Chi and asked for help. In response, volunteers twice visited the disaster areas to assess the extent of devastation. After careful evaluation, 123 volunteers from six countries arrived in Laos in late November to conduct distributions for flood victims in Sonabouly, Savannakhet Province, and Sanasomboun, Champasak Province. Among the distributed items were rice, cooking oil, salt, sugar, and the most important source of income for local farmers: rice seeds.

Difficult road conditions

Before the distributions could take place, the Tzu Chi Foundation had to first process a lot of paperwork with the Lao government. After that was done, volunteers immediately began to look for quality rice seeds in Laos to distribute. They needed 600 metric tons (660 tons) to aid 10,000 farming households. With help from Hong Zai-sheng (洪再生), a Taiwanese rice expert, and after discussions with local rice seed merchants, agriculture officials, and rice seed center staff, Tzu Chi settled on Thasano 11, a much sought-after variety of sticky rice seed in Laos.

There were ten distribution venues, spread across the plains and hills in the two provinces of Savannakhet and Champasak. Due to inadequate infrastructure and road construction in the country, volunteers experienced very bumpy roads on their way to the venues. One time, their vehicle even got stuck in a pothole. Another time, volun-

Local young people load Tzu Chi relief goods onto a truck to be transported to a distribution venue in Champasak Province.

teers had to cross an undeveloped, protected forest area in four-wheel drive vehicles to reach the venue. Only a small number of volunteers went to that location to put aid in the hands of villagers.

Though it was difficult to transport people from place to place, it was an even greater challenge to move the bulk of goods from one place to another. When the large trucks carrying supplies came to bridges with lower load capacities, everything had to be unloaded into smaller trucks. Spreading the weight of the goods out among smaller vehicles was the only way they could be transported across the waterways.

Instead of being disheartened by the difficulties, volunteers became even more determined to safely deliver Tzu Chi’s aid to flood victims. They sincerely hoped that the aid, made possible by the kindness of people from all over, could help dispel the post-disaster gloom for those affected.

Chen Zheng-hui (陳正輝), an entrepreneur in Laos, had helped Tzu Chi carry out relief work after a dam collapse in the nation in 2018. In the aftermath of the flooding this time, a car repair shop he owned was used by the government as a temporary shelter for survivors. The shop later served as a hot food station and a Tzu Chi disaster relief service center. For months after the floods,

Chen helped Tzu Chi organize aid for the survivors. From assessing damage in the disaster areas to getting relief goods ready, he was there to help volunteers overcome all kinds of difficulties.

“Some difficulties were obvious,” Chen said. “They were like the leaves and flowers on a tree, in plain sight. But the obvious difficulties weren’t the main challenges. The truly thorny challenges were like the roots of a tree. They couldn’t be easily detected.” However, no matter how difficult a problem was, he faced it humbly and positively, upholding the Tzu Chi principle of “gratitude, respect, and love.” His positive mindset kept things in perspective for him.

Like a family

“Sabaidi!” Volunteers, every one of them smiling, greeted the aid recipients who had arrived at

Villagers who have arrived early at a distribution venue clutch claim checks in their hands.

the distribution venue at Sapay Temple with the Lao version of “hello.” Their warmth and enthusiasm instantly shortened the psychological distance between them and the villagers.

With the aid of an interpreter, a volunteer who was serving as an emcee for the event at the temple square told the crowd, “We are Tzu Chi from Taiwan.” She explained to the villagers the proceedings of the distribution ceremony, and then guided them to pray in Chinese that the rice seeds distributed would lead to bumper harvests. In awkward Chinese, the villagers said again and again, “Bumper harvests, bumper harvests....” The fervent wishes and blessings from Tzu Chi volunteers resonated through the square.

This was the first time most of the locals had participated in such a large, impressive distribution. Fifty-four-year-old May Kun Sai didn’t leave immediately after she had received her relief supplies but stayed to take in more of the event. “This is the first time I’ve taken part in a distribution,” she said. “It feels very special.”



Recalling the time of the floods, she said that the water was almost higher than her head when the flooding was at its worst. She was fortunately able to evacuate in time, but the rice seeds she had in storage were ruined by the water. There weren’t many odd jobs to do in the countryside, so after the disaster she relied on a meager allowance her daughter sent to her. Her daughter had moved to Thailand after she married a man there. “I’m really so grateful for your help,” May Kun Sai exclaimed. The aid from Tzu Chi would temporarily resolve the difficulties she was facing after the floods.

Laos is just one river away from Thailand, and the two nations share many linguistic and cultural similarities. Most Laotians can speak and understand Thai. Thus, when the Thai version of the Tzu Chi song, “One Family,” was played at the venue, May Kun Sai listened carefully. She felt that this group of foreigners clad in blue shirts and white trousers conveyed the warmth and care of a family.

The warm feelings were mutual. Volunteers were touched by the villagers’ responses when they shared Tzu Chi’s origin with them and encouraged them to give what they could to help others. When the villagers learned that Tzu Chi had started with 30 housewives each saving a little of their grocery money every day in a bamboo coin bank to help the needy, they enthusiastically deposited what money they could spare into the

Chen Zheng-hui (first from left), an entrepreneur in Laos, did his utmost to help Tzu Chi carry out relief work for flood victims. He was there every step of the way, from assessing damage in disaster areas, to choosing relief items and inquiring of their prices, to helping conduct distributions.

coin banks held out by volunteers. This was heartwarming, considering that they had just lost a lot to the floods. In five days, volunteers collected 14,000,000 kip (US\$1,576) during the distributions.

The villagers who had no money to spare were also able to demonstrate their love, by placing their hand on their heart and then making a gesture of depositing money into the banks. “One by one, they put their love into the bank. That’s so touching,” said volunteer Pan Xiao-tong (潘曉彤), from Cambodia. At first, she didn’t understand why the aid recipients were putting their empty hands on the coin banks, but after she realized what the action symbolized, she was profoundly moved, her heart full of gratitude for their heartwarming gesture.

Working together to help farmers

Tzu Chi’s distributions were held over five days. The delegation broke into two groups, each handling different distributions. The largest event served 2,500 recipient families. All told, 15 distri-



Tzu Chi volunteers perform the song, “One Family,” with accompanying hand gestures at a distribution held at Sapay Temple, located near a tributary of the Mekong River. More than 2,000 families from eight villages benefited from this distribution.

butions benefited 55,000 people.

Given the large number of families receiving aid from Tzu Chi, efficiency was of the essence. The foundation used an on-line database system this time to build up data on the recipient families. When villagers reported to a distribution, volunteers didn’t need to sort through paper ros-

ters to find information about them. Instead, volunteers used a cell phone to scan a claim check a villager had received beforehand to confirm their identification. This greatly shortened the processing time.

Villagers received cooking oil, sugar, and salt at the distributions. As for the rice and rice seeds, recipients were required to come back to the venues at the times and dates assigned by the local government to obtain their share.

As the distribution of household goods was underway, the agriculture departments of the Champasak and Savannakhet provincial governments were busy preparing the rice seeds that Tzu

Chi would distribute to farmers. In a processing factory, workers first manually sorted through seeds before dumping them into machines to remove unwanted objects, such as straw and dry stalks. Then the seeds were put through hullers before they were packed into sacks of 20 kilograms (44 pounds) each to be transported to different distribution venues. A lot of work was involved before the aid could be put into the hands of the recipient farmers.

Every distribution involves different people and is held at different times and places, so they all present different challenges to volunteers. “In Laos, the biggest hurdle was the language barri-



A family poses at their home with the items distributed by Tzu Chi.

er,” said Taiwanese volunteer Hong Qing-xia (洪清夏), who had worked on the relief mission to Laos from the very beginning. He was on the reconnaissance team who had visited Laos in September and now was back in the country helping with the distributions. He explained that though students from a local overseas Chinese school served as interpreters at the venues, there weren’t enough of them to go around. As a result, volunteers had to resort to hand gestures or body language to get their messages across.

Though the language barrier might have made their work more difficult, volunteers were very happy to be of service to the flood-affected farmers. By delivering aid to them, volunteers hoped more than anything else that the farmers could feel the warmth and love of this world; they hoped to help them know that people cared, even though unrelated and unbound by blood ties.

Laos is the only landlocked nation in Southeast Asia. It has always seemed shrouded in a veil of mystery, due to its unique geographical location and conservative social ambience. Without personally visiting the country, it’s hard to appreciate the simple, down-to-earth charm of its rural villages and people. Perhaps because of the influence of centuries of Buddhist belief, most farmers remained optimistic despite the devastation and trauma left behind by the floods. It’s everyone’s sincerest hope that the rice seeds from Tzu Chi will bring them bountiful harvests and big smiles.



Long-Term Care for the Elderly

By Yang Shun-bin

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

Tzu Chi currently has more than 200 community care locations for the elderly across Taiwan. In July 2019, the foundation established its first senior day-care center, further expanding its services for the senior population.

Seniors at the day-care center at the Tzu Chi Miaoli Campus use recycled materials to make handi-crafts in a recycling education class.

“Good morning!”
 “And good morning to you too!”
 It was around seven-thirty, and older people warmly greeted each other as they arrived one after another at the Tzu Chi Miaoli Campus in northern Taiwan. Some had been brought by family members, others by Rehabus, a government-sponsored bus service for people with disabilities.

Occupying an area of nearly 24 hectares (60 acres), the Miaoli Campus looks more like an ecological park. Boasting large expanses of natural landscape, it serves as a Tzu Chi community activity center and is also home to the foundation’s first educational center for disaster prevention and preparedness. The campus took on an additional role in July 2019 when Tzu Chi’s first senior

day-care center opened there.

The day-care center has been approved to provide care for 30 seniors. Though newly established, many people have signed up for the program. In the center’s clean, comfortable space, every senior has their own locker, seat, recliner for taking a nap, and toiletries. Each program participant has their own thick journal in which care

providers at the center record their daily blood pressure, weight, the medications they take for the day, and other relevant information. How they perform at the center is also noted in their journals for their family’s reference. Photos of the seniors participating in the center’s activities are even shared real-time via messaging apps so that their family’s minds can be put at ease.

Yang Qiu-feng (楊秋鳳), 83, is one of the program participants. Despite her age, she is mentally and physically nimble. She was elected class president for the program, and can often be seen encouraging participation in the center’s activities or giving a hand to other seniors who are in poorer health.

“I was the oldest participant when I first came here, but now I’ve been surpassed,” Yang said with a hearty laugh. She went on to recount her duties as a class president: helping to keep an eye on other participants, maintaining class order and tidiness, assisting to serve lunches, etc.

It’s hard to imagine Yang depressed and unhappy, but that is what she was before she started coming to the center. An operation on her spine had constrained her mobility and sapped her strength. When her family left for work each day, she was left alone at home, dozing or watching TV. But that was in the past. Now she leaves home every morning with her son. He goes to work and she goes to the center, where she and other older people pick vegetables, draw, exercise, sing karaoke, and attend DIY recycling courses according to their daily schedule. Her days have become much happier and a lot more fulfilling since she’s been attending.

Helping them regain their functions

Liu Liang-yin (劉亮吟) is a senior staffer at the Tzu Chi Long-Term Care Promotion and Development Center. A retired acute ward nurse, she helped launch the day-care center and is now helping its operation get on track. She entered the field of long-term care because of her affection for elderly people and her wish to create an ideal life for the senior population.

Care provider Wu Qi-wei (left) leads program participants at the day-care center in doing exercises to start a new day. They watch a video of exercises for older people produced by Taiwan’s Ministry of Health and Welfare and copy the movements.



“Our day-care center is different from a typical nursing home in that people who come here can still function in everyday life,” Liu explained. “It’s just that a sudden illness or other issues have made them less capable of taking care of themselves. Our work here is to help them regain the functions they might have lost.” She pointed out that though the seniors who come to the center are still relatively healthy, the center still evaluates their performance on ADL and IADL scales. ADL refers to “Activities of Daily Living” and includes the most basic functions of living, while IADL means “Instrumental Activities of Daily Living” and is comprised of more complex skills. The center uses the seniors’ ADL and IADL performance to determine their dietary needs and rehabilitation objectives.

Liu said that when people care for their elders, they tend to do too much for them. For example, they feed the older people instead of letting them eat themselves. Or, out of fear that the older people might fall, they limit the senior’s movement as much as possible. These actions, though well

intentioned, end up decreasing the seniors’ ability to take care of themselves.

To avoid these situations, the team at the center encourages and lets the seniors do things for themselves as much as possible, such as feeding themselves and moving around on their own. This helps them regain their lost functions. Even if they can’t regain one hundred percent of their lost functions, just recovering 30 to 50 percent is enough of an encouragement for the older people and their family.

There was, for instance, a program participant who liked to be pushed around in his wheelchair even though he could still walk himself. Care providers at the center did their best to persuade him to move around more on his own. Eventually he agreed to do so and would stand from a chair with the help of a walking stick and walk to fetch stuff for himself. People who don’t know better might take issue with the center’s approach, but it was done to stimulate the man’s ability to take care of himself. This method has been effective in helping the seniors at the center improve their mobility and other skills.

Liu Liang-yin said that the team at the center tries to run the program in the form of a class. There is a class president and vice president and regulations to follow. Anyone who wants to stay at the center has to follow the regulations. Every participant is around the same age, and they each have their own physical or health issues, but those whose condition is better can often be seen helping those whose condition is worse.

The care providers at the center play only an auxiliary role—they don’t actively serve the seniors, but instead encourage them to help themselves. But that doesn’t mean that their job is an easy one. They are on their feet almost all day, from greeting program participants when they arrive at the center in the morning to seeing them off at the end of a day. They rarely have a chance to sit and have to pay close attention to the seniors’ needs and safety. Wu Qi-wei (吳琦瑋), one of the care providers, said that she is so exhausted

Every care provider at the day-care center serves an average of five to ten seniors. They provide assistance to the older people and record their daily blood pressure readings, body temperature, and weight as well as their appetites and even the number of times the seniors go to the bathroom. This is done to give their family peace of mind.



after work every day that she often collapses into a chair when she gets home.

Wu has another identity in addition to her work as a care provider at the center: She’s a Tzu Chi volunteer too. She’s been active in Tzu Chi for over three decades. She’s done all kinds of volunteer work, including visiting the needy, serving older people at Tzu Chi’s community care locations, and providing support and guidance for students attending Tzu Chi schools. Now she serves at the center. She’s been a devoted disciple of Master Cheng Yen the whole time and has tried her best to follow in her footsteps.

In addition to Wu, there are at present two other care providers at the center. Their average age is 60. Only one of the them has worked as a professional care provider before; the other two are both senior Tzu Chi volunteers who, embracing a passion for serving others, underwent training in order to work at the center. They work hard to help create an environment where seniors in the community, including Tzu Chi volunteers, enjoy spending time.

“We’ll all grow old one day,” Liu Liang-yin commented. “How will you want to be treated when you are old? As you sow, so shall you reap. We treat the seniors at the center as we ourselves want to be treated when we are old.”

Liu added that loving just a little is different from loving a lot. Even though the staff at the center is not large, everyone gives their all. It’s hard work serving at the center and it’s inevitable to feel pressure, but the pressure comes from wanting to do a better job. A senior might begin to show improvement after they’ve spent several months at a similar institute, but at the center their improvement is often obvious in just a few weeks. The team at the center feels that all their hard work is worth it when they see the seniors they serve making progress day by day.

Bringing charity and medicine together

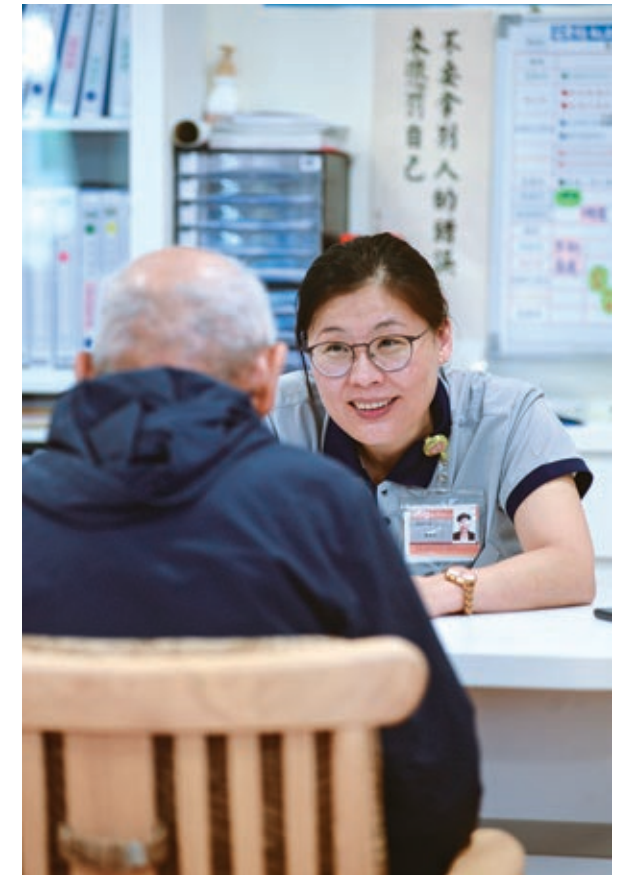
Taiwan officially became an aged society in April 2018, meaning that at least 14 percent of its

Liu Liang-yin, a senior staffer at the Tzu Chi Long-Term Care Promotion and Development Center, has a background in nursing. She often interviews program participants at the Tzu Chi Miaoli Day-Care Center to better understand their condition, including the extent of their physical or mental disabilities and how much family support they are receiving.

population is 65 or older. In other words, one in seven people in Taiwan is a senior. The government has projected that in just seven or eight years people aged 65 or older will account for at least 20 percent of the entire population in Taiwan. Faced with the growing need for geriatric care, the government launched Long-Term Care Plan 2.0, a revised edition of the original plan, dubbed version 1.0. This is an effort to raise the quality and amount of care available to Taiwan’s elderly and disabled population.

“In fact, long-term care for the needy was something Tzu Chi was already providing 54 years ago, when Master Cheng Yen first founded Tzu Chi in 1966,” said Zhuang Shu-ting (莊淑婷), deputy convener of the Tzu Chi Long-Term Care Promotion and Development Center. Zhuang said that the foundation’s first long-term care recipient was an elderly woman named Lin Zeng (林曾). Tzu Chi gave her rice and financial aid every month, and even hired people to cook for her and tend to her other needs.

To provide better services for people needing



long-term care and in response to the government's new long-term care plan, the foundation established the Long-Term Care Promotion and Development Center in August 2018. The center integrated two independent long-term care systems, one from Tzu Chi's charity mission and one from its medical mission. Now people who need long-term care just need to call Tzu Chi's long-term care hotline or contact the government's referral system to receive services from Tzu Chi.

The Tzu Chi Miaoli Campus is the second base of the Long-Term Care Promotion and Development Center that provides a comprehensive three-tier service for the public. (The first is in Taichung Jing Si Hall.) There are on-site case managers to handle applications from the public. They evaluate applicants' needs and help them obtain long-term care resources. The campus also provides in-home care services or day-care services. Elderly people can apply for caregivers to go to their homes, or they

Seniors at the day-care center pick vegetables while chatting with each other.



can go to the day-care center at the campus. In addition, seniors who live near the campus can go in two days a week for half-day events and to share meals together.

The Miaoli facility currently serves more than 600 older people. Its model of operation will be replicated at Tzu Chi's Jing Si Halls across Taiwan in the future so that more people can have easy access to long-term care resources.

Zhuang Shu-ting pointed out that Tzu Chi brings charity and medicine together in an integrated long-term care system so that the foundation can reach more people in need. When a patient is to be discharged from a Tzu Chi hospital and the medical team who cares for him finds that he will need long-term care services at home, they can make referrals for him to receive the services. The reverse is also true: If an in-home care provider finds someone she cares for needs medical care, she can make referrals for him to receive appropriate medical treatment.

Zhuang gives an example to illustrate her point. In early 2019, an old man named Chen who suffered from middle-stage dementia checked into Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital to have surgery for a bone fracture. When it came time to dis-



Every program participant at the center has their own seat and recliner. They walk around indoors ten times after lunch each day to help digestion and then take a nap.

charge him, hospital workers determined that he and his wife would need long-term care services at home. In response, they referred him to a case manager for evaluation. The case manager subsequently discovered that the couple lived in a remote old house that didn't even have an indoor toilet, and that their daughter lived out of town. A meal delivery service was immediately arranged for them, and an in-home care provider was assigned to visit them regularly to bathe them and clean for them. Tzu Chi volunteers were called in for help too. More than 30 volunteers worked together to spring-clean the house before Chinese New Year. They also delivered brand-

new furniture and everyday household items to the couple.

"Long-term care is a combination of 70 percent charitable resources and 30 percent medical resources," Zhuang explained. Tzu Chi's long-term care aims to provide integrated, comprehensive services to anyone in need through its various services in this field, including the newly established day-care center and more than 200 community care locations all over Taiwan. The community care locations offer a variety of services, including activities or memory upkeep classes for the elderly. Some have on-site case managers that can help people obtain long-term care resources, and some provide in-home care services.

Growing older is something we all will face and will always come with challenges. Through its financial, physical, medical, and emotional support for the elderly, Tzu Chi is helping empower Taiwan's population to age with grace and dignity. ❁

Crossing the Seas to Meet You

By Li Wei-huang

Translated by George Chen

Photos by Chen Ji-xiong

A stem cell recipient from China meets her donor in Taiwan. She calls him her brother because the same blood now flows in their bodies.

In August 2019, the mainland Chinese government suspended independent travel by tourists to Taiwan. Although that decision made traveling from China to Taiwan more difficult, it couldn't deter Zhao Hongyan (趙鴻雁) from making her trip. She eventually overcame this and other challenges and traveled to Taiwan in October 2019 from her hometown in Dalian, Liaoning Province, in the north of China. On October 19, she met her "life savior," a meeting for which she and her family had waited five long years.

Undeterred

Zhao arrived in Taiwan the day before a gathering of stem cell donors and recipients. The meeting had been organized by the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center. To ensure that she would have the energy and strength to meet and thank her donor, she went to bed at eight the night before the meeting after taking a sleeping pill. The next morning, she washed her hair and took a shower before putting on makeup, hoping to present her best self to her "Taiwanese brother," the donor whose blood now flows in her body.

The only thing she knew of her "brother" was that he was two years older than she was, though she secretly hoped that he weighed at least 100 kilograms (220 pounds). Because the amount of stem cells harvested depends on the weight of the recipient, Zhao hoped that her "brother" would be bigger so she could feel less guilty about the extraction she had received from him.

When the moment finally arrived for Zhao to meet her donor in the auditorium where the gathering was held, Zhao saw a tall, handsome man, Lin Zhe-qian (林哲謙), together with some of his family members, stand up from the audience. Zhao, who was already on stage, immediately knelt and prostrated herself in his direction three times. She explained that two of the prostrations were made on behalf of her parents who were unable to attend the gathering.

She had hoped her folks would have been able to accompany her, but she was the only person in her family that had been permitted to travel to Taiwan. Even so, her trip was only possible with the help of the China Marrow Donor Program and the Red Cross Society of China. She was very thankful for their help.

Zhao's yearning to meet her donor had grown stronger and stronger after she regained her health following her stem cell transplant. In May 2019, she traveled to Xiamen in Fujian Province with her family during China's May Day "Golden Week" holiday, thinking they could simply take a boat across the Taiwan Strait to Taiwan. They thought that once in Taiwan, they could track down Tzu Chi to obtain her donor's address and then visit her donor in person to express their gratitude.

When they reached Xiamen, however, they were told that besides the permit they had already obtained, they needed another entry permit to visit Taiwan. Because that application process would take two to three weeks, they had no choice



but to return to their hometown.

Later, Zhao contacted the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center in Taiwan online and learned that a gathering of donors and recipients would be held at Tzu Chi's Taichung Jing Si Hall in central Taiwan on October 19, 2019. When Zhao received this news, she approached China's Taiwan Affairs Office and other relevant agencies and tearfully pleaded for a chance to visit Taiwan for the gathering.

"We empathize with your situation, but we just can't let you go. It's our national policy." Though she received that answer over and over, she refused to give up. Finally, an exception was made for her, and she received permission to visit Taiwan on October 8, 2019. Her determination and persistence had finally earned her an opportunity to meet her donor.

Can't afford to die

Zhao was turning 30 when she fell ill. She had been an exemplar of success before that—a degree from a good school, a stable career, and a loving family with a newborn baby.

She recalled that she had once read about the plight of children afflicted with leukemia when she was still a student. She felt for them so much

Zhao Hongyan (right) meets her donor, Lin Zhe-qian (second from right), and his family in a gathering for stem cell donors and recipients at Taichung Jing Si Hall in central Taiwan.

she even signed up to be a donor with the China Marrow Donor Program and had a blood sample drawn. Sadly, before she could help others, she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

"No one in my family, going back three generations, has ever had such an illness," Zhao said. "My paternal grandparents both lived past 85, and my maternal grandmother is still healthy at 92 years old. And I'm still young! Why did I get such an ailment? Why me?" She was disconsolate.

Before she fell ill, she was an energetic person who could work 14 hours a day without showing any sign of fatigue. She thought leukemia was a hereditary ailment, something that only happened in television dramas or in other families. Never in her worst nightmare had she imagined she would be struck with the illness.

As a single child, Zhao was very clear she would have to overcome her disease. "I can't

afford to die,” she remarked. “I must continue to live. If I, a precious only child to my doting parents, was defeated by the illness, I’m sure they would succumb to grief and fall ill too!”

Her whole family was unanimous in their decision to save her—even if it meant losing their entire fortune. Zhao’s mother, already over 60 at the time, said, “I don’t mind if she’s wheelchair bound, as long as my daughter is alive!” Zhao felt like crying when she heard that. She realized that her life was not just hers alone. She had to do all she could to stay alive no matter how hard she would have to fight.

Snatched from the jaws of death

Zhao’s son was only just over four months old and still unweaned when she fell sick. Even so, she had no choice but to leave him under the care of other family members. Her whole family banded together to fight the illness with her, and they supported her with a clear division of labor. Her husband, mother, and parents-in-law accompanied her to Beijing to seek medical treatment. They even rented a place to live there. While her

mother prepared meals for her and her parents-in-law took over the care of her baby, her husband cared for her in the hospital. Her father stayed home to raise money for her treatment.

Since Zhao was an only child, she had no siblings for human leukocyte antigen (HLA) matching. Her parents were over 60 years old, and her child was too young, so they didn’t qualify as potential donors either. If Zhao was going for a stem cell transplant, her only hope would be to find a match in a bone marrow/stem cell registry. Fortunately, a match was found for her in the China Bone Marrow Program. However, that hope was short-lived. Two months later, the potential donor, after thinking long and hard, decided not to donate.

Zhao’s mother, devastated by the news of the donor’s refusal, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer shortly after. The cancer had metastasized to the cervix, stomach, and other areas. If there were ten stages of cancer development, the doctor diagnosed her mother’s cancer to be in stage nine.

Just as hope, disappointment, and despair were played on Zhao and her family like a cruel prank, a piece of good news came from the Tzu Chi bone marrow registry in Taiwan: A match with a high degree of HLA compatibility had been found in the registry for Zhao!

The whole family, after being plunged into despair, saw hope again. They were afraid that they would be disappointed again, but several blood disease patients reassured them by saying, “If the match is found in Taiwan’s bone marrow database, you can rest assured!” It turned out that many blood disease patients in China had received stem cells from donors registered with the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center in Taiwan. They all affirmed and had great confidence in the compassion of Taiwanese people.

On July 9, 2014, Zhao lay in Beijing Daopei Hospital, watching the stem cells from a stranger in Taiwan being transfused, drop by drop, into her body. One month later, her mother underwent

surgery in Peking Union Medical College Hospital. During that period, the whole family was under tremendous stress. They were all spread thin caring for Zhao and her mother, both with life threatening ailments.

But after a storm comes a calm. That was the case here, and happily both mother and daughter survived.

A costly illness

The entire treatment for Zhao was very costly. She clearly remembered consulting with the doctor after the diagnosis. The doctor told her that her ailment would be treated first with chemotherapy, after which they’d try to find a matching donor for a stem cell transplant. The entire course of treatment would require a huge sum of money. “At least one million renminbi [US\$141,617],” said the doctor, “and there is no ceiling to the final cost.” He explained that the entire expenditure would depend on how well she responded to the treatment.

Zhao was a high school science teacher. When news spread that she was ill, her colleagues and students started a fundraiser for her at school to help cover her medical expenses. They raised more than 330,000 renminbi (US\$47,160) within less than 40 hours.

A retired teacher sent 1,000 renminbi (US\$140); a student donated 2,000 renminbi which she had painstakingly saved from her allowance; a colleague who had just returned to work after surgery for cancer donated 500 renminbi; and a young teacher donated one month of his salary. Everyone hoped that Zhao would recover soon and return to school to teach.

Zhao’s father sold a house, but the money was still insufficient. “I have six aunts and four uncles. They all chipped in to help too,” Zhao remarked. Every relative gave all they could to help her conquer the disease.

Zhao remembered a popular Chinese movie titled *Dying to Survive*. It explored the issue of the

expensive treatment costs for leukemia patients in China. It was even said that leukemia was an ailment for the rich. Many patients’ families had to sell everything they had to pay the medical bills, but even so, there was no guarantee the patients would recover. Many ultimately lost their loved ones.

Zhao and her family spent a total of 1300,000 renminbi (US\$184,290) in the end. That money included their rent and living expenses for the two years they stayed in Beijing for Zhao’s treatment.

Being alive is all that matters

Zhao, who was naturally cheerful and optimistic, was an entirely different person when she first started receiving treatment. She rarely spoke, and insisted that her mother not speak to anyone either. “There were four patients in my ward,” Zhao recalled. “When someone vacated their bed, or when a new patient moved into the ward, I would feel very stressed.” This was because she felt she might end up like any of her fellow patients.

“What’s your type of leukemia?” she would ask a fellow patient. “How many chemo sessions have you completed? Have you found a donor? Have you received a transplant?” Zhao’s anxiety was so obvious that even her attending doctor became concerned about her physical and mental state. And yet, every time she underwent a lumbar puncture or a bone marrow aspiration test, she never showed any sign of being in pain nor did she ever shed a tear. “I just felt that my entire body was numb. All I could think of was whether I would survive.”

Although Zhao did not know why she became ill, she had not slept well for almost five months before the onset of the illness. Her son weighed nearly nine pounds at birth. He had to be fed every hour during the day and every two hours at night, which greatly interrupted her sleep. A lack of rest drained her vitality, and she became so



Zhao on an outing with her family after she regained her health. Diagnosed with leukemia in November 2013, Zhao received a stem cell transplant in July 2014. The transplant was successful and Zhao recovered from the illness.

COURTESY OF ZHAO HONGYAN

Statistics from the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center

In November 2019, 287 patients applied to the center to find a matching donor.

- Number of patients that have sought a match over the years: 60,486
- Number of potential donors listed at the center: 441,122
- Number of transplants that have happened via the help of the center: 5,539



LAST UPDATED: NOVEMBER 30, 2019



down, it was as if she were suffering from post-partum depression. "My mood couldn't have been lower," she commented. "Some time after that, I came down with the illness."

Zhao admitted that because her life had been smooth sailing before she fell ill, she had been the kind who only allowed herself to win and not to fail: "I believed that as long as one worked hard, one would definitely make it in life." After her close brush with death though, she began to think differently. "Now I feel that as long as one is alive, there is nothing to complain about life."

After her successful transplant, she was so grateful to be alive she would easily tear up. "Even being able to step out of the hospital wearing a mask and walk around a supermarket was enough to reduce me to tears of gratitude." She had missed places full of people, life, and vitality when she was ill. "Being alive is just so wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Zhao used to value success, excellence, and achievement, but they are no longer her priorities in life. She now defines her happiness as "being able to accompany my parents as they age and my son as he grows up." Compared with her fellow

Donor Lin Zhe-qian (front row, third from left) said that his whole family was very happy when they learned about the gathering for donors and recipients. They decided they would all attend to meet the recipient. Sitting beside him is Zhao Hongyan, the recipient, who was delighted to have a new extended family in Taiwan.

LIAO WEI-CHEN

patients who had passed on, Zhao knew she had already been given a lot.

"The world has kissed my Soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs." Zhao used this quote from *Stray Birds* by the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore to convey her feelings after gaining a new lease on life.

Ever since Zhao arrived at the airport in Taiwan, she had been accompanied by Tzu Chi volunteers wherever she went, be it Taichung or Taipei, until her departure. During this trip, she fulfilled her wish of meeting her "Taiwanese brother," someone who now shares the same blood as she, and she returned home with an abundance of love.

She has already mapped out a plan: When China again allows independent travel by tourists to Taiwan, she will definitely take her family in Dalian for another visit there.

Gratitude Tinged With a Trace of Regret By Zhao Hongyan

I've already shared with my family the videos and photos of my meeting with my stem cell donor. They were all in tears, extremely touched by the scenes they saw. They repeatedly expressed their regret for being unable to attend the gathering, especially as the whole family of my "brother" came, but I alone had to represent my family.

This thanksgiving trip was wrought with challenges. Besides the distance, it was difficult to make it from China to Taiwan. When my husband picked me up at the Fuzhou airport on October 21, 2019, I broke down in tears as soon as I saw him. I was so emotionally charged from all that I had experienced in Taiwan, I went on and on about my trip till three the next morning. We planned to do some sightseeing in other cities before returning to Dalian, but I knew I would be too distracted to enjoy the scenery. Whenever I thought about my brother and what had happened during my trip, I could not remain calm. I even dreamed of it at night.



I Was the Lucky One By Lin Shu-huai

"Seeing her in good health, living happily, and even able to visit Taiwan, I feel relieved," said Lin Zhe-qian, Zhao's donor. "It's fate that I was able to help her. I hope she will take good care of herself, live a full life, face her future with courage, and cherish her time with her child and family." The donor gave Zhao his best wishes.

In November 2008, 25-year-old Lin and his girlfriend signed up to be stem cell donors. They each had a blood sample drawn and registered with the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center. Only 10 cc of blood was extracted, which was insignificant compared to the blood he donated each time. As the years went by, his girlfriend became his wife, and he gradually forgot about his participation.

It wasn't until June 2014 that he received a phone call from Lin Xiang-que (林香雀), a volunteer for the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center. "You're a match for a stem cell donation," the volunteer told Lin on the phone. "The patient's condition is very bad. She really needs a transplant." Lin thought that if he could save someone, why not? Therefore, he immediately ran through all donation protocols, and completed the donation in July 2014. To this day, the donation has had no effect on his health.

As a result of Lin's donation, his mother got to know Tzu Chi better. She went on to undergo training and become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer. Her joy was beyond description when she met Zhao in the gathering for donors and recipients. Zhao endearingly called her "Mother, Mother" repeatedly (since Zhao now deems her donor as her brother). Mrs. Lin said she was most grateful to her son's mother-in-law because she was the one who encouraged her son to register for stem cell donation back in 2008. If she hadn't done that, the donation wouldn't have happened and her son wouldn't have been able to save Zhao's life.

Donor Lin believes in showing empathy to people in need of help, an empathy that was borne from his own experience. He recalled that when his father was lying unconscious and critically ill in the hospital, he rushed to his bedside, only to be told by the doctor "there is nothing more we can do." At that moment, he was so despondent he almost got down on his knees to plead for his father's life. That experience taught him that when people are faced with loved ones on the brink of death, they are the most helpless and most in need of others to provide them with strength and hope. Therefore, he counted himself very blessed and fortunate for being able to give others help and hope.



Tzu Chi University Has Its First Woman President

By Joy F. Morrison, Ph.D.

Tzu Chi University (TCU) in Hualien, Taiwan, has a new president as of August 2019. Dr. Ingrid Y. C. Liu (劉怡均) was presented with the University Seal by Masters De Fan (德飢) and De Chien (德倩) of the Jing Si Abode before more than 700 attendees in the inauguration ceremony.

Dr. Liu was one of two vice-presidents between 2017 and 2019, and prior to that she was the provost and director of the Center for Faculty Development and Instructional Resources. She is a professor in the Institute of Medical Sciences and an active researcher also overseeing TCU graduate students. Dr. Liu has served at TCU for over 25 years. She is the tenth president of TCU and the first woman to serve as university president.

Dr. Liu received her doctorate in Neuroscience from the University of Southern California (USC) in 2003, where she studied under Richard Thompson, a pioneer in the field of neuroscience. Her M.S. in Microbiology, awarded in 1992, is from Indiana University, Bloomington, and her B.S. in Plant Pathology from National Taiwan University in Taipei, Taiwan, was awarded in 1990. In 1993, Dr. Liu became a faculty member of the Tzu Chi College of Medicine. In 1998, she received a TCU Fellowship, followed by a USC Provost's scholarship to study neuroscience at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. After completing her Ph.D. program, she returned to TCU and dedicated herself to teaching and research in the Department of Molecular Biology and Human Genetics and the Institute of Medical Sciences. Dr. Liu has received TCU's Excellent Research Article award five times (2011, 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2018) and remains a prolific reviewer for eight journals in her field. She also won the Excellence in Teaching award at TCU in 2009. Dr. Liu's neuroscience research currently focuses on the ways memories form and fade, and explores the pathology and prevention of Alzheimer's disease.

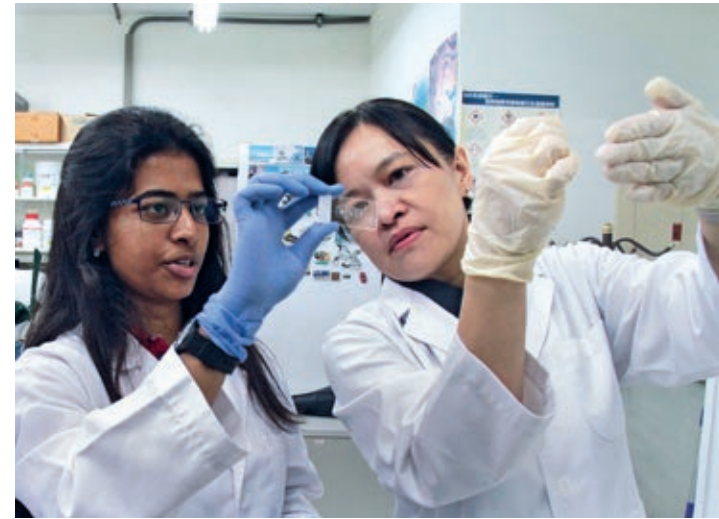
She became a member of TCU's administrative team in 2010. In 2013, she was appointed dean of the

College of Liberal Arts and Basic Education, and director of Faculty Development and Instructional Resources. She was promoted in 2014 to become dean of the Office of Academic Affairs and, in 2017, she became a TCU vice president. In 2019, she was nominated as TCU's president by the Presidential Search Committee and was approved by the Board of Directors.

Over the past 25 years, TCU has become a university that is people-oriented, covers diverse campuses, and is dedicated to nurturing professionals. It advocates the values of the Tzu Chi Foundation, equips its students with professional skills and knowledge, and leads them to altruistically attend to others' needs. The mission of the university is "Teaching with propriety, educating with virtue, instructing with truth, and guiding with principles." In 2019, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings rated TCU 67th among over 1,250 universities assessed, and first in Taiwan.

In her inaugural address, President Liu said, "TCU is my first workplace, and it will be my last workplace as well." She expressed her appreciation to Dharma Master Cheng Yen, members of TCU's Presidential Search Committee, and the Board of Directors, for trusting her to lead TCU. The president expressed her thanks to her predecessor, President Wang Pen-jung (王本榮), and every other TCU president for their fine efforts. She promised to stand firmly on their solid ground, working with TCU faculty members, staff and students to assist TCU to become an international university, equipping its students with professional skills and knowledge, and inspiring them to attend to others' needs. One of President Liu's goals is that all TCU graduates will be professional and altruistic. She foresees that TCU will look after the needs of Tzu Chi volunteers around the world, and will provide a variety of courses to meet their needs and enhance their capabilities. President Liu welcomed Tzu Chi volunteers to come to Hualien to take short-term, undergraduate, or graduate programs.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi University for the sole purpose of education, guided by its motto, "kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity." The motto encourages faculty, staff and students to enhance their physical well-being and wisdom, preparing students to become kind and compassionate people as well as educated professionals. Master Cheng Yen expects President Liu to lead TCU forward, cultivating



Dr. Liu (right) at work in a lab

LI JIA-XUAN

future generations of kind and compassionate individuals.

Earlier this year, Dr. Liu led a team of TCU staff and faculty members to the United States, visiting some of TCU's many international university partners. They visited Andrews University in the state of Michigan, Indiana University at Bloomington, the University of Southern California, the University of California Los Angeles, Loma Linda University and Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. She recently traveled to the U.S. again visiting the Tzu Chi Foundation Regional Offices in New York and Chicago, describing the relief work of the foundation, and promoting Tzu Chi University as a destination for higher education. TCU has formal partnerships with Duke University, New York University, and the University of Southern California. Other partnerships are in Malaysia, Singapore, India, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Sweden.

President Liu has some long-term goals for Tzu Chi University. They are: 1) to develop TCU as an international university that cultivates professionals from different countries, cultural, and religious backgrounds; 2) to ensure that TCU's curriculum and research are for the purposes of protecting the globe and improving people's health and well-being at all ages; and 3) to ensure the sustainable development of TCU.

Dr. Liu is 53 years old, married to Eugene Chen, and has a son, Ellison Chen, who works in the technology sector in San Francisco. Her hobbies are reading, playing the piano and cello, and pilates. She also plays table tennis! ❀

Dr. Ingrid Y. C. Liu became Tzu Chi University's first woman president in August 2019.

COURTESY OF INGRID Y. C. LIU



Standing Tall for the Earth

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

There are over 13,000 Tzu Chi recycling volunteers in Malaysia, spread across more than a thousand recycling stations. Everyone willingly pitches in to do the unpaid work, no matter their educational level or socioeconomic standing. By reclaiming reusable garbage, they hope to inspire everyone to conserve and cherish the Earth's resources so that a better, cleaner Earth can be left behind for our posterity. In this article, we feature recycling volunteer Tan Wee. Despite being 87 and afflicted with a severely stooped posture, she works hard at recycling with a persistent spirit worthy of everyone's admiration. Though severely stooped, she stands tall for the Earth.

As a photojournalist for *Tzu Chi Monthly*, I've interviewed and covered many Tzu Chi recycling volunteers in Taiwan. That's why I was very excited to meet their counterparts in Malaysia during a recent trip to that country. One of the people I met was Tan Wee (陳為), a resident of the Gombak District in the western Malaysian state of Selangor. I warmed to her immediately because she spoke a very familiar language—Hokkien, a Chinese dialect widely spoken in Taiwan and often referred to as Taiwanese. Tan is 87 and badly hunch-backed. Her severe stoop is a result of a traffic accident at age 46. The accident left her with a curvature in her spine, which increasingly deteriorated with age. But despite her severe impairment, she never complains or laments. On the contrary, she makes the best of her time by giving of herself—and her way of giving is to work at recycling every day. Taking Master Cheng Yen's words to heart, she does her best to do the Earth a good turn.

Tan wears traditional Chinese clothes, looking dignified and spirited in them. "I make every single one of these garments myself," she said proudly. She is good with her hands and makes her clothes to suit her slouched figure. Admiring her skills, I asked her to pose with one of her garments for me to photograph. She smiled cheerfully into my camera as I snapped photos of her. She looks radiant in the photos, as if she were saying: "I've never allowed the deformity in my body to hold me back. I know how to make clothes for myself to make me look good. My stooped back has never stopped me from giving either. It has never been an impediment to my serving as a recycling volunteer."



A hard life

Tan sat at a sewing machine, her feet pumping the treadle as her hands pushed the edges of aligned fabric under the needle. The sound of the machine echoing in the room transported me back in time to her childhood. She told me that as a child she enjoyed watching her mother work at a sewing machine—that's how she picked up her sewing skills. She was using those skills to help with her family's finances by the age of ten, helping her parents out when they were out working in a kitchen garden. At 13, she took up work as a rubber tapper, going from plantation to plantation to cut into rubber trees and collect the latex oozing from the incisions. Later, she married and bore six children, but her husband was irresponsible and liked to gamble, and he passed away early. The heavy burden of supporting six children fell to her. She did what she could to provide for them: She cleaned houses, cooked, and washed clothes for others. Even though caring for her children after long days of work was hard, she sometimes made clothes too to supplement her income. Making ends meet was a challenge, and she had to pinch every penny. The family's clothes were repeatedly patched up to save money.

Her life at the time wasn't easy, but she bore her hardships with fortitude and resilience. Her hunched back seemed to tell a tale of a lifetime of heavy burdens. Happily, that was all in the past. Surrounded by her children and grandchildren now, her life is one of contentment and peace.



Staying the course

Tan said that her appearance might lead people to think otherwise, but her deformity hasn't decreased her usefulness. In fact, she can do as much work as others, if not more. After working hard most of her life to support her family, she refused a well-deserved life of ease and comfort in her old age. Instead, she threw herself into recycling work in response to Master Cheng Yen's appeal to love the Earth through action.

Dawn had barely broken when Tan, carrying a large bag, stepped out of her home, ready to start her daily trip to collect recyclables in the neighborhood. I followed her as she traversed the streets and alleys on foot, her back bent at an angle of nearly 90 degrees. She walked no slower than I did, all the while breathing easily, even though I'm younger by several decades.

"Do you have recyclables for me today?" "Do you still want these glass bottles?" "Anything for me?" She asked local residents as she visited household after household. Whether people had recyclables for her or not, she smiled at them and said, "Thank you. Thank you."

She took every step firmly and steadfastly, unhampered by her physical limitations, and she went about her business fully at ease. She knew she was walking on the right path and that all she needed to do was to stay the course.



Undaunted by heavy work

Tan went from household to household on her collection trip, knowing like the back of her hand where to stop and in which corner there would be recyclable garbage waiting for her. She has worked in this district for years, and people are used to seeing her around. Whether Chinese or Malay, many save their recyclable garbage for her and take it out to her when they see her coming. Others put their recycling in a fixed corner for Tan to take away.

I grew curious as I saw how she worked. She was on her own, with no one to help her carry stuff. She didn't even have a hand truck or a cart. How then did she cope when there was a large amount of recycling or when the weight was too much for her to handle? That question was answered later during the trip, when I learned that she would patiently take her recycling home in installments or on repeated trips. When the garbage was heavy, she would, using all the strength she had, drag it a few meters at a time, stop to take a breath, and then continue on. She'd keep this up until she had gotten all the stuff home.

She didn't rest once she got home, but immediately went on to sort the garbage she had collected. She even washed soiled items. Then she put everything in order, grouping the recyclables by type and preparing them for other volunteers to haul away by truck. Her meticulous approach showed that she's the type of person who would rather do more herself than add to others' trouble and leave loose ends for them to tie up. She knows that if she does more herself, she makes the work easier for others. She exemplifies a spirit of service and consideration for others.





Different places, same spirit

When I had finished covering her story and was taking leave of her the next day, I saw her discreetly giving money to volunteer Ong Hok Ki (王國開), who had come to pick me up. It turned out that she was hoping that Ong would treat me to some tea. She felt that she hadn't been a good enough host to me, especially as I had come all the way from Taiwan. I was very grateful to her when I witnessed this display of thoughtfulness. She was treating me like a grandson. A Chinese saying goes: "A person's appearance reflects what is in their heart." This is definitely true in Tan's case. She has a good heart, and it shines through. She's not only a loving mother to her children—she is also polite and kind to others. People can't help but like her.

The warmth and friendliness of the people in Selangor, Malaysia, warmed my heart and made me feel at home. If not for the signs written in Malay and the sounds of prayer wafting from a mosque, I wouldn't have known I was in a foreign country. I asked myself if there were any differences between Tzu Chi recycling volunteers in Taiwan and Malaysia, and I concluded that they are intrinsically the same. More than 3,000 kilometers (1,865 miles) from Taiwan, there are more volunteers who love the Earth as mothers love their children, who demonstrate their love for the environment by rolling up their sleeves to collect and sort recyclables. Though what each of them can do is limited, they persist at their work, day in and day out. They persevere in their commitment for the good of the Earth. That spirit of unwavering dedication is what moves me the most. ❀

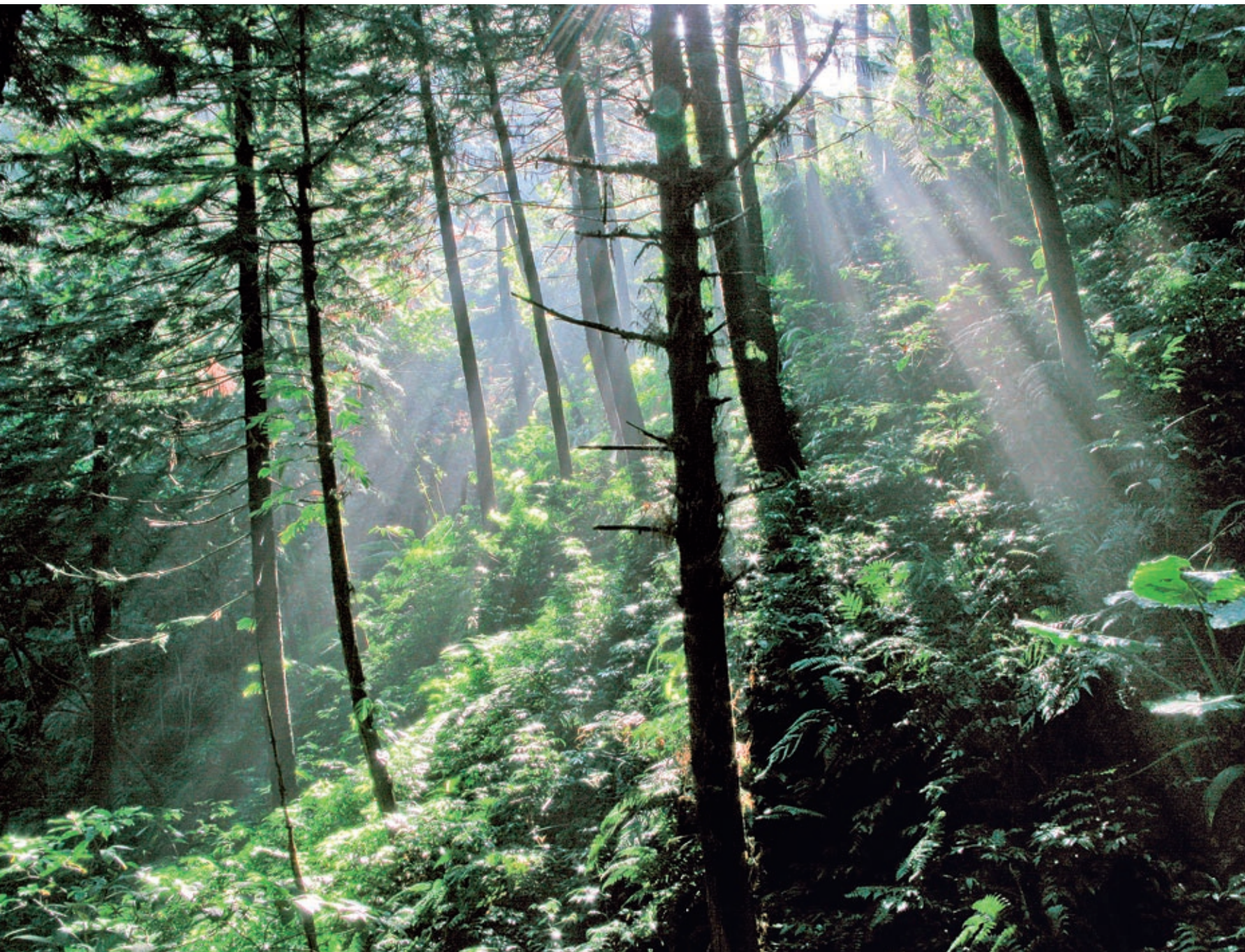


A Breather

By Wu Deng-shan

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



Don't always be in such a hurry. Take time to enjoy the beauty around you. Reaching your destination might be important, but enjoying your journey will result in a richer and more fulfilling life.

One day, I was waiting for my train at a small countryside stop, but it was significantly delayed. I was very displeased at first, but then I thought better of it. Since my unhappy attitude wasn't going to make the train arrive any sooner, I decided to stop fretting about it. Instead, I took advantage of the unexpected delay by having a look around the countryside.

As I ambled away from the train station, I saw that the weather had finally cleared up after days of gray skies and rain. The landscape was bathed in bright sunlight under the azure firmament. An older woman was weeding in a vegetable garden not far away. A flock of sparrows descended from the sky and landed near her. The woman smiled, and then seemed to be talking to the birds. They chirped in response. Suddenly one of the sparrows fluttered its wings and rose into the air before diving into a field. It pecked several times at the ground and then lifted off with an earthworm squirming in its beak. The bird looked proud, as if showing off its catch to its friends.

The woman was tickled to laughter by the sparrow's "performance." I laughed too, but not in a completely relaxed way.

The sun gradually sank lower in the sky. I sat on a railway tie and drank in the scenery. Rapeseed plants filled the farmland on both sides of the railroad tracks. The plants were flowering, and yellow blossoms blanketed the fields. Soothing breezes rustled and swayed the flowers like waves in the ocean. The scene was so beautiful it took my breath away.

By then, I no longer cared when my train would arrive. Instead, I was thankful for its delay. Because of this unexpected episode, I was given a chance to detach myself from my busy life and take some refreshing time off. I was given a chance to lose myself in the beauty of nature and witness that delightful scene between the woman and the birds.

In today's fast-paced society, many of us are like machines that never stop running. We rush from place to place and task to task. There is always another item on our to-do list to take care of. With the wheels of our lives constantly turning, our youthful days and the prime of our lives slip away unnoticed. When we get stuck in our hurried, harried lives, how many other precious things slip right through our fingers and are gone before we know it? Often it isn't until some health issues emerge that we begin to learn to take it easy.

I often reminded myself of this after I returned home from my trip that day: You are here to live life, not to rush through it. Don't become so caught up in a vicious cycle of hurrying through things that you never stop to admire life and everything around you. Life is like a river. If you allow yourself to be constantly swept along by the currents, the scenery on both sides of the river will simply pass you by. Be sure to take time to pause, look around, reflect, and recharge.

I learned to pace my days from that day on. I'd occasionally snatch half a day of freedom, go out in nature, and revel in its beauty, its tranquility, and its wisdom. In the middle of a busy day, I'd take a breather by listening to some classical music or reading a short essay. These things helped me relax and unwind. I tried to make the most of the time I spent with my family by really focusing on them instead of having half of my mind on something else.

Life is short. You surely notice how time flies. Didn't I just turn 40 yesterday and now 50 is staring at me? Many of us have felt this way. Remember that there is no rewind, no going back. Don't let life pass you by. Pause to take in the scenery and discover all the beauty life has to offer. ☘

Twinkles of Light in Dark Corners Sierra Leone

By Lin Pei-fei, Yee Siang Yong, Zhang Ru-rong, and Chen Pao-chu

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Tzu Chi started aiding the West African country of Sierra Leone in 2015 during an outbreak of the Ebola epidemic. In the process of giving help, the foundation learned of more people and communities in need of aid—homeless children, flood-ravaged slums, and communities of amputees and other war-wounded individuals. Tzu Chi is working with three local charitable organizations to bring light into the lives of the underprivileged.

Culvert in Cline Town, Freetown, was one of the areas hit hard by the floods. A Tzu Chi distribution held there on November 14 benefited 500 households. The event started in the afternoon and continued into the night. Some simple lighting was set up, which, coupled with illumination from car headlights, lit up the scene.



Fight for Survival

Commotion of some sort occurred in almost every distribution Tzu Chi held with its three local partners in Sierra Leone in November 2019. This distribution venue, chock-full of people anxiously waiting to obtain their supplies, reflected how survival is a challenge in a country plagued by poverty, epidemics, and natural disasters. Volunteers did their best to maintain order.

Love for Desert Flowers

Children return home carrying aid items on their heads. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered blankets and multigrain powder to the Kiera Chaplin Desert Flower School, located in a community where most people make a living by quarrying stones. Most families struggle financially, and children often have to skip breakfast. The nutritious multigrain powder Tzu Chi distributed was exactly what the children needed.



Mention Sierra Leone and most people think of *Blood Diamond*. That famous movie, released in 2006, was set during the Sierra Leone Civil War. Its title refers to the diamonds mined during the war and sold to fund the armed conflict. The brutal civil war in Sierra Leone lasted over a decade, from 1991 to 2002, and left tens of thousands dead and

millions displaced. Even though 17 years have passed since the end of the war, vestiges of the war are still visible today in the villages and on the streets in the nation.

The country has been more recently known for the Ebola epidemic that devastated parts of West Africa from 2014 to 2016. Nearly 4,000 people died and more than 14,000 were infected in Sierra

Leone by the time it was declared Ebola-free in March 2016. The epidemic destroyed families, crushed the nation's weak healthcare system, and devastated an already poor economy. It was also what brought Tzu Chi into the nation.

Tzu Chi started providing long-term aid to people in Sierra Leone in March 2015, in cooperation with Caritas Freetown, the Healey

International Relief Foundation, and the Lanyi Foundation. Through these partnerships, Tzu Chi has been able to help survivors of the Ebola epidemic, orphans struggling with hunger, the war-wounded and amputees, health facilities that lack basic supplies, and other underserved people and organizations. Tzu Chi's work has changed lives for the better in the country.

Tzu Chi's three partners in Sierra Leone have worked in the nation for a long time. They are like Tzu Chi's hands and eyes there. It was through them that the foundation learned about the severe floods that hit Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, in August 2019. Torrential rains there led to flash floods, submerging houses and forcing people out of their homes. The situation was especially dire for those who lived near the sea or in low-lying regions. They were badly in need of help after having sustained serious losses from the floods.

As soon as they learned of the plight of the flood victims, the Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, immediately set out to organize aid for them. Rice provided by Taiwan's Council of Agriculture, multigrain powder, blankets made from recycled PET bottles, and second-hand clothes collected from across Taiwan were prepared for shipping and distribution. Then, a Tzu Chi delegation consisting of 22 members from the United States, Taiwan, Malaysia, and South Africa flew to Sierra Leone in mid-November to personally deliver into the hands of the needy the much-needed aid supplies. In addition to flood victims, Tzu Chi's aid also reached Ebola survivors, orphanages, schools, and other institutions. A total of 10,644 people benefited from 18 distributions over nine days. Such an intense distribution schedule was difficult to pull off, but the mission was successful thanks to Tzu Chi's partners in Sierra Leone.

The first distribution

The first distribution was held in Culvert, a district in Cline Town, Freetown. It had been devastated by the floods. The event was delayed due to several factors, including the limited preparation time, the late arrival of the relief items due to traffic congestion, and the difficulty of confirming

Under the guidance of the Lanyi Foundation and Tzu Chi, women in a community for Ebola survivors grow rice and vegetables to be self-sufficient. They are now able to harvest rice twice a year.



household information. The long wait made some of the people in the crowd restless.

The high temperatures, reaching 31 degrees Celsius (87.8 degrees Fahrenheit), made the wait even more of an ordeal. Everyone was sweating, their clothes soaked in perspiration. Dr. Zheng Shun-xian (鄭順賢), an infectious disease specialist from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, eastern Taiwan, helped people pass the time by teaching them techniques of good hand hygiene. He taught the crowd the correct way to wash their hands using a simple mnemonic and a step-by-step demonstration. Practicing good hand hygiene is a simple but effective way to prevent infections and the spread of disease. The doctor used exaggerated gestures and movements for his demonstration, thus making it fun and engaging.

People line up for blankets and clothes, which are welcome due to the wide temperature variations between day and night in Sierra Leone.

Dr. Zheng and his colleague Dr. Chen Pao-chu (陳寶珠), an OB/GYN physician, had joined the mission to Sierra Leone to promote hygiene among the locals. They had even prepared PowerPoint slides for their presentation. However, it turned out that the slides they had prepared were useless—wherever they went there was neither electricity nor projectors for them to show their slides. Due to the language barrier and with no visual aids, they were stumped as to how to convey the health information they needed to share. Thankfully, it occurred to them they could help protect local people from diseases by teaching them to wash their hands.

The atmosphere at the event became livelier when some local women invited Dr. Chen to dance with them. Everyone had a good time. Music and dance are indeed wonderful channels to release people's emotions and set their souls free.

Since there was no electricity on site, carrying on the distribution after dark would be difficult, so every member of the Tzu Chi delegation worked hard, hoping to wrap up the distribu-

tion before sunset. Even so, many people still hadn't received their supplies by the time dusk fell. Fortunately, people from the Healey Foundation managed to set up some simple lighting, and some time after seven in the evening all items had finally been distributed. Volunteers breathed sighs of relief as they watched the last recipients return home loaded with aid from Tzu Chi.

The warmth of their hands

Most of the distributions this time were held in Freetown. The only other place Tzu Chi's aid reached was Bo District, in Southern Province.

On November 17, the Tzu Chi team set out from Freetown at five in the morning for Bo District, to distribute aid there. They arrived at their destination four hours later.

Philomena Yumkella, CEO of the Lanyi Foundation, was from Bo. She told the volunteers, "I was born and raised here. I started out from here. I know the needs of the people here, and so I came back to help." The volunteers could tell that the items they distributed were truly appreciated by the recipients. After receiving the blankets, second-hand clothes, and multi-grain powder from Tzu Chi, the villagers cheerfully hoisted the items onto their heads and headed home with a bounce in their steps.

One of the team's stops in Bo was a farm. Yumkella's mother had provided the land for some local women to grow crops. With smiles brightening their faces, these 30 women sang sonorously to welcome the volunteers, their singing so lovely that everyone was soon moving their bodies to the rhythm, instantly forgetting the fatigue of their long journey.

These female farmers grew rice and vegetables on the farm. They showed off their freshly harvested rice to the visitors, explaining that although they received aid from Tzu Chi, they worked hard to support themselves too. The volunteers were happy that Tzu Chi's aid had empowered the recipients, given them strength and hope, and inspired them to work hard to make a living. This is probably the best thing humanitarian aid can achieve.

The multigrain powder Tzu Chi has been providing on a long-term basis to local institutions has enriched the diet of many children. The principal of St. Paul's School for the Blind, himself visually impaired, thanked Tzu Chi for their help. "Our world is dark, but your love brings light to it," he said to the visiting volunteers. The children



Lin Pei-fei (林裴菲), deputy director of Tzu Chi's Foreign Affairs Office in Taiwan, kisses a baby girl in Sierra Leone. Children in this African country face all kinds of survival challenges growing up. Lin gave the girl her best wishes.

at the school couldn't see the volunteers, but when the volunteers held their hands, the children responded by tightly holding their hands back. Though the language barrier prevented them from talking to each other, the volunteers' love was transmitted to the children through the warmth of their hands.

The delegation's last stop was Kalia, a village with 54 households. Forty-eight people there had died of Ebola. This was the first time Tzu Chi volunteers had come to Kalia, and the residents were looking forward to the aid distribution. Volunteers led the villagers in singing the Tzu Chi song, "One Family." Then volunteer Liu Jing-qiang (劉鏡鏘) encouraged the villagers to hug each other and pay the love from Tzu Chi forward.

The volunteers distributed aid in six places in Bo District before they left for the long trip home. It was midnight by the time they returned to their hotel in Freetown, bringing to an end a nearly 20-hour stretch to serve those in need.

The light of the world

Caritas Freetown is one of Tzu Chi's partners in Sierra Leone. On November 19, the delegation visited a school and an orphanage founded by Father Peter Konteh, director of Caritas Freetown.



At the Kiera Chaplin Desert Flower School, the volunteers met first-grader Yatu Koroma. She didn't know her father, and was being brought up by her mother. She suffered from a congenital issue with her hip, but her family was too poor to afford treatment. She couldn't walk normally, nor could she stand for a long time. Dragging her weak feet, she "walked" for a kilometer (0.6 mile) every day to school. The trip to and fro was a long journey for someone with her condition.

Koroma was absent from school on the day Tzu Chi volunteers visited. There were goods to receive on this day, and so the school principal wondered why Koroma hadn't come to school. He hurried to her home to find out why she was

absent. Koroma told him that she had had no breakfast that morning, and she was so hungry that she didn't have the energy to walk to school. Without a moment's hesitation, the principal picked her up, hoisted her on his back, and carried her to school. Everyone was touched when they heard the story.

Dr. Zheng felt so much compassion for the little girl he decided to help out. He measured the girl's height and the distance between her elbow and the ground. He would have crutches custom-made for her in Taiwan and then mailed to Sierra Leone.

St. Mary's-Fatima Interim Care Center is an orphanage that gives shelter to children

orphaned by Ebola and natural disasters. After Tzu Chi started providing rice to the institution, the center was able to save up enough money to buy a vehicle to ferry older children to and from school. Due to care from Father Konteh and assistance from Tzu Chi, children at the orphanage have been able to attend school and have a different life.

Tzu Chi volunteers witnessed unimaginable poverty on this trip to Sierra Leone. Food was scarce in many places, and medical care was gravely inadequate. Volunteers visited several medical clinics and found that none of them had doctors—nurses were caring for patients, providing treatment, and even delivering babies.

This is a country that will need long-term aid and support.

But amidst that poverty and deprivation, volunteers also witnessed hope and the beauty of humanity. For example, the clergy members and school teachers that the volunteers met exemplified lives of service and compassion. These people lead very poor lives themselves, but still choose to give to those who are more in need. They ask for nothing in return. Their lives of selfless service are truly worthy of admiration and respect, especially in a world where fame, status, and wealth are so much valued and sought after.

The children, teenagers, and adults the volunteers met also demonstrated that happiness is



Women take winding mountain paths home. On their heads are items distributed by Tzu Chi.



Caritas Freetown, the Healey Foundation, the Lanyi Foundation, and Tzu Chi carried out 18 distributions in communities, welfare organizations, and schools in Sierra Leone in November 2019, providing local underserved people with multigrain powder, rice, blankets, and second-hand clothes.

not such a difficult thing to obtain. Despite the little they had, the locals seemed easily satisfied and contented. Perhaps it is because a life of poverty is all that they know, all they have ever seen. And yet, they are entitled to so much more—clean water, a steady supply of food, and a quality education.

Volunteers were impressed that locals had not lost their enthusiasm and passion for life, even though their lives were so destitute. They remembered a school they had visited in which the classrooms were as shabby and crude as could be. The lighting was so poor that the stu-

dents had to rely on sunlight filtering in through the windows to read and study. To welcome the volunteers, students stood outside their classrooms, singing at the top of their voices: “We are the light of the world, we are the light of the world.”

That brisk melody and their resonant voices made the visitors forget for a moment how run-down the school was, and that the children were either orphans, Ebola survivors, or flood victims. Their smiles conveyed to the visitors their happiness and contentment and made the volunteers feel that, like the lyrics said, these youngsters were indeed the light of the world and the hope of Sierra Leone.

The volunteers hoped that with the help of organizations like Tzu Chi and its partners, these youngsters will grow up properly and, by dint of their own strength, change their lives for the better and bring hope and light to their own country. ❀

The Illustrated JING SI A PHORISMS

The Buddha says:
Only when you stop trying to be happy can you be truly happy.
Even absolute happiness is not the final goal.
There is an even better state:
the freedom and wisdom of nirvana.



What is nirvana?
Some people think that death is nirvana.
But it isn't.

Nirvana is a state of constant, serene light. It means that no thoughts come and go in your mind, and therefore you are not defiled by any worries. Your mind is capable of producing wisdom and completely illuminating your inner being. This is also called “quiet light.”



I don't want people to get angry with me, but I don't know what to say and what not to say.
Master Cheng Yen replied: Say good things that will help others. Don't say bad things—in fact, don't even think about them. Every thought is a seed of karma. If you have bad thoughts and act them out, that would really be bad.

Translated by E E Ho and W.L. Rathje; drawings by Tsai Chih-chung; coloring by May E. Gu

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



HUANG YI-JIE

The Philippines

On the morning of October 29, 2019, Constancio Orbita and his neighbors were farming in the mountains in Tulunan in the province of Cotabato, Mindanao. Just then, a powerful earthquake hit and triggered mudslides. Luckily, Orbita and his neighbors escaped unharmed. But when Orbita arrived home, he was sad to find that his house had been reduced to a pile of rubble. His life's work had been lost in an instant. He didn't know whether he, already 60 years old, had it in him to rebuild his home and everything he had worked so hard for in the last several decades.

Three earthquakes over magnitude 6 struck the island of Mindanao in October 2019. Tzu Chi volunteers in Davao City, about 140 kilometers (87 miles) from the severely hit area of Tulunan, swung into action. They assessed damage in the disaster area and quickly distributed blankets and folding beds to those affected. Three large-scale distributions followed on November 10, benefiting 2,080 families in Tulunan and Magasaysay, in the province of Davao del Sur.

Three earthquakes over magnitude 6 struck the island of Mindanao, the Philippines, in October 2019. Tzu Chi quickly provided aid to victims.

Distributed items included rice, blankets, and emergency cash.

"Tzu Chi's aid went a long way toward helping me get back on my feet," Orbita said. "Without their help, I wouldn't have known what to do." Orbita and his neighbors used the money they received from Tzu Chi to buy materials to rebuild their homes. Each household received financial aid ranging from 10,000 pesos (US\$200) to 20,000 pesos, depending on the size of the family.

"I can't thank you enough," Nilda Tinagon said to Tzu Chi volunteers. Not long after the quake, her son fell ill and had to check into the hospital. "I was at my wits' end. I didn't know where to get the money to pay my son's medical bill, so I prayed to God for help. You can imagine my happiness when I learned that Tzu Chi was

distributing cash aid to us quake victims." After paying off her son's hospital bill with part of the cash aid, Tinagon used the remaining money to buy a second-hand motor scooter for her husband. She wanted to make it easier for him to transport the vegetables they grew to the market. The unexpected gift from Tzu Chi gave the family a ray of hope.

Cambodia

Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cambodia joined forces to offer free medical treatment in Battambang Province, Cambodia, from November 1 to 3, 2019. The services were provided at Ek Phnom Referral Hospital, Battambang Provincial Referral Hospital, and Srok Ek Phnom High School.

A pregnant woman named Yum Sey, accompanied by her husband, sought help at Ek Phnom Referral Hospital. Dr. Chuang Chi-jou (莊啟柔), from Taiwan, was the only OB/GYN physician on site. The doctor gave her an ultrasound exam and discovered the fetus in her womb had died. The fetus could normally have been easily removed, but a large fibroid in the lower part of her uterus

compounded the situation, making the procedure more of a challenge.

Yum Sey said that this was her tenth pregnancy and her fifth miscarriage. She had sensed something was wrong with her pregnancy this time, and had gone to a hospital for a checkup. A doctor told her and her husband that she would need surgery, but they were too poor to afford it. In the end, they returned home without any treatment. The only thing she could do was to take painkillers to reduce the pain she was feeling. The day before the free clinic, a vehicle passed their home, informing people of the free medical services. Yum Sey jumped at the opportunity to seek help.

Unfortunately, the hospital where the free clinic was held didn't have the required equipment for Dr. Chuang to perform the needed procedure

A scene at the dental department at a Tzu Chi free clinic held at Ek Phnom Referral Hospital, Battambang Province, Cambodia. Tzu Chi volunteers from six countries offered free medical care in internal medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, and traditional Chinese medicine in Cambodia from November 1 to 3, 2019.



LI DONG-XING

on her. The Tzu Chi Cambodia office decided to send Yum Sey to a bigger hospital the following day for treatment.

This was the first time Dr. Chuang had visited Cambodia to take part in a free clinic. He said that normally an operation like the one Yum Sey needed was not very difficult to perform, but the lack of equipment limited what they could do. His heart went out to Yum Sey and other medically underserved people like her.

A 20-year-old young man with a tumor on his lips turned people's heads at the venue. Suy Minea, the patient's father, said that when his son was born, his lips appeared swollen, and as he grew older, the tumor also grew larger. When the boy was five years old, his father took him to a charitable hospital which offered free surgery, and had the tumor removed. However, the tumor grew back afterwards. Suy Minea took his son for treatment again but the doctor said he had no confidence in curing his condition. The father thus gave up seeking treatment for his son.

Their hope was reignited when they learned about the free services offered by Tzu Chi. Dr. Fong Poh Him (馮寶興), a renowned plastic sur-

geon from Singapore, examined the young man and diagnosed the tumor on his lips as a hemangioma, a usually benign vascular tumor. He explained that a patient afflicted with this kind of tumor may suffer a lot of blood loss during surgery, and so not every surgeon is willing to perform this type of operation.

It took more than an hour for Dr. Fong to remove the tumor from the young man. The doctor said after the surgery that although a hemangioma was not life-threatening, its existence on the man's lips might affect his confidence. He believed that the young man would feel better about himself after the removal of the tumor. A tumor of this kind can be cured if completely excised.

Dr. Fong watched the father and son leave, much happier than before now that the tumor was gone. The doctor said, "Why do we come here to provide a free clinic? It's to help improve people's quality of life."

At Battambang Provincial Referral Hospital, Dr. Antonio Say, of the Philippines, led a seven-member team in providing ophthalmological services. Ung Pothirath, an employee at the ophthal-

mological department at the Battambang hospital, came to have the cataract in his right eye removed. He said that an operation of this kind costs between US\$75 and US\$100 locally, which many people can't afford.

Luot Chheam, 69, made a living by fishing. He explained that an illness when he was 12 had affected the vision in his right eye. Later in life, both of his eyes additionally developed cataracts. His eye condition had severely affected his ability to work because as a fisherman, he often had to dive into water to catch fish. He and three fellow villagers had arrived at the venue after a two-and-a-half-hour boat ride. He hoped that he could receive treatment at the free clinic to restore his vision, so that he could teach his children how to catch fish.

Treatment in dentistry and traditional Chinese medicine was also offered during the three-day free clinic mission. All told, more than 3,000 patient visits were served.

Indonesia

A handover ceremony was held on November 17, 2019, for ten new homes Tzu Chi Indonesia had built for underserved residents in Kamal Muara, North Jakarta.

In May 2019, Tzu Chi volunteers learned that some residents of Kamal Muara, a coastal village, were living in dilapidated, rundown houses susceptible to flooding during the rainy season or

whenever the tide rose. The residents' constrained financial situations made it impossible for them to repair or rebuild their own homes. The foundation decided to step in and help out. It took about three months to finish the first batch of ten houses. Residents moved into their new homes in November 2019.

One recipient of Tzu Chi's assistance was Ayanah, a 50-year-old washerwoman. She had lived with two other family members in a wooden house situated much lower than the surrounding roads. She had hoped for decades that she would one day live in a house that wasn't susceptible to flooding. Her wish finally came true when Tzu Chi built a new home for them. "I was so happy that I cried when they demolished my old house for rebuilding."

Hendra and his brother, Henrik, lived in an old house left behind by their parents. They would be anxious every time it rained or when the tide rose. If the rising water flooded their house, they'd have to escape to higher ground. They also worried when strong gales blew for fear that their house would collapse.

The brothers wanted to repair their house and make it safer, but they both only had a junior high school education and couldn't find anything better than factory jobs, which didn't pay much. They were very grateful for Tzu Chi's help. "It's like a dream living in the new house," Hendra said. "It's sturdy and beautiful."

On November 14, three days before the house handover ceremony, volunteers and the contractors of the construction project visited villagers in their new homes to find out if their houses were comfortable to live in or needed any improvement. The residents all claimed that they were very satisfied with their new homes.

Volunteer Teksan Luis said in the handover ceremony on November 17 that Tzu Chi planned to rebuild more houses in the village. "Hopefully, with a sturdy house to live in, residents will not have to worry about leakage and flooding problems," he said. "This will make it easier for them to focus on their work and improve their family's finances."

The United States

Every year since August 2013, Tzu Chi Orange County has held three free medical clinics at the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana in Orange County, California. The clinics are for low-income families and people without medical insurance. The events provide services in tradi-



HADI PRANOTO



AYANAH

Hendra, a villager in Kamal Muara, North Jakarta, Indonesia, poses in front of his new home (left). His old house (right) was low-lying and run-down. Tzu Chi built ten new houses for underprivileged people in Kamal Muara to help them live more safely and comfortably.



YAN GUO-XING

tional Chinese and Western medicine, including ophthalmology and dentistry. Participants can also have their blood pressure, blood sugar, and other vital signs measured. The latest clinic took place on November 3, 2019.

It costs an arm and a leg to see a dentist in the United States, especially for low-income people and those without medical insurance. The free dental services provided at the Tzu Chi clinics are therefore very popular. People wearing thick coats or wrapped in blankets were already lining up for the free clinic at 2:30 a.m. on November 3, even though the event wouldn't start until nine a.m.

Martin Rosas was the first patient to arrive at the venue. The dentist who saw him diagnosed a decayed tooth that would take two and a half hours to treat. Due to the long line of patients waiting, however, the dentist could not spend so much time on him and could only clean his teeth. Rosas was disappointed and volunteers really wanted to help him, so they came up with another treatment plan. A referral was made for him so that he could have his teeth treated for free in another place. Rosas broke into a smile when he learned how Tzu Chi had arranged for him to get the treatment he needed.

The eye clinic at the event helped many people

A dentist treats a patient at a Tzu Chi free clinic in Orange County, California, the United States.

see better. Luz Elena Nina received a pair of prescription glasses. In an instant, her vision became bright and clear. She was happy that her world had become so different after just an hour at the clinic. Maria Ramos, another patient, had arrived at the venue at three that morning. She said that it was very cold outside, but the wait was worth it. She cheerfully thanked Tzu Chi for giving her free glasses.

Dr. Peter Chen (陳福民) has participated in the free clinics for six years. He has told patients that everyone can help others by saving a little every day. Return patients Andres Salado and his wife, Juana Almazor, brought a full coin bank to the event to donate to Tzu Chi. They had saved the money bit by bit, a few coins at a time. Almazor said that she hoped they could help others get the help they needed, just as they had received help themselves. Dr. Chen responded by saying, "A big heart allows one to help others."

Tzu Chi hopes to help underserved people feel love and care from society by organizing events like the free clinics. ❀

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Life's most valuable gift is a healthy body; more valuable yet is following the right direction.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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