

# Tzu Chi

A background photograph showing a classroom setting. In the foreground, a student with dark hair and glasses is out of focus. Behind them, two other students are visible, looking towards the right. They are wearing dark blue school uniforms. The lighting is soft, coming from a window on the right.

Buddhism in Action


Fall 2013

慈濟

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS GET A CHANCE

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A sculpture of the Buddha worshipped at the Japanese Garden in Clingendael Park, The Hague, Netherlands.

ECHO OF THE HEART

# The Story of Nathou

Text and photo by Liu King-pong

Once upon a time there was a poor farmer named Nathou. He worked very hard, but his storage room was never full. One night he discovered a mouse stealing his food. Indignant, he shouted at the mouse, "Why do you steal rice from a poor man like me? Can't you steal from a rich man instead?"

The mouse replied, "No matter how hard you work, you are destined to be poor for the rest of your life. Only the Buddha knows how to free you from this misfortune." Frustrated and bewildered, Nathou decided to go ask the Buddha why he was so unlucky.

On his journey, he happened to meet a rich man. When the man learned where Nathou was heading, he gave him a good meal and shared the story of his own misfortune with him. He told Nathou that his young daughter had been mute since she was born, 16 years before. He promised his daughter's hand in marriage to anyone who could get her to speak. "Could you please ask the Buddha why my daughter cannot talk?" the rich man asked. Nathou consented and went on his way.

He kept walking until he met an old monk in front of a temple. The monk was holding a walking stick inlaid with gold and jewels. Nathou asked the monk for some water, and then began talking. After listening to his story, the monk said, "I've been doing my spiritual cultivation for 150 years, but I still cannot ascend to the Western Pure Land. Could you ask the Buddha why this is so?" The kind-hearted Nathou agreed, and continued onward.

After walking for several more days, Nathou came to a big river. To his dismay, he saw no boats around that could carry him across the river. Just then, a huge turtle emerged from the water and asked Nathou about the purpose of his journey. Nathou explained everything from the very beginning. The turtle replied, "I can carry you on my back across the river, but under one condition. You see, I've done my spiritual cultivation for more than a thousand years, but I still cannot become a dragon and go to paradise. Could you ask the Buddha what I'm doing wrong?" As with all the previous requests, Nathou agreed. He then rode the turtle across the river.

By now, Nathou had travelled quite a long distance. Exhausted, he fell asleep under a big tree. Just then, the Buddha appeared in front of him. Nathou was jubilant and excited. "You've traveled so far to see me," the Buddha said kindly. "You must have something important to ask me." Nathou folded his palms together, knelt down before the Buddha, and nodded his head. The Buddha said, "You may ask me three questions."

This perplexed Nathou. The Buddha was allowing him three questions, but he had four to ask! After thinking carefully, Nathou made up his mind to ask questions on behalf of the rich man, the old monk and the turtle. He felt his own problem was too trivial to mention.

After listening to the three questions, the Buddha tersely replied: "The turtle has 24 priceless pearls hidden beneath his shell, and he's reluctant to give them away. The monk cherishes his precious stick too much, and he'll only be able to ascend to the Western Pure Land when he's willing to toss it away. And the young girl will speak once she sees the man she's going to marry." With that, the Buddha suddenly disappeared.

Nathou promptly started his journey back home. He passed the Buddha's message to the turtle, who in turn bestowed his 24 pearls upon Nathou, was transformed into a dragon, and flew away. Nathou next delivered the Buddha's answer to the monk, who in turn gave him his stick and ascended to heaven. When Nathou approached the rich man's home, he saw a beautiful young woman rushing out to greet him, calling, "The man who went to see the Buddha has returned!" The rich man came out, amazed at what his daughter was saying. After listening to Nathou's account, he happily allowed his daughter to marry him.

This fable beautifully illustrates the value of putting the needs of others first. Master Cheng Yen often reminds her disciples of this principle. Nathou turned out to be the real beneficiary after he demonstrated his noble, selfless character. Another valuable moral I've learned from this fable is that one can truly be unencumbered and carefree if one can eradicate the attachments, represented by the pearls and the walking stick, that lurk in one's mind. ❀



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The *Tzu Chi Quarterly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address and telephone number.

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# It Needn't Always Be Rice

*Native grains, beans and other crops used to grow abundantly throughout the countryside in Taiwan. The calories and nutrition they provided enabled many Taiwanese to remain self-sufficient during bygone years of poverty.*

*But free agricultural trading policies throughout the world have changed that. Now, large quantities of all sorts of agricultural products are regularly imported into Taiwan, suppressing their domestic counterparts. The people on the island no longer have control over their own food supply.*

*Rice, fruit and vegetables still occupy a major place in Taiwan's agricultural landscape, but some citizens are now working to revive the cultivation of other traditional crops. The government has even implemented programs for reestablishing these suppressed foods. Will this renaissance grow and flourish as hoped?*





By Cai Jia-shan  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Huang Shi-ze

It was early spring, and we were visiting Dongshi, Jiayi County, southern Taiwan. We were standing on what used to be a vast expanse of arid, salty land, but which is now more than ten hectares (24.7 acres) of golden wheat. Hairy wheat stalks waved to and fro as we admired the scene.

“Dongshi is in the middle of nowhere, and it used to attract attention only when it flooded. Now, we’re gathered here today to attend a one-of-a-kind concert—in the middle of this vast wheat field,” announced Wu Shu-fang (吳淑芳), director of the Sustainable Development Association of Rural Towns in Jiayi County. “I’m thrilled to see so many of you here,” she continued, obviously overcome with emotion.

Taiwanese are accustomed to seeing rice plants growing in the countryside, not wheat. In fact, the acreage dedicated to wheat production in Taiwan has totaled no more than a hundred hectares (247 acres) per year for each of the last 15 years. Even agricultural officials said that Taiwan was just not suitable for wheat cultivation.

But Wu tells a different story. “Decades ago, this area used to have lots of wheat fields,” she recalled. Land use statistics confirm her memory: During the period of Japanese rule (1895–1945), the acreage devoted to wheat cultivation in Taiwan once reached 6,700 hectares. This was followed by an all-time high of 25,000 hectares in 1960.

Like Wu, Cai Yi-hong (蔡一宏), a farm owner attending the concert, remembers those days. He was a small child back in the 1960s, and he loved to pull pranks on other children by slipping an ear of wheat into their pants legs. Somehow, the wheat always worked its way up the leg. “Usually by the time you noticed it, the wheat had reached your thigh, and you had to take off your pants to get it out,” Cai recounted with a big grin as he savored those moments years before.

Those fond memories are the reason that when Cai decided to take up farming four years ago, his first choice was to raise wheat. It also just so happened at that time that Adama Shih (施明煌), of the Rejoice Bread Workshop, was pushing for the resumption of wheat cul-



vation in Taiwan. The two men hit it off right away. They struck an agreement whereby Cai would plant wheat and Shih would buy it. The arrangement has been a win-win: Cai gets to plant what he loves and relive his childhood dreams, and Shih gets the wheat he needs for his bakery—as well as the chance to advance his plan to bring non-rice grain cultivation back to Taiwan.

Cai convinced neighboring farmers to join in, and they helped convert the idle land on which the concert was being held into fields of golden

**These farmers in Puzi, Jiayi County, have grown organic red Job’s tears for years. However, they are all getting old.**

wheat. Shih has persuaded farmers in other parts of Taiwan to take up wheat cultivation as well. Other crops, such as soybeans, are also gaining momentum.

All told, contract wheat farming for the Rejoice Bread Workshop exceeded 200 hectares in 2013. “This is proof that it is possible to bring back non-rice grain cultivation,” Shih said. He has worked hard for the revival movement, and

now he can see a glimmer of hope, despite all the difficulties and ridicule he has encountered along the way.

Two hundred hectares is hardly one percent of the peak acreage in 1960; an agricultural official even commented that it was like nothing at all. But for Shih and his fellow devotees of the non-rice grain renaissance, 200 hectares is a great indicator of hope.



### The decline of diversity

Once upon a time, the agricultural landscape in Taiwan was quite diversified. In addition to rice, all sorts of grains and other crops were abundant on the island. The dazzling spectrum of crops included sorghum, corn, wheat, peanuts, sesame, Job's tears, adzuki beans, mung beans, black soybeans, sweet potatoes, and more. Most of these crops are now produced at vastly reduced levels.

Yu Ren-sheng (余仁聖) was a witness to the abundance and diversity of those days gone by. The Yu Shun-feng Store, founded by his family in 1956 in Puzi, Jiayi County, dealt in assorted crops grown by farmers nearby. During harvest season, Yu, then a youngster, would help out at the family store. He was

responsible for weighing and pricing the crops to be purchased from the farmers. "Their line started at the front of the store and went out quite a ways," he remembered.

Having grown up in an agricultural community, Yu feels a deep emotional connection to the land and the crops that grow on it. He took over the family business after completing his military service, but by that time most grains were being imported. "I was really sorry to see the vitality in the countryside evaporate. Agriculture seemed to have lost its hope and future," he lamented.

According to Yu, the decline started when Taiwan was severely damaged by Typhoon Ellen on August 7, 1959. The huge agricultural loss led to rising imports of grains, beans and other crops.

Then in 1984, in an effort to relieve the pressure of an oversupply of rice, the government instituted guaranteed prices to purchase feed corn and sorghum. However, the cultivation of these subsidized crops squeezed not just rice, the intended target, but other crops as well.

"Crops such as sesame and mung beans were labor intensive and not very profitable," Yu noted. "Farmers were getting old, so everyone began planting sorghum and feed corn instead. We ended up with a monoculture."

In 1997, the government started to implement a fallow-land policy in preparation for joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). This approach gradually lowered agricultural production even more. Even sorghum and feed corn production eventually dropped. After Taiwan

joined the WTO in 2002, production of everything other than rice, fruit and vegetables was virtually wiped out by imports—the only exceptions were sweet potatoes, dietary corn, peanuts, and adzuki beans, the latter two being protected by tariff rate quotas.

"It's a pity that cultivation of these crops disappeared from Taiwan," said Professor Warren Kuo (郭華仁) of the Department of Agronomy at National Taiwan University. He pointed out that the acreage for grains, legumes and tubers in the 1960s routinely exceeded 450,000 hectares (1,737 square miles) per year. That figure has declined to less than 60,000 hectares (231 square miles) today.

Taiwan Rural Front spokeswoman Cai Pei-hui (蔡培慧) attributed the disappearance of these



Wheat fields in Dongshi, Jiayi County, beautify the local landscape and bring vitality back to the land.





Women (above) sort peanuts at the Yu Shun-feng Store. The reintroduction of traditional crops must be accompanied by the revival of all the other links in the production cycle. One of the links is the availability of farming implements. Contract farmer Su Rong-can (right) harvests buckwheat with heavy machinery.

crops from Taiwan to four factors. First was the pressure from abroad to sell agricultural products to Taiwan. Second, with rice exports dropping, the government encouraged the growing of more economic crops such as vegetables, fruits, and flowers. Third, the food preferences of consumers shifted away from traditional foods to vegetables and meat. And fourth, the high labor cost of cultivating traditional foods and their low economic value marginalized those crops.

#### Diversity gives way to dependence

Soybeans, wheat, and corn are important crops in international agricultural trade. They are also the top three agricultural products that Taiwan purchases from abroad. In 2012, for example, Taiwan imported 2,340,000 tons of soy, 1,380,000 tons of wheat, and 4,380,000 tons of corn. The country's wheat purchases exceeded its rice production.

"Dining tables in Taiwan used to be dominated by rice, but that has changed to a mixture of rice and wheat noodles over the past half century," explained Liu Zhi-wei (劉志偉) in his book, *Dining Revolution in Taiwan: Noodle Culture and the Baking Industry*.

In 1950, according to the book, each Taiwanese consumed an average of 133 kilograms (293 pounds) of rice and not quite 6 kilograms (13 pounds) of wheat flour. Rice was so much the staple of the Taiwanese diet that many folks didn't feel full until they had downed some. A meal

back then was incomplete without rice.

Then Taiwan began receiving large quantities of wheat flour as part of economic aid from the United States. That, and a flour promotion movement, helped make wheat flour much more prevalent in Taiwan. The arrival of fast-food giant McDonald's in Taiwan three decades ago also contributed much to the westernization of the local diet.

By 2011, per capita annual rice consumption had dropped to 45 kilograms, whereas flour consumption had risen to 36.4 kilograms. With the



two-thirds drop in rice consumption and the six-fold increase in flour consumption, flour is now almost on a par with the venerable rice on Taiwanese dining tables.

Liu points out in his book that humans in Taiwan were not the only creatures to experience a change in diet over the past decades. Pigs—pork is the most commonly eaten meat in Taiwan—have also experienced the same sort of dietary shift. People used to feed their pigs sweet potatoes, but that changed when American corn made its way into Taiwan in a big way.

To sell its surplus corn to foreign markets, America helped boost Taiwan's demand by guiding pig farmers in Taiwan to feed their animals corn. This quickly increased corn imports from the U.S. and reduced the demand for sweet potatoes, whose production plummeted from a high of more than three million tons to just 200,000 tons per year. Corn has been the leading agricultural import in Taiwan ever since.

Corn is not the only new import that has found its way into Taiwan. Just pick up any package of mixed grains from a supermarket





PHOTOS BY CHEN HONG-DAI

Shen Fu-lai of Pingdong sun-dries his adzuki beans (above). Chen Wen-long of Miaoli (below) threshes his black soybeans. Such farming is very labor-intensive.



shelf, and you will find that the oats in it come from Australia, the millet from China, the Job's tears from Laos, the mung beans from Myanmar, the sesame from India, and so on.

Taiwan's rate of food self-sufficiency has dropped to dangerous levels. Before 1970, Taiwan used to be entirely self-sufficient in regards to food, with a surplus to export. Over the last ten years, however, the rate of food self-sufficiency has hovered between 30 and 35 percent. Food independence has become an urgent national security issue that cannot wait.

Ironically, while allowing the importation of so much food, Taiwanese agricultural policy is intentionally letting 200,000 hectares (772 square miles) of farmland stand idle. Should a food shortage on the international market occur, Taiwan is highly vulnerable. Such a shortage could be caused by natural disasters or spikes in energy prices that disrupt shipping. The way things are going, these two scenarios are not at all that far-fetched.

Under pressure, in 2013 the Taiwanese Council of Agriculture finally made a significant change to its policy on subsidizing farmers for letting their fields lie fallow. Instead of giving out subsidies twice a year to farmers to leave their fields idle for two harvests a year, the revised policy pays for just one idling per year. This is intended to induce farmers to plant crops to reduce imports or to increase exports of competitive local crops. Those who grow corn, soybeans, and wheat all receive subsidies from the government.

### A long road back

Unfortunately, returning farmland that has lain fallow for a long time into production takes more than a change in policy. Much more is needed, and it certainly is not as easy as flipping a switch.

The cultivation of a crop involves many steps, performed at the right time by skilled personnel. The same is true with the sale of the crop after a harvest. The components necessary to bring in a successful crop include the study and cultivation of seeds; the production and distribution of fertilizer; the practical knowledge needed to plant, weed, fertilize, harvest, and sell the crop; and not the least important, the willingness to do the backbreaking work.

Once a crop ceases to be grown, these components invariably disintegrate or are deployed elsewhere for other purposes. The cultivation of the seeds for the crop may have stopped, farm

machinery may be out of production, and, probably the most daunting of all, farmers with the knowledge and the willingness to do the job may be too old or have moved on to other things. In other words, the "production line" for producing a successful crop may be broken in several places. Getting those components functional again may not be as easy as one might think.

Puzi, Jiayi County, southern Taiwan, used to be a center for traditional agriculture, and the farmers association in the town has been pushing for a rebirth of local production, first Job's tears and then soybeans. The association's high hopes, however, have already run into some roadblocks.

"Farmers are old, and we can't find people willing to grow [those crops] anymore. Although some young people have come back here to farm, they are interested in growing high-value crops such as tomatoes or melons," said Cai Jia-hang (蔡嘉航), a staffer at the farmers association. This is why the association's initiative for bringing back the cultivation of traditional grains and other crops has yet to gain greater acceptance.

Similar difficulties are facing localities in northern Taiwan. Farmer Pan Wei-hua (潘偉華), in Xinwu, Taoyuan County, pointed out that many of his neighbors have started to use their idle land to grow rice instead of any of the assorted grains and other crops that the revised government policy intended. Compared with those crops, rice is easy to grow since a smooth-running infrastructure for rice cultivation is already well established. A farmer does not actually need to do the work himself if he does not want to because the work can easily be contracted out. There is even the government's purchase program to help out.

"If all else fails, one can always give the rice to friends or relatives," said Pan. This path of relative ease has therefore attracted farmers to grow rice on the land that they have put back into production.

"[The government officials] meant well in making the policy change, but they didn't think through all the nitty-gritty ramifications of its implementation," commented veteran contract farmer Su Rong-can (蘇榮燦).

In response to criticism, the government's Agriculture and Food Agency said that they will work harder to promote the cultivation of crops such as corn and soybeans, and they agreed to help match farmers with bulk purchasers. This should make it easier for farmers to grow something other than rice.





### Broken production line

Su saw the heyday of contract farming for non-rice grains, legumes and tubers. About 20 years ago, he worked day and night to contract-farm 800 hectares a year. "At that time, we had nine contract farming centers in Jiali [Tainan, southern Taiwan] alone. But today, none of them are left," Su said.

He attributed his ability to plant 800 hectares a year to the help of machinery. "Without the machinery, just a few tenths of a hectare can wear out anyone," he said.

Mr. and Mrs. Chen Wen-long (陳文龍), of Yuanli, Miaoli County, northern Taiwan, can attest to Su's assertion. The couple harvested a crop of black soybeans entirely with their own hands in mid-December 2012. Even though they had planted just two tenths of a hectare (half an acre), it took them three days to harvest their crop. And many more steps had to take place before the beans could be sold and consumed.

After harvesting the plants by hand, the Chens had to use a threshing machine to separate the beans from the stalks and husks, and then they

used a sorting machine to remove the undesirable beans from the good ones. Finally, they spread the beans out on the courtyard in front of their house to dry in the sun for a few days.

If growing black soybeans is so very labor intensive, why do the Chens do it? Mostly "just for the fun of it," they say. Their main crop is still rice. They also do it to lend moral support to Adama Shih's endeavor to revive non-rice agriculture in Taiwan.

Like the Chens, Shen Fu-lai (沈富來) of Wandan, Pingdong County, southern Taiwan,



Yang Xie-han (left) of Yunlin prepares his sweet potatoes for market. In the old days in Taiwan, sweet potatoes used to be the main staple for both people and pigs. Now people eat sweet potatoes for their health benefits. Pigs, on the other hand, are fed corn (above).

also harvested beans in December 2012, but his crop was adzuki beans. He went through much of the same process as the Chens. Before he sent his beans to the buyers, he even went through them one by one to sift out the bad ones. Such a labor-intensive separation method often made him dizzy and his vision blurred.

Dedicated farmers like Shen and the Chens undoubtedly contribute positively to the government's policy to diversify agricultural products. Their beans may be different, but their hard work, devotion, and love for farming are the same. However, the large-scale reintroduction of crops that have been absent for so long needs more than a few dedicated farmers to succeed. Each link in the entire production chain needs to be reestablished.

Cai Pei-hui explained about the well-established rice production chain in Taiwan. At each step, machinery or workers for hire are available





**Saving seeds for future planting is an important link in crop cultivation. By keeping seeds for the future, farmers can ensure better crops and find the best candidates for cultivation. Keeping seeds also saves money.**

to help out if a farmer does not wish to personally perform the task. For example, machinery is available for rice planting, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, and threshing. Workers are readily available, too. No wonder it seems that everyone loves to grow rice.

When the government implemented the policy of decreasing the production of grains and other crops by paying landowners or farmers to leave their fields fallow, it also pulled the plug on the production chain. Farmers stopped planting, and everyone else involved in the production chain stopped as well. While farmers or landowners received government subsidies for taking their land out of production, no one else in the chain received any compensation—for example, those who dealt with seeds, fertilizer, farm hands, machinery, and buying or selling of the crops. Even seed researchers were left out. Stores shut down and people lost their livelihoods. Farming communities slumped into recession, and all those resources were scattered. Agriculture now accounts for 3 percent of the

gross domestic product, down from 35 percent in 1952.

“To revive farming villages, we must resume agricultural production,” said Professor Kuo. Needless to say, the government needs to help this revival by keeping the big picture in mind and rethinking the whole production chain. “As the saying goes, it won’t do to treat only where the pain is,” said Cai Pei-hui.

But what crops should be planted? “We already have too much rice, vegetables, and fruit, so the only choices are non-rice grains, legumes and other traditional crops,” observed Professor Kuo. He is a strong advocate for growing an assortment of organic crops to boost food self-reliance and to bring idle land back into production. He pointed out that environmental subsidies allowable under the WTO framework can help. By distributing these subsidies to encourage farmers to grow various organic crops, the government can help farmers reduce costs in cultivating high-cost non-rice crops and do the environment a good turn at the same time.

Another benefit to Kuo’s approach could be water conservation. “The water needed for these alternate crops is less than ten percent of what is needed for rice or vegetables,” said Yang Xie-han (楊協翰) of Erlin, Yunlin County. Yang grows organic sweet potatoes and soybeans.

Water conservation has practical significance in Yunlin County, where residents have pumped out groundwater to such an extent that the ground has subsided at a number of places—a potential risk for the high-speed trains that pass through the area.

### **The value of diversity**

Erlin, also in Yunlin County, is the sweet potato capital of Taiwan. “In the old days, when I was a kid, pigs, water buffalo, and people in Taiwan all subsisted on sweet potatoes,” farmer Yang Tian-long (楊添隆), 65, recalled. At that time, life was much harder. Many Taiwanese would have gone hungry were it not for sweet potatoes.

Some of those people, sick of having eaten so much of them, have continued to avoid sweet potatoes to this day. But for most people, the sweet potato has morphed from being a food to stay alive to a food to stay healthy. Nowadays, many people seek out this food for its perceived health properties.

That is good news for farmers in Erlin, who are mostly getting on in years—they can still earn a living raising sweet potatoes. “They don’t want to rely on handouts from their children,” Yang said. “[By growing sweet potatoes], some of them have even managed to help their children buy homes.” The sweet potato once again does very good things for the people whose lives it touches.

Adama Shih, of the Rejoice Bread Workshop, is more than glad to hear news like this. He has always emphasized the many benefits of planting diversified crops. He laments the harmful effects that the dominance of rice has had in Taiwan: “Prolonged cultivation of a single crop has deprived our farmers of their skills in other crops. They have the land, but not the skills to farm it.”

His choices for crops that should be cultivated again are soybeans, wheat and sesame. He favors crop rotation, which is also good for the productivity of the soil. Different crops need different nutrients in the soil, and crop rotation gives time for the nutrients to be replenished. In particular, soybeans enrich the

nitrogen content of the soil, which can improve the growth of rice or wheat with reduced need for fertilizer. The soil is then naturally more fertile for the next crop.

Crop rotation can even cut down on the damage done by pests. How is this possible? Rice is water-intensive and grows in waterlogged paddies for much of its life, while wheat needs less water and grows on dry land. The Fabaceae (legumes such as soybeans) and Poaceae (grasses including rice, wheat and corn) families of plants also have different diseases and different pest profiles. Subjecting land to alternating wet and dry conditions and different families of plants disrupts the rhythms and life cycles of pests living on that land, which makes it more hospitable to the crops.

The successful experience of non-rice grain cultivation in Dongshi in the last six years is proof that fields on the west coast of Taiwan are quite suitable for planting wheat and other grains. “Wheat has grown pretty well despite the high levels of soil salinity,” said Shih. “The crop is a gem in bringing life back to these fields.”

Turning from green to golden brown and bowing under the weight of maturing grain, wheat plants add life to blunt the gloom of winter. It is a pleasant sight to farmers, even more so when their fields attract the admiration of other people. “[Seeing fields of wheat] brings satisfaction and sunlight back to the faces of old farmers, who would otherwise probably feel useless, and that is priceless,” said Shih. “No amount of money can buy that.”

Wheat is probably the best crop for older farmers because the requirements for growing it are relatively few. It requires no regular checking of water levels, and it requires no pesticides.

Cai Pei-hui, of the Taiwan Rural Front, advocates cultivating wheat during winter too. “Many people plant vegetables during the winter, and the oversupply brings down prices,” Cai contended. “If wheat is planted instead, we’ll have an additional supply of wheat, and vegetable prices won’t plummet.”

### **Local is better**

All the public and private advocacy aside, domestically grown non-rice grains cannot survive in the long run unless they can stand on their own strength. Their success ultimately boils down to this simple question: Will people open their wallets for local grains?





**A well-established, traditional business, Yage Bakery in Daxi, northern Taiwan, started using local wheat flour for its products this year, hoping to bring new quality and higher standards.**

“Have a taste of local grains and local freshness,” said Su Rong-can as he handed me a cup of a thick, ten-grain blended drink. Even unsweetened, it tasted amazingly good to my palate. It felt nutritious, too. But is that enough to win the Taiwanese over?

Having been under the shadow of dominant imported foods for so long, how can domestic grains and other traditional crops return to their past glory? Su Rong-can offered his opinion: “First, the quality must be superior. Second, local niches must be identified.” He believes that local foods can compete with imports on the basis of their characteristics, not price.

Su also advocates the cultivation of what he calls “low-maintenance” crops such as buckwheat. “You can basically plant it and forget about it until harvest time,” he said. Though the yield of buckwheat is not high, its low maintenance makes its total cost extremely low. It can be used to make noodles or tea for considerable profit.

Yu Ren-sheng, who saw the heyday of traditional crops in Taiwan when he was a youngster helping out at his family store, has years of experience

with those products. He has every confidence in the quality and sale of domestic crops. “The sesame oil made from Taiwanese sesame is simply more aromatic,” Yu said. “Even though it costs three times as much [as imports], it always sells out.”

Yu pointed out that imported mung beans, perhaps because of excessive oxidation during the long transit from abroad, remain tough even after much cooking. “Our own mung beans, mushy and soft when cooked, are much better than the imports,” he said.

Local grain has found huge support from the Lien Hwa Industrial Corporation. It is the largest wheat flour company in Taiwan, and yet Huang Bei-chen (黃北辰), director of its business department and a veteran of the trade, said, “I smelled the scent of fresh wheat for the first time only last year.” Apparently, fresh wheat plants are rare enough in Taiwan that even a wheat flour veteran like Huang had not seen or smelled them until recently.

To support local agriculture, the company buys up all the wheat that the Rejoice Bread



**Lien Hwa Industrial Corporation mills local wheat for flour. It also refines its formulas and seeks out distribution channels for its flour.**

Workshop acquires from its contract farmers. The company pays two and a half times what it pays for imports. Flour made from this domestic wheat is now on the market commercially.

When the company first put local wheat flour on the market, some bakers questioned its quality and balked at using it. However, researchers have found that the wheat grains yield higher amounts of flour than imported ones, and the flour is more flavorful with superior water absorbency. Its quality is unimpeachable.

Rejoice Bread Workshop’s farmers do not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Their eco-friendly approach has received the confidence of Taiwanese bakers, who snap up all the available flour. With a big business such as Lien Hwa Industrial Corporation making the flour and bakeries using it, local wheat farmers have found breathing room to establish and expand their production.

Domestic wheat seems to have found a foothold in the Taiwanese market. Part of that stems from the rising desire among consumers to take charge of their own health by eating more

healthy foods. Wholesome local wheat fits the profile of food they are looking for: high-quality, fresh, safe, and eco-friendly.

Wheat and other grains are riding on this rising tide. Huang Kai-yun (黃楷芸) runs a grain store in Ershui, Zhanghua County, central Taiwan. “More people are buying brown rice or mixed grains,” said Huang. “White rice is actually on the decline.” This is true in big cities and small communities alike. Huang also pointed out that many people have called from big cities to order organic or local grains.

Zhang Shou-xin (張守信), also in the grain business in central Taiwan, offered similar observations. He observed that the demand for non-rice grains has grown consistently for the past 15 years. He acknowledged that due to the cost, not every batch of imported grain has been tested for chemical residues, but he pointed out that the grain comes mostly from poor villages in Southeastern Asia or China where farmers cannot afford pesticides. He believes that Taiwanese farmers should shun pesticides too.



**A concert in the midst of wheat fields. The revival of a more diverse agricultural economy in Taiwan takes the concerted effort of both the public and private sectors.**

#### **An issue of security**

A visit to any supermarket certainly gives one the impression that Taiwan has an abundant supply of food. However, more observant shoppers will notice that much of the food in the market is imported from abroad. In fact, due to global free trade, Taiwan produces only about 30 percent of the food that its residents consume.

Japan has faced similar trade pressures and has had to open its markets to agricultural imports even more than Taiwan has. Japan has only one rice harvest per year, and its farmers are even older than those in Taiwan. It may seem that the country should be highly dependent on imported food. However, it is able to produce 40 percent of the food that it needs, more than Taiwan. We apparently have room for improvement. Perhaps we can learn how Japan does it.

Hu Zhong-yi (胡忠一), deputy head of the Department of Irrigation and Engineering at the Council of Agriculture, studied in Japan. He pointed out a few things that the Japanese have been doing to lessen their dependency on imported food.

First, they are proud of and have great confidence in domestic products. They believe in local production for local consumption. In supermarkets, they use special labels to highlight domestic or local products. The northern Japanese island of Hokkaido even launched a green lantern project that has received wide acceptance throughout the nation. Thousands of restaurants hang a green lantern near their entrance; the more stars on the lantern, the more local food the store uses.

Second, by law students are required to go to nearby farms to help out. The farms produce crops to supply school lunches. Hu contends that such an arrangement helps bond students with local farms and local food. Farmers get a sense of honor and a sense of responsibility by cultivating crops safe for consumption.

Hu is of the opinion that food globalization and localization should be adopted side-by-side. Since joining the WTO, Taiwan has experienced widening agricultural trade deficits mainly because of large quantities of imported foods. It is a good time and a must-do to bring production of traditional grains and other crops back to Taiwan. ♣





# A Chance for Needy Students

**By Zheng Ya-ru**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

A view of the campus of the Tzu Chi College of Technology. Located in Hualien, where there is a large population of Taiwanese aborigines, the college has been designated by the Ministry of Education as a school with an emphasis on education for indigenous students.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI FOUNDATION





*Other things being equal, aboriginal students in Taiwan perform as well as their mainstream counterparts. But the reality is that other things are generally not equal for the indigenous population. For example, they are often financially unable to afford a quality education.*

*Tzu Chi offers a nursing program dedicated specifically to the indigenous population in Taiwan. The program levels the playing field by allowing aboriginal students to obtain a nursing education with no tuition or fees. More than 500 students have graduated from the program in the last 17 years. As a result, they have secured jobs and helped improve the finances of their families, forging a path that younger native people can also take for a solid life.*

In 1989, the Tzu Chi Junior College of Nursing (upgraded to the Tzu Chi College of Technology in 1999) was established in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. In 1996, it inaugurated a program dedicated to serving indigenous students. Once admitted to this program, a student receives free tuition, fees, books, and room and board for five years, the length of time needed to complete the program. Each student also receives a little spending money each month from the program. Graduates earn a degree equivalent to an associate degree available from community colleges in the United States.

In the nurturing environment provided by the Tzu Chi college, young students, like seeds in a fertile field, can concentrate on their studies, learn a trade, and get ready for a life of service and fulfillment.

#### **Nowhere to turn**

In 2010, Zhong Ya-qin (鍾亞琴) was a senior at Xincheng Junior High School in Hualien. She is a member of the Taroko, one of the indigenous tribes in Taiwan. When her mother passed away, she was left with the responsibility for caring for her two younger sisters. It would have been a lot to lay on any young person's shoulders, but to make life even more challenging for Zhong, her youngest sister suffered from cerebral palsy.

Zhong was an excellent student. Her homeroom teacher, Chen Yong-zhi (陳勇志), helped her apply for scholarships and social assistance. The aid helped the three sisters scrape by, but it wasn't enough to allow them to pursue further education, so Chen advised Zhong to aim for the Tzu Chi nursing program for native students. She followed his advice, and now she is approaching her fourth year in the five-year program.

She is growing to like nursing, and she is carrying on with the comfort of knowing that she's learning a trade that will provide her and her

family with a decent living. She uses the monthly spending money given by the school to cover the living expenses of her younger sisters.

One of her sisters, Ya-zhen (鍾亞珍), took the admission tests for the same program this year and has also been accepted. The two sisters will be schoolmates come the new semester. "I'm glad there's this dedicated program. I don't know what our future would be like if it had never been established," Ya-qin said.

"There are many indigenous students at our school," said Chen, a 14-year veteran at Xincheng Junior High. "Some of them go to work right after graduation because they're poor. Even some of those who go on to senior high school quit halfway through because they can't afford it." As soon as new students enter his school, he gets to know them better so that he can present them with further schooling choices that will best meet their interests and budgets.

Lo Wen-jui (羅文瑞), president of the Tzu Chi College of Technology, pointed out that many junior high school teachers in Hualien and Taidong affirm the dedicated nursing program for aboriginals at his school. They encourage their indigenous students who have good grades but who come from impoverished families to take the admission exam to the dedicated program. "Teachers at schools such as Xincheng and Xiulin junior highs have helped their students prepare for our admission exam. They've even driven their students here to take the tests," said Lo.

He stressed that the indigenous students and mainstream students are now about the same in competence and capabilities. "As long as we give [the minority group] a nurturing environment and suitable resources, their performance can stand out too."

#### **An incubator**

Established 24 years ago, the Tzu Chi Junior College of Nursing aims to train nurses to care for local patients. An added benefit is that aboriginal students in the relatively undeveloped area

**The aborigines-only program offers native students a quality education without charging fees.**





COURTESY TZU CHI COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

**Second-year students visit aboriginal villages as part of a course called “Tribal Care and Practicum.” Through this training, students learn more about native culture and lifestyle, and they experience the essence and meaning of nursing. A session on traditional handicrafts (left) is part of an annual aboriginal culture camp that the school has held for over ten years.**

of eastern Taiwan would have one more school near their homes where they can continue their education. Chen Shao-ming (陳紹明), a vice president of the Tzu Chi Foundation, explained that years ago, many aboriginal girls had to enter the work force right after they graduated from junior high school. They needed to help support their families, and they often went out of town to do that. “If they could stay at home to continue their schooling, they could be in a better position to reverse the adversity in their homes,” Chen said, referring to the improved earning power that more schooling could bring to these young people and, by extension, their families.

Initially, the school received its students based on their scores on a joint entrance examination which was administered in highly devel-

oped northern Taiwan, where competition was fierce. Well-prepared candidates from northern Taiwan largely outscored aboriginals from eastern Taiwan. As a result, few indigenous students were admitted to the school. To help more indigenous students gain entrance, the college obtained permission from the Ministry of Education to establish a special program exclusively for 50 native students each year.

This program, launched 17 years ago, does not rely on the results of the joint entrance exams. Instead, it administers its own admission tests to select its prospective students. “Once admitted, the students receive financial assistance from Tzu Chi,” Chen explained. “This frees them up to focus on learning a marketable skill.”

Lin Yu-fang (林郁芳), who now works in a psychiatry unit at Yuli Veterans Hospital in Hualien, entered the program the first year it was instituted. “[When I started in the program] my family was in debt, and we often had to borrow money. If I had not been a beneficiary of the program, I would have had to give up my nursing dreams,” Lin recalled.

Lin’s older sister also studied nursing, but at a school in Taipei where she also received financial aid. Lin compared the two schools: “Tzu Chi took really good care of us indigenous students. They waived our tuition and fees and gave us spending money. I even obtained scholarships, which helped support my family.” She went on to say that her sister chose to serve in emergency care after graduation. “As for me, while studying at Tzu Chi, my curricular and extracurricular activities often took me out to local communities [to care for needy or elderly people]. These visits kindled my interest in geriatric care.”

It has been 12 years since she graduated from the nursing program. With both sisters working, their family finances have greatly improved. Lin contentedly summed up her present outlook: “My life is very stable now, and I love working in nursing. With a steady income, I can plan for my future.”

### The program

Lin is an example of the beneficial effects of the aboriginals-only nursing program. To extend those benefits to more young lives in need, the program was expanded in 2011 to a hundred new students per year, doubling the original size. Currently, there are close to 400 students in the program.

Though for indigenous students only, the program is otherwise an integral part of the overall nursing program at the school. All students, indigenous or not, are mixed together in classes. Other than being indigenous, students in the dedicated program come from different backgrounds and for diverse reasons. Some are there for the financial aid at the expense of their interests. Others may be there because they experienced unexpected deaths in the family, and they want to learn to care for their loved ones still around them.

Their abilities to learn may vary, too. “Some of our indigenous students fall behind because of distractions at home or because they’re working. We offer such students remedial classes on key subjects to help them catch up,” said department chair Professor Peng Shao-zhen (彭少貞).

During the first two years of the program, students take courses on required subjects and elementary nursing. The next two years are for core nursing courses and brief internships. The first semester of the final year is for internships at local hospitals and communities, and the second semester is more schoolwork.

Students learn much from their internships. Lin Shu-ting (林樹婷), of Dawu, Taidong County, shared a couple of experiences: “An elderly female patient suddenly took a turn for the worse. In the space of one day, she changed and deteriorated so much—in her looks and body shape—that I almost couldn’t recognize her. She was gone in just a few days.” Lin learned firsthand that life is fleeting and things can happen at any moment. Another time, she saw an old couple looking through a glass window at their newly delivered grandchild in the obstetrics ward. “On one side of the glass window was life that was fading away; on the other side a new life just beginning.” At that very moment, she felt intensely the ever-continuing cycle of life, death and rebirth.

Lin Wen-xin (林雯馨), another beneficiary of the program, graduated about ten years ago. She now works at the respiratory care center at Mennonite Christian Hospital in Hualien. When she was in the program in 2000, she volunteered to intern at the newly opened Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. “I knew that the population in the Dalin area was predominately Han Chinese, that I didn’t speak their dialect, and that my Austronesian ethnicity showed on my face. I kind of expected that I might feel out of my element, but nothing like that happened. Everyone was really warm to me.”





**Students work on a simulation in a nursing laboratory at the school.**

She served conscientiously. She served her patients so well that one patient, before being discharged, thanked her with a key ring that was engraved with her name. "I was very touched. I felt that my first step in nursing had been reaffirmed and encouraged," she said. Lin still has that key ring today, and she takes it out when she feels drained at work as a reminder of why she entered the nursing profession in the first place.

### **Recruiting**

The care and benefits the school provides for students in the program has attracted many—some from the same families. Lian Xin-ci (連欣慈), 20, graduated with the class of 2013. She now works at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Her brother, Lian Xin-en (連欣恩), is studying in the program, too. There have been quite a few other siblings like them over the years—even twins!

Recruiting for new students swings into high gear as graduation season nears. Recruiting used to be carried out in only six to eight schools in the Hualien area. The effort for this year, however, was expanded to include many more schools. The entire department faculty went on the road to visit over 20 junior high schools in the Hualien area to recruit students for the entire nursing department. They also visited schools near the six Tzu Chi hospitals around Taiwan.

Besides giving its indigenous students excellent financial aid, the school also gives them an excellent education. It even offers a special course for students to prepare for the all-important nursing licensure examinations. Over the years, the students have done very well. For example, students last year achieved a pass rate of 76 percent, head and shoulders above the national rate of 41 percent.

Tzu Chi has spent a lot of energy and resources on the aboriginals-only program. Since the inception of the program 17 years ago, the foundation has spent more than 200 million Taiwanese dollars (US\$66 million) on close to 500 graduates. That is about NT\$400,000 (US\$13,300) for each graduate.

With the resources spent on these students, it is heartening to see that graduates have fanned out and established themselves as upright people contributing to the well-being of society. ❀





PETER CHU

# Hope, Commitment, and Love

## Three Schools for the Sisters of Saint Anne

By Yungli Tseng, Colin Legerton, and Peter Chu

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*Since the earthquake of 2010, Haiti has been plagued by political instability, an outbreak of cholera, and the onslaught of Hurricane Sandy. All this has slowed the efforts to rebuild the nation.*

*Tzu Chi decided to help rebuild three schools that the earthquake had destroyed. Volunteers flew to Haiti countless times over three years to help with the construction. Now that the work is completed, the schools have been turned over to their operator, the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne. The handover marks an important milestone in Tzu Chi's post-quake relief work in Haiti.*

At 4:53 in the afternoon of January 12, 2010, Gracieuse Willande Mars had just walked out of her school, Christ the King Secretarial School, when it collapsed right before her eyes. That day and that moment will likely stay etched in the collective memory of the Haitian people for the rest of their lives.

At that moment, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake rocked Haiti. Over 300,000 people perished in the disaster. A quarter of a million homes and 30,000 commercial buildings were destroyed. Even the National Palace and all central government buildings collapsed in the temblor.

Three years later, Gracieuse, now 24, returned to her alma mater. "It's a miracle!" was all she could say when she saw the beautiful, sturdy school building standing in front of her.

After the devastating earthquake, the Tzu Chi Foundation helped the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne rebuild their three schools in Haiti, one of which was Christ the King Secretarial School. The other two were Collège Marie-Anne primary and secondary schools. On May 17, 2013, the foundation turned the three new schools over to Saint Anne in an inauguration ceremony.

A huge banner with "Welcome" written in French, English, and Chinese greeted more than 500 guests at the ceremony. The guests included Port-au-Prince Auxiliary Bishop Quesnel Alphonse and Simon Dieuseul Desras, President of the Senate and President of the National Assembly, who attended the inauguration ceremony on behalf of the President of Haiti. More than 300 students watched from the second- and third-floor balconies of the Collège Marie-Anne secondary school. Over a hundred Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan, the United States, Canada, and Haiti also joined in the celebration. All told, about a thousand people witnessed this historical event.

The three new schools are situated side by side on a hillside on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. The complex of structural steel buildings provides 8,540 square meters (91,920 square feet) of floor area, so far the largest of its type in Haiti.

After the 2010 quake, William Keh (葛濟捨), then CEO of Tzu Chi USA, led the first Tzu Chi aid delegation to Haiti. He witnessed the devastation in Port-au-Prince, and he even slept in tents just as Haitians were forced to do. With those grim images still in mind, Keh could really appreciate the nice facilities that were being dedicated in the ceremony. "These buildings are

a result of the convergence of love from Tzu Chi volunteers around the world; they are like pagodas rising from the ashes," Keh said.

It is fitting that reconstruction takes the form of new schools. Out of the country's population of ten million, more than a half of the adults are illiterate. Education is important to the nation.

### Rebuilding

Tzu Chi volunteers set foot in Haiti on January 21, 2010, just nine days after the quake, to begin to help earthquake victims. In 77 days, 19 delegations of volunteers conducted large-scale distributions and free clinics, and offered work-for-food programs. During that time, volunteers also thought long and hard about how to provide medium- to long-term assistance.

One of the prerequisites for rebuilding was indisputable land ownership, which was hard to ascertain in Haiti after the disaster. Things were very chaotic, with government offices virtually shut down. Title verification efforts were almost impossible to carry out.

Hard or not, these challenges had to be confronted and overcome. Because practically all schools in Port-au-Prince had been destroyed by the earthquake, new schools needed to be built.

Collège Marie-Anne, which is run by the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne, is a highly valued school in Haiti. After the earthquake, the government provided temporary classrooms so that the 1,500 students could continue their schooling. Tzu Chi volunteers in Canada visited the headquarters of the congregation in Montreal, and they learned about its emphasis on education and its schools in Canada, Haiti and Africa. After much evaluation, they decided to help the congregation rebuild the three schools it had lost in Haiti.

Sister Rita Larivée, General Superior of the Sisters of Saint Anne, initially requested that the volunteers give them two cargo containers connected by a tent. She only wanted to have enough space for the more than one hundred students at Christ the King Secretarial School to continue with their lessons. She even had a plan drawn up.

The volunteers submitted her request to Master Cheng Yen, but the Master rejected it. Instead, she said, Tzu Chi would build permanent, high-quality school buildings for the 1,800 students of the three schools.

Haiti imports most of all the materials it uses. Therefore, the three schools required the importation of materials such as steel columns and pre-



fabricated concrete wall units. In all, it would take more than 70 cargo containers to ship. "If taxed, those materials would have incurred more than a million American dollars in import duties," noted James Chen (陳健), a U.S. Tzu Chi volunteer. In order to acquire an exemption of import duties, Chen made many trips to the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Anne, the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy.

### Surprises every day

David Chang (張士錡) was also heavily involved with the reconstruction project. Chang is the deputy general manager of Overseas Engineering and Construction Co. (OECC), which was chosen to build the three schools. That company had built Haiti's Sylvio Cato stadium, the University City campus, and many other structures. These buildings survived the strong quake of 2010.

The reconstruction of the schools entailed a great many steps and even more details. Everything needed planning, and everything seemed to have quirks that threw things off and required alternate planning. "In the aftermath of the earthquake, many things were beyond our control, so everything had to have a plan B," Chen said.

Chang has an MBA and a degree in civil engineering, but no amount of schooling could have completely prepared him for the surprises that popped up seemingly at every turn. He found that the skills he had learned in school were not necessarily applicable for the work in Haiti. "What I do here is crisis management," he said wryly. "Every day is filled with excitement."

For example, when cargo containers containing building materials for the project arrived at the port, the local freight company trucks hired to deliver the containers to the destination failed to show up. As a result, OECC ended up having to use its own trucks to do the job. Even so, the freight company was still paid for a job it didn't perform. Sometimes in the process of transporting materials for the project, a driver would call and say his trailer had been detained by the police. Chang had to rush over at such times to straighten things out.

According to the project plan, the high-strength nuts and bolts to fasten steel columns to the ground were scheduled for arrival at Port-au-Prince in May 2012. That month came and went, but the nuts and bolts never arrived—they were still sitting at the port in Singapore, waiting for other goods to fill the container before they would be shipped out. There was no telling how long the wait would be. Facing the possibility of a serious delay, OECC airfreighted another set of nuts and bolts from the United States. However, when OECC staffers went to the airport to pick up the goods, a warehouse worker said that they were not there. Two weeks of inquiry and tracking still failed to find the necessary parts. They had mysteriously evaporated. The steel columns had arrived, but they would be utterly useless without the nuts and bolts to fix them to the floor and keep them standing.

A major project delay seemed imminent. James Chen and others had to request Haitian government officials to help track down the shipment from the States. Those efforts paid off, and the nuts and bolts were found just in the nick of time.

In the three years between 2010 and 2013, James Chen made 35 trips between Los Angeles and Port-au-Prince, logging 240,000 miles in the

**The inauguration ceremony of the three Saint Anne schools is graced by guests including, from left, Stephen Huang, Tzu Chi Executive Director of Global Volunteers, Sister Rita and Sister Monique of the Sisters of Saint Anne, Canadian Ambassador Henri-Paul Normandin, and Joseph Champagne, Mayor of South Toms River, New Jersey.**



LUCA YE

**The slope on which the schools were built necessitated the use of retaining walls, made here into an amphitheater. The sturdy buildings can be used as emergency shelters in case of earthquakes or hurricanes.**

sky. Sometimes he had hardly arrived home in Los Angeles when another urgent matter would force an immediate return to Haiti.

To complicate matters further, Haiti was politically unstable from the end of 2010 into 2011. Social unrest often led to the delay or cancellation of flights to Port-au-Prince. Chen spent countless hours waiting in Miami International Airport for a flight. He once waited two whole days and still could not board a plane.

To overcome all the surprises and all the unexpected roadblocks, one needs persistence and mindfulness—the two things that Chen was bent on using, in triple strength if necessary, to see the project to successful completion. "Without perseverance and mindfulness, you just couldn't carry on," he said.

### Completion

Despite the roadblocks and frustrations, the new schools were completed in 16 months. They were a labor of love by people like Chen and Chang.

At the dedication and inauguration ceremony, Chang said, "I've completed more than 50 construction projects in Haiti, and this one was the best of them all. It'll definitely remain an unforgettable experience for me." He believed that building schools and teaching students good values and ideals could really help Haitians transform their core.

Chen smiled as he said, "I think I can say that I've given my all to Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers around the world."

Sister Larivée, who understood the trials and tribulations that had happened during the implementation of the reconstruction project, spoke at the ceremony: "The project, under the guidance of Mr. Chen, was not easy. There were many challenges to solve. But you always found a way to solve the problem. And you did this with great kindness and great patience.... You taught us that hope and compassion can overcome many obstacles.

"You cannot see the foundations of these new buildings, but they are not made of cement and steel. The real foundation is much deeper than the cement and steel. The real foundation is the cour-



LIN MEI-XUE

age you have given us that nothing is impossible. The real foundation is the strength you showed us that when people work together, dreams can come true. The real foundation for these schools is that compassion does work miracles."

### Hope

Tzu Chi has also done other things to help the multitude of Haitians following the 2010 earthquake.

The destitute neighborhoods around Saint Alexandre Church in Port-au-Prince were badly damaged. Schools were completely paralyzed, leaving children to wander amid the exposed, twisted steel bars of fallen buildings and the repulsive odors of rotting corpses.

To keep the children out of harm's way and keep them in a learning environment, Jean Denis Petit Pha, a former high school English teacher, and Marie Ange Colinet, President of the National Association of Girl Guides in Haiti (ANGH), found a run-down house, covered the broken roof with plastic tarps that Tzu Chi had distributed, and borrowed benches and an old blackboard to set up a makeshift classroom. They recruited volunteer teachers to teach 120 community students, ranging from four to fifteen years old. They taught them math, reading,





**Key figures in the construction of the schools: from left, architect George Tseng, OECC deputy general manager David Chang, Tzu Chi volunteer James Chen, and OECC site manager Yang Zhong-xing.**

writing, personal hygiene, environmental protection, and character building. They also fed them two hot meals a day—the only food for the day for many of the children. They did this with the financial support of Tzu Chi.

Six months later, with most schools reopened, Tzu Chi terminated that program and started a tuition aid program for local poor school children. After one semester, volunteers discovered that most of the students on the Tzu Chi aid program had done poorly at school, and some of them even had to repeat a grade. Volunteers visited their homes and found out that their parents were either too busy working or too busy looking for work to check their children's schoolwork. They typically lived in tight quarters—hot, humid, and without electricity or light. The children could not have studied at home if they had wanted to. It was no surprise they were not doing well in their subjects.

Father Columbano Arellano, OFM, of Saint Alexandre Church in Port-au-Prince, had seen a few children studying under the light of the basketball court across the street from the church at one or two o'clock in the morning. The children wanted to learn, but they needed a place to study. Haitian Tzu Chi volunteers decided to give them after-school tutoring, which started in spring 2011. More than 150 children started going to Saint Alexandre Church after school, and received extra instruction there. After a few months of tutoring, 85 percent of the students passed their subjects. One year later, virtually all the children passed.

Even so, some children did not go to school, much less go to the church for after-school tutoring. Volunteers visited their homes and discov-

ered that they were simply too poor. Some of them managed to have only one meal a day, sometimes not even that often. How could a hungry, malnourished child have the energy to study? Tzu Chi volunteers decided to provide hot food at Saint Alexandre Church for local children so they could get some nourishment. Fr. Arellano, who has always been supportive of Tzu Chi, allowed them to set up a small kitchen in front of the church.

Volunteer Immacula Cadet led a group of mothers to cook for the children. As a result, fewer children were absent from the after-school program, and they were able to concentrate better in class.

Tzu Chi also provides tuition aid to students in Route Neuve, a community in Cité Soleil (Sun City), one of the largest slums in the Northern Hemisphere. Ecole Mixte Des Humanistes is the only school in Route Neuve. Some children start school late, so they can often be seen in classrooms with much younger classmates. It is not uncommon for a fifth-grade class to have students who are 15 or even 20 years old. Because of their poverty, many children would not be attending the school, or any school, without financial aid from Tzu Chi.

François Runer, the school principal, pointed out that many students could have been recruited to deal drugs if the United Nations had not interdicted drugs in Cité Soleil in the previous several years, and if Tzu Chi had not provided tuition aid, which helped keep the students in school and out of trouble.

Centre Préscolaire Carmen René Durocher, a three-room preschool, was the only school in Solino, another impoverished community in Port-au-Prince. Several hundred preschoolers were taught by qualified teachers here, so they had better chances for getting admitted to the best elementary schools in Port-au-Prince. Sadly, the school was destroyed by the 2010 quake.

The families of the students could not help much in rebuilding the school because they were just too poor. "Our tuition was just 250

gourde [US\$5.80], but still we could collect it from only 12 families in a class of 40 students," said Marie Ange Colinet. The preschool was managed by her organization, ANGH, which could not afford to rebuild the school, either. Because they wanted to keep their students in school, they hung a tarp overhead to provide shade in which classes could resume.

The students, the teachers, the sound of learning, the sun, and the shade would have been enough of a sight to move any observer to do something to help them. Tzu Chi volunteers decided to help them rebuild.

The new preschool is now under construction. When completed, by the end of 2013, the school will have nine rooms to replace the three rooms that were lost to the quake. There will be space for administrative and other purposes.

**Each student gets a moringa seedling after the school inauguration ceremony, courtesy of Tzu Chi volunteers. The foundation has promoted the cultivation of this "miracle tree" in the nation. These students, like these seedlings, are the hope of Haiti.**



More students will have an opportunity to attend the school.

It has been more than three years since the devastating quake. The streets of Port-au-Prince have been cleared of damaged buildings and houses. But the pace of rebuilding is very slow. It is estimated that about 320,000 people still live in tents. There is no indication of when these people may move out of these filthy, unpleasant sites into new permanent homes.

The reconstruction of Haiti would have been quicker had international aid come in as pledged. But data from the United Nations indicated that of the 5.4 billion U.S. dollars that international organizations had promised to donate to help Haiti, 2 billion dollars never materialized.

Representatives of both the Sisters of Saint Anne and ANGH pointed out that many aid organizations had promised help but were never heard from again.

Sister Rita was therefore particularly grateful to Tzu Chi for having made a promise... and for making good on that promise. ❀



# A Small Paradise in Zimbabwe

By Precious Dzuty

With information from Ho Qi-lin and Tino Chu

*Giving will reap the greatest harvest. Rusununguko Primary School, near Harare, Zimbabwe, is now a school for our future ministers, teachers, doctors, lawyers....*

Master Cheng Yen says, “Blessings flow from our ability to love and be loved by others.” However, we never expected the love which God sent us from Taiwan. Love is what we have for girls and boys who are orphans or who are from single-parent families. Yes, seeing these kids roaming the streets was a bitter taste to swallow.

This school of ours started in January 2000. Mrs Elina Mazhandu and Mr Sylvester Mahurevana, filled with love, had this plan. Others also gave their views, but those two had the children at heart. They never gave up. At that time, I was still in secondary school.

When Rusununguko Primary School started, there was nothing to protect the teachers and students from the sun or rain. Yes, some helpers came and promised to help. But Master Cheng Yen says, “To begin is easy, to persist difficult. Talking about truth without practicing it leads neither to enlightenment nor to realizing the Dharma.” Only one group among many persisted with the help. In 2006 they gave the school some large pieces of cloth to protect us from the sun. But they could not protect us from the wind, rain and cold.

Summer came. Rain and the bitter sun beat on the children mercilessly, but they strove to learn. They had nowhere else to go. This was the only place where they could get an education. Many schools rejected these children because they did not have birth certificates to prove their eligibility or money to pay school fees. Teachers also came and went because of the harsh conditions. They could not stay for even a term. So,

when I had taken my O-level exams, I thought of my community. I came back to be a teacher at Rusununguko Primary School.

It’s true it was difficult to teach in a bare place without shelter. In summertime—October, November, December and January—children suffered from severe headaches and sore eyes. These were the worst days. As the earth orbited round the sun, the winter season came. Ballpoints could not write. Children could not even hold their pens and pencils because they shivered so badly. Diseases like fever and influenza attacked both teachers and children. I remember one morning, I shivered to the extent that I was not able to write on the chalkboard. At around 10 am, after the sun had warmed me, I finally started to write.

Weather was not the only problem which we faced. Dust from the ground affected us also. Books and clothes always looked untidy. Even teachers went home looking like people from the fields, not from school. The noise from passersby disturbed our school. Children could not concentrate on what the teacher said. In addition, the children and we teachers suffered discrimination from members of the community and other schools. People would bully our students on their way home, and they would call our school bad names. This discouraged the children and made them feel like outcasts. This pained us, but we could not do anything about it.

**For over ten years, the school had no classrooms. Makeshift chalkboards such as this one were hung by students every day.**

HUANG CHENG-YOU





Zimbabwe means “large houses of stone” in a local dialect. Stone is abundant in the nation. Rusu-nunguko Primary School was an outdoor school amid boulders, which provided some shade against the sun, but nothing against rain.

WEI LIANG-XU



We were suffering, but God did not sit aside and watch. He sent brothers and sisters from Taiwan to rescue us. Master Cheng Yen heard our cries from afar, and she looked into the distance and saw us. Her loving heart ached for our safety. She sent members of the Tzu Chi Foundation to our aid. At first we could not believe that shelter would truly come. When Mr Tino Chu came and told us about the plans made by the Tzu Chi Foundation, we could not believe our ears. But it was true because in Tzu Chi it is said: “Make great vows to benefit all sentient beings, then carry them out in action.” Mr Chu came in October 2011 and bought us bricks to build toilets. This was the first step of a journey. Master Cheng Yen says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with one first step. Even a saint was once an ordinary human being.”

The second step which the Tzu Chi Foundation took was a big one. In July 2012, brothers and sisters came from Taiwan, from America (including Brother Joe and Brother Jiren), and from South Africa (Brother Michael).

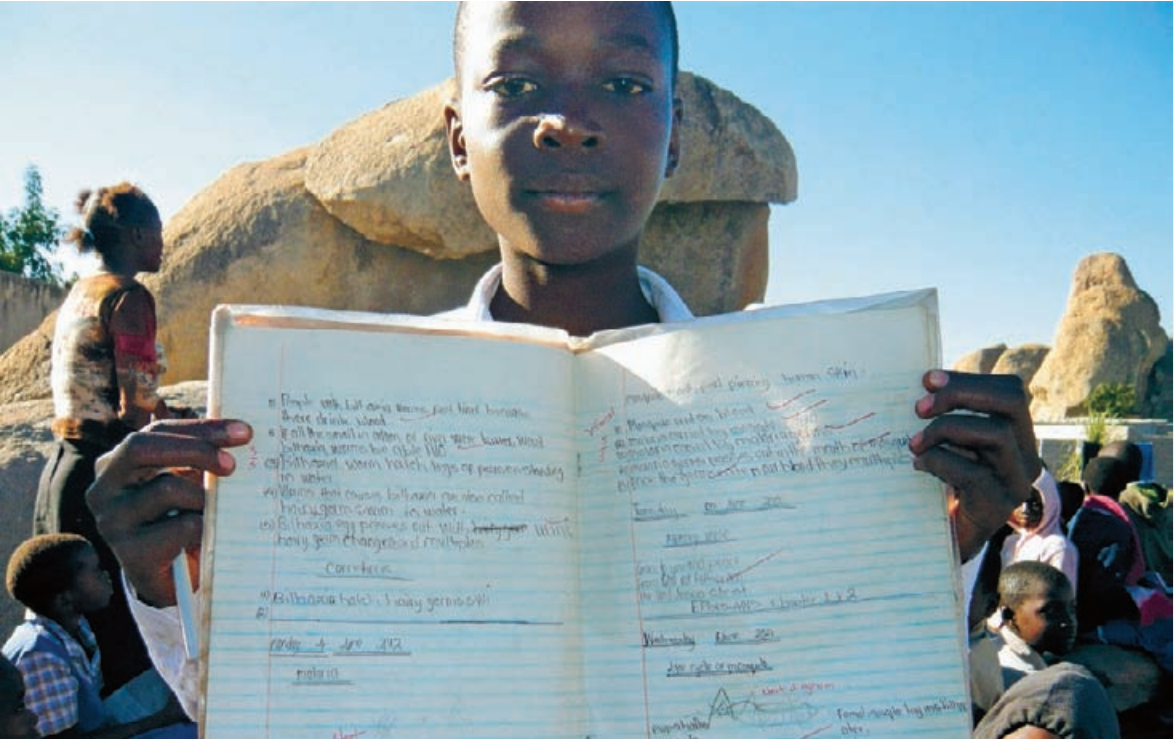
When these brothers and sisters came, it was a miracle.

The building started on a Sunday. On Monday when I came to school, I could not believe my eyes. I pinched myself to see if I was dreaming. I felt pain and saw that I was awake and that it was really happening. I was overjoyed. I thanked Master Cheng Yen for the Great Love for our outcast community. I felt the warmth of the tears rolling down my cheeks. It was not because I was hurt, but it was because of the unexplainable joy and thankfulness filling me. In one week and a half, the new shelters were complete. I also thank parents from the community who helped the engineers from Taiwan.

In August we used the shelters for only a short period because the schools were closing. When the third term began in September, we were very happy to go back to school. Now that we have shelters, many things have changed. There are no complaints about headaches or about the sun and harsh winds which used to

In the open-air school or in their homes, students had no desks to use. They had to write their homework on the floor or on a rock, not the most comfortable writing positions. Still, the handwriting was neatly done page after page.

HUANG CHENG-YOU



Students use one hand to shade their eyes and the other hand to answer the teacher’s question. Despite a lack of school supplies, students cherish the chance to receive an education.

HUANG CHENG-YOU



Seven new classrooms were built using fortified plastic sheets over light steel frames, one classroom for each grade. The materials came from Taiwan.

WEI LIANG-XU



Each classroom is well ventilated through eight windows and three ceiling vents.

CHEN ZHI-QIANG

beat on us. The rains no longer distract us from our lessons and make us go home before break time. We can study until the proper dismissal time, because now we have a roof over our heads. Now I am proud of being a teacher at Rusununguko Primary. I even boast of being a teacher on my way home. The bad names have disappeared. Parents have transferred their children to our beautiful Rusununguko school, improved by the Tzu Chi Foundation, and we now have 1,400 students.

The shelters are warm inside and have good ventilation. Master Cheng Yen says, "When we have something, let us cherish it. When we do not, let us be content." Thank God for giving us Master Cheng Yen. Now we are cherishing what we have. Because of the improved condition of our school, the children have gained the respect

of children from other schools. Teachers have gained respect from the community and from other school teachers. Those who once laughed at us now admire us. With the addition of flowers and other greenery, hey, Rusununguko is now a small paradise on earth!

God did not ignore our pleas and cries, and indeed he sent help. How fortunate we are at Rusununguko to have friends even from abroad with unlimited love. Master Cheng Yen says, "Remain soft-spoken and forgiving even when reason is on your side." We did that even when people called us bad names. We remained focused. Now the Master of love and mercy has rewarded us with Great Love.

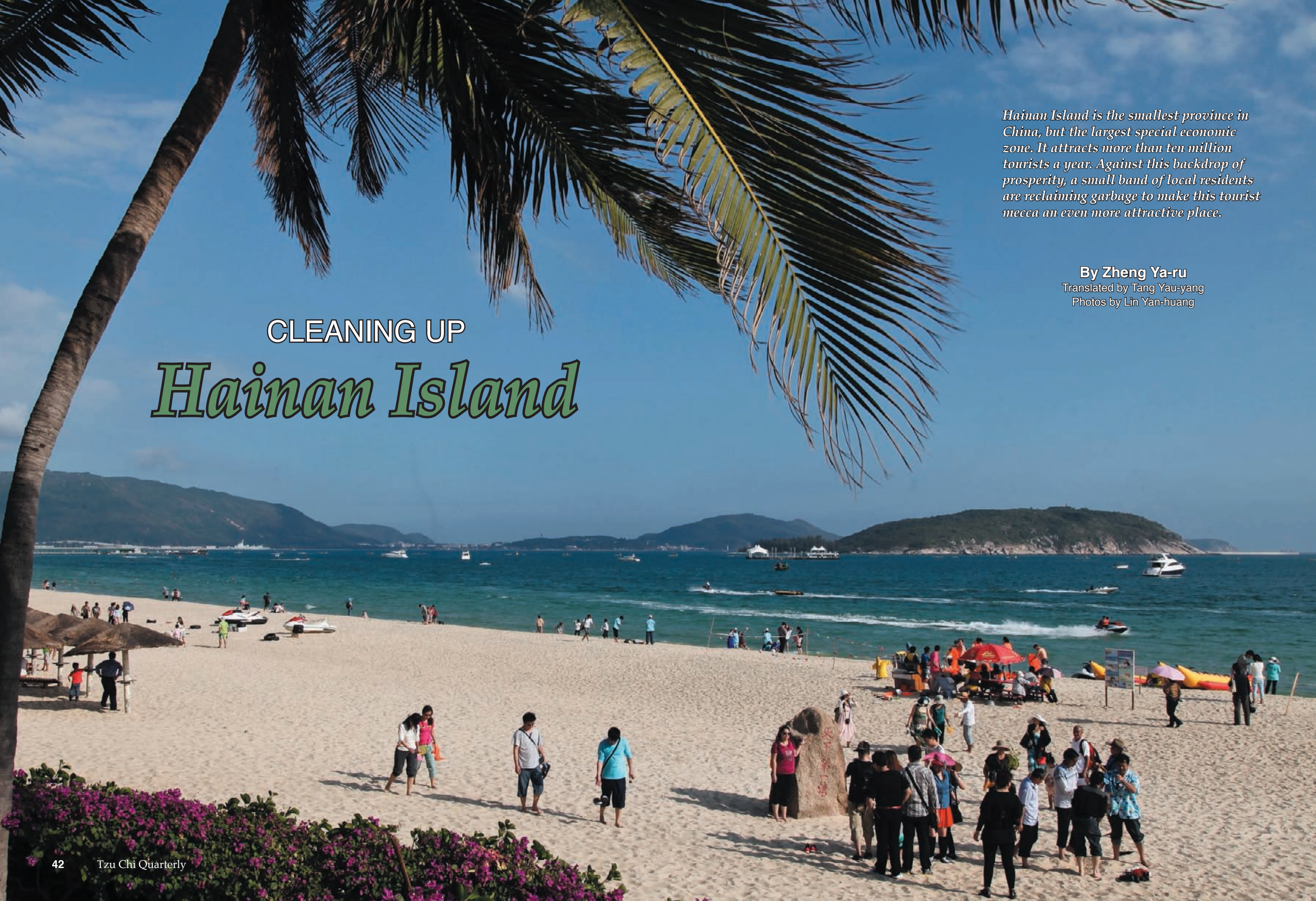
Master Cheng Yen, although we cannot be together every day, I know and believe we are always and will always be together in spirit. ☸



The new classrooms offer a much more comfortable environment for education.

TINO CHU





*Hainan Island is the smallest province in China, but the largest special economic zone. It attracts more than ten million tourists a year. Against this backdrop of prosperity, a small band of local residents are reclaiming garbage to make this tourist mecca an even more attractive place.*

**By Zheng Ya-ru**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Lin Yan-huang

## CLEANING UP *Hainan Island*





**H**ainan, China's southernmost province, was designated by the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission as "Hainan Island of International Tourism" in 2010. Its tourism and real estate industries are flourishing.

Haikou, the provincial capital located on the northern coast of the island, attracts many tourists. Five streets make up the old-town district, or "Old Haikou" as the locals call it. Deshengsha Pedestrian Street, one of the five, is both a tourist destination and a hub for the clothing trade. It is always packed with people selling, sauntering, shopping, and buying. Real estate here is precious, so merchants use every inch of usable space for business.

Huang Peiwa (黄坏娃) lives on the fifth floor of an apartment building on this street. A dozen or so women were in the unfurnished living room of the apartment one morning, chatting away as they prepared large piles of recyclables

to be picked up by a truck that afternoon. The volunteer-operated truck would take the sorted materials and sell them to a commercial buyer.

There were no elevators in the building, so the women had to carry everything down the stairs. The staircase was so narrow that only one person could pass at a time, making the job even more complicated. They first carried smaller items to the first floor and left them near the apartment gate. Used plastic bags, packed into larger plastic bags, were bulky but lightweight. They could be rolled down the steps. Heavy or fragile items were carefully relayed hand to hand down the steps. Soon, the staging area by the gate was almost full.

Finally, the women were ready to take the things out the gate and into the business district. Balancing stacks of bags piled up taller than a person on their pushcarts, they rushed their cargo through the thick crowds of shoppers and vendors to a waiting truck 50 meters from the



**A big plastic bag (opposite), packed solid with many more plastic bags inside, rolls down the stairs from the fifth floor to volunteers at the bottom of the stairs, who will put it on a truck waiting on the street.**

**At the Deshengsha marketplace (above), Huang Peiwa picks recyclables out of a garbage can. She believes that every time she picks up garbage, she is cultivating her spirituality and exercising.**

gate, moving as quickly as they could so as not to inconvenience the other residents of the building or the pedestrians on the street.

Moving the recyclables from the fifth floor down to the entrance and out to a truck requires a lot of work on the part of the volunteers. However, even before the process can get that far, Huang has to collect the recyclables and carry them up five floors to her apartment. That must surely be harder than moving them down, and it just goes to show Huang's dedication to recycling for Tzu Chi. She offers her apartment to serve as a Tzu Chi recycling station.

#### **Where from?**

Big, black plastic bags in hand, Huang patrols the Deshengsha marketplace every afternoon in search of recyclables on the ground or in garbage cans. She also asks storekeepers for unwanted bags or boxes, often available in abundance at these establishments. After two hours of searching and garbage picking, she goes home with

several big bags of goods. She drags the bags up five flights of stairs and puts them away in her apartment.

When Huang first started collecting recyclables, some storekeepers mistook her for a cleaning lady and gave her their real garbage as well. Others shooed her away, afraid that customers would shun their stores if she was there. Instead of feeling demeaned, Huang accepted the recyclables and politely explained, "Recycling helps the earth, and it helps the needy." She was referring to the fact that Tzu Chi sells recyclables and uses the proceeds to help people in need.

Some shopkeepers have come to support Huang's cause and save their recyclables for her. Once she went on a trip with her family and was absent from the marketplace for two days. During this time the owner of a clothing shop, instead of throwing his recyclables away, saved several bagfuls and gave them to Huang upon her return.

Huang is one of the multitudes of volunteers around the world who collect reclaimable



garbage for Tzu Chi. Their efforts have kept Tzu Chi recycling stations replenished and the earth cleaner.

### Recycling station at home

At first, Huang's husband did not like the thought of her working with "garbage." To win his support, she paid extra attention to her family and made sure volunteering did not get in her way of caring for them. For example, she would prepare the ingredients for dinner before she went out to volunteer at five in the afternoon. When she returned home, she could go straight to the kitchen. In this way, her family would have a hot meal soon after they got home from work.

After six months, her mindfulness and resolve finally won the support of her husband. "As long as I have my family behind me, I'll have the energy to keep going," she said.

Once or twice a week, volunteers gather at Huang's little apartment to process the recycla-

**In Huang's apartment, where volunteers sort through garbage, a volunteer puts on a pair of plastic eyeglasses, fresh from a brand-new box in the pile of recyclables.**

bles that she has collected, carried up the steps, and stored in her home. All of these volunteers are females, most of them housewives in their fifties. They also pick up reclaimable garbage in their own neighborhoods and tell people about the importance of recycling.

One of these women, Wang Ju (王菊), was born and raised in Hainan. After she married a Taiwanese man in 1996, she moved to Taiwan, where she joined Tzu Chi and served as a recycling volunteer. In 2010, her family moved back to Hainan. They now live in Qionghai, more than an hour's drive from Haikou. Though the two places are far apart, Wang takes the time to join other volunteers at Huang's apartment whenever she can.

### The Taiwan experience

Without Wang, the recycling effort at Huang's apartment probably would never have gotten started.

One day in early 2012, Wang asked Lin Yan (林燕) if she wanted to go to Taiwan for a Tzu Chi recycling camp in March. Lin knew about Tzu Chi and had even taken part in a relief distribution held by the foundation. She had also studied Buddhism for many years. "Buddhism

taught me to cherish resources, but I didn't know exactly how to put that ideal into practice," she remembers. Even though she wasn't clear what they would do at the camp, she decided to accompany Wang. She even rounded up a dozen of her Buddhist friends to sign up for the camp. Huang Peiwa was the last one to join the bunch.

Wang knew how well recycling had been established in Taiwan. She expected that the group would be awed and inspired. And she was right about that.

Feng Shuzhen (馮淑珍), 77, was so impressed that after she returned home from the camp, she offered the courtyard in her home to be used as a recycling station. "Many volunteers in Taiwan are older than me, and they're still doing recycling. They made me feel that I can still be quite useful."

For her part, Lin Yan learned a lot about recycling as she saw how finely and precisely volunteers worked at recycling stations in Taiwan to reclaim garbage. Their painstaking care in categorizing recyclables increased the amount of materials that they reclaimed and the income from selling them. She was especially amazed to learn that recycled PET bottles could be used to make fabric. "I'd always known that PET bottles could be recycled, but I surely didn't know that they could be turned into blankets," she exclaimed.

Having learned specific recycling techniques from Tzu Chi in Taiwan, Lin, Feng, and the others in the group began putting them into practice after returning from the trip. They were happy to learn about this good way of cherishing resources and protecting the earth.

Feng used to go to temples where she'd chant sutras or the Buddha's name. "Now I chant the Buddha's name while I do recycling. At the same time, I get some exercise. It's really killing several birds with one stone," she said. Her younger brother advised her to cut back on recycling out of concern for her age, but she told him not to worry. "While I'm doing this to protect the earth, I'll be sure to take good care of myself too," she told him.

Her gung-ho spirit greatly boosts the spirits of other volunteers, and many of them gather at her courtyard every week to reclaim garbage. Lin Yan always has a little notebook with her while working there, partly to record attendance, but more to check on the absent. "We're all old acquaintances. If someone is absent, we call her



**Recycling volunteers work in the courtyard of Feng Shuzhen's two-story house. Over time, Feng's neighbors have gotten into the habit of collecting and bringing their recyclables to her.**

to see if she's all right," Lin said. Recycling thus has also fostered good fellowship among members of the group.

### Putting down environmental roots

The volunteers opened three recycling locations within just six months following their return from Taiwan. The first was in Feng Shuzhen's courtyard on Bailong North Road, the second was Huang Peiwa's upstairs apartment on Deshengsha Pedestrian Street, and the third was a sidewalk location that Lin Lizhu (林麗珠) and her neighbors on Jianguo Road established.

Volunteer Cheng Zhuyue (程祝月) has brought these environmental ideas to Jingshan Kindergarten, which her daughter attends. Cheng is in the habit of taking her daughter along when she goes out recycling for Tzu Chi. One day when she was dropping her little one off at school, she thought how great it would be if the other children there could also help recycle. She talked to Yuan Lingli (袁玲利), the direc-







**Preschoolers at Jingshan Kindergarten ferry box-fuls of recyclables to a waiting recycling truck.**

tor of the kindergarten, and was surprised that she accepted her suggestion right then.

Yuan had two decades of experience in preschool education. She had always wanted to instill an environmental awareness in the young minds of the children. She tried to get help to do so from the government, but her efforts had all been to no avail. This explained why she immediately accepted Cheng's idea.

The teachers at Jingshan have been helpful, too. They have helped explain the idea to the children and their parents. The program has been running since October 2012.

Children ages four to six go to Jingshan each day with the recyclables that they and their family have saved at home, and they put them in containers at the kindergarten. "At first, we used stickers and toys to entice them to recycle," said

Yuan. "But now it's become their habit. When they see reusable garbage on the road, they pick it up, save it at home, and bring it here when they have saved up enough."

When the recycling truck comes to the kindergarten, the youngsters pick up the containers and follow their teachers to the truck, loudly singing "A Clean Earth."

Recycling is still not a household word on Hainan Island. If anything, people think of it as something only the poor would do to make a living. But having the children do recycling is a way to change that. "There is a family behind each child," Cheng observed. "The children can best influence their parents to do recycling." Now that Cheng has the experience at the child-care center to back her up, she is more confident that she can get other kindergartens or schools to do the same. "We'll have adults as well as children reclaiming garbage, and Hainan will be a more attractive place." ❀



# Less Hurt on the Earth

**By Wu Yu-dui and Huang Xiao-qi**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Huang Xiao-qi

*She's getting on in years and suffers pain from old injuries, but she doesn't let that stop her. She visits stalls and shops every day to collect her "treasures." As long as the market is open, she doesn't let herself rest.*

It is just four o'clock in the morning, but Guo Wu Lan-xiang (郭吳蘭香), 62, is already on Zhonghua Road in Xinzhuang, New Taipei City. She makes sure that she is there early so that the precious things are loaded onto her bike—not a garbage truck.

She calls on fruit stalls and other shops in the marketplace to collect used plastic bags and packaging material, such as styrofoam. Fruit farmers typically wrap their fruit in cushioning material before placing it in large cardboard boxes for shipment. When the fruit eventually

arrives at retail stores, the storekeepers remove the cushioning wrappers and put the fruit on display to be purchased.

Before fruit makes its way into the hands of consumers, a lot of cardboard boxes, plastic bags, and cushioning material have already piled up on the premises of a fruit stall. The disposal of cardboard boxes is relatively easy because many people collect them as recyclables and take them off the hands of store owners. But the plastic bags and cushioning materials are a different story. Many people don't know they are recyclable, and



even if they do know, such things don't fetch much money anyway. So storekeepers usually just toss the stuff in large plastic bags and throw it out with the rest of their garbage.

Lan-xiang is out to prevent the last step from happening as much as she can. She makes her rounds in the marketplace and fumbles through large plastic bags looking for her treasures. It is not uncommon for rotten fruit to make its way into the bags, too. She simply ignores the foul smell of the rotting fruit as she works through the bag.

She goes to the marketplace three times a day: in early morning, around midday, and at night. She does not take time off from that routine; if the market is open for business, so is she.

**Guo Wu Lan-xiang and her bicycle, almost engulfed by recyclables.**

She picks out the plastic bags and cushioning material, rain or shine, one store after another. She never stops.

After doing this persistently for some time, she has won many storekeepers over to her efforts. Du Wen-jie (杜文傑) was the first of them all. He said that on windy days, plastic bags and fruit wrappers used to be blown all over the place; when it rained, people would easily slip on them. It was only later that he learned that those things could be recycled.

Du expressed his admiration for Lan-xiang's eco-friendly efforts. He said that she shows up at four in the morning when he receives a new shipment to replenish his inventory, and he sees her still in the marketplace at seven in the evening collecting her things. "I'm deeply impressed by her steadfastness," the store owner marveled.



Each guava is wrapped with a white, foam-mesh wrapper, then placed in a plastic bag, and finally placed into a cardboard box for transport to a retail store. The shipper of the fruit must ensure that their goods reach the retailer in good condition. Any slightest blemish diminishes the price that the fruit can fetch for the retailer. However, such protective packaging carries an environmental cost.

Her dedication has touched a chord with many fruit vendors. They voluntarily pick out recyclables from their operations throughout the day and keep them in one location for Tzu Chi trucks to pick up after the market is closed.

If shopkeepers do not help her out like this, Lan-xiang does her thing

manually. She gathers her recyclables, loads them onto her bicycle, pedals to the recycling station to drop them off, and returns to go through the cycle again. Once she made nine trips between the marketplace and the recycling station in a single day. Such frequent trips have raised calluses on the inside of her thighs.

Her energy has been passed not just to the stall operators but also to volunteer Chen Huang Mei-yu (陳黃美玉). Mei-yu uses her lunch break at work to collect plastic bags and cushioning material at another market and rushes them to a recycling station before returning to work.

Lan-xiang says that to ensure that she does not miss the early start each day, she does not allow herself to go back to sleep when she wakes up at three o'clock. She works hard every day. Though her body aches, she does not take much rest—the pain gets worse when she sits around doing nothing. To rejuvenate herself, she goes to a park and uses a tree to help her stretch out a bit and to rub her aching back.

When the day comes to an end and she lies down in her bed, she prays not for a good night's sleep, but rather to be able to wake up in the morning in good enough health to work another day. She always tells herself: "To give is a blessing. If you don't, it's a waste of your life."

Early each morning, she goes out to work as usual—the moon and the stars seem to light her path. When the sun comes up, she feels that she has earned another day of precious time to do her good work. Her bicycle wheels keep on spinning down her path of treasure collection. ❀

### Packaging treasures

Lan-xiang has volunteered for more than a decade at the Tzu Chi Zhonggang Recycling Station in Xinzhuang. In July 2011, she learned from volunteer Xu A-jiao (許阿嬌) that packaging material for transporting fruit was recyclable. That included things like plastic bags and foam cushions.

She knew that those things littered the grounds of the marketplace near her home. They had always been swept up and disposed of like regular garbage, but when they end up in an incinerator, they can contribute to bad air pollution. Therefore she decided to pick out these items for recycling. She started to dig through the garbage in the marketplace for those materials and take them back to her recycling station. She's been doing it ever since.

"It feels great to be able to pick out treasures from mountains of garbage," she said, "Doing this keeps me busy and makes my day go by quickly." That also leaves her with little time to lament the physical pains that are with her always, pains from an old injury in her ankle and from spinal surgery.

She has difficulty bending forward, a motion that is called for again and again in her routine of picking things up. The physical exertions often cause her to perspire profusely, especially in the muggy summer heat. Sweat pours off her forehead and cheeks, sometimes getting into her eyes or mouth, but still she does not stop. "Do you know that sweat has three distinct tastes?" she asked. "Salty, bitter, and bland."







# New Homes Here and New Homes There

By Ye Zi-hao

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Lin Yan-huang

*Jakarta, the national capital of Indonesia, teems with more than ten million inhabitants. Multitudes of destitute people from all over the country have flocked into this thriving city, hoping to eke out a better life for themselves. Many of them are forced to live in housing districts they can afford, districts where conditions are far from ideal. Sadly, they often lack the means to improve their lives.*

*Over the past six years, Tzu Chi volunteers have built new homes for about a thousand families to replace the shanties in which they had been living. For those that have been helped by Tzu Chi, life is definitely looking up.*

The village of Belakang is located in Kamal, West Jakarta, Indonesia. Single-story houses are common here, their gardens flourishing with abundant vegetables and fruit. Trees sway in the gentle breeze, their leaves peacefully fluttering back and forth. We found that the countryside ambience of Belakang was like a breath of fresh air within the hustle and bustle of the great city of Jakarta.

This is one of the communities Tzu Chi helped improve by building new homes for indigent villagers who lived in old, run-down houses. Belakang used to be called a “backward village.” According to Tzu Chi volunteer Tan Soei Tjoe, many local residents worked odd jobs or sold recyclables, earning an unsteady income of one American dollar a day. As a result, they were too poor to keep up their homes. As more and more homes aged in neglect, the whole community looked run-down. Some villagers even lived with their livestock, heightening the residents’ chances of contracting diseases from the animals. Considering all this, it is no surprise the village got that unflattering nickname.

But that began to change in December 2006. At that time, the government and Tzu Chi volunteers joined forces and started an aid project for Belakang. Eighty-two destitute families were selected for the project. Their old houses were torn down and new ones were built in their place. The project also improved the roads and the water supply in the village.

The project was completed in the summer of 2007. Each of the new homes had a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The grayish white, reinforced-concrete structures were far superior to the houses of bamboo walls and dirt floors that they had before.

Liam Warni’s family was one of those that benefited from the project. They live in a new house near the entrance to the village. Her husband is a janitor, and her mother-in-law lives with them. Liam is happy because their new house does not leak like their old one, whose roof was only tree leaves.

Some residents that have moved into the new houses have used the grayish white exterior walls of their new homes as canvases, on which they have added their colorful creativity. They have brought much originality and local feel to the village.

The improvements brought on by the Tzu Chi project have even attracted new construc-





This was one of the houses selected to be replaced in a Tzu Chi home replacement project in West Pademangan. The disintegrating floor of the second story overhead indicated a dangerous situation. These people lived on the first floor and did not even have room to stand up. With not enough headroom, residents either sat or squatted in the restricted space.

tion in the village. “Look at those houses under construction over there. They’re not being built by us local people. People from the outside bought the land, and now they’re building on it,” said a villager by the name of Marshin.

Some villagers have become regular donors to Tzu Chi as a result of this build-to-replace joint project. Their monthly donations of 3,000 or 5,000 rupiah (about half an American dollar), though not a great sum by any means, are a sure sign of goodness of heart, especially coming from people of little means.

#### More of the good thing

The housing improvement project for the village of Belakang worked quite well, and the quality of living there has improved substantially. The government has even designated it a model village.

Building on the success in Belakang, Tzu Chi volunteers began to replicate the project in other Jakarta communities, including West Pademangan, Kelapa Gading, Cilincing, and Jalan Lautze. They built new houses and improved the standard of living of the recipients,

which contributed to the improvement of the whole environment in those communities. Volunteers in Bandung, West Java, and Makassar, West Sulawesi, have also replicated the experiences of their counterparts in Jakarta.

Agus Yatim, nearly 50, lives in a new house that Tzu Chi built in West Pademangan, North Jakarta. Sitting in his new home, he reminisced about the past. He said he moved with his parents into their old home when he was eight years old. Over the years, more and more people moved into the same neighborhood. However,

prosperity or increased living standards didn’t come with the increased housing and population density—because the district began to sink lower. Excessive pumping of groundwater in the Jakarta area caused the water table to decline. As the water went down, the ground sank and the community with it. This subsidence was the last thing the residents of West Pademangan needed. The area is not far from the sea, and the sinking ground made the region prone to frequent flooding. Because of that, the government raised the surfaces of the roads, relegating the houses along the way to low ground. That, and the sinking of the water table, exacerbated the dire situation that the residents had to face, particularly during high tides.

Those who could afford to do so had their homes raised or moved away. Those who did not have the means to improve their homes could only stay and endure the ever-worsening floods. “During high tides, water would gush up between our floor tiles. We had to sleep upstairs [if we wanted to stay dry],” recalled Agus Yatim.

“Look! That second floor has become the first floor,” he continued, pointing at an abandoned house nearby. If a person stood on the first floor of that house looking out the window, their eyes would be at the knee level of a person standing on the raised road outside. Agus Yatim’s old house was just like that house he was pointing at. “I used to climb directly into the second floor if the first floor was flooded.”

Life for him and his family finally began to improve in early 2008, when Tzu Chi joined the North Jakarta city government and the military and started to build new houses to replace the run-down homes of destitute residents in West Pademangan.

When the residents first met Tzu Chi volunteers, they were wary about the foundation’s offer to build them new homes for free. They wondered what the catch might be. “Other groups had come before Tzu Chi and offered to help us, but we later saw the strings that they





**A Tzu Chi volunteer congratulates a recipient as he moves into his new house in Cilincing, North Jakarta.**

#### Seeking out the needy

Kaswanto and his wife, Yuliati, both in their 40s and also residents of West Pademangan, had become Tzu Chi volunteers. When we met them, they were looking forward to moving into a new house that would be finished by Tzu Chi two months later. In addition to being house recipients themselves, they accompanied their village head and some other officials around the village to identify the families most in need of new homes.

Kaswanto and Yuliati have three children. Their oldest daughter is studying accounting at a private vocational high school, the tuition and fees for which are substantial. Their youngest child, a son, is just two years old, and Yuliati stays home to take care of him. Thus, the financial burden of the whole family falls solely on the shoulders of Kaswanto, who works at a plastics factory.

To get into their old house, we first had to bend down and walk through a tunnel-like entryway. The couple

was quite creative and had paved their concrete floor with tiles discarded by others, adding a distinctive artistic flavor to their home. However, their house was next to a large drainage ditch and was therefore very susceptible to flooding, which was a great inconvenience.

Their home, while far from ideal, was not as derelict as some other houses in the area. "You must come take a look at this house," they said, as they led us through some dark alleys to a small, dilapidated wooden house. The decaying double-decker building was barely standing. In the bottom level we saw a bed and some cooking utensils, but it was so low only small chil-

dren could stand in it without having to bend down. It was raining, and we noticed that the area under the bed was very muddy.

Though Kaswanto and Yuliati's old house was worn and in need of repair, at least their floor was covered and there was enough headroom to allow us to stand upright. Seeing this old ruin made us wonder how many more houses like this one existed in the dark corners of Jakarta.

Kaswanto and Yuliati do recycling and solicit donations for Tzu Chi. Yuliati pays back to society in another way, too: She tutors students on Thursdays in a nearby park. "Children here are relatively weak in their lessons, so I help them learn," she said. "I also teach them to be grateful and to cherish things."

Yuliati said that when they move into the new house built by Tzu Chi, "I'll put some books recycled from our local recycling station in the front room of our new home. They'll help the children greatly."

**Agus Yatim works in a Tzu Chi recycling station. He received a new home from Tzu Chi.**



#### A fire-ravaged community

In addition to building new homes to replace old decaying ones, Tzu Chi also has helped destitute fire victims rebuild their houses.

A fire hit Jalan Lautze (Lautze Street) in Central Jakarta, on February 7, 2012. The conflagration burned down 394 houses and left more than 1,200 people homeless. "Many people escaped the fire with only the clothes on their backs," Tzu Chi volunteer Hendra Kastan said as he walked through the neighborhood, where the charred vestiges of the inferno were still visible.

Immediately after the fire, Tzu Chi volunteers began distributing daily necessities to fire victims. Next, they went with village officials to call on the victims and determine their economic status, verify their land ownership, and assess the amount of damage caused by the fire. Volunteers hired builders to prepare the sites, and they started building new homes in May of the same year. Fire-retardant materials were used in the new construction, adding a measure of safety in this densely populated neighborhood. Over a hundred houses were built.

had attached: They wanted to convert us to their religion," said Agus Yatim.

That would be a significant request for anyone, but all the more so for Agus. He is a devoted Muslim and has taught the Koran to women and children in the community for many years.

Tzu Chi volunteers told Agus the ideals and missions of the foundation, and provided examples of how its assistance had been given out. Then he saw a neighbor's child taken to a Tzu Chi free clinic to have his goiter treated. The boy was cured without Tzu Chi volunteers asking for anything in return. "Ever since then, I've felt that it is a trustworthy group," he said.





**Three generations of Hassan Dan's (left) family pose in their new home in Jalan Lautze.**

Suwarni, 95, received a new home. She lost her daughter at the beginning of 2012, and then she lost her old home to the fire a few weeks later. She was in dire straits. A granddaughter did odd jobs to support her. Touched by the help that Tzu Chi volunteers gave Suwarni and her granddaughter, a neighbor was willing to sell a bit of land to Tzu Chi to augment Suwarni's original land before Tzu Chi rebuilt her home for her. Though her new place is still quite small, merely four square meters (43 square feet), she can now live in peace in familiar surroundings.

Hassan Dan's new home was built on the land on which he has lived since he was born, 60 years ago. When his father died, he left the land to him. "The families of my two sons and my daughter live in the new house. Adding my wife and me, that's four families that live here," said Hassan Dan. Although occupied by so many people, his house is spacious compared with Suwarni's little one. This large household is supported by the meager incomes of his two sons and son-in-law.

The family has settled down in their new house. Hassan Dan's daughter described a typical day for the family: "In the morning, the children go to school, and the men go to work. Everyone comes home at night, and we watch TV and chat. It's great to be able to live here."

It has been six years since Tzu Chi started building replacement homes such as the ones described above. About a thousand homes have been built so far, covering areas in Jakarta, West Java and West Sulawesi.

These building projects are in addition to larger projects that Tzu Chi had previously undertaken. In 2003 and 2005, the foundation completed two Great Love Villages for impoverished people who lived along the Angke River, and it built three more villages after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.

In all cases Tzu Chi gave new homes to the needy, and its volunteers shared Tzu Chi ideals with them. The needy now have better homes, and they may be further inspired to help other less fortunate people in society and thus live more fulfilling lives. ❀

# Life Sutra

**By Dharma Master Cheng Yen**

Translated by Teresa Chang

In early July, I set out from Hualien, eastern Taiwan, and visited Tzu Chi offices around the island. The scenery on the way was beautiful, but I also found beauty in the hearts of people I met at each stop, especially from those who shared how they had turned their deluded lives around. When I listened to them, my heart resonated with them and their stories.

Some people had attained great material wealth, but had lost themselves in it and lived a troubled life. After they joined Tzu Chi, they learned to humble themselves, change their ways, and show care for their families and for society. By doing so, they became rich spiritually.

Some people had been hit by adversities which devastated both their health and finances. But instead of giving up, they managed to overcome and transcend their setbacks. The ways in which they turned their lives around are living sutras that can inspire us all.

One of the stories I heard was that of a man from Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. He began using illegal drugs when he was in middle school, and he was repeatedly jailed. Every time he was released, he'd tell himself he would never touch drugs again. But when his old friends sought him out, he would go back to his old ways. A large part of his life was thus spent in and out of jail. Not only was his precious youth wasted, but he also began to suffer from depression. His parents were very sad about his situation and felt helpless to do anything.

Things began to change six years ago when he was invited to volunteer at a Tzu Chi recycling station. There he saw how people suffering from depression had gotten better after doing

recycling for some time. He decided to give it a try. Gradually, he began to realize that the real value of life was in doing good things for others and for the world.

The more he helped out at the station, the happier he became. He volunteered there every day. Seeing that he had transformed into a "new" man, some volunteers wanted to help him get a job. But his mother declined their kind offers. She wanted him to stay in the benevolent environment of the recycling station; her mind could only be at ease when he was with Tzu Chi volunteers. I can only imagine how she must have worried about her son over the years.

I also heard the story of another man. Unable to resist material temptations when he was young, he accumulated a lot of credit card debt. Police officers and creditors began visiting his home, looking for him. His parents felt so harassed they would jump at the sound of the doorbell. One day, unable to endure it any more, they gave him a little telling off. The man got so upset that he left home.

He wandered aimlessly for nearly 18 years after that. Things got so bad for him that he had to eat leftover food that people threw away.

Eventually, chance brought him to a Tzu Chi recycling station, where he saw people from all walks of life giving of themselves. No matter if they were company owners, university professors, laborers, or street vendors, the volunteers took time out of their busy schedules and helped out at the station. They all spoke kindly to him. Feeling that everyone was equal at the station and that no one looked down on him, he began to volunteer there. Gradually he was able to open his heart and let go of the ignorance and delusion in his mind. In the end he even met with his family, whom he hadn't seen in nearly two decades.



JUAN-JONG

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from July 1 to 17, 2013.





ZHAN XIU-FANG

**In addition to serving as a place where volunteers gather together and reclaim reusable resources, a Tzu Chi recycling station is also a spiritual cultivation ground. Many people have begun to live a more fulfilling life by volunteering at one.**

This time when I was at our Kaohsiung office, the man came to the office with his family and shared his story onstage in front of a large gathering. He knelt down before his parents and asked for their forgiveness. His parents were very grateful to Tzu Chi volunteers for redeeming their son.

In Tainan, I learned the story of Wang Ying-sheng (王盈盛), a very dedicated volunteer. Despite having limited mobility, he goes to the local Tzu Chi recycling station every morning and sets up the computer to connect with the Jing Si Abode so that volunteers can gather together at the station and listen to my Dharma talks via videoconferencing. To do this, he has to get up every morning at 3:30. Just putting on his

volunteer uniform takes him half an hour. Then when he arrives at the recycling station, he has to climb to the third floor. This is quite a feat for someone who has difficulty moving around.

Wang said there are many things that are beyond his ability, but he does his best at the things he can do. Being able to help out and be useful is better than sitting around idly. His mother is glad he volunteers at the recycling station because many people there care for him and give him support. This puts her mind at ease. Her son used to be depressed and unhappy. Volunteering for Tzu Chi has helped him change. She takes great comfort in seeing him becoming happier and more optimistic.

Volunteers at our recycling stations don't just protect the Earth by reclaiming reusable resources—they also help transform people's minds and heal broken families. Our recycling stations are truly spiritual cultivation grounds and a broad Bodhisattva Path on which to walk. When there is harmony among people and in

families, when everyone practices filial piety and does good deeds, peace will prevail in our society and our world will be able to enjoy stability and wellbeing.

### **Walking the Bodhisattva Path**

Tzu Chi volunteers first visited Myanmar in 2008 to provide help after Cyclone Nargis devastated parts of the country. Our volunteers have continued spreading seeds of love there ever since. Many seeds have sprouted and grown there over the last five years.

Wu Bing-hui (吳炳慧), 71, was one of those inspired to join Tzu Chi. Following the example of what our volunteers did in Taiwan when Tzu Chi was first founded, she talks with people about our foundation every day when she goes to the market. She explains that even small donations, when pooled together, can help a lot of people. Sometimes she has to climb several flights of stairs when she visits her donating members to collect their donations, but she doesn't mind, even though she is getting on in years. If a member is not home, she goes back again and again until she finally meets him or her. She said nothing is difficult if you have the will to do it. With perseverance and determination, there is no goal that can't be reached.

In South Africa, our volunteers give of themselves in the same spirit as Wu. Many of the local Zulu volunteers were once our care recipients, but they have since changed from people who need help to ones who help others. They have taken on the responsibility of providing long-term care to local poor people and AIDS orphans. Many of the volunteers had painful pasts, but after participating in the work of Tzu Chi, they came to realize that the true meaning of life lies in giving. This realization enabled them to leave their painful pasts behind and serve others unconditionally. Despite having only few resources available to them, they diligently help others untie the knots in their hearts by sharing their own life stories with them. This helps relieve others of suffering and helps them gain happiness. At the same time, the volunteers open up a way to happiness for themselves.

These examples show how one should walk the Bodhisattva Path. If we seek the Dharma only to help ourselves transcend the impermanence and suffering in life, then we are just at the starting point. We should try to emulate the Buddha and endeavor to attain enlightenment as he did. Start by understanding the Four

Noble Truths: Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Path leading to this emancipation. Then make the Four Great Vows: "I vow to save all living beings however countless they are, to get rid of all worries however innumerable they are, to study the methods of the Dharma however endless they are, and to attain the Buddha Way however transcendent it is."

The Buddha had a disciple named Sariputra. For a long time, Sariputra diligently carried out spiritual cultivation to maintain a pure heart and to end his own suffering. He believed that he had attained the ultimate by practicing Hinayana Buddhism. [Hinayana is a Sanskrit word meaning "Lesser Vehicle" because it is concerned with the individual's salvation.] It wasn't until he listened to the Buddha expound Mahayana Buddhism [that is, the "Greater Vehicle," concerned with universal salvation] that he realized he had been wrong in seeking only to benefit himself. He had focused only on his own salvation instead of walking the Bodhisattva Path to benefit all living beings. He felt deep remorse for not having opened up his heart to the ultimate meaning of the Buddha's teachings, and he felt he had let decades of his life pass by in vain.

The Buddha teaches that "There is no difference among these three: the mind, the Buddha, and all living beings." All living beings possess the same pure, enlightened nature as that of the Buddha. All of us can attain buddhahood. As the wisest among the Buddha's disciples, Sariputra naturally should have known about this. It was just that he became so complacent in what he had achieved in practicing the Hinayana that he failed to make greater aspirations to walk the Bodhisattva Path. When he heard the Buddha explain the Mahayana, Dharma-joy welled up in his heart and he publicly expressed remorse for his mistakes.

Sariputra's remorse and joy after hearing the Buddha talk about the Mahayana should serve as a cautionary tale for us. We must not become arrogant; instead we should always humbly reflect on ourselves. We should often ask ourselves if we have modestly learned from others, if we are improving ourselves, and if we are dealing with people and matters with gratitude in our hearts.

As I have said before, "Our Jing Si principles are about diligently following the way of truth, and the path of Tzu Chi is about going amongst people to serve others." The spiritual cultivation





YAN LIN ZHANG

**After receiving assistance from Tzu Chi, many Zulu people in South Africa have taken up volunteer work themselves, helping AIDS orphans, senior citizens and poor people in their communities.**

As a result, they feel their spirits are actually getting better and their minds more focused.

Keeping your mind broad and pure is the way to good health. When your mind is pure and clear, you are able to perceive things more clearly, which will do you a lot of good. Try to overcome your habit of sleeping late. Before long you will find it's not so difficult to rise early and listen to my morning talks.

When you have been exposed to the Dharma, you must not only take it to heart, but go further and put it into practice. If you stick to your old ways and continue to fuss over issues with others and never give an inch when you feel you are right, your mind will stray from the right track. In this way, you will miss many good chances to cultivate yourself.

You should cherish the karmic affinities that lead you to meet people. Treat everyone you meet nicely and learn to yield to others—then you'll enjoy harmony in all your relationships. If you owe someone a karmic debt that you incurred in the past, repay it willingly and you will clear your debt sooner. Otherwise you will just continue to suffer. Being kind, gentle and thoughtful to others is the way to bring joy to everyone and to yourself.

If you can take the Dharma to heart, put yourself in others' shoes, harbor gratitude in your heart, and spread love to all human beings, then you have become an "enlightened being." Be careful not to turn into a "deluded being." If, when you help others, you are attached to the idea of being a giver, thinking "Because I have money to give away, these people are getting the help they need," then you have become a deluded being. Attachment to such notions prevents you from realizing the true meaning of the Three Spheres of Emptiness and leads to arrogance and conceit. [The Three Spheres of Emptiness means that when you give, you do not see yourself as the giver, others as the receivers, or what is given as the gift.]

Some might say, "I know all this. I will change, but not right now." Knowing that you have done wrong but procrastinating instead of changing your ways is definitely not the way to go. When you know something is right, you must do it

ground for Tzu Chi volunteers is among people, in society. There is a living sutra to be found in everyone. If you go into communities to serve others and humbly and mindfully learn from them, you will gain wisdom and you will come to understand the truth of all things.

Let us work in harmony with others to benefit the world and use wisdom to bring peace to people's minds. If we can do so, we're on the path to enlightenment.

### **Be enlightened, not deluded**

During my visits to Tzu Chi offices around Taiwan this time, many volunteers shared their thoughts about listening to my Dharma talks at 5:30 every morning. Some said that at first they doubted if they could get up so early every day, but they made themselves do it in order to nurture their wisdom. After getting up early and listening to my sermons for some time, they began to see the benefits.

They said that their minds often used to be cluttered with all sorts of worries and afflictions and could not stay calm. A side effect of such a mindset was that they felt tired no matter how much they slept. But now in order to get up early, they go to bed early. The regular schedule helps them get their rest. On top of that, my teachings help their minds stay clear and calm.



JUAN HONG

**Christopher Yang shares what he has learned from Master Cheng Yen in front of a large audience.**

Master's sermons]. Nobody had told him what to say, but every sentence he said was powerful. I was very impressed.

This past July when I was visiting our offices around Taiwan, I often asked him to speak in front of large audiences. Never once did he hesitate. When he went onstage, he'd introduce himself and say, "The Dharma name the Master gave me is Cheng Yuan [誠愿]." Among the things he shared with the audience were the "six reminders" he had set for himself:

Prevent arrogance: Never think "I am the best" because there is always room for improvement.

Prevent regression: To walk forward diligently on the Bodhisattva Path, you must hold firm to your initial aspirations.

Prevent deluded thoughts: The Master's only request for Tzu Chi volunteers is to maintain a pure heart.

Prevent restlessness: To calm your mind, you must get rid of unwholesome thoughts.

Prevent being violent: Be soft and gentle instead of being violent.

Prevent laziness: Do not slack off. Work hard to benefit the world.

Cheng Yuan is like a bodhisattva who has returned to this world to serve others because he had vowed to do so in his previous life. Despite his young age, he is so diligent in learning and upholding the Dharma. He is a living example of how the Dharma we learn in our previous lives is stored in our eighth consciousness and is later manifested in the next life.

When we pass away, we can take nothing but our karma with us. Everything that we do, good or bad, will become a seed that enters our eighth consciousness and follows us to our next life. We can see how important it is to watch our actions, speech, and thoughts. When we see others' merits, instead of feeling jealous, we should learn from them. And when we see others' faults, instead of despising those people, we should be grateful to them for helping guide us to refrain from being like them. When we do that, we're forming good affinities with others and sowing seeds of good relationships for our future lives.

I sincerely hope everyone will take in the Dharma and live it out. Let us be ever more mindful! ❀

without delay. Take steps immediately to correct your wrong ways. Only then will you be heading in the right direction in life and be able to start your life anew.

### **Create good karma**

Christopher Yang (楊凱丞) is an 11-year-old boy born in the United States. He has been very kind-hearted since he was very little. He cannot bear to think that cows are butchered for meat, so he tries to talk people out of eating steak. Because of that, Tzu Chi volunteers in the States nicknamed him "Xiao Niu" [Little Ox].

A few years ago, in order to learn Chinese, Xiao Niu came to Hualien and studied at our Tzu Chi Elementary School for a year. He would often come to the Abode after class. When I talked with others, he would sit silently aside and listen and take notes. This summer, he visited Taiwan again and stayed at the Abode. I didn't have much interaction with him until one day he went onstage to share his understanding of my teachings. I found that he was able to digest what I had taught and "translate" it into simple and easy language to share with others. He told everyone, "To keep up with the Master, you must watch 'Wisdom at Dawn' and 'Life Wisdom'" [TV programs that cover the



# In the Eyes of an Accountant: Is This Worth Doing?

*Wei Lijuan co-owns an accounting firm and is a pro in business analysis. She felt that it made no economic sense when she saw Tzu Chi volunteers take time away from their jobs to do volunteer work. It made even less sense when she learned that these volunteers paid their own expenses. According to her analytical, cost-benefit way of thinking, the volunteers were violating all the known economic principles on the books.*

*Wei even suspected that the volunteers had ulterior motives. However, her own subsequent volunteer work erased her doubts and suspicions and led her to find the value of life.*

By Li Wei-huang   Translated by Tang Yau-yang   Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Wei Lijuan (衛麗娟) was born in 1962 in Kunshan, Suzhou, near Shanghai. She was the youngest of eight children in the family. Her father, Wei Yonggao (衛永果), ran a rice shop and provided well for the family. Wei's early childhood years were carefree.

However, those blissful years ended abruptly when she was just five years old. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began sweeping through China. Ensnarled in the turmoil, her father lost more than his job—he also lost his dignity. Like countless others around the country that the overzealous Red Guards picked on, he was often forced to march in public parades and had to endure unjust humiliation. He often contemplated suicide.

Wei clearly remembers those difficult days. Her mother, Hong Shuying (洪樹瑛), worked, but brought home just over 20 yuan a month. The entire family would then try to live for the next 30 days on that meager amount. That was not much money to begin with, and divided among such a large family it was next to nothing. It was virtually impossible for the family to go on like that in a large city, so her mother decided to move the family from Kunshan to a rural area, where the Weis received a house to live in from the government as part of a public policy to relocate people like them to the countryside.

The sudden fall in the family fortune was hard on Wei, not so much because of the ensuing austerity, but for other factors. For example, one day she told her friends that she had had won-

tons for dinner at home the night before. Little did Wei realize that her innocent remark—and to her own good friends, no less—would cause her father to be criticized in public the very next day for “indulging in the luxury of wontons.”

“After that, I never told others what was really on my mind,” she said. Instinctively, she built a protective wall around herself. She was always on guard in her dealings with others. She no longer easily trusted anyone, with the exception of her own family.

The family moved back to Kunshan when the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. Her father started working again, this time in a job that the government arranged. “We all worked hard to earn others’ respect,” Wei said. “Dad told me that studying would be the only way for me to get ahead in life.” Though still a youngster, she took that advice seriously. At the same time that her contemporaries were taking it easy and having fun, she was poring over books and striving for good grades.

China started giving nationally administered tests for certified public accountants in 1991. Wei passed it in 1993 and became one of the earliest CPAs in the nation. She continued to work very hard when she entered the accounting field. “I hoped to perform better than all my peers, and I wanted the best reputation, too. I wanted to gain others’ respect,” she said of her earliest days in the profession.

She was an expert in analysis; she was efficient, rational and, due to her experiences in her





**Wei Lijuan in her office in Kunshan. She has been in the accounting profession for almost 20 years.**

youth, on guard. That's why she was quite puzzled when she was first exposed to Tzu Chi. When she heard Tzu Chi volunteers express their gratitude at every turn, she wondered, "What's there to be thankful for?"

She was likewise befuddled when she learned that volunteers used their own time and paid their own travel expenses to take part in disaster relief missions. "I didn't even have the time to do all the work in the office [much less to volunteer], and you expected me to pay out of my own pocket?"

Wei also doubted the Tzu Chi philosophy of "giving without asking for anything in return." She thought to herself, "What's their hidden agenda? What do they really want?"

Thinking back on those doubts and suspicions in the early days, she said, "It was like I was walking out from a dark room. When I first saw this sunny world [of Tzu Chi], I had to squint because of the bright light."

#### Work first

Wei was a workaholic at the time. Her whole world, the focus of her life, was work. Her work came first and foremost and her family came second. Nothing else came after that.

She used to work 360 days a year, and she was busy all the time. She never had a moment to waste. "I went to my appointments promptly and left as soon as the business was concluded so I could rush off to the next client."

However, despite her efficiency, she often would not get home until ten at night. As a result, her husband, Gu Yinchun (顧寅春), usually had to cook dinner after he got off work. He even had to take their only child, Weiwen (顧蔚雯), shopping for her clothes.

Wei was convinced that there was no better way for her to love her family than to provide well for them, so she worked exceedingly hard to that end. And she succeeded in being a good provider for her family, as she wanted. But her



business success cost her and her family in other ways. For example, she was so busy succeeding in work that she neglected to be a friend to her own daughter. She simply demanded Weiwen do exactly what she told her to do. There was little room for any discussion of daily matters, much less for serious heart-to-heart conversations.

As part of her work, Wei met Huang Rui-lan (黃瑞蘭), a businesswoman from Taiwan, for the first time in 2004. Huang's family had experienced sad misfortune only half a year after they moved to Kunshan, and she was going through a great deal of stress. "At first, we only talked about work because I felt that she was kind of cold," Wei recollected. "When she warmed up to me, I told her that I'd been worried that she wouldn't be able to go on much longer. She confessed to me then that were it not for Tzu Chi volunteers, she wouldn't have lasted that long."

"What's Tzu Chi?" Wei asked. Huang told her about the philosophy and work of the foundation, and she gave her a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms*, a collection of maxims by Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi. "I opened the book, and one line caught my eye: 'If you have a sharp tongue, then no matter how good your heart is, you are not a good person.'" Wei thought that was a dead-on description of herself.

Huang invited Wei to Tzu Chi activities a few times, but Wei never went to any of them. In

2006, Huang told her once again about an upcoming event where volunteers would be making pastries for a charity sale. Wei promised to show up for a day, probably more as a favor to Huang than anything else.

"I was cool to people," Wei said, as she talked about her defensive self. "Usually I didn't talk to people in the first five minutes after meeting them because I was gauging them." Being the way she was, she was very unused to the warmth Tzu Chi volunteers showed her at the event. They called her "Sister Wei this" and "Sister Wei that," which made her feel quite odd.

Her hands, much more adroit and at home with pens than dough, got very tired after just one morning of ceaseless work. She decided to skip the afternoon part of her commitment.

Just as she was ready to take off, she saw a poster about water cisterns that Tzu Chi had built in Gansu Province. By habit, she paid special attention to the numbers on the poster, such

as the average unit cost of building a cistern and the number of cisterns built.

As is always the case with Tzu Chi when it comes to money matters, the accounting of the project was immaculate. Likewise, ever the immaculate accountant, Wei easily ran the numbers through her mind, and she immediately spotted something that did not quite click.

She asked a volunteer about the poster. "I notice that something is amiss with the accounting on the poster. Where are the remittance expenses? Didn't Tzu Chi people go to the building sites? If so, where are the travel expenses? How come such expenses aren't deducted [from the donations]? How could there be no administrative costs?"

The volunteer told Wei that all Tzu Chi volunteers pay their own expenses. Wei was shocked by this revelation. "What kind of group is this? They're a bunch of fools." She could not make sense of their behavior.

**Wei, her husband, and their daughter at a Tzu Chi event. Wei's professional career used to take up almost all her time, but now her volunteer career is taking on increasing significance.**

#### A chance encounter

At around that time, volunteers invited members of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association to participate in a camp held for students in





Guizhou who were either receiving tuition aid from Tzu Chi or attending schools the foundation had helped build. Wei registered her daughter, Weiwen, who was then waiting to start college. They only found out shortly before the trip that the parents of the youth were also required to attend the camp. After much hand-wringing and deliberation, Wei decided to accompany her daughter on the trip. She was for once willing to forgo her beloved work for the sake of her child—and for nine days, no less.

At the camp, Wei was assigned to a group whose duties included preparing snack platters for the attendees. As she prepared the snacks, she tried to sneak in a few extra items on the platters for her daughter's team.

Other volunteers suggested that she refrain from doing so. They suggested that she regard all the children in the camp as equals, no matter what their background was or whether they came from Taiwan, Guizhou or Jiangsu. "Treat every

**Wei and other volunteers wished an aid recipient, right, a peaceful winter when they visited Suqian, northern Jiangsu Province, on January 13, 2013, for a relief distribution.**



one of the children as your own," they said.

She was humbled. "I learned much on that trip. I realized that I had been too narrow-minded."

After the camp, Wei signed up for one event after another, some of which lasted as long as seven days. "I wondered where I got the time to do all that." However, even though she was taking more time off from work, the number of her clients only grew.

In May 2008, a strong earthquake devastated Sichuan, China. The death toll was high, and many survivors badly needed help. For a time, all Wei could do was stare at images of their suffering on the TV screen and sob helplessly. Then Tzu Chi announced its plans to send volunteers to the disaster zone. Without hesitation, she signed up, packed up, and waited for the departure notice.

Each volunteer team would go in for about seven days, then the next team would arrive to take its place. Wei had to wait a few turns before she set out.

She was all ready to roll up her sleeves and help survivors clean up debris and garbage. However, when she got there, she found that her

**Wei and all of her living siblings, dressed in Tzu Chi uniforms, pose for a picture. Three other siblings have passed away.**



job was to help prepare hot food. This was not what she had anticipated, nor was it exactly her forte. She rarely cooked at home, so she knew precious little about even cutting vegetables, much less stir-frying and steaming them. Therefore, she ended up mostly washing vegetables and dishes. "I washed more dishes in those few days than I had in my whole life."

Many victims also helped with food preparation at the Tzu Chi hot food station. Wei discovered that volunteering had a therapeutic effect for these victims. "Volunteering got them out of their tents so they wouldn't keep dwelling on their misery," Wei observed. "Helping with hot food preparation, they were able to take their minds off the sadness of losing loved ones... at least for a time." She also realized that that model of giving assistance could not be done by any individual alone. Only groups working in relay such as theirs could provide so much help.

Two of the survivors whom Wei got to know during the mission used to go to temples every day to worship the gods and bodhisattvas. After seeing them serving at the hot food station for several days in a row, Wei asked them one day if they felt that they were neglecting their temple routine. "You guys are real-life bodhisattvas right here," they replied, "so there's no need for us to go to temples to seek out other deities."

Wei realized right then that bodhisattvas are not lifeless statues sitting on altars to which people bow and pray. Instead, they are real-life people doing what they can to help others in need.

Wei visited Taiwan for the first time in 2009. When she saw Master Cheng Yen, she walked closer to her for a better look at the person whom she admired so much. But the closer she got, the blurrier the Master became: Wei's tears were in the way. She could not help herself.

Tzu Chi helped her find something that had long eluded her. She had missed many Chinese traditions that had been lost in the destructive Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966. But that same year, Tzu Chi was founded in Hualien, Taiwan. For many people, the foundation has restored or highlighted many Chinese traditional values. In the process of doing Tzu Chi work, Wei has found many of the things that she had been looking for, and she is gradually losing one thing that she acquired during the unpleasant revolutionary days: her suspicion of others.

Many things in life cannot be analyzed according to the principles of accounting. There are things that can only be felt intuitively. For example, Wei has gradually come to understand why people are willing to volunteer at their own expense.

Many people have come in contact with Tzu Chi during times of despair, but that was not Wei's experience. She was well and doing well. She is thankful for being so blessed, so she feels that she should give more. Having seen the destruction of buildings and the eternal separation of loved ones in disaster zones, Wei understands that worldly possessions are not absolute, and that more important than wealth is the blessing that her family is together and healthy.

Volunteering for Tzu Chi has helped her find bliss and contentment. She wanted others to share the same joy, so she has gotten her husband, siblings and nieces to also join Tzu Chi. Together, they enjoy the happiness of giving without expecting anything in return. ❀



# Standing Up Once Again

With love, everyone can survive  
the torrential river of life

By Qiu Ru-lian

Translated by Hsieh Jen-ting

*Although she is just a teenager, Yi-jie has long carried a heavy burden upon her shoulders. At an age when she should have been cared for by adults, she began serving as the caregiver for her physically challenged mother. When she was little, her mom fed her milk and changed her diapers. Now, in a reversal of roles, the daughter is repaying her mother for raising her.*

**L**u Yi-jie (呂詒婕) is a 17-year-old schoolgirl. Although hairstyles for students in Taiwan are no longer regulated, she still prefers to wear her hair straight in the traditional style. When she smiles, her eyes smile with her and a dimple appears on her cheek. In her uniform, she looks just like any other schoolgirl her age. However, she has a lot more on her mind than her schoolmates. They may only be concerned with the heavy schoolwork, endless exams, and perhaps how to act properly in front of the boys they have a crush on. Yi-jie, on the other hand, has had to face the realities of life since she was very young, and the life she leads after school is very different from those of her peers.

In the evening, her school bus pulls to the side of a busy street and stops to let her off. She walks along a path that leads to her home, where she lives with her mother. A breeze blows across the paddy fields along the way, making lovely, harmonious sounds. Not far off she can see her house, a yellow light glowing from within.

Picking up her pace, she soon arrives home. She drops her school bag just inside the door, but instead of going out to play or calling her friends and chatting on the phone, she rushes to the rice cooker to start a fresh batch of rice. Next, she stir-fries some greens and some sunny-side-up eggs. When she's done, she has prepared a delicious dinner for her mother and herself. After dinner,







PHOTOS COURTESY OF LU YI-JIE

**After undergoing multiple operations and having been on steroids for years, Xiang-ling's body and face were considerably swollen. She also spent most of her time indoors because she had to rely on a wheelchair to move around. Cooped up all day in her home, she began to suffer from depression. In order to cheer her up, Yi-jie would take her out for walks on weekends.**



**Yi-jie feeds her mom in the small room they used to live in. The bunk bed took up so much space that it was difficult to move about. Yi-jie would get up at five in the morning and prepare breakfast and lunch for both of them before going to school.**

she washes up the dishes and does some housework. Last but not least, she takes the time to massage her mom's legs. Taking care of her mother every day is a top priority for Yi-Jie.

Huang Xiang-ling (黃湘鈴), Yi-jie's mom, suffers from a congenital dislocation of the hip. This abnormality causes the ligaments of the hip to easily become loose or stretched. As a result, Xiang-ling has trouble walking properly. It also causes her pain and makes her feel tired easily. Nevertheless, after she was divorced from her husband and had to take her daughter and move back in with her mother, she managed to find herself a job as a hairdresser. With the help of a custom-made chair, she was able to serve her customers in a beauty parlor with no problems.

Though Xiang-ling did not earn much money, by living frugally she was able to sup-

port herself and her daughter. The fact that they were not materially well-off did not stop them from being happy.

### Shaken lives

It is said that life is like a river. The upstream portion can be perfectly calm, and then all of a sudden the downstream portion can become turbulent. A major earthquake that hit Taiwan on September 21, 1999, suddenly caused such unexpected turbulence in the smooth-flowing lives of Xiang-ling and Yi-jie. It took them a lot of effort to make it through this disturbance in their lives.

When the quake hit, Xiang-ling and Yi-jie were living near the epicenter in Nantou County. Yi-jie was just three years old at the time. When Xiang-ling felt the earth begin to shake violently, she quickly grabbed her baby girl under one arm

and started to climb upstairs to escape from danger. But before she even realized what was happening, a deep crack had opened up beneath her. She fell and became stuck in it. Xiang-ling tried to free herself, but couldn't. Aftershocks soon hit, causing the gap to close with Xiang-ling still trapped within. Her already fragile hip bone was shattered.

Eventually, Xiang-ling was freed and sent to a hospital. But when she got there, she discovered that it was full of other quake victims in more urgent need of treatment. It was impossible for her to have an operation immediately to set her fractured hip bone. The doctors could only give her some painkillers and send her back to her dilapidated home. She endured two weeks of pain before she was finally scheduled for surgery. Since her upper body was in a plaster cast after the surgery and she needed to lie in bed to recuperate, her own mother, over 60 years old, had to take care of both her and little Yi-jie.

Later they moved into a prefabricated house built for quake survivors. When her grandmother was out working, little Yi-jie would stay quietly at home with her mother. Although she hadn't learned to read yet, she learned to administer medicine to her mother on time.

One day, Yi-jie accidentally gave her mother an overdose of sleeping pills. When her grandma returned home and found Xiang-ling speaking incoherently, she immediately called for an ambulance to take her to the emergency room. Xiang-ling still remembers that day: "The door of our prefab house was too small to let the stretcher in, so a wall was torn down. When I was being carried out to the ambulance, Yi-jie wailed loudly, 'Mom, don't die!'"

Yi-jie cannot recall that tearful moment now. But after that frightful incident, she began carefully learning how to look after her bedridden mom, including applying her medicine, changing her diapers, and washing her. When asked how she learned, she replied, "I simply did what my grandmother had been doing." Having a bedridden mom to care for, she was forced to grow up faster than most young girls her age.

Even after three operations, Xiang-ling still could not stand up, and she was confined to a wheelchair. Because of that, Yi-jie started doing the housework very early on, including cooking the meals. She soon got pretty good in the kitchen.

"When she was still little, she'd take a stool and stand on it so she could reach the stove and

fry an egg," Xiang-ling recalls, smiling while trying to hold back tears in her eyes. Xiang-ling feels for her daughter because of what she has had to go through at her young age.

### Having each other

For years after that, Xiang-ling's mother looked after Xiang-ling and Yi-jie. But Xiang-ling did not want to be a burden to her aged mother. After her brother got married, she and Yi-jie moved to Taichung, about 60 kilometers (37 miles) away.

Xiang-ling and Yi-jie settled into a small room of about 140 square feet. Being disabled, Xiang-ling found it difficult to land a job. Thus, they had no choice but to live on government subsidies for the disabled and financial assistance from Taiwan Funds for Families and Children, a charity foundation. Even with the welfare money, they had little left after paying the rent. They were living right on the edge, often without enough money for food.

One Sunday, Yi-jie started running a fever, but Xiang-ling had no money to take her to see a doctor. She was so worried that she sought help from everyone she could think of, asking them for money to get Yi-jie some medical attention. She promised to pay them back as soon as she received her subsidies the next day. But her pleas were to no avail; she was turned down time and again. Someone even said to her, "I'm not running a charity organization, am I?"

The more Yi-jie's temperature went up, the more worried Xiang-ling became. Finally, Yi-jie plucked up her courage and walked to the home of one of her classmates who lived nearby to ask his mother for help.

"Ma'am, may I borrow some money from you?" the little girl asked.

"What do you need the money for?" came the reply.

Yi-jie told her classmate's mother that she needed the money to buy some over-the-counter medicine for her fever, and some food so she could fill up her stomach before taking the medicine.

Not only did the kind woman lend Yi-jie the money she needed, but she even took her to the doctor and then to a noodle stand for some noodle soup. Even today, Yi-jie and Xiang-ling still feel deeply grateful for the help that lady provided.

Because they often had no food to eat, Yi-jie began getting up at an early hour to go to a near-





**When Xiang-ling and her daughter settled down in their new home, Tzu Chi volunteers brought food to celebrate. Xiang-ling invited several of her friends to the house too. The many visitors warmed up the atmosphere.**

"Eventually, Mom refused to eat anything," Yi-jie remembers. At first, Yi-jie found that her mom would throw up the food she ate. Gradually, she couldn't eat anything at all and only drank water, which made her weight drop drastically. "I was really scared. I begged my mom every day not to leave me all alone in this world," she recalls.

Feeling helpless, Yi-jie mustered her courage and wrote to the Taichung County government to ask for help. When social workers came to visit them, they found that Xiang-ling was little more than skin and bones, not having eaten properly in eight months. Even moving her eyes was something of an effort for her. The social workers immediately took her to the hospital.

Just by coincidence, Xiang-ling's mother happened to be at the hospital to see a doctor that day. "It was at that hospital that I saw my daughter and granddaughter again," she said. When she saw her daughter, collapsed in a wheelchair, and her tearful granddaughter, she was so shocked that she almost fell into a heap on the ground. Her heart ached unbearably after she learned of the suffering the two of them had endured after they had moved out of her house.

With words of encouragement from both Yi-jie and her mother, Xiang-ling decided to seek medical treatment for her depression. She ended up at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. Moved by the tenderness with which the Tzu Chi volunteers at the hospital treated her mom, Yi-jie wrote a letter to the Tzu Chi Taichung branch office asking for help.

In March 2011, volunteers from the branch office visited Yi-jie and Xiang-ling for the first time. They saw a dim, cramped room crammed with a table and a bunk bed donated by the Taichung City government. Though the room was small and crowded, Yi-jie had kept it very clean.

The volunteers were deeply moved after learning about what Yi-jie had done for her mom all these years and the challenges the mother and daughter had had to face. The volunteers visited Xiang-ling regularly from that day on. They also helped take care of things for her when she was hospitalized.

by breakfast shop and ask for leftover bread crusts that the shop owner was about to throw away. Before entering the shop, she would take a quick look around to make sure that none of her schoolmates were inside. When the owner asked what she needed the crusts for, she answered, "They're for my puppy at home."

Yi-jie then went back home with her bagful of bread crusts. She still had to prepare breakfast and lunch for her mom and herself before rushing off to school. She was often late.

"I'm sorry. I'm not being a good mom. Instead of taking care of you, I have to let you look after me," Xiang-ling would say apologetically to her daughter.

"When I was a baby, you fed me, changed my diapers, and took good care of me. Now it's my turn to take care of you and repay you for raising me," Yi-jie would reply, comforting her mom the best she could.

Yi-jie was in junior high at this time. For a girl her age, peer acceptance is usually more important than anything else. Adolescents usually try their best to avoid any risk of being mocked by their schoolmates. How did Yi-jie ever find the courage to walk into the breakfast shop and ask for leftover bread crusts when she knew that her schoolmates would laugh at her if they found out? She answered without hesitation: "Because my mom is everything I have now...."

### **A light in their dark room**

Xiang-ling was left all alone in their tiny room after Yi-jie went to school each day. She had no one to speak to all day long, and since she could not move around, she'd lie on her bed and stare up at the ceiling until her daughter came home to clean away her waste and wash her. The all-consuming gloom that filled the room made her very depressed.

"Our home would be filled with laughter every time Tzu Chi volunteers visited us. They really brought us happiness and joy!" Yi-jie said.

"The volunteers indeed took good care of me," Xiang-ling recalled. "But back then, I still suffered badly from depression...." She trailed off. Even though she was receiving treatment, she was often emotionally unstable during that period of time, to such an extent that one time she even refused to let the volunteers into her house.

In 2011, volunteers brought her a cake to celebrate Mother's Day. However, instead of being pleased, Xiang-ling flatly rejected their kindness and said coldly to them through the door intercom, "Go help people who need your care more. We don't need it!"

Xiang-ling thought that by shooing them away so rudely, the volunteers would never come back again. But quite the opposite happened—the volunteers realized how badly she was suffering, and they resolved to not be so easily daunted. They continued to pay her regular visits, hoping they could serve as her emotional outlet by being attentive and sympathetic listeners.

As for the cake, the volunteers said with a smile: "We took it back home and finished it ourselves."

After a later operation to treat her hip bone, Xiang-ling was able to walk with the help of a walker. She later found herself a sewing job through an employment center. With the assistance of Tzu Chi volunteers, Xiang-ling's considerable medical expense was partially covered by the government's social medical aid system. She insisted on paying the remainder of her bill in installments. "Even though I can only pay back NT\$500 [US\$17] a month, I want to move forward on my own strength," Xiang-ling said.

### **If not for her**

In April 2012, Xiang-ling was once again hospitalized with a ruptured lens in her eye. Tzu Chi volunteers offered to defray the treatment fees, but she turned down their offer, saying once again that she wanted to rely on her own efforts to foot the bill. However, by September, Xiang-ling found herself deeply in debt. She couldn't afford Yi-jie's tuition, so Tzu Chi volunteers reached out to them and helped pay it.

To cut down on expenses, Yi-jie never asks her mother to buy her new clothes. If a T-shirt is worn out, she wears it as a pajama instead. To save on utility bills, she forbids herself to open

the fridge after seven o'clock in the evening, and she unplugs electronic devices when not in use. She even cuts toilet paper in half so she can make it last longer.

Xiang-ling takes great comfort in the thoughtfulness of her daughter. But that very thoughtfulness also makes Xiang-ling's heart ache. "Throughout her three years in junior high school, Yi-jie only bought herself one pair of socks. Even after she had worn holes in the socks, she still said she didn't need a new pair. She always told me that with her shoes on, no one could see the holes, so it made no difference."

But one fateful day, a class activity required all of the students to take off their shoes. Yi-jie's classmates had a good laugh at her worn-out socks. "Though she told me the story with a smile, it broke my heart," Xiang-ling remarked. "If it hadn't been for her, I couldn't have made it this far in life."

A while ago, at the encouragement of Xiang-ling, Yi-jie ate out with her classmates. That was Yi-jie's first time eating out, and it truly made her day. "I hope that every now and then she can take time off from looking after me to hang out with her friends a bit," said her mother.

It is not just because Yi-jie needs to look after her mom that she turns down her friends' invitations to go out, but also because she wants to save up as much as she can. When asked if she ever felt lonely, she fell silent as tears suddenly started streaming down her face. She longs for the things that any teenage girl would want. But unlike other teenage girls, she keeps telling herself that her mother comes first.

Last year on Mother's Day and again during the Chinese New Year, Yi-jie took money out of the savings she had pinched and scraped together and gave a *hong-bao* to her grandmother to thank her for the care she had given her and her mother over the years. Hong-baos are red envelopes containing money, a traditional gift in Chinese society. Even though there was not much money in each envelope, her grandmother was deeply moved.

Xiang-ling got into the habit of watching Da Ai TV, which is run by Tzu Chi, when she was hospitalized at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. "It has become my emotional support," she said. Yi-jie also watches it with her quite often. Inspired by programs on Tzu Chi's body donors, Yi-jie even encouraged Xiang-ling to sign organ and body donor cards with her. What's more, they make a monthly donation of 200 NT dollars





PHOTO COURTESY OF LU YI-JIE

In March 2012, Yi-jie (third from left, middle row) received an award from the National Youth Commission for her exemplary conduct and filial piety. Her mother and grandmother, sitting in the audience, broke into big smiles when the girl received the certificate of merit from Ma Ying-jeou, the President of Taiwan.

(US\$6.70) to Tzu Chi to help other needy people like themselves.

Yi-jie has two coin banks she received from Tzu Chi volunteers at a year-end reunion meal that the foundation held for its care recipients. Whenever she has spare change, she puts it into the banks. When they are full, she donates the money to Tzu Chi.

With a friend's help, Xiang-ling found a cheaper place to rent in June 2012. After she and her daughter moved into their new home, Tzu Chi volunteers brought some food to celebrate the occasion with them. Xiang-ling also invited several friends who had helped her along the way.

"The new place has good ventilation and enjoys pleasant surroundings," one of the volunteers said. "It opens out to green, lush paddy fields. We can feel Xiang-ling getting more and

more cheerful." They were really happy to see the mother and daughter settling down in a good place.

Recently, Xiang-ling suffered a fall and injured her spine. Fortunately she recovered well after surgery, and just one week after being discharged from the hospital she could move about with a walking aid. When Tzu Chi volunteers visited her, she told them that she had recently gone with some friends to visit a single-parent family, in which a mother had to support her six children on her own and could not keep them fed. Seeing their miserable condition, Xiang-ling took out all the money she had in her pockets—US\$6.70—and gave it to the mother to buy food for her kids. "Compared to them, I now feel I'm very blessed," Xiang-ling said.

Yi-jie was recently awarded a scholarship from the Tzu Chi Foundation. When volunteers asked her how she was going to use the money, she replied without a second thought, "I plan to buy my mom a pair of comfortable shoes and some warm clothes, and to donate the rest of the money to help people who are more in need than me."

Indeed, life is like a river and can be very turbulent at times. But with love, we can survive even the worst turmoil. ❀



ZHANG CHAO-HONG

# One in Every Nightstand

By United States Documenting Volunteers

Information provided by Su Mei-juan, Chen Chun-shan, Zheng Ru-jing, Pan Yan-rong, and Chen Li-ting

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*A few words of wisdom may help relieve stress for a traveler fatigued by a long journey on the highway—or on the path of life. To that end, Tzu Chi volunteers in the United States have visited close to a thousand hotels since 2011, trying to put a complimentary copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms* in every guestroom. They have given out 37,000 copies.*

One Monday morning, Tzu Chi volunteers walked into Hotel Chino Hills in Chino, California. It was the fourth hotel they had visited that morning. They were on a mission to provide free copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* to hotels and motels for their guestrooms. This book is a collection of short sayings from Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi. The volunteers were giving out a multilingual edition printed in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Spanish.

Unfortunately, they had not experienced any success on their book-giving mission so far this day. This hotel did not seem very receptive either. A woman stepped out from behind the counter to meet them, and she looked very solemn.

No matter the reception they received, all the volunteers could do was take a deep breath and make their pitch. They told her about the ideals of Tzu Chi and the purpose of their visit, all in one breath. Unexpectedly the woman, whose name was Michi Schultz, smiled and agreed to accept their offer.

Schultz and the volunteers read a verse from the book: "Every single day of your life is like a blank page in a diary. Every person you meet, every event you participate in, is a living essay." In just a few moments, the atmosphere in the lobby changed from tense and solemn to cordial and welcoming.

There were 99 guestrooms at Hotel Chino Hills, and Schultz agreed to place a copy of the



book in the nightstand of each room. She also showed the volunteers one of the rooms. The volunteers happily thanked her for her receptiveness. They snapped some group photos before saying their farewells, and then headed to the next hotel to try their luck again.

#### **Do your best, and accept what comes of it.**

This movement of putting *Jing Si Aphorisms* in hotel rooms originated in 2011, when Gao Guo-feng (高國峰), a businessman in southern California, traveled to Taiwan on a business trip. He read the *Jing Si Aphorisms* he found in his hotel room there, and he was deeply touched. Upon returning to the United States, he contacted Tzu Chi volunteers and said he wanted to donate 5,000 copies of that book to be distributed to hotels and motels. He hoped that they could serve the same function as the bibles which are often placed in American hotel rooms to help travelers soothe their minds.

The Taiwan Hotel and Motel Association of Southern California held an exposition in June 2011. Liu Sheng-ping (劉昇平), a director of the association, rented a booth at the expo for Tzu Chi volunteers to promote *Jing Si Aphorisms*, thus kicking off the drive to get the book into hotels.

By the end of the expo, 60 hotels had agreed to put copies of the book in their guestrooms. After that, many people followed Gao's example and purchased more copies for the drive.

Tzu Chi volunteers in New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Texas have also been involved in the project. They have visited hotels and motels in those areas and offered copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* for their guestrooms.

Excellent though the book is, getting hotels to accept it is difficult. There always seems to be one obstacle after another. Volunteers were often told on their visits: "We're just front desk personnel, and we don't make decisions as to what goes into the rooms," "Nothing religious," "We must follow the rules of the franchiser," or "Our company prohibits the display of publications other than our own brochures."

Sometimes volunteers visited a dozen hotels without success; at other times, they might find eight out of ten hotels they visited receptive to their pitch, and they would give out more than 500 copies in a single day.

Yang Cong-ming (楊聰明) and Su Mei-juan (蘇美娟) recalled that they used to call their targeted hotels ahead of time, "but we got turned down ten times out of ten tries." In response, the

volunteers changed tactics and began visiting hotels directly. "When I open the book and ask the hotel personnel to read a verse from it, they often feel the power of it. The book is the best spokesperson for itself."

It was inevitable for volunteers who visited hotel after hotel to feel pressure at the prospect of being repeatedly turned down. Their fear of rejection was understandable. But they pressed on because they had all benefited from the teachings of *Jing Si Aphorisms*. The book does not contain lengthy, profound theories on Buddhism, but inspiring, terse sayings on how to live. The volunteers believed that hotel guests could benefit from the teachings as they themselves had, and though their path was by no means smooth, that hope gave them strength to call on one hotel after another.

Volunteer Wu Qin-yi (吳沁怡) is from Fremont, just north of San Jose, California. She said that she had hesitated about participating in the undertaking, afraid that her English was not fluent enough. Explaining the aphorisms to strangers and promoting the book to them in a foreign language was a frightening prospect. But she joined in anyway because she believed that someone might gain renewed confidence in life by reading some verse or other in the book.

One of the aphorisms in the book says, "Do your best, and accept what comes of it." With this advice from the Master, volunteers can face rejections with more composure and keep going.

#### **Don't underestimate yourself, for human beings have unlimited potential.**

One day, volunteers entered a motel in Gilroy, "the garlic capital of the world," south-east of the San Francisco Bay Area. Soni Patel, the newly appointed manager of the motel, bluntly told them that the establishment was but a transit stop for druggies and scum, implying that they might not be the best audience for the books.

The volunteers suggested that sharing the good thoughts in the book with people on the fringe of society might be even more worthwhile. To their delight, Patel agreed to try the books out, and he even referred the volunteers to a few more motels nearby. He gave detailed directions to those places, and he told the volunteers that he would call ahead of them to inform the other hotels that "A group of Tzu Chi volunteers would deliver good books to them."

Driving north on U.S. Route 101 north of San Francisco, the volunteers arrived at Windsor, located in Sonoma County, the largest producer of California's Wine Country region. The manager of a hotel there accepted 20 copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* from volunteers. She browsed one of the copies and smiled at the aphorisms that met her eyes: "Don't underestimate yourself, for human beings have unlimited potential," and "With confidence, perseverance, and courage, nothing is impossible." She smiled because those sayings happened to resonate with her mood at the moment.

Further north, the volunteers reached Ukiah, the seat of Mendocino County. Near this small town is the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, an international Buddhist community and monastery. Of the 13,000 residents in Ukiah, fewer than 30 are Asian Americans. Zhang Ji Yu (張濟宇) is the Tzu Chi contact person in the town. He told

the volunteers that few people there had ever heard of Tzu Chi, which might be more recognized in his neck of the woods by the homeless who had received aid from the foundation.

There were 18 motels in Ukiah, nine out of ten owned by people originally from India. Business was slow due to the prevailing economic recession, and occupancy was dismal. When volunteers walked into one of the motels, the proprietor brightened up momentarily, thinking that he was getting some business. He was extremely disappointed when he found that he was wrong.

The volunteers patiently explained to the proprietor the purpose of their visit. They said that people had purchased copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* to be given to establishments just like

**Volunteers offer free copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* to a motel worker for placement in guestrooms.**



SUN WEN-XIAN





**In San Jose, inn manager Mitesh Patel, third from left, and visiting Tzu Chi volunteers all hold copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms*.**

his, all free of charge. “Free” seemed to be the only word in their presentation that urged him to listen on.

Volunteer Zhang Ji Yu told him about Tzu Chi’s routine aid distributions in the town. Then the volunteers listened attentively to the owner as he spilled his worry over the gloomy prospect his industry was facing. They gave him warm words to cheer him up, and he seemed to feel better.

In all, the volunteers successfully distributed the *Aphorisms* books to 15 motels in Ukiah.

In late June 2013, volunteers braved a heat wave and went back to motels in Modesto, east of San Jose, that they had previously visited. Some guests had taken the *Aphorisms* books with them when they checked out, and the volunteers went to replenish the supplies. They gave out a total of 325 copies.

Roger Patel, the proprietor at Hacienda Inn, told the volunteers that he himself had read the aphorisms. The one that he liked the most was: “A person with a generous heart and compassion for all living beings leads the most blessed life.” He told the volunteers that he would make a point of asking his cleaning staff to put the books beside the lamps so they would be conspicuous and inviting.

**If we can reduce our desires, there is nothing really worth getting upset about.**

There are 350 hotels and motels of all shapes and sizes in Las Vegas, Nevada. Many of the largest hotel, casino, and resort properties on the globe are located on the Las Vegas Strip. Many smaller properties also vie for a piece of the action. It is estimated that there are more than 140,000 guestrooms in Las Vegas.

With so many potential destinations for *Jing Si Aphorisms*, Tzu Chi volunteers in Las Vegas thought it would not be too hard to give out the free books when they first kicked off the project. Many of the properties that they visited gave them rather encouraging signals at first, and their staff asked volunteers to come back to them later. However, when the volunteers did, they could not reach the hotel personnel in any way. Those people became unreachable by phone or e-mail, or they simply refused to meet with volunteers already on their premises.

A hotel manager confided in private to the volunteers that the real reason his company had declined Tzu Chi’s offer of free books was purely a mat-

ter of dollars and cents—not of acquiring the book, but of maintenance. Though the books are free of charge, their upkeep is not. If the hotel agreed to feature the book in its guestrooms, it would need to set aside a storage space for the inventory of the book, its housekeeping staff would need to check each time they cleaned a room to see if the book was still in the nightstand, and an employee would need to push a cart of new books to restock the guestrooms as needed. All this activity would cost the hotel \$4,000 every three months. These extra expenses would not sit well with the management.

Another reason that the volunteers’ effort met with no success may have been the result of the special hotel culture in the area. Due to the

gambling in Las Vegas, hotels and motels have quite different characteristics than establishments elsewhere. For example, one day in March 2013, volunteers walked into a motel, explained the purpose of their visit, and handed over a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms* to the person working at the front desk. He shot right back: “We’ve got tenants here, not guests. They’re not people of faith. In fact, some of them take their bad luck out on the Bible—they tear it up. Nobody’s going to look at your book.”

The volunteers refused to be ruffled, however. Instead, they became more resolved to advocate the book—if for nothing else than that they wanted to counter the potential damage of gambling in the city.

The total annual revenue in Las Vegas from gambling rose to 6.5 billion dollars in 2012, a 15 percent increase over 2011. This was in spite of a weak economy. Perhaps the more shaky the economy, the more people seek to make a killing by gambling.

There is at least one problem with gambling: Once started, a gambler usually has a hard time quitting. If she has a hot hand, why quit? If he has lost money, he has even less incentive to quit because he wants to win it back and then some.

Gambling is so addictive that it can cause social problems. Xu Kun-guo (許坤國), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Oakland, was once addicted to gambling. He had been so entangled in the game and the tantalizing promise of winning that he would forgo everything else. In fact, he was once injured on his job because his mind was so absorbed in gambling.

Now that he has managed to quit, he wants to help others kick the addiction. That desire to help the helpless has propelled him to take repeated rejections with composure and to keep inviting hoteliers to place the *Aphorisms* in their guestrooms. He has faith that the book can exert a positive impact on some gamblers.

Carol O’Hare, executive director of the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling, said that she was deeply touched by a verse in the book: “If we can reduce our desires, there is nothing really worth getting upset about.” She herself was once a compulsive gambler who lost her job and her house. “If I had read this book 26 years ago, I wouldn’t have done those dumb things, and wouldn’t have had to suffer through those painful days.”

In March and April 2013, volunteers called on 27 hotels and motels in Las Vegas, and they





Tzu Chi USA has received donations of 100,000 copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* to be placed in hotels and motels across the country.

books and to share the latest about Tzu Chi events. When necessary, they return to the establishments to replenish the books.

They placed some copies at a motel in Fremont in early 2013. The proprietor was very happy to receive a follow-up phone call from a Tzu Chi volunteer. He said that his guests responded well to the book and many had requested to keep them. "I identify with the core message conveyed by those

convinced 19 of them to accept the books. They plan to recruit American husbands of Tzu Chi volunteers to join the project. They hope to remove language barriers that may have diminished the effectiveness of the volunteers, who are not native English speakers.

#### Feedback

Though the path of the project has been strewn with difficulties and rejections, it has not been without bright spots either.

Boston volunteers received a phone call one day in April from a Christian woman. She said she had traveled to California the week before. In her hotel room there, she saw a book that was filled with maxims of wisdom. Through an Internet link printed in that book, she found the phone number of the Boston office and called to inquire about purchasing the book. After the call, she drove one and a half hours to buy four copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* from the Boston office for her sisters.

Fontaine Inn in San Jose has put the book in each of its 62 guestrooms, and it is using the book to train its employees. "Each morning, I pick out one aphorism from the book and write it on the white board in English and Spanish for all employees to read," said manager Mitesh Patel. "That sort of orients our mindsets toward positive thinking before we start the day. It's worked pretty well for us."

Volunteers regularly call establishments that received the books from them to check on the

aphorisms—many issues in life can be resolved 'starting from one's mindset,'" he said. "I often urge my guests and staff to read an aphorism each day from the book to help themselves cultivate a positive attitude."

From June 2011 to July 2013, volunteers visited 972 hotels or motels in the United States, and 409 of them accepted more than 37,000 free copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms*.

Volunteer Li Jing Yi (李靜誼), who has long helped promote Tzu Chi publications in the States, implores more volunteers to join in this long-term undertaking by contributing books, even just one copy, talking to hotel personnel about the project, or putting the book in their own hotels or motels. Any one of these simple actions could help change someone's life.

"I would consider the project a worthwhile effort even if the book influences just one out of ten thousand recipients," said Gao Guo-feng, whose donation of 5,000 copies kicked off the project, and who has continued to donate more copies.

The volunteers involved in the project have a long road ahead of them—there are, after all, more than five million hotel rooms in the United States. But the length of their path does not daunt them. The next time you stay at a hotel, remember to look for a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms* in your room. When you have read it, share it with others. It may set in motion an ever-widening ripple of goodness. ❀

# From a Drug Addict's Family Member

By Wu Yu

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Paintings by Liu Jia-wen

*"All I do is take drugs. I don't commit any atrocious crimes like manslaughter or arson. My actions don't hurt others. It isn't so bad, is it?" This is the way that many drug addicts rationalize their behavior to lend legitimacy to their deeds.*

*It is true that they hurt themselves most of all, but they hurt others as well whether they intend to or not. My brother-in-law is one such heart-rending example.*

My nephew was born about 18 years ago. He was a sickly baby. His heart was damaged, and his stomach and intestines were incompletely formed. He slept day and night, waking only to feed. His body was limp and he couldn't even cry very loud. When he was two, he contracted blood cancer and underwent chemotherapy for a year. The boy's doctors concluded that his problems resulted from his parents' drug abuse.

The baby's father is my husband's younger brother. This brother-in-law of mine was always a problem for his parents, but the situation worsened when he became addicted to drugs. He would often stay out all night. Worried about him, my mother-







in-law would stay up waiting for him, and she even went everywhere looking for him.

He befriended a girl who was still in her teens. She had run away from home and often spent her time in video arcades. Like my brother-in-law, she had become addicted to drugs. When she was 18, they had a baby boy. This would be a joyous occasion in most families, but my parents-in-law hardly had a moment of joy from their newborn grandson. Health problems and mental disabilities plagued him from the moment he was born.

My brother-in-law was later sentenced to 20

years in prison for using and selling drugs, and the baby's mother left not long after giving birth to him. My parents-in-law suddenly had a baby on their hands. Even their combined 150 years on earth had not adequately prepared them to take good care of such a challenging baby.

The old couple ferried him to and from the hospital, day in and day out. I couldn't bear to see this, so I decided to take over and raise my nephew.

The upbringing of a healthy child is daunting enough; the presence of a disability makes it much, much harder. But the occurrence of mul-

tiple disabilities, such as those my nephew had, rendered the responsibility all but insurmountable. I could not help but wonder about the cost of drug addiction—to myself, to my family, and to society as a whole.

### Anti-drug volunteer

Drug users in Taiwan are starting at younger and younger ages. Criminal groups have now extended their tentacles onto campuses. Drug dealing in schools, once the purview of solo practitioners or small-time groups, has become a well-organized gang activity.

Every time I see a young soul overtaken by drugs, I see and hear a heartbroken mother weeping desperately over the loss—for all intents and purposes—of this child.

Drug addicts need all the support that they can get to even have a chance of quitting the habit. Their family members are often willing to give unconditional support to help their loved one return to the right path, but often even their unlimited love and resolve can be worn thin by repeated offenses and broken promises. Family members themselves need support. I know how hard it is to be a family member, so I have become an anti-drug volunteer.

I sometimes telephone addicts' homes to offer help, but such gestures of support are often met with rejection. Many people do not want others to know about the drug addict in their homes. They'd simply keep their dirty laundry private, just as my mother-in-law used to do years ago with her son.

In the face of such rejection, with which I can empathize, I share with them the story of my brother-in-law and his struggling son. I speak to them as one of them. As a result, many of them end up confiding in me their sorrows and struggles. We cheer each other up and we urge each other to stay the course in the fight against drugs, as victims or volunteers.

### Never too late

I run a bakery. I once hired a young baker and asked him to start the next morning. He showed up on time at 8:00 the next day but was habitually late after that. I called him every day to remind him to come to work. I also talked to his mother and encouraged her to keep a motherly eye on him. The daily calls went on for more than a month. Then, unexpectedly, he started coming to work on time without being called. He has been a normal employee ever since.

One day, after he had started a new batch of dough in the oven, he shared with me some thoughts. "I gave you a lot of hassle when I first started, but you kept calling me every day. To be honest, I'd just gotten out of jail at that time. I'd been put behind bars for drug use. I was still struggling with drugs. However, my mom's getting old, and I didn't want to trouble her with my addiction. Luckily you called me every day and Mom encouraged me. The two of you helped me restore my confidence in myself."

"If you'd known about my drug history and imprisonment, would you still have hired me?" he asked. "I would," I said firmly.

"When I was released from prison, I wanted to renounce my past evils [and start an upright life]," he said. "Fortunately, you put up with me and encouraged me, and you allowed me to evolve my life according to my own plans."

I often shared with him the stories of my brother-in-law and my nephew. The young man has worked hard at my bakery and learned new skills, he stopped seeing his drug friends, and he's made monthly donations to charities as a token of his determination to do good.

His return to righteousness has thrilled his mother. The sight of his family, now in the process of healing, deeply touches me. Love and accommodation do sometimes return a wanderer to the right path, so it is never too late to try to put things right.

### An incomplete life

My nephew is now 18 years old. Those long 18 years have been a great challenge to our patience and love.

Afflicted with both mental and physical handicaps, he has undergone a lot of painful treatment and physiotherapy. He has fought bravely along the way, perhaps feeling the love from us.

Yet even to this day, he can't talk or take care of his own daily needs. The reckless drug abuse by his parents has left this boy in perpetual suffering. He will probably never cease to suffer for as long as he lives. Sadly, our entire family is suffering right along with him.

Will this real-life lesson of our family serve to warn just one tempted person not to use drugs?

Parents beware. Observe your children, and know what they're up to. Get involved with their lives. Intervene at the first sign of trouble, and seek out help from government or private groups. Do so before it's too late. ❀



# One Renminbi Weighs This Much...

By Lin Hui-fen and Hong Jun-da

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Liao Zhi-hao

Chen Long (陳龍), 12, lives in Shimenkan Village, Malutang Township, Luquan County, Yunnan Province, China. The area is in the mountains, 2,750 meters (9,000 feet) above sea level. An autonomous district for Yi and Miao peoples, Luquan is an officially designated "county of poverty," one of 341 minority ethnic counties in the nation with this designation. Chen Long's village is the poorest of the poor—it has been listed as a "village of absolute poverty."

Homes in the area, though electrified, do not always have a dependable supply of power. As a result, residents still mainly use firewood to cook and heat their houses.

On this day, Chen accompanied his grandmother to a nearby hill to collect tree twigs and branches for fuel. He's done this chore since he was seven.

He swung his billhook at a tree branch. He can tell when a branch is dead and can be chopped off for firewood. "I check if all the leaves have fallen off, and I use my fingernail

to dig into the bark," he said. "If it's still moist, it's alive [and I'll skip it]. Otherwise, I'll cut it off." After some more searching, he held down another branch and hacked at it. "Oops, wrong one—it's still alive," he said with embarrassment. "Perhaps it'll survive the injury."

By this time, his grandma had already picked up a lot of dry twigs and branches off the ground. The two of them, carrying large piles of fuel on their backs, started down the hill.

Every time Chen comes home from his boarding school, he helps his grandma gather enough wood to last two weeks. By the time the wood runs out, it's time for him to return home and repeat the routine once again.

"Grandpa's sick, so he can't help Grandma. Her feet hurt when she walks, so she needs my help," Chen said. In addition to helping her collect firewood, he always helps his grandparents in the kitchen and he feeds the chickens and pigs.



When they arrived home, his grandma prepared to cook dinner. Like other farmers in this area, they have just two meals a day. The boy fetched water and stoked the fire in the stove. Grandma made Chen's favorite dish—potatoes cut into cubes and stir-fried until they were soft and tender. Breathing in the aroma, Chen exclaimed, "It smells so good. Grandma's cooking is the best."

He feels that nothing beats seeing his grandparents in good health and having a meal with them.

## A hard-working boy

Chen attends Malutang Central Elementary School, which receives its students from various villages scattered in the nearby mountains. Chen's village is about ten kilometers (6.2 miles) from the school.

The fare for a bus ride between the village and the school is ten renminbi (US\$1.60). To save money, Chen walks instead of taking a bus. It takes him about three hours to cover that distance over the mountain roads, so walking to and from school every day is impractical. Other students in the area are in similar situations. To help these students out, the school modified its calendar: ten consecutive days of instruction followed by four days off, during which students may go home.

Like his schoolmates, Chen lives on campus, and he only goes home to be with his grandparents once every two weeks. That is why he makes sure that his grandparents have enough firewood to last two weeks before he returns to school.

The temperatures in the mountains often hover around the freezing mark. Before starting a class, teachers even need to build a fire

**Chen Long reviews his homework in his dorm room, which has no desk. All students at his school live on campus, more than 2,000 meters (1.2 miles) above sea level.**

in the corridor outside the classroom for some heat. Yet the cold never seems to bother the kids. During recess, most of them go outside and play basketball or horse around. But not Chen—he stays in the classroom. He is a hard-working student, and between classes he does drill questions in his books.

His grades put him in the top three in his class. According to his teacher, he is responsible though a bit introverted—he is taciturn even when he hangs out with his classmates. "When I'm alone," said Chen, "I think about my problems. I like studying because it can improve my life."

When Chen was three years old, his father died. His uncle, Zhang Tianyong (張天勇), married his mother at that time and took over the responsibility of caring for him, his mother and his brothers.







**Chen's father delivers drinking water for students, earning one renminbi per bottle. He hopes that his children will not need to earn a living the hard way like he does and that they will support themselves with knowledge and skills.**

Chen's older brother goes to senior high school in the Luquan county seat. That costs close to 10,000 renminbi (US\$1,630) each semester for tuition, fees, supplies, and room and board. This is all on top of a mortgage that the family had to take out to rebuild their home after it was destroyed by an earthquake more than a decade ago.

Chen's parents have to work very hard to make the mortgage payments and to defray the cost of schooling for their three children. To make a living, they took their youngest child and moved to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. There they work and work, and they get to go home

just once a year for the Chinese New Year holiday.

As a result, Chen's family is split three ways for most of the year. Though Chen is a very independent boy and he lives with his grandparents, he misses his parents and brothers. He expressed his longing for them in a drawing of his entire family visiting a park together. "This is Dad, Mom, and these are my brothers," he pointed out. "It was Chinese New Year, and we were playing on the grass. There were fish in the stream. My kid brother and I had such a great time running after the fish." That was the most memorable time that he had had with his family.

His stepfather loves him very much. "Once when I was in first grade, my feet hurt a little and it was snowing," Chen reminisced. "Dad carried me on his back the whole long way to school."

With moist eyes, Chen told us what he wanted to say to his father: "Thank you, Dad. I want to repay you for all you've done to raise me." He continued: "Don't worry, Mom and Dad, I'll help Grandma at home. I hope you pay off the debt soon and come home to stay with me. I miss you very much. How I wish we could all be together."

### **The weight of one renminbi**

Kunming has seen rapid economic growth in recent years, and high-rise buildings abound. Kunming University, in the northern part of the city, has a student body of 17,000. There are more than ten dormitory buildings, and Chen's parents work in two of them.

His father sits in a ground-floor room in the building where he works, waiting to take orders from students for bottled drinking water. When an order comes in, he carries the water on his shoulder to the student's dorm room. These are not small water bottles—each holds 19 liters (5 gallons) of water and weighs 19 kilograms (42 pounds).

Even just one such bottle of water would be heavy enough for most people, but he carries at least two on a shoulder pole. It would be great news for him if all his deliveries were made to rooms on the ground level, but he often needs to walk fully loaded up several flights of stairs. Sometimes he takes as many as four bottles in a single trip. For each 19-kilogram bottle of water that he delivers, he is paid one renminbi. He may deliver as many as 60 bottles to students on a particularly busy day. Busy or not, the day starts at eight o'clock in the morning and ends 12 hours later.

When there is no business for him, he sits in his room waiting and watching students pass by, chatting, laughing, bantering, or doing whatever else students do. As he looks on, he, who only finished elementary

school, thinks to himself, "I just hope my three children will grow up and become good people."

While Chen's father hefts water bottles, his mother, She Youju (佘有菊), works in another dorm as a cleaning lady. She mops floors, washes windows, empties garbage, and performs other custodial duties. "We didn't get much education, so we have no choice but to do menial jobs or heavy labor," she says. That statement pretty much sums up their predicament.

After a long day of hard work, the couple can finally get some rest. They have dinner with their youngest son, Xiaoguang (小光), in their rented room. It is less than 110 square feet and has no toilet or bathroom. The locals refer to these types of dwellings as "villages in the city." Chen's mother furnished the room with things that others had thrown out. This small room costs the couple 300 renminbi (US\$50) a month, a good portion of their total income of about 3,000 renminbi a month.

It takes the couple 3.3 months to earn enough money to put their oldest son through just one semester of high school. Imagine the burden they will face when the other two boys go to high school.

Chen's father knows that his boy at home misses them and is waiting for them to return. "If he gets admitted into a college, I'll definitely put him through," he said firmly. The tuition for college is 10,000 renminbi a year, for which he'll have to deliver 10,000 bottles of water. "However hard it may be, we'll support him."

So, for Chen, one renminbi weighs 19 kilograms, to say nothing of the weight of his father's love for the family. The boy knows his parents love him, so despite his loneliness he studies hard. He believes that his education will one day lead him, and hence his parents, to better days.



# The Illustrated JING SI A PHORISMS

## The Buddha says:

In this world, hatred cannot get rid of hatred.  
You can only get rid of hatred  
by forgetting about it.



THE BUDDHA TAUGHT  
US AGAIN AND AGAIN TO  
TAME OUR BODIES AND  
MINDS AND TO MAKE OUR  
RESENTFUL, HATEFUL,  
ANGRY MINDS BECOME  
GENEROUS AND LOVING.

AT ALL TIMES,  
WE MUST FORGIVE  
AND LOVE OTHERS.



## How can I become a good leader?

A good leader must have an open mind. Treat all people with gratitude, understanding, tolerance and contentment.

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



Tzu Chi volunteers removed a tottering shack and built this new house for a family in Khlong Toei, Bangkok, Thailand.

## Thailand

Lakkhana and her younger brother, Phiraphon, have been raised since they were little by their maternal grandparents, Somboon and Sa-Nguan. Their mother gave birth to them when she herself was underage, and she soon abandoned them. Grandpa Somboon has been sick a lot, so Sa-Nguan has been the primary breadwinner of the family. Although their financial situation is strained, the young sister and brother have done well enough at school to earn Tzu Chi scholarships.

One day in May, Tzu Chi volunteers visited the family in their home, located in a narrow alley in Khlong Toei, Bangkok. They found the house standing precariously, leaning to one side, its rotting roof supported by old, worn wooden beams. Water from a sewage ditch ran directly through the house. The volunteers had to bend down in order to get into the house,

taking care to avoid the darting cockroaches and rats. The ramshackle condition of the house prompted volunteers to rebuild the home for the family.

Volunteers first rented a place for the family to live during the rebuilding process. Then, on June 30, construction workers and volunteers tore down the dilapidated shack. Neighbors and several Tzu Chi scholarship recipients in the neighborhood helped to haul away the debris and waste with wheelbarrows.

Somboon, 71, visited the site often during the construction. "I'm old, and I couldn't do anything about our old house," he said. "Living there was like sitting on a ticking bomb—we were on pins and needles every day. Never in my dreams did I ever think that a new home would be possible for us. You're truly bodhisattvas."

The new home was completed in three weeks. It has windows on opposite walls to allow air



circulation, and it has an indoor bathroom. (The family's bathroom used to be located outside, behind the old house.) After volunteers helped paint the house, everyone sat on the floor, chatting and laughing. Two teachers from Lakkhana and Phiraphon's school also came to visit the new house.

Benja Ruangsamer is a respected teacher with more than 30 years in the profession. She was grateful to Tzu Chi for helping the family, and she reminded Lakkhana to take good care of the house and to learn to be an upright person.

Lakkhana has long been a recycling volunteer in the community, and her grandmother also volunteers for Tzu Chi. The old woman said thankfully, "Tzu Chi volunteers not only built a new home for us, but they also bring us daily necessities. I'll urge my grandchildren to work harder at their schoolwork, and we'll all do what we can to help others as a way to give back to society."

#### New Zealand

The government of New Zealand has a good social welfare system that takes care of its less fortunate citizens, but the assistance does not always cover the needs of poor families. To help out, Tzu Chi joined forces with Community Development and Safety, South Auckland, and Otaru Budgeting Service and began distributing food to needy families every two weeks. The first distribution was held on June 12.

The Otaru Budgeting Service was founded by the New Zealand government to help low-income families plan family budgets. People with financial problems have often come here for help, so the service maintains a list of needy families. Tzu Chi New Zealand offers assistance to those on the list.

On June 10, many volunteers gathered at the local Tzu Chi office to package food in preparation for the distribution. Aid items included spaghetti, spaghetti sauce, cream-style canned corn, biscuits, cooking oil, sugar, onions, and potatoes, as well as toilet

**Tzu Chi volunteers in New Zealand discuss the food distribution program for needy people.**



LI JIANZHONG

paper. A local supermarket, owned by Cai Meihong (蔡美虹) and her husband, provided the onions and potatoes to Tzu Chi below cost. Cai, originally from Taiwan, said happily that they have operated the store for eight years, and that when they heard about the distribution, they took the opportunity to support Tzu Chi and give back to society.

On the morning of June 12, eight volunteers went to the Otaru Budgeting Service for the first food distribution. Rakanui Tangi and others at the Budgeting Service had contacted and arranged for 25 families to come to pick up the food packages.

During the distribution, volunteers offered to carry food to the cars of recipients. Their gentleness softened the awkwardness between the recipients and the volunteers, and many families thanked them for the gesture. On behalf of the Budgeting Service and the families, Tangi thanked Tzu Chi for the distribution, which certainly made life a little easier for the recipient families.

#### Indonesia

The Indonesia Tzu Chi branch, in cooperation with Indonesian police, held a free clinic from June 21 to 23 at RS. Polri Kramat Jati Hospital in Jakarta. This was the 91st free clinic conducted by the branch. The event logged 1,703 clinic visits in internal medicine, dentistry, and surgery.

At the venue, a woman named Nurmini and her husband, Barudin, waited anxiously as their son was being operated on. Two-year-old Ahmad Rikaffi had been born with a cleft lip, but the couple had not been able to afford surgery to



**Ahmad Rikaffi, two years old, was born with a cleft lip. His family couldn't afford surgery for him, but fortunately he was able to receive treatment at a Tzu Chi free clinic held in Jakarta.**

correct the problem. When they heard about the free clinic, they decided to take their boy there, their hearts full of hope.

The family is from Bekasi, West Java. They live in a crude, simple house with walls of woven bamboo and a dirt floor. They sleep on a plastic sheet on the floor.

The husband collects and sells recyclables for a living, bringing home about 20,000 rupiahs (US\$1.83) a day. With such a low income, the family can barely get by. Surgery to correct their boy's condition was just not possible.

Dewi Sartika, from a neighboring village, felt sorry for the boy, so as soon as she heard about the free clinic, she helped the couple sign up for it. Nurmini started a fast three days before the free clinic and prayed to Allah that the surgery would be a success.

When the boy was brought out from surgery, the parents were happy and relieved that the operation had gone well. Dewi was also very happy to have helped the boy.

Isep Hidayatullah, 10, was another young patient who benefited from the free clinic. One day when he was eight months old, he accidentally bumped into a table when he was crawling around, and a bottle full of hot water fell on him. He sustained severe burns on parts of his body.

His father, Tatang, took him to a doctor, and spent all the money he had on skin grafts for the boy. But the fingers on the baby's right hand had become stuck to the palm. The doctor dressed the wound and asked Tatang to bring his son back in three days to see how the wound was healing. Unfortunately, unable to afford further medical treatment, Tatung didn't take his son back to the doctor, and Isep ended up with a deformed right

hand. As the boy grew older, his friends mocked him because of the deformity, and sometimes he would come home crying. His father blamed himself for his son's suffering.

The injured hand was corrected by surgery at the free clinic. "If it hadn't been for the Tzu Chi free clinic, I would have felt awful and deeply guilty every time I thought about what my son would have to face in the future," said Tatang.

Now, with his hand recovering, Isep can pursue his dream of serving in the army when he grows up.

#### The United States

From June 21 to 23, 2013, the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation held a free clinic in conjunction with Molina Medical at the National Orange Show Events Center in San Bernardino, California. Tzu Chi deployed their Dental Mobile Clinic and the Vision Mobile Clinic for the event.

The county has suffered high unemployment in recent years. House foreclosures are prevalent, and more and more residents are in need of help. Tzu Chi has held small-scale free clinics for the needy in San Bernardino for 18 years. This was the second large-scale free clinic the foundation had conducted in the area.

The event marked the first time that Tzu Chi used its Vision Mobile Clinic, fully equipped with optometry equipment. Patients could have their eyes examined as well as their eyeglasses made, right on site.

Volunteer Jiang Rong-he (江榮和) and his wife, Chen Shu-yun (陳淑雲), donated all the eyeglasses provided to the patients during this event. Jiang said that he had been in the business of manufacturing glasses for years. "I'm glad that Tzu Chi now has this van to treat people who have eye problems but can't afford the insurance," said Jiang.

Vision and dental care is largely excluded from general health insurance in the United States. Therefore, free services in ophthalmology and dentistry were particularly popular at this event.

Dr. Sam Yel, a retired ophthalmologist, attentively examined every patient. A patient remarked that his eyes got tired easily from reading newspapers or magazines, so he simply stopped reading them. Now, with his new





**Tzu Chi held a joint free clinic with Molina Medical in San Bernardino in June 2013, serving over 2,000 patients in the three-day event.**

phone number on the vehicle. When he retired, he wanted to do something for society, so he contacted Tzu Chi and became a volunteer.

He told several dental assistant trainees working in the free clinic that it was costly to learn dental skills and to become a dentist or a dental assistant. Now that they had a chance to learn those skills for free, he advised them to cherish the opportunity.

Than Kyaw, a young American of Burmese descent, received a Tzu Chi scholarship three years ago, when he started high school. This year, he won another scholarship from Tzu Chi, and he will go to the University of California, San Diego, in September. He came to volunteer at the free clinic because he had heard that many volunteers would be needed for the event. He also invited his sister to come along.

Ruthy Argumedo, associate vice president at Molina Medical, stated that she had known Tzu Chi for ten years, and for the last six years her group had worked with the foundation and provided free medical services in places like Lytle Creek Elementary School and Lucky Farms, both in San Bernardino. She was happy to work with Tzu Chi again at this event.

Over 200 Tzu Chi volunteers served more than 2,000 patients during the three-day event. Overall, there were 4,831 patient examinations

prescription eyeglasses, he believed the situation would greatly improve.

Yel had originally planned to volunteer at the event for just one day, but after seeing how many patients needed to be served, he decided to come all three days. He even declined to take breaks because he did not want patients to wait any longer than necessary.

Dr. Kwang-Soon Chung was born in North Korea. He said that his parents had taken him and escaped to South Korea when he was one year old. His family later immigrated to the United States, where he received a good education and became a dentist. Three years ago, he saw a Tzu Chi Dental Mobile Clinic by chance and jotted down the

**To conform to a standard operating procedure, everything in this clinic from patient registrations and check-ins to clinic encounters was recorded on computers. Thirty computers that had been newly purchased by the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation were used at the event in San Bernardino.**



in the clinics for general medicine, Chinese medicine, dentistry and eye exams.

### The United States

Asiana Airlines flight 214 from Seoul crash-landed at the San Francisco International Airport on July 6, killing three passengers and wounding 181 people on board.

Nearly one week after the accident, the government still had not opened up any channel for Tzu Chi or other groups to offer direct help to the victims and their families. Tzu Chi volunteers decided to hold a prayer service for the victims.

Working with the local Red Cross chapter, volunteers in San Francisco organized the July 13 prayer event with help from other volunteers in Oakland, Cupertino, San Jose, and Fremont.

For the event, they chose a small park by the Crowne Plaza Hotel near the airport where the families of the victims were staying. Coincidentally,

volunteers had delivered copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* and *Tzu Chi Monthly* to that hotel on July 5, the day before the plane crash.

The prayer service started at 11 in the morning of July 13 with brief remarks from Qiu Qiong-zi (邱瓊姿), the master of ceremonies, and Xie Ming-jin (謝明晉), CEO of Tzu Chi Northern California. Xie invited everyone to observe a minute of silence for the deceased. Reverend Andrew Kille, chairperson of the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, then led a Christian prayer. Master Jian Ang of the Zen Center of Sunnyvale also prayed for the deceased in fluent English.

The parents of two of the deceased victims were present at the prayer ceremony. So overcome with emotion that they couldn't speak, they stood on stage while a friend spoke on their behalf to thank the people in attendance. The parents bowed to everyone. Many people were in tears.

Then Xie led everyone in singing a Tzu Chi song, "Love and Care for All." After volunteers

**Tzu Chi members pray at an interreligious service for the victims of Asiana Flight 214 at a seaside park near the San Francisco International Airport.**





and the three parents offered flowers to the deceased, the volunteers formed two lines and warmly hugged the parents.

**Britain**

Women's Direct Access in Manchester is a public temporary shelter for disadvantaged women, including victims of domestic violence. Tzu Chi volunteers have gone there regularly for three years to give care to the residents.

Volunteers visited the shelter on June 15. Despite the approaching summer vacation, many students signed up to volunteer for the visit.

Veteran volunteer Wang Yi-chieh (王以潔) made work assignments and shared tips with the other volunteers, some of them first-time participants, and the group set to work. They first started an origami session with the residents in attendance. Together, they folded paper into small containers and boxes. Residents enthusiastically enjoyed the activity. Gradually the air of unfamiliarity melted away, and laughter was heard from time to time.

Then the volunteers led the residents in singing a Tzu Chi song, "One Family," with accom-

**Veteran volunteer Wang Yi-chieh assigns work to other volunteers before the start of an event at a women's shelter in Manchester, England.**

panying sign language motions. The residents cheerfully followed the hand gestures of the volunteers.

At lunch time, Tzu Chi volunteers offered tomato basil soup, cheese noodle casserole, salad, fruit, and desserts.

The food was particularly welcomed by the residents because the short-staffed shelter did not provide regular meals and the women often had to take care of their meals by themselves. The food the volunteers prepared gave the residents a feel and a taste of family cooking, something that many of them had not had for a long time.

There were several new volunteers in the group. They wanted to chat with the abused women, but they were concerned that such conversations might open old wounds. Wang taught the novices how to get such conversations started. Feeling the sincerity of the volunteers, some residents opened up and shared their painful pasts with the visitors, who listened attentively and compassionately.

Many volunteers said afterwards that the visit helped them realize how fortunate they were to live in nice, warm homes without violence. They also promised that they would continue to care for the battered women in the shelter and help set them free from the grip of their old pain so they might start their lives anew.



CHEN TING-AN

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*Continue even when it is hard to go on, release even when it is hard to let go, endure even when it is hard to bear. This is how we build our character.*

*—Master Cheng Yen*

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