

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action



Tzu Chi Responds to the Pandemic

July 2020

What We Can Do to Help During the Pandemic

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting



Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines distribute rice to the underserved to help them weather the impact of the pandemic.

HUANG LIANG-LIANG

The coronavirus pandemic that has spread across the world has caused much fear and alarm, even more so because no one knows where it came from and when it might run its course. During such a challenging time and faced with such uncertainty, what can we do to mitigate the impact and help the world? I believe everyone can help by doing the following.

First, practice sincere piety. We can all help by praying piously for the disaster to end as soon as possible and for everyone who has been affected by the pandemic. COVID-19 might have created physical distances between us, but we shouldn't use that as an excuse to grow indifferent towards others or to withhold our love. At the Jing Si Abode, we have prayed every afternoon at 1:30 since 2008 for blessings for the world. Many Tzu Chi volunteers around the globe have joined us in the prayer. Now with the coronavirus impacting the entire world, we sincerely hope everyone will join us in this daily event. You can tune in to Da Ai TV or participate online. Let's pray together for the purification of everyone's heart and mind, for peace and harmony in society, and for a world without disasters. We hope that with everyone's sincere piety, our prayers will reach the buddhas and bodhisattvas and be answered.

Second, reach out to help others. The coronavirus outbreak has halted industries and shut down businesses around the world, leaving many people struggling to make ends meet. Even though these people haven't fallen victim to the virus, they still need help to make it through this difficult time. Whether you give your money, time, or strength, you can create blessings and help the force of love grow stronger in the world. If we can all contribute our bit, our trickles of love will converge into a force powerful enough to help many people.

Take our volunteers in the Philippines for example. Since the outbreak, they have worked together and distributed rice to tens of thousands of families to prevent them from going hungry. One local resident makes a living by working as a driver. Getting by was already a struggle for

him, but the pandemic made it even more difficult for him to scrape by. After he received rice from Tzu Chi, enough to last his family for a month, he could finally breathe easier.

Third, respect and love life. If we want to dispel or stave off disasters, we must abstain from killing to avoid creating bad karma. That's why eating vegetarian helps us sow blessings. As we put our love into action by doing good deeds and giving to others, we must also endeavor to inspire in everyone a love for animals and help them see the importance of a meatless diet. Loving just our fellow human beings is not enough—we must extend our love to include all other living creatures as well. I've seen many children choosing a vegetarian diet and urging others to refrain from meat to prevent animals from being slaughtered for food. If even little kids can do this, I hope more adults can overcome their craving for meat and show their love and respect for life by switching to vegetarianism.

Fourth, rein in your unwholesome thoughts, greed, or desires. A bad or unwholesome thought can lead to wrongdoing and cause harm. Our incorrect thinking and practices have resulted in irreversible damage to the environment and caused harm to many living creatures. We should all repent for our mistakes and try to make amends. Not long ago, a volunteer in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, stopped selling meat in his three restaurants. He says that his businesses have done just as well since the switch. What's even better, he is more at peace now because no lives are being sacrificed for his sake. A change of mindset and thinking has resulted in a new and better life.

Just like this volunteer, we can all attain peace of heart by a simple shift of mindset. This COVID-19 pandemic is like a "grand lesson" for all of us. Let's all awaken to the message it is bringing us and use this opportunity to reflect on ourselves and aspire toward the good. Let's head in the direction for the common good of the world and work together with love to dispel and mitigate all disasters. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

July 2020



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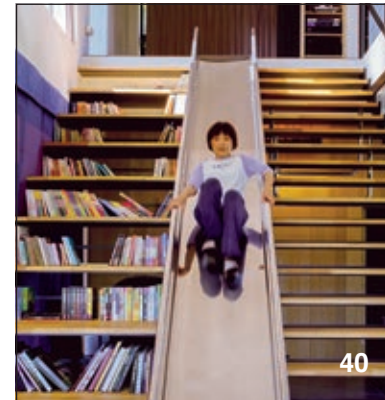
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ON THE COVER Tzu Chi volunteers in Myanmar distributed rice to 20,000 families in May and June to help them through the economic challenges caused by the pandemic.
Photo by Nay Thura



The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* 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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Let Love Travel During COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted the entire world in an unprecedented manner. Front-line medical workers are among those exposed to the greatest risks, while lockdown and stay-at-home mandates have threatened the livelihoods of the poor and underserved. During this time, Tzu Chi has overcome many challenges to provide aid and help lessen the impact of the pandemic.



On April 25, 2020, a Cebu Pacific Air jet arrived at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, in Guangdong Province, China. Its purpose was to transport nearly 50,000 protective gowns and 2,000 face shields donated by Tzu Chi to the Philippines for frontline medical workers in the country. In April alone, Tzu Chi volunteers in Guangzhou helped complete dozens of such delivery missions.

Guarding Medical Workers and Helping the Underprivileged

By Ye Zi-hao
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Though Taiwan's efforts in combating COVID-19 have been very effective, the island will be in peril until the disease is contained worldwide. The economy of Taiwan is likewise intertwined with the economies of other countries. Therefore, helping other countries around the world fight and overcome the disease is a wise and necessary course for Taiwan.



By early July 2020, COVID-19 had swept through more than 200 countries and territories, infecting over 11 million people and killing 530,000. The destructive force of this global plague is such that some people have likened it to a bomb-free World War III.

When the epidemic first broke out, Taiwan was considered one of the most at-risk regions of a major outbreak outside of China due to its proximity and transport links to the latter. However, Taiwan's geographic advantage of being an island, its tight border control following the outbreak, and other effective preventive measures instituted by the government averted a disaster. The Taiwanese people should also be lauded for playing their part in the battle against COVID-19. As urged by the government, they wore masks

when needed, washed their hands frequently, and observed social distancing. As of early June, Taiwan had recorded just seven deaths and less than 450 confirmed infections. Because there had been no locally transmitted cases for over 50 days straight, many anti-coronavirus measures were lifted by the government, and life picked up as normal on the island. Taiwan's impressive performance in the fight against the coronavirus has won attention the world over and received extensive media coverage.

Though Taiwan has remained relatively untouched by the pandemic, the disease has taken many other areas around the world by storm. America and Europe have been hit especially hard. At its height in those regions, the daily number of people dying there was many times the

total number of infections in Taiwan. Japan, Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia—countries closer to Taiwan—have registered high numbers of infections too.

As the poet John Donne penned, "No man is an island." Likewise, no country can realistically isolate itself from the rest of the world in today's global situation. However good a job Taiwan has done in combating COVID-19, it will be in peril until the disease is effectively contained worldwide. The economy of Taiwan is also intertwined with other countries, and will be affected as other economies are impacted by the pandemic. Therefore, whether for humanitarian reasons or for its own economic interests, helping other countries in the world fight the disease is a wise and necessary course for Taiwan. The Tzu Chi

Tzu Chi volunteers in Guangzhou, China, move medical supplies into a Cebu Pacific Air passenger plane to be transported to the Philippines. LI HONGLI

Foundation, based in Taiwan, has been doing just that since the beginning.

The early days of the outbreak

"We started taking action on January 23, the day before Chinese New Year's eve, the day Wuhan was put on lockdown," said Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission. "The next day, Master Cheng Yen issued a letter to the Tzu Chi volunteers in China, wishing them well and urging them to take precautionary measures, avoid crowds, and most

importantly, eat vegetarian to help protect life.”

In fact, Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, was on alert as early as the end of last year, as soon as news began to spread about the appearance of a viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China. The situation escalated quickly. An anti-coronavirus team consisting of the CEOs and deputy CEOs of the four Tzu Chi missions was formed on January 26, the second day of Chinese New Year. Two days later, the first domestic case was diagnosed in Taiwan. A morning meeting was established daily at the headquarters to organize and coordinate Tzu Chi’s response to the epidemic.

By the end of January, the number of infections in China had hit 9,000, with a death toll surpassing 200. Although Taiwan had recorded just ten confirmed cases by that time, there was such a high local demand for surgical masks that the Taiwanese government banned their export on January 24. As a result, during the earlier days of the outbreak, all the anti-coronavirus supplies that Tzu Chi donated to areas hit hard by the epidemic were purchased outside of Taiwan. From late January to the end of February, volunteers purchased and prepared supplies in the United States, Indonesia, and other countries not yet noticeably affected by the epidemic, and had them delivered to Wuhan and other places in China. Meanwhile, nuns at the Jing Si Abode, the convent established by Master Cheng Yen, and Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan mobilized to make cloth masks to relieve shortages. The masks they started producing on February 10 were provided to people in Taiwan and abroad.

Religions joined hands

The COVID-19 situation took an unexpected turn in March and April. Areas that had previously recorded few confirmed cases, such as Europe and North America, began to witness a sharp increase in infections and deaths. It was as if a levee had been broken by an unstoppable flood—the number of people that needed to be tested and treated in those areas climbed exponentially. Severe shortages of sickbeds, medical professionals, and personal protective equipment (PPE) ensued.

The pandemic accelerated in India and Indonesia too, turning those nations from exporters of PPE supplies to areas that needed help. The exact opposite happened in China. As the coronavirus situation began easing in April in that country, lockdowns were gradually lifted and production lines resumed. The country turned from

needing aid to becoming a major supplier of medical supplies to other nations.

As a result, Tzu Chi’s aid reflowed too. Volunteers began making purchases in China and other areas in Asia and had them delivered to countries around the world that needed help. Among the 72 countries and territories Tzu Chi has helped so far, the aid to two countries is especially worthy of mention because of its significance in cross-religion cooperation.

One of those countries is the Vatican City. “Priests and nuns from the Vatican expose themselves to infection when they visit the sick or deceased,” said Simon Shyong. “We reached out to help so these front-line workers could be better protected.” Shyong explained that a physician at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, in eastern Taiwan, has a brother who is a priest at the Vatican. Tzu Chi’s aid mission to the Vatican came about due to the link between these two brothers.

After the face masks donated by Tzu Chi arrived at the Vatican, they were distributed to members of religious orders as well as to medical professionals. The protective gear helped prevent the spread of the coronavirus and soothed the users’ minds. On April 18, authorities at the Vatican emailed the foundation, thanking Tzu Chi volunteers around the world in the name of Pope Francis for reaching out to people in need at a time when the world was facing a huge challenge.

The other country was Italy. Father Giuseppe Didone is a priest from Italy who has dedicated



half a century to serving people in Yilan, northern Taiwan. He made an appeal in early April to Taiwanese people for donations to the fundraising center of Camillian Saint Mary’s Hospital Luodong, Yilan. The money was needed to purchase emergency medical supplies, including surgical masks and protective gowns, for medical professionals in Italy, which had been hit hard by COVID-19. His appeal resulted in a warm response. Support poured in from Taiwanese citizens, but Father Giuseppe and his team needed further help in purchasing medical supplies from China. That’s where Tzu Chi came in.

Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, personally visited Camillian Saint

With the United States facing a severe shortage of personal protective equipment, Tzu Chi volunteers there donated N95 masks and safety goggles to the Orthopaedic Institute for Children, which is in alliance with UCLA Health.

LUO SHU-LI

Mary’s Hospital to meet with the priest and his team, and to learn how Tzu Chi could help. After learning about the Father’s expectations, personnel at Tzu Chi headquarters contacted Tzu Chi volunteers in China to help Father Giuseppe find manufacturers, sign contracts, place orders, and arrange for delivery to Italy. The priest’s wish to help his home country was fulfilled, and love



from the Taiwanese people was transformed into severely needed medical provisions for those who needed them most.

Challenges abounded

"The anti-coronavirus supplies—such as face masks—that Tzu Chi has sent to hard-hit countries came mostly from China," said Simon Shyong. "Some were made in Mexico. We also purchased some hand sanitizer from Thailand." In speaking of the purchase and transportation of the aid provisions, Shyong mentioned that Tzu Chi possessed an advantage: "We didn't have to go through intermediary agencies when we made the purchases," Shyong said. "Since there are Tzu Chi employees and volunteers in China, they could go directly to a factory to check out the quality of the goods we had ordered and help make sure that the deliveries were on schedule."

Even with this advantage, the foundation encountered many logistical challenges in carrying

In late April 2020, Tzu Chi volunteers in Thailand distributed packages of daily necessities in Bangkok to people whose lives were impacted by the pandemic. Items distributed included rice, cooking oil, sugar, salt, and vegetable and fruit juice.

PINTICHA JANSUKSRI

out the aid mission for COVID-19. For example, due to the worldwide surge in demand for face masks, governments all over the world scrambled to buy the masks they needed to fight the pandemic. As demand spiked, so did the prices. It was therefore difficult to find manufacturers that could deliver quality goods at a fair price on time.

Another challenge arose in April, as the Chinese government began tightening its control and inspection of anti-coronavirus supplies. The purpose was to prevent those supplies of poor quality from being exported from the country, but the increased quality control added to the complexities of the purchase procedure.

The transportation of goods also became more difficult. In order to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, countries worldwide had enacted travel restrictions and strict border control measures, leading to the cancellation of many flights by airline companies. Some routes witnessed a reduction of 80 or even 90 percent of their flights. And as the number of flights was slashed, the cost of transportation rose to twice the original level.

Yet another problem was caused by the collection of goods. Tzu Chi has helped over 70 countries and territories during the pandemic, some of which have never been visited by volunteers. How could Tzu Chi make sure the goods were properly delivered? Who could go to collect the supplies upon arrival? Should volunteers from other countries travel to the destination countries to help? These were among many of the issues that confronted Tzu Chi staffers and volunteers as they worked to help others weather the pandemic.

In the midst of these challenges, Tzu Chi has received a lot of kind-hearted assistance that has made its mission easier. Cebu Pacific Air, a Philippine airline, helped the foundation transport aid provisions at a discount. On April 25, the airline company sent a chartered plane to Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, in Guangdong Province, China, to fetch 49,900 protective gowns and 2,000 face shields Tzu Chi was sending to the Philippines. With permission from the airport authorities, Tzu Chi volunteers from Guangzhou entered an access-controlled area at the airport and helped move the items, carton by carton, into the chartered plane to be flown to the Philippines.

Indonesia's Air Force and a state-run airline company also helped Indonesian Tzu Chi volunteers transport medical supplies, including COVID-19 test kits, face masks, protective clothing, and oxygen concentrators, from China to Jakarta, Indonesia's national capital. After the supplies had cleared customs in Jakarta, they were escorted by police to the local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall before being delivered to medical facilities in various places in Indonesia.

"As for the United States, we worked with some organizations to have Tzu Chi's supplies transported there," Simon Shyong explained. "They provided airplanes to transport our goods."

In places where there are Tzu Chi offices or near which volunteers live, local volunteers or employees can go personally to collect goods when they arrive. In places where there are not, the foundation asks recipient organizations or agencies to collect the goods at airports and fol-



Simon Shyong, deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, has participated in Tzu Chi's relief efforts for the pandemic since late January 2020. HSIAO YIU-HWA

low up with confirmation of receipt.

Take Spain, where there are no Tzu Chi volunteers, for example. When organizations or government health agencies in that country appealed to the foundation for aid, Tzu Chi readily responded. All Tzu Chi asked of them was "to send us a few photos to let us know the supplies had safely arrived, and provide us with information about where they had distributed the items and who had benefited," Shyong said.

Alleviating economic impacts

By early July, Tzu Chi had provided more than 20,433,000 aid items to 72 nations. Countries receiving aid from the foundation include the United States, one of the hardest-hit nations; the Philippines, which lies near Taiwan; and South Africa and Mozambique in Africa. Volunteers not only purchased medical provisions for delivery to those who needed them—they also mobilized to make cloth masks, face shields, and protective clothing. Volunteers also urged people to wear masks, wash their hands often, and observe social distancing to help stop the transmission of the virus.

The foundation plans to aid 14 more countries. "It's no easy task conducting the relief operation this time, given the large number of countries and regions on our aid list," Simon Shyong said. "Despite the difficulties, we are very grateful to have this opportunity to help." The deputy CEO commended Tzu Chi volunteers and staffers at



the Hualien headquarters who oversee Tzu Chi's international relief work for keeping their cell phones on 24 hours a day so that they could quickly respond to a situation. Everyone worked hard so that Tzu Chi's aid could be delivered to the front lines as soon as possible.

Besides providing medical supplies, the foundation also extended assistance to people whose financial situations had become difficult as a result of the outbreak. In Taiwan, the foundation started by helping volunteers whose livelihoods had been seriously affected by the pandemic—for example, those who ran businesses which had come to a standstill due to the pandemic. "We're also conducting a survey on families who used to receive aid from Tzu Chi," Shyong said. "If we discover that they are experiencing financial difficulties again [due to COVID-19], we'll offer help to them so that in addition to government aid, they can have some extra help from Tzu Chi."

As for places outside Taiwan, the deputy CEO pointed out that currently volunteers in 35 countries had made plans or were already implementing plans to help people who had lost their jobs or were having difficulty making ends meet as a result of the outbreak. In the Philippines, for

Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines had to overcome many challenges, from purchasing the rice, to its transportation, to finally distributing it to needy families during the lockdown.

CHEN YU-YI

example, despite lockdown measures implemented by the government, volunteers managed to overcome many challenges and distributed rice to many needy families. Social distancing was dutifully observed during the distributions, which were conducted in an orderly manner. From mid-March to early June alone, volunteers helped 100,000 households.

The United States has recorded the highest numbers of infections and deaths to date worldwide. While the country works to fight the infection, unemployment or unpaid leaves of absence have taken a toll on many people's finances. They need help as much as the underserved people in other countries. In response, Tzu Chi prepared some instant rice and noodles and had them sent to Tzu Chi offices across the United States to be distributed to the needy. "We'd gotten the food ready by early May and had it shipped to the United States in the fastest way possible," said

As of July 4, 2020, Tzu Chi had provided anti-coronavirus supplies to 72 countries and regions around the world.



Shyong, who for many years had lived in the state of Texas in the U.S.

The impact inflicted by the pandemic may not be as tangible as the physical destruction wreaked by an earthquake, typhoon, or tsunami, but its effects are so far-reaching that billions of people around the world have been affected. Given the extent of the impact, the scale of mobilization by Tzu Chi has also been unprecedented. Though volunteers around the world can only move in

limited areas in their respective countries, they can still connect and work effectively together via the Internet to allow their care to reach as many people as possible.

"We do what we consider is our duty to do," said Simon Shyong. With the world still reeling from the pandemic, it's every volunteer's hope that more people, while taking measures to protect themselves, can put their love into action to help repair a world that is badly in need of healing. ☸

Asia and Oceania



Klang, Malaysia



KOH POO LENG

Observing social distance during an aid distribution, a foreign migrant worker holds up her passport and a Tzu Chi blessing card for a volunteer to photograph. The photo serves as proof of receipt for shopping vouchers from the foundation. With the Movement Control Order extended again and again, many foreign workers were forced out of a job or forced to take unpaid leaves of absence, plunging them into financial difficulties. Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor set up a hotline to help people like them get through this difficult time.

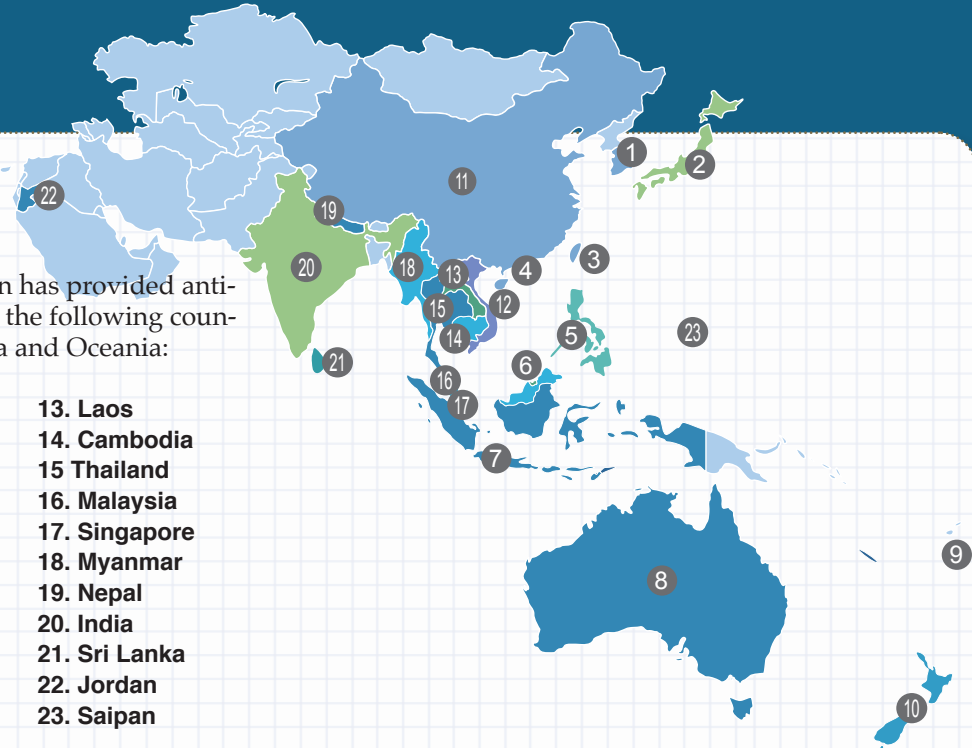


Zamboanga, the Philippines



COURTESY OF YANG WEI-SHUN

Cluster infections of COVID-19 occurred in Zamboanga after the pandemic broke out around the world. Tzu Chi volunteers provided aid, including medical masks and infrared thermometers, to more than 50 local hospitals to help fight the infection in the area. With the help of some Muslim students, volunteers also transported rice to outlying islands for distribution to the needy there. As of early June, Tzu Chi had distributed rice to more than 100,000 families in the Philippines.



The Tzu Chi Foundation has provided anti-coronavirus supplies to the following countries and regions in Asia and Oceania:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| 1. Korea | 13. Laos |
| 2. Japan | 14. Cambodia |
| 3. Taiwan | 15. Thailand |
| 4. Hong Kong | 16. Malaysia |
| 5. The Philippines | 17. Singapore |
| 6. Brunei | 18. Myanmar |
| 7. Indonesia | 19. Nepal |
| 8. Australia | 20. India |
| 9. American Samoa | 21. Sri Lanka |
| 10. New Zealand | 22. Jordan |
| 11. China | 23. Saipan |
| 12. Vietnam | |



Jakarta, Indonesia



ARIAMAMI SURYO ASMORO

Tzu Chi Indonesia, working with the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, raised enough money to buy a million COVID-19 test kits, which they then donated to government and medical agencies. Sugianto Kusuma (郭再源), deputy CEO of Tzu Chi Indonesia, said that the price of the test kits in March was prohibitive, but since they were racing against time to fight the disease, they decided to make the purchase anyway. Saving lives should take priority over everything else.



Phnom Penh, Cambodia



COURTESY OF TZU CHI CAMBODIA

On June 10, more than 800 needy families in Prek Pnov received a month's supply of rice, cooking oil, and salt from Tzu Chi. As garbage salvagers, plasterers and bricklayers, or street vendors, their income had diminished as a result of the pandemic. Even so, they donated what little money they could spare during the distribution to help others. They wanted to pay forward the love they had received from kind-hearted donors around the world.

The Americas



Santiago, Chile



COURTESY OF TZU CHI SANTIAGO

The pandemic has thrown many underserved people out of work, making their lives even more difficult. Tzu Chi volunteers joined hands with teachers at Escuela Básica Likán Antai, an elementary school in Conchalí, Santiago Province, to help struggling families through this difficult time. They used donated food ingredients to cook for local underprivileged households and then delivered the meals to them.



New York, the United States



GARSON ORMISTON

The United States has the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the world, with New York State being one of the worst-hit areas. Tzu Chi volunteers started delivering personal protective equipment to various hospitals in New York City in March. In April, they started donating anti-coronavirus supplies to nursing and rehabilitation facilities. When volunteers from Long Island delivered supplies to Oyster Bay Manor, an assisted living facility, a nursing staffer there, choked up with emotion, said to the volunteers in American-accented Mandarin, “Xie xie [thank you].”



São Paulo, Brazil



LI JIN-MAN

Brazil has the second highest number of cases of COVID-19. By June 19, the country’s case count had passed a million. Tzu Chi donated surgical masks, protective clothing, safety goggles, and medical gloves to seven local hospitals in May to help protect frontline medical workers during the pandemic. Santa Casa de Misericórdia, founded over 400 years ago, was one of the hospitals benefiting from the donation. The Santa Casa hospital system, comprising five hospitals, provides treatment for people from Brazil and other South American countries, serving over 10,000 patient visits a day.



Toronto, Canada



ZHU QI-CHENG

Originally equipped with just nine oxygen concentrators, North York General Hospital decided to purchase 130 more to meet the demand of COVID-19 patients. Tzu Chi volunteers raised money to help the hospital equip itself against the coronavirus. In just four days, volunteers exceeded their initial goal of 50,000 Canadian dollars (US\$36,800), and raised a total of 75,200 dollars (US\$55,400). Hospital personnel thanked the foundation for its help, saying that the donated equipment will help patients now and for many years to come.



The Tzu Chi Foundation has provided anti-coronavirus supplies to the following countries and regions in North and South America:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. Canada | 9. Guatemala |
| 2. The United States | 10. Mexico |
| 3. Saint Martin | 11. Brazil |
| 4. Puerto Rico | 12. Paraguay |
| 5. Dominican Republic | 13. Ecuador |
| 6. Haiti | 14. Bolivia |
| 7. Honduras | 15. Chile |
| 8. El Salvador | |

Johannesburg, South Africa



South Africa's Minister of Health Zweli Mkhize confirmed on March 5 that the coronavirus had spread to the country. Soon afterwards, on March 15, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster, which was followed by a national lockdown effective from March 26. South Africa has since registered more infections than any other country in Africa. The first batch of medical supplies provided by Tzu Chi arrived in the country in mid-May, which volunteers then donated to various hospitals. The lockdown took an economic toll on needy families, and many of them suffered from hunger. In response, volunteers in the township of Tembisa distributed food to help the needy survive the pandemic.

Maputo, Mozambique



A long-standing shortage of healthcare professionals and medical equipment left Mozambique powerless to defend itself from the invasion of COVID-19. Tzu Chi volunteers responded by delivering education and information to help local people fight the pandemic. They made videos to promote correct preventive measures, and worked with government health authorities by visiting communities to teach residents how to properly wash their hands. Volunteers also donated medical supplies to 12 hospitals and two testing centers.

Ladysmith, South Africa



After South Africa was locked down, some villagers in Thabo Mofutsanyane, Free State, were in danger of running out of food to eat. Volunteers from Ladysmith drove 200 kilometers (124 miles)—about two and a half hours—to deliver food to them. Led by villagers on horseback, volunteers distributed the aid to 60 families.

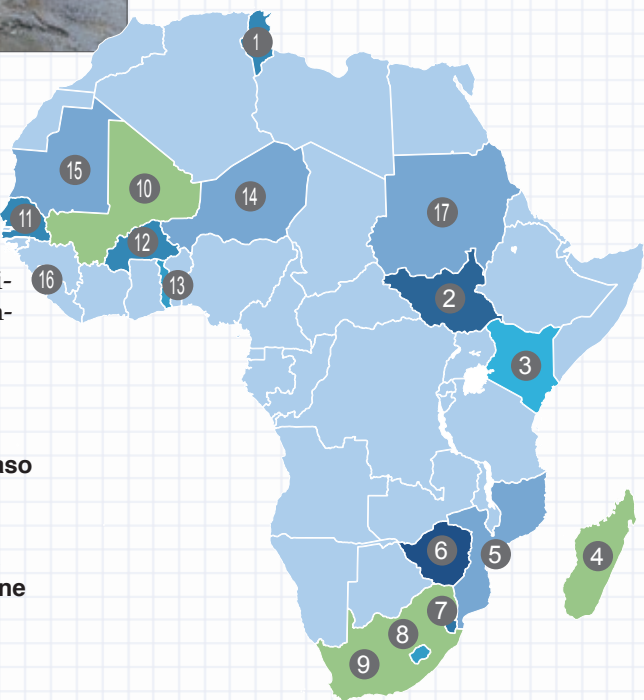
Zimbabwe



Zimbabwe was grappling with the effects of a drought when the novel coronavirus pummeled the world. Many wells there had dried out, worsening the local health and hygiene situation. Tzu Chi volunteers led villagers in Domboshava, about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Harare, the national capital, in drilling a well. When the well was finished, volunteers pumped it many times before the water finally cleared and clean water began gushing out.

The Tzu Chi Foundation has provided anti-coronavirus supplies to the following countries in Africa:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Tunisia | 10. Mali |
| 2. South Sudan | 11. Senegal |
| 3. Kenya | 12. Burkina Faso |
| 4. Madagascar | 13. Benin |
| 5. Mozambique | 14. Niger |
| 6. Zimbabwe | 15. Mauritania |
| 7. Eswatini | 16. Sierra Leone |
| 8. Lesotho | 17. Sudan |
| 9. South Africa | |





France

Tous Bénévoles en Sologne——和 Hubert Dambrine
5月4日 · 🌐

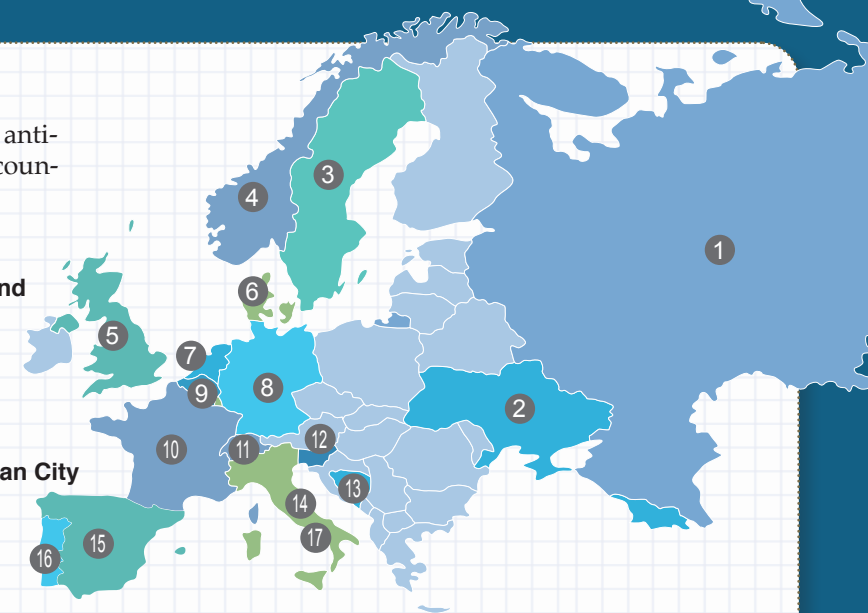
Livraison ce matin de 4000 masques chirurgicaux à la Mairie de **Ville de Selles-sur-Cher** suite à la généreuse dotation de Tzu Chi Taiwan Fondation



On March 16, in response to the pandemic, French President Emmanuel Macron announced mandatory home confinement for 15 days starting at noon on March 17. The order was extended twice and ended on May 11. During that period, Tzu Chi volunteers, taking advantage of the short time they were allowed to go out, mailed masks to Taiwanese students in France who were returning to Taiwan so that they could be better protected during their journeys home. Volunteers also donated masks, protective clothing, and gloves to a hospital in Bayonne, Centre Hospitalier de la Côte Basque, as well as the areas of Chanteloup-en-Brie and Sologne. The photo shows recipients acknowledging Tzu Chi's aid on social media.

The Tzu Chi Foundation has provided anti-coronavirus supplies to the following countries in Europe:

1. Russia
2. Ukraine
3. Sweden
4. Norway
5. The United Kingdom
6. Denmark
7. The Netherlands
8. Germany
9. Belgium
10. France
11. Switzerland
12. Austria
13. Bosnia
14. Italy
15. Spain
16. Portugal
17. The Vatican City



The United Kingdom



The pandemic peaked in the United Kingdom in April. Tzu Chi's anti-coronavirus supplies started arriving in the country on April 21, including 200,000 masks and protective gowns, which were subsequently donated to institutions in London, Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, and Malvern. Medical workers at Homerton University Hospital told volunteers that they had felt completely helpless when they saw their coworkers knocked down one after another by COVID-19, and so were deeply grateful to Tzu Chi for the donation.



Germany



Eighty thousand medical masks provided by Tzu Chi arrived at Frankfurt Airport in April. Volunteers collected the shipment, then immediately headed toward Heinsberg, a region in Nordrhein-Westfalen that had been hit hard by COVID-19. Volunteers arrived at a supply intake center set up by the local government's fire department and donated 20,000 masks there. The masks were then delivered to three hospitals in the area.



Russia



In February, when the coronavirus situation in China was severe, a Tzu Chi volunteer in China, with the help of a friend in Moscow, purchased 6,000 masks from Russia. Later, when the pandemic went out of control in Russia—the number of confirmed cases there hit 500,000 in June—the foundation sent medical supplies to that country to help them fight the infection.



Helping the Underserved in Thailand Cope with COVID-19

By Wu Shu Chen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Pinticha Jansuksri

The economy or public safety: which comes first? Though the Thai government has effectively brought the pandemic under control with lockdown measures, the country's economy has suffered as a result. How have Tzu Chi volunteers in Thailand responded to the pandemic and its effects?



On April 26, volunteers visited household after household in Khlong Toei, Bangkok's largest slum, to distribute aid and evaluate if the recipient families would need further support from Tzu Chi. DATCHANEE SURATEP

Thailand recorded its first confirmed coronavirus case on January 13, making it the first country outside of China to detect an infection. This should not be too surprising, given that tourism is a major industry in Thailand, and though the nation attracts tourists from around the world, Chinese tourists are the largest group among foreign visitors.

Though Thailand was the first country outside of China to register an infection, the number of cases remained low there throughout the earlier days of the outbreak. That initial spike in infections was avoided because of the country's preliminary efforts in dealing with the virus. As early as January 3, just four days after China reported the new virus to the World Health Organization, the Thai government instituted precautionary measures to protect themselves from the disease. For example, visitors from China were screened at four international airports, and patients diagnosed with the virus were quickly isolated for treatment.

But even with these early precautionary measures, the Thai government and the private sector weren't on a high enough alert for COVID-19. Instead of enforcing tight border control measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the Thai government continued to keep its doors wide open to Chinese tourists. Why was this? One reason was that tourism plays such an important role in Thailand, both in terms of the GDP and the number of jobs. Another reason was that, unlike

Taiwan, Thailand had been almost untouched by the SARS epidemic back in 2003. The country hadn't been preparing for another disease outbreak, so when it came to making a choice between the economy and public health, the balance tipped toward the former.

In early March, the South Korean government asked Thais working illegally in the nation to return to their home country because the COVID-19 situation had been escalating in South Korea. Over 15,000 illegal workers returned to Thailand as a result, which began to trigger some alarm and fear of the disease. But even then, when many other countries were imposing a 14-day quarantine on incoming travelers, the Thai government continued to waver in its quarantine decisions, yielding again to economic interests. The indecision eventually led to several cluster infections, with the number of confirmed cases increasing rapidly in March, from single digits a day to over a hundred new cases a day.

On March 16, for the first time in Thai history, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health cancelled Songkran, the Thai New Year, and related celebrations to reduce the risk of the coronavirus spreading. All schools nationwide were ordered to close, as were public venues and businesses in Bangkok and several other provinces. On March 25, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha declared a state of emergency effective the next day. Lockdown measures were instituted in varying degrees throughout the country; all commercial international

flights were suspended in early April; and checkpoints were set up in Bangkok and other provinces to screen inter-provincial travelers for symptoms of Covid-19. A ban was even imposed on the sale of alcoholic beverages to curb irresponsible socializing. As a result of these efforts, the number of new cases was finally brought under control, and continued to drop throughout April.

The cancellation of Songkran, also known as the Water Festival, was unprecedented in Thailand. People inevitably felt disappointed. But the impact of that decision paled in comparison to that caused by the government's overall lockdown measures. These measures were like a double-edged sword. While they were effective in containing the outbreak, they also closed businesses and suspended jobs, which greatly strained many people's financial situations.

Thailand experiences fewer natural disasters than other Southeast Asian countries. Though flooding occasionally hits the country during monsoon season, the impact of such events is manageable. The nation is self-sufficient in terms of food production, and because most people practice Buddhism, a general spirit of optimism reigns in the country. People there often wear a smile, winning the nation the nickname "the Kingdom of Smiles." Even so, Thailand's economy has witnessed a decline over the last several years. The government's slow response to the threat of COVID-19 might have partly been triggered by the fear that preventive measures against

the pandemic might cause the economy to further worsen. How will the kingdom emerge from the outbreak? Will it lose some of its smiles?

When there is a will, there is a way

Bangkok is the national capital of Thailand, and one of the economic centers of Southeast Asia. People from all over the country come to the metropolis to seek better opportunities. Some of these people are day laborers, and even if they don't belong in a low-income category, a day without work means a day without pay for them. They are among those badly affected by the measures adopted to alleviate the pandemic.

Seeing their need, Tzu Chi volunteers in Thailand sprang into action to help. In addition to continuous care for families receiving regular aid from the foundation, volunteers decided to distribute daily necessities to people whose lives had been rendered difficult by the pandemic but who hadn't been placed on the government's aid list. Tzu Chi launched a relief project intended to last three months, during which they would distribute 30,000 packages of daily goods. Each package contained rice, crackers, cooking oil, sugar, salt, and vegetable and fruit juice—enough to last a family of four for at least two weeks.

The logistics of such a large undertaking were daunting. How could those most in need of Tzu Chi's aid be identified? And would there be enough manpower and resources to carry out such a large project? At the time, people in



Bangkok were panic buying, and even people who had money couldn't necessarily buy the things they needed. Sukanya Rimphanawet (林純鈴), CEO of Tzu Chi Thailand, had difficulty falling asleep for several nights in a row thinking of the difficulties lying ahead. She even considered scaling back the aid project to make things less difficult. But she knew that a lot of people needed help, and as Tzu Chi volunteers, they should do their best to reach out to those in need instead of allowing themselves to be deterred by difficulties. She received a lot of encouragement when she reported on the project in a video conference with Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan. The meeting boosted her confidence, so she decided to just go for it.

On that very same day, Lin held another video conference with Tung Chen-yuan (童振源), who was the representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand at the time. After Lin explained to Tung about the charity program Tzu Chi Thailand was going to implement in response to the pandemic, he promised his backing. Immediately afterwards, two general managers of Taiwanese conglomerates in Thailand phoned Lin, one after the other, and offered help for the program. The news that Tzu Chi was soliciting donations to help people affected by the COVID-19 outbreak spread throughout different sectors of society, and the goods to be distributed were quickly purchased and prepared for distribution.

A volunteer accompanies an aid recipient for a time on her way home after the latter received her relief items from Tzu Chi.

During this time, several volunteers from the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security happened to be attending courses at the Tzu Chi Thailand office in Bangkok. When they learned of Tzu Chi's distribution project, they helped the foundation obtain lists of people needing aid. Volunteers followed up by confirming and double-checking those on the lists to ensure that Tzu Chi's aid was going to those who really needed it.

On an April afternoon, 200 volunteers gathered at the Tzu Chi office to pack the aid supplies. A curfew instituted by the government had gone into effect on April 3. It forbade people from leaving their houses between 10:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. Therefore, all goods had to be delivered to the distribution venues before ten at night. The IT personnel at the Tzu Chi office worked overtime to produce distribution claim slips with QR codes. This was to avoid the use of paper and pens at the distributions and thus reduce the possibility of close-range contact.

The distributions

The first distribution took place on April 23 in Ratchaburi Province. More distributions soon fol-



lowed. One was held in Nong Chok District, Bangkok, on April 25. It took place in an open-air space at Bangkok Arena, a venue designated by the government. Aid recipients came from seven communities, arriving at the arena at different times, in accordance with the time slots for which they had signed up to claim their goods. The staggered arrivals helped minimize the crowd and reduce the chance of disease transmission.

On April 26, volunteers delivered goods to household after household in Khlong Toei District, known for its slum. They made the door-to-door distribution to avoid the gathering of crowds. They also used the opportunity to further learn about the situation of each family and if they would need long-term care from Tzu Chi.

One of the aid recipients said to visiting volunteers, "My family is running out of rice. The supplies you gave us can help us save what money we have left. This is really a great help for us." Wipas, a motorbike taxi driver, said, "I used to make 500 to 700 baht [16 to 22 U.S. dollars] a day, but business has dropped sharply due to the pandemic, making life difficult for me. I know this is a crisis and we must do our best to pull through, but thanks to Tzu Chi for easing my financial burden."

Tzu Chi volunteers started visiting out-of-the-way rural communities in mid-May to distribute aid. They held four distributions in Bang Kruai District, Nonthaburi Province, on May 13, and another five there on May 26. At the same time,

Volunteers pack goods to be distributed to people whose livelihoods have been seriously affected by the pandemic.

they began making purchases for people who had lost their jobs and had returned to their hometowns in Fang District, Chiang Mai Province. Volunteers also donated personal protective equipment to medical facilities. They donated surgical masks and protective gowns to six medical facilities on April 27 alone. Volunteers also launched a program to promote vegetarianism, providing 200 vegetarian boxed meals each day to people living near the Tzu Chi office.

No matter which district volunteers visited to distribute the daily necessity packages, hordes of loving people showed up to help. They assisted older people and women in obtaining and carrying their supplies, directed traffic, and maintained order. April is the hottest month in Thailand, and the packages distributed by Tzu Chi were heavy. Everyone's clothes were soaked, but people who had come to help still said to Tzu Chi volunteers that they were thrilled to be able to contribute. The warm-heartedness of the Thai people manifested itself again and again through such kind gestures of help. Working together, everyone hoped to help pull the underserved through this difficult time. (Information provided by Budsara Sombut and Datchanee Suratep) ❀



Emergency Cash for Refugees

A Joint Effort by Tzu Chi Malaysia and UNHCR

By Tan Kim Hion and Chan Shi Yih

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia, working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, delivered emergency cash to refugees to help them weather the economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis.



How often do we complain about our jobs or that our houses are too small? The next time you are tempted to do so, remember that somewhere in the world are people fleeing their home countries to escape from war or from racial and religious persecution. Their journeys to safety are often grueling, a matter of life and death for them. Even if they make it safely to another country, does that guarantee a good life? For many refugees in Malaysia, the answer is “no.”

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly 180,000 people had registered as refugees or sought asylum in Malaysia as of March 2020. Of that number, 154,460 refugees were from Myanmar, with more than 100,000 of those being Rohingya. These staggering numbers represent a low estimate—the actual number of refugees is believed to be higher.

Malaysia was not a signatory of the 1951 U.N. Convention on Refugees, so all refugees, even those possessing UNHCR refugee cards, are considered illegal immigrants in the nation. As such, they are not entitled to work. But what can they do? They have to survive, so they take jobs anyway, despite the risk of arrest or deportation. They might make a living by moving goods at the Selayang wholesale market in Kuala Lumpur, or by working as construction workers, or by serving as waiters at restaurants. Due to their illegal status, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by their employers.

Shakamatddin Nabi Husson, 22, is a Rohingya from Myanmar. His father sold land in Myanmar to pay smugglers to get him into Malaysia by boat. Shakamatddin successfully made it to Malaysia, but his father, brother, and sister were all sadly killed by Burmese soldiers. The only other person in his family to survive was his mother, who ended up in Bangladesh.

Shakamatddin worked as a construction worker in Mentakab, in the state of Pahang, before the COVID-19 pandemic. His daily wage was 50 ringgit (US\$12). He took good care of his mother. Of the 1,500 ringgit (US\$350) he earned every month, he kept only 500 for himself. He sent the rest to his mother in Bangladesh.

Mobilizing for refugees

Malaysia has not been spared from the coronavirus pandemic. To rein in the infection, the country implemented a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18. Just as similar lockdown measures in other countries have hobbled their economies, many people’s livelihoods in Malaysia have been affected as well.

The economic fallout has been especially hard on refugees like Shakamatddin. He was just barely scraping by before the pandemic, so the lockdown just added insult to injury. “I was able to get by before the implementation of the MCO,” said the young man. “But now with my income gone, I often go hungry [to make what food I have last longer]. My mother in Bangladesh has had to do the same.”

Many refugees, at their wits’ ends, turned to UNHCR for help. So many phoned the agency that the helpline was constantly busy. One refugee said that he couldn’t get through, even after nearly 60 attempts.

Overwhelmed by the large number of requests for help—over 4,000 households according to UNHCR’s estimates—the agency decided to partner with Tzu Chi to help refugees weather the COVID-19 crisis. Because refugees in Malaysia are spread throughout the country, the project was designed to cover many districts, including Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, and Perak.

Extending care and support to the needy is routine work for Tzu Chi volunteers. When a family is referred to Tzu Chi for help, volunteers typically visit them personally to learn about their situation and evaluate how the foundation can help. But the current situation is far from typical. Due to the Movement Control Order, volunteers could only phone the refugees on the list provided by UNHCR to obtain necessary information about them. Volunteers then sent whatever data they could gather to the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor branch office. At that point, employees at the Refugee Affairs Department at the office would evaluate and double-check the information. If approved, volunteers received the grants and then set out to refugees’ homes to deliver the money to them.

A medical worker from the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Kuala Lumpur photographs a refugee after delivering cash to him. This was part of an aid project Tzu Chi Malaysia and UNHCR jointly launched to help refugees in Malaysia weather the coronavirus pandemic. Photographs were taken for proof of receipt in lieu of a signature from the refugee to maintain social distance.

WEE SUAN YEAN

The first round of phone calls was kicked off on April 8. Two days later, the Refugee Affairs Department staffers assessed the information that had been submitted. Soon thereafter, volunteers received money for the families who had been approved for aid. The volunteers promptly fanned out to distribute it.

Volunteer Yap Poh Wee (葉寶蔚) helped coordinate the project. She admitted that it wasn’t an easy mission to pull off. She talked about some of the challenges they had encountered: “Because most refugees could only speak simple English and Malay, the volunteers who made the phone calls and distributed the cash had to be able to speak both languages. When they went out to deliver the money, only one person per vehicle was allowed, in accordance with the Movement Control Order. Only two volunteers were allowed to be present when the cash was given out. We also had to report our trips to the police in order to deliver the money. The schedule was very tight.”



Yap made a point of reminding volunteers each time they set off to make distributions to be sure to wear a mask and their volunteer ID cards, and to carry the documents issued by the police and UNHCR. She also asked them to be sure to maintain adequate social distance with the refugees. Because of that, no signatures were required to confirm that refugees had received the money. Photos were taken instead for proof of receipt.

An angel's voice

Tang Lai Kuen (鄧麗娟) was one of the volunteers who helped make the phone calls. She hadn't had much contact with refugees before the project, so she wasn't very aware of their situations and the difficulties they faced in life. It was only through the project that she came to learn more about the sad stories of this group of people.

"When I first started to make the phone calls," Tang said, "I told myself that the refugees must be experiencing a lot of anxiety due to the pandemic. I reminded myself to be especially gentle when I talked to them. During the phone calls, I took care to be slow and gentle. A Rohingya refugee I talked to surprised me by calling me an angel."

Tang remembered how that refugee, Muhamad, had poured out his experiences when

Shakamatddin Nabi Husson, a Rohingya refugee (second from left), received cash aid from Tzu Chi volunteers on April 24. Volunteers learned when conducting the first batch of deliveries that most refugees were running out of food. In response, they purchased food out-of-pocket for refugees during the second batch of distributions, and delivered it to refugees along with their cash aid.

CHEW YEE LENG

she asked with concern how things were going for him. Muhamad was a young father. He lived with his wife and 16-month-old son. Their son had Down syndrome, so to make it easier for Muhamad to take his son to the doctor, he chose to do only part-time jobs. Making ends meet was already a challenge for him and his family, but the coronavirus and the resulting Movement Control Order just made things worse. Deprived of all means to make money, he wasn't able to pay the rent or buy formula for his son. He couldn't even take the little one to the doctor. He was anxious about running out of food and being turned out of their home by their landlord. Both he and his wife were very depressed.

Muhamad's helplessness and fear tugged at Tang's heartstrings. As soon as she put down the phone, she uploaded the family's information to



staffers at the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor office. She kept emphasizing to them what a tight spot Muhamad and his family were in, and urged them to quickly process the case so the family could receive help as soon as possible.

Because Muhamad had previously taken his son to the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Kuala Lumpur for medical attention, his information was quickly confirmed. Volunteers were able to deliver cash to Muhamad on the second day after Tang talked to him on the phone. She was later relieved to learn that he had used the cash aid to buy food and take his son to the doctor.

After he received the cash aid, Muhamad wrote to Tang to express his gratitude. He said that he was deeply grateful to Tzu Chi and UNHCR for helping him when he was at his most helpless and despairing. He said he would never forget such kindness, and he thanked Tang for her gentle, caring manner. He said her voice was like that of an angel. His heart was warmed to no end. He wished Tang and all the others who had helped him would have happiness, good health, safety, and peace.

She wrote to him in reply: "You don't have to thank us. We were just doing what we Tzu Chi volunteers should do. Our Master [Dharma Master Cheng Yen] always teaches us to give

Volunteers in Seberang Perai, Penang, double-check information before handing over cash to refugees. It took the volunteers some time to locate this residence, due to the complicated house numbering system in this rural district. Because 16 refugee households lived at the same address, the volunteers took extra care to confirm the identifications of the recipients and distribute cash to them.

LIM CHOON NYA

without asking for anything in return. Your child chose to be born into your family because you have the love required to take care of him. Never give up hope. Love him as much as you can. Someday, when you can, reach out to help others. I give you my very best wishes."

By the end of April, volunteers had completed five rounds of phone calls and cash deliveries. They worked a total of 8,000 shifts and helped 2,876 families. UNHCR and Tzu Chi have extended the project to help more refugees ride out this difficult time, and volunteers have followed up with more phone calls and deliveries. It's a difficult mission to carry out, but no one minds the hard work. Everyone appreciates the opportunity to help a group of people forced out of their home countries into an unknown future.



Compassion and Courage

Tzu Chi Mozambique Helps Fight the Coronavirus

Text and photos by Karmen Long, Tzu Chi International Medical Association

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Tzu Chi volunteers in Mozambique bravely visited communities at risk of COVID-19 to ensure residents had essential information on how to avoid the disease. They were driven, despite the risk to themselves, by a sense of responsibility to take care of their communities.

In March 2019, Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique in Africa, dealing the country a hard blow. Barely a year later, just as the country was gradually recovering from the devastation and when students were able to return to their schools, the coronavirus pandemic took the world by surprise. Mozambique, like most countries around the world, has not been spared from the impact of this disease.

On March 20, 2020, seeing the number of confirmed cases rising rapidly in South Africa, President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique introduced a series of preventive measures to protect his country from the coronavirus pandemic, even though there were no confirmed cases yet. Ten days later, on April 1, he declared a national state of emergency to last for 30 days.

The measures implemented in Mozambique to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus included limitations on entry to the country, and on movements within the country. Only cases of State interest, the transportation of goods by accredited operators, and health-related situations were exempted. Additional measures included a ban on public and private gatherings, and a mandated 14-day self-quarantine for all arrivals to Mozambique and all persons who had had direct contact with confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Even with the precautions, the country recorded its first coronavirus case on March 22. The number of diagnosed infections slowly crept up to more than a hundred by mid-May, though the rate

of growth may have been obscured due to the limited testing capacity in the country.

Safeguarding medical professionals

Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries, ranking seventh from the bottom worldwide in terms of GDP per capita in 2019. It was ill-equipped to handle a widespread outbreak of COVID-19.

The severe lack of medical equipment in the country is well known. The country has a population of 29 million, but only 34 ventilators nationwide. Beira Central Hospital in Sofala Province, central Mozambique, is the second largest hospital in the nation. Yet Dr. Bonifácio Cebola, the hospital's deputy superintendent, told me and other Tzu Chi volunteers in March that the hospital had only two ventilators to serve patients from among nine million people in four central provinces. As if that fact wasn't crushing enough, the two machines had been broken for some time. Faced with the threat of the coronavirus, Dr. Cebola and his colleagues were really worried.

Mozambique isn't just short of medical equipment, but actual medical workers too. The few doctors and nurses in the country couldn't afford to be sidelined by the coronavirus. That would have made a bad situation worse. Sadly, the personal protective equipment (PPE) that would have protected the doctors and nurses from falling ill as they served patients was as limited as everything else.



As of mid-March, Beira Central Hospital had less than a hundred medical masks left. Other hospitals were doing no better. Doctors at Nhamatanda Rural Hospital, also in Sofala Province, had none. Though they had turned to Beira Central Hospital for help, the central hospital was powerless to do anything—when Beira Central didn't even have enough masks to meet their own demand, they were in no position to supply another hospital.

I'm a physician myself, and when I learned that my fellow doctors had to examine and treat patients unprotected, without even the most basic PPE, my heart really went out to them. When Tzu Chi volunteers in the nation heard the news of this situation, Tzu Chi Mozambique donated medical masks to 12 hospitals and two testing centers so that the medical workers there could have better protection.

Instead of soap

In this digital era, almost everyone has a smartphone. With just a light touch or a swipe on our screens, we can bring up news from around the world. But this is not the case in Mozambique. Many households here don't even have running water or electricity, let alone a television, radio, or cell phone. Those latter technologies are luxuries most locals can't afford. Thus, as the coronavirus began to spread around the world, the Mozambican government was concerned that

Invited by Mozambique's health department, Tzu Chi volunteers visit communities to spread health information about the coronavirus. They shared verbally, using posters and written material, and even through theatrical performances.

many of its citizens, especially older people, were putting themselves at risk of an infection because they had no way of learning about the pandemic and how to protect themselves.

As there are Tzu Chi volunteers in every community in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, the government's health department invited Tzu Chi volunteers to help spread information about preventing COVID-19 to community residents. To that end, the government sent medical professionals to the "Tzu Chi Home," a Tzu Chi facility in Mahotas, Maputo, to provide training to volunteers.

After the training, volunteers began visiting community after community to share with people how to protect themselves from the novel coronavirus. They took with them buckets, soap, masks, and posters printed with coronavirus-related health information. During their visits, they met many people who had never even heard of COVID-19.

Our world witnessed a shortage of hand sanitizer and disinfectant alcohol after the outbreak of the pandemic. People everywhere scrambled to



buy what they could. But in Mozambique, an ordinary citizen had to think twice even about the purchase of soap and cloth masks. In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, how could the purchase of even these simple items be a cause of concern?

The answer to that question is simply a matter of economics. People who have a steady job in Mozambique make an average of less than 5,000 metical (US\$70) a month. But most local people have no regular jobs; they make a living by doing odd jobs, and thus have no regular income. For example, the monthly income of the native Tzu Chi volunteers in Maputo ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 metical.

A bar of soap costs 20 Mozambican metical (30 U.S. cents) in Mozambique, but before the pandemic drove up food prices, that same amount could purchase eight tomatoes. With incomes being what they are for the locals, it is a no-brainer for them whether they should spend 20 metical on tomatoes or soap. Purchasing food will win out every time.

The world of the impoverished is beyond my imagination. Without masks, how do they protect themselves from COVID-19? Without soap, how do they wash their hands to reduce the chance of picking up the virus? To my surprise, I learned later that people in the countryside areas of Mozambique use ashes from cooking fires to clean their hands. When I learned about this from a promotional video made by the government's health department, I asked local volunteers about it and was told that using wood ashes as a cleaning

Dr. Karmen Long (龍嘉文, first from left), the author of this article, and Denise Tsai donate medical masks to Nhamatanda Rural Hospital to help medical professionals there better protect themselves during the coronavirus pandemic.

DANIEL TOME

agent was actually very common for them.

Later, when I went online to check this out, I discovered that people in many poor countries have been taught to use wood ashes to clean their hands too. Even the World Health Organization has made such a suggestion. Wood ashes are alkaline, so when no soap is available, they mix some ashes and a little water into a paste to create a home-made cleaning agent.

When a volunteer shared this with Master Cheng Yen in Taiwan in a video conference, the Master said that people in Taiwan used to use that same strategy in the old days, when resources were scarce, and people were generally poor. Only then did I realize how blessed people of our generation are.

The Master often says that we are taught to count our blessings when we see the suffering of others. That's indeed true. Hailing from Malaysia and now practicing medicine in Mozambique, I've learned from my everyday life here to appreciate even more the comfort and convenience of life I enjoy. With what we are blessed to have, shouldn't we spend more of our time serving the needy instead of focusing all our attention on pursuing personal gain?



The community needs me

Denise Tsai (蔡岱霖), who is from Taiwan, was the first Tzu Chi volunteer in Mozambique. The first community she visited when she first started doing charity work in Mozambique back in 2012 was Maxaquene. It was also where volunteers kicked off their anti-coronavirus campaign.

Rebeca Mabunda, 58, is a Tzu Chi volunteer who lives in Maxaquene. She was among the first group of volunteers who helped Denise Tsai carry out Tzu Chi work in Mozambique. Other volunteers and I followed Rebeca into Maxaquene and saw how she talked with confidence about the novel coronavirus to community residents, and how proficiently she showed them the proper way of washing their hands. Seeing her like this, I found it hard to imagine that just eight years before, she had been a mother suffering from domestic violence. Denise told me that Rebeca had once been abused so badly by her husband that her face was covered in blood. Denise quickly rushed over to help her after being alerted of the incident by another care recipient.

Denise worked with the couple for six months before Rebeca's husband gradually changed, during which time Rebeca also was transformed from a care recipient into a volunteer. Her work of giving to the needy eventually won her respect from her husband, who not only stopped abusing her but became proud of her for her role as a Tzu Chi volunteer.

Entering a community to spread word about the coronavirus was not without risks for Denise,

Tzu Chi volunteers distribute face masks to people in a vehicle. The Mozambican government made it compulsory on April 8 for everyone to wear a face mask on all forms of passenger transport. A shortage of masks on the market made it difficult to carry out, so people were very happy to receive masks from Tzu Chi volunteers.

Rebeca, and all the volunteers.

When South Africa implemented its lockdown in March, all the migrant workers in the nation were asked to go back to their home countries. As a result, tens of thousands of Mozambicans returned to their home country from South Africa in early April. The Mozambican government required the returnees to undergo home quarantine to reduce the chance that the virus would be brought into Mozambique, but these people still posed a threat to local communities.

Volunteers who visited communities for the anti-coronavirus campaign told me that they were worried about their safety when they first learned about the campaign. In the face of this disease, it's human nature to be afraid. I was afraid too when I followed the volunteers to communities where infections had been detected.

But they didn't let that fear stop them. Rebeca said that she believed that if they took the necessary precautions, they didn't need to be overly worried. They also embraced a sense of mission for their work. That sense of duty and mission helped them overcome their fear and motivated

them to do better and better at educating their fellow Mozambicans about the disease. They faced their fears with courage and visited community after community with their important message.

The spirit of our volunteers helped keep me going too. I was greatly moved when I heard them say that as Tzu Chi volunteers, they believed they had a duty to take care of local communities. I witnessed the bodhisattva spirit in this group of mothers and grandmothers. Instead of seeking comfort for themselves, they chose to reach out to help others. They are truly worthy of my deepest admiration.

Unemployed

A virus does not choose its host based on skin color, status, or other physical or social distinctions. The coronavirus preys upon the rich and poor, young and old, with no regard for race or ethnicity. However, when it comes to the lockdown measures that countries around the world have implemented to contain the pandemic, the poor suffer the greatest impact.

Originally scheduled to end on April 30, Mozambique's state of emergency was extended twice more, for a total of 60 more days. Though the decision was made to keep the country's citizens safer, it has made life very difficult for those at the bottom echelon of society.

When Mozambique declared its state of emergency, even roadside stalls were forced to close to prevent the gathering of crowds. Many Mozambicans scrape together a living by running stalls like this. With that income gone, what could they do? Similarly, some local women worked as house maids for richer families. Most of them had to take a bus to work, which exposed them to a higher risk of contracting the virus. As a result, their employers chose to temporarily lay them off during the pandemic. At the beginning of the state of emergency, the first things in stores that were sold out were, surprisingly, washing machines. Wealthier people can get along without a house maid, but what about poorer people who have been let go?

The economic impact of being thrown out of work was made worse by rising food prices during the pandemic. Mozambique imports more than 70 percent of its food from South Africa. When South Africa reduced its food exports as a result of its own lockdown measures, it resulted in a spike in food prices in Mozambique. That just rubbed salt into the economic wounds of the working poor.

Some native volunteers told me that they used to be able to buy a week's worth of food for their entire

family with 1,000 metical (US\$14.20), but that was no longer the case. For example, the price of a bag of onions has risen from 250 to 700 metical. Volunteer Elina Esmael Matavele told me that with food so expensive now, she has had no choice but to cut the amount of rice she cooks for her family of seven by half. Some volunteers started to add tapioca to their rice to keep their families fed. If their children still complained that they were hungry, they told them to drink some water and go to sleep to stave off the hunger pangs.

Realizing the livelihood problems faced by many families, Tzu Chi has decided to implement food relief projects in the country to help those affected by the pandemic.

Less meat to relieve food shortages

A food supply problem has long existed in our world. The coronavirus pandemic has made this problem even worse.

Actually, our global food production has been on the rise year after year. With that, there should be enough food to feed everyone on the planet. However, that's not the case. In 2019, more than 800 million people in the world didn't have enough food to eat. According to an *Environmental Research Letters* study, a contributing factor is that 36 percent of the calories currently produced by the world's crops are being used for animal feed. Only 12 percent of those feed calories ultimately contribute to the human diet.

I began dreaming of practicing medicine in Africa more than ten years ago. Later, when I joined Tzu Chi, my understanding of the world increased, and I began to realize that I was actually contributing to the world's hunger problem by eating meat. I was eating for a single meal what should have been enough to last a person in Africa for several days. That realization made me understand that if I wanted to help people in Africa, I didn't even have to go to the continent—I could just become a vegetarian.

Ten years have passed since then, and I did end up being a doctor in Africa. From the time I've spent here, I've learned how much children here pine for food. I'm happy I became a vegetarian ten years ago. But me being a vegetarian is not enough. We need more people, a lot more people, to become vegetarian if we really want to make a difference. Given that the duration of gastronomic satisfaction is very short, is it worth it to make the world's food problem worse just to satisfy our palates for a few seconds?

I shared with a gathering of local volunteers the importance of eating vegetarian. They were



stunned when they learned that the number of animals eaten by humans per day was six times the population of Mozambique. Many expressed their willingness to try a vegetarian diet afterwards. The next day, Antonio Patricio, a young volunteer, shared a photo of his dinner with me. I was surprised to see that his dinner consisted only of rice and cucumbers.

Antonio is an orphan with no income or land to grow crops. To feed himself, he often turned to rivers to find food. He'd just eat whatever he caught. As such, becoming vegetarian was quite a challenge for him—even more so because vegetables often cost more than meat in remote countryside areas. I was concerned that he would not have enough to feed himself if he became a vegetarian, but he assured me he would be okay. He said what Master Cheng Yen said about how we shouldn't hurt animals to feed ourselves resonated with him. He said he was happy even if he had only cucumbers and rice because he felt at peace being a vegetarian. He even pledged that he'd eat vegetarian for the rest of his life.

Antonio has difficulty keeping himself fed every day, but even so, when he learned that so many animals were being slaughtered for human consumption, his heart went out to those animals so much that he decided right then to adopt a vegetarian diet. Compared with him, we are blessed

Mozambican volunteers stand amidst flourishing vegetable gardens at the Tzu Chi Home in Maputo. Mozambique imports more than 70 percent of its food from South Africa, but South Africa cut down on its food exports during its own lockdown. In response, volunteers expanded the land where they grew vegetables at the Tzu Chi Home as a preparatory measure to meet food shortages.

with far more resources. Shouldn't we make a bigger effort to help starving people by eating vegetarian?

It isn't easy for our volunteers in Mozambique to get by. Yet despite their poverty, they took up charity work to help their own people after hearing Master Cheng Yen's teachings. Motivated by a sense of mission, they were willing to conquer their fear and visit communities to spread word about the coronavirus. They are even willing to eat vegetarian to help protect life. They are truly the living embodiment of loving-kindness and compassion.

We may not know the course the pandemic will take, but one thing is certain: our volunteers in Mozambique will continue to follow the Master's teachings by doing what they can to accompany people in their own communities through this difficult time. They will stay true to their commitment to serving the needy. ❀



Tzu Chi Paraguay Provides Food to Relieve Hunger

By Cai Qi-ru and Song Jin-sheng

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Cai Qi-ru

Dumplings and pieces of dough sizzled in a frying pan while milk warmed over a coal fire. This was the scene at a hot food station in Paraguay, set up to provide meals to impoverished people during the coronavirus pandemic. Tzu Chi Paraguay helped keep such stations going by donating food and ingredients.

Two vehicles loaded with 4,200 kilograms (9,260 pounds) of food sped along a suburban road outside of Ciudad del Este, the second largest city in Paraguay. The vehicles carried Tzu Chi volunteers from the city as they delivered and replenished supplies for some hot food stations set up to feed people whose lives had been rendered difficult by the pandemic. When the volunteers arrived at one of the stations at a private home in Minga Guazú, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Ciudad del Este, people there broke into cheers and hugged one another. Some even burst into tears.

Maria, one of the volunteer moms at the station, said that they deeply appreciated the donated food from Tzu Chi. "Some families around here have as many as six to eight children," she said. "The youngsters often have to go hungry. Some of them, when they see our food running low, start to beg for more food from us because they won't have anything to eat for dinner. We can't help but feel like crying." She thanked the Tzu Chi volunteers profusely as she received the food and ingredients they had brought: rice, flour, adzuki beans, cooking oil, and fresh vegetables. The volunteers had even brought some cloth masks.

Paraguay was one of the first countries to take measures to stem the spread of COVID-19 when the virus spread to South America. School was suspended, public gatherings banned, and bor-

ders closed. The preventive measures effectively contained the spread of the infection in the country, especially when compared with other South American nations, but the nationwide lockdown created another problem: the sharp increase in the number of people going hungry.

Seeing the need, charity groups and women in different communities began providing hot food to the underserved in March to prevent them from starving. In early April, Tzu Chi volunteers in Ciudad del Este learned that some of the hot food stations were running out of food. In response, they purchased and delivered food and ingredients to stations located in Ciudad del Este, Ciudad Presidente Franco, and Minga Guazú.

Soon thereafter, Tzu Chi Ciudad del Este's Facebook page saw a spike in requests for help. Volunteers began visiting different hot food stations every week to deliver ingredients. By May 5, they had provided 41 stations with enough ingredients to prepare 50,000 servings of food. Fidelio Baez, who oversaw a hot food station in a slum, said, "Thank God for helping us through you. The much-awaited food is finally here. Thank you so much!"

Across the Friendship Bridge

Ciudad del Este is located on the border of Paraguay, separated from Brazil by the Paraná River. It's a commercial city and one of the world's largest free-trade zones. Its tax-free status attracts



many Brazilians to the city to shop. The Friendship Bridge links Ciudad del Este with Foz do Iguaçu, the city on the Brazilian side. When the Friendship Bridge was closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the livelihoods of many families on both sides were impacted. Not only were some residents of Ciudad del Este going hungry, but so were some on the other end of the bridge, in Foz do Iguaçu.

Xie Jia-hong (謝家弘) is a Tzu Chi volunteer in Brazil. As a tour guide, he often crosses the Friendship Bridge to show tourists around Ciudad del Este. When he learned that some slum residents in Foz do Iguaçu were so short on food they had to drink water to feel full, he decided to act. He enlisted the help of some of his colleagues, and they delivered 500 portions of food, each weighing nearly 13 kilograms (29 pounds), to a charity organization, Associação Fraternidade Aliança (AFA), for distribution to the needy. They also delivered emergency food supplies to a nursing home and to Associação de Pais e Amigos do Excepcionais, an organization that provides education to special needs people from underprivileged families.

Volunteers deliver food and masks to a hot food station in Pablo Roja, in Ciudad del Este.

AFA director Cristina Rinaldi said that many locals make a living by carrying goods across the bridge for their customers, doing odd jobs, or salvaging garbage. When their livelihoods were wiped out or diminished due to the pandemic, many had no choice but to go without food for days on end. The 500 portions of food—enough to help 500 families—would be extremely helpful to them.

Paraguay started lifting its lockdown measures in May, but because the coronavirus situation in Brazil was still severe, the border between the two countries remained closed. In addition to helping hot food stations, Tzu Chi volunteers continued to deliver food to the foundation's long-term aid recipients and to offer them help with rents. Volunteers also provided medical professionals with personal protective equipment. With the pandemic still developing, they are committed to continuing to help people ride out this difficult time.

When Your Kids Want a Pet

By Li Qiu-yue, Tzu Chi Teachers Association

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Zhong Ting-jia

When your kids beg for a pet, how can you help them realize that they will be taking on the care and responsibility of a living thing?

Many people, including me, dream of having a pet. Who can resist a furry little kitten or a cute cuddly rabbit? A pet can also be a great source of company and comfort, especially when one is lonely or experiencing difficulties in life.

Whenever I see a dog or cat on TV nestling against their owners, I can't help but exclaim, "I wish I had a pet, too!" When this happens, my husband steps in to play the devil's advocate. He'll say to me things like: "Okay, if you get one, will you have time to feed it, clean up after it, walk it every day, get it shots, cut its toenails, take it to a vet when it's sick, and so on?" His questions are like a bucket of cold water thrown on me, instantly cooling my enthusiasm and sobering me up.

When your kids want a pet, make sure they understand the realities of having a pet, in the same way my husband does for me. Let your children know that once they own a pet, they will have to be responsible for it—because every life needs respect. When young ones learn about the responsibilities that come with keeping a pet, they may try to bargain with you to get things in their favor, but don't back down. If you do, you are paving the way for them to ignore their duties for the pet, and you'll very likely end up being the major caretaker for the animal once the initial novelty has worn off. It's therefore important to reach some kind of understanding with your kids before allowing a pet into your life. It may even be necessary to establish some consequences with your children in the event they don't live up to their commitment to take care of the pet. They need to understand

the importance of taking care of another living thing.

Many parents eventually give in and get a pet for their children because they can't resist the youngsters' constant begging or withstand their looks of pleading. But if you don't establish important ground rules and expectations with your children ahead of time, they will play with the animal but leave the responsibility of caring for it to others. What's worse, their love for the animal might cool as the novelty of having a pet fades. What could have been a great opportunity for them to develop a sense of responsibility and respect for a real-life animal is lost.

Laughter and tears

A good friend of mine and her two children love dogs and they once had one of their own as a pet. The children would take the dog out for walks, clean up after it, and tag along when it was taken to a beauty salon to be bathed and groomed. When the dog fell ill, they took turns with their parents caring for it and would accompany it to the animal hospital. They even prayed for it when it became seriously ill. When the dog eventually passed away, the family purchased a niche in a columbarium for its ashes. They still go to the columbarium often to "visit the dog."

Everyone in the family—parents and children—actively cared for the dog throughout its life and afterwards. They were all involved and had built an unbreakable bond with the animal.

My two children once kept silkworms for projects required by their natural science classes. I taught them how to wash mulberry leaves and wipe them dry to feed their worms. I also taught



them to clean up the worms' houses. We observed them as they made cocoons, metamorphosed into moths, laid eggs, and eventually passed on one by one. When a worm died, I asked my kids to wrap its body in tissue paper, bury it in a flowerpot, and say a proper goodbye to it.

My children kept a turtle and some fish too. The first thing they did when they returned home from school was hurry over to their pets to say hello and talk to them. After a while, however, their pets started to get sick. My kids were extremely worried, and discussed with their classmates how to better care for the animals. They washed the fish tank with more care and took their turtle out into the sun once a week. Even so, their best efforts proved futile. The time to say goodbye eventually came as the pets passed away. My children were very sad, and they never asked to keep a pet after that.

Adopt instead of buying

If, after discussion, you and your children still decide to get a pet, I suggest that you take their ages into consideration. If your kids are younger, consider getting pets that are less demanding of time and attention, such as fish or turtles. Pets such as cats and dogs are more appropriate when your kids are older and better able to provide care for the animals. Also, consider adopting rather than buying a pet—you will be giving a stray animal a warm and loving home.

Another good idea is for you and your kids to volunteer at an animal shelter before taking on a pet. The animals will benefit from the love you show them, and you will receive hands-on experience in learning how to care for animals. It will help you decide whether or not you will be a suitable pet owner, and it will help your kids learn the meaning and value of respecting life. ❀



The Artistic Blacksmith

Zeng Wen-chang

By Chen Shi-hui
Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Alberto Buzzola
Used with permission of *Rhythms Monthly* magazine

This is a story of a blacksmith from an impoverished background who won respect and admiration for his work by dint of his incessant efforts and an unflinching pursuit for excellence and perfection.

40 Tzu Chi 41 July 2020

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Zeng Wen-chang and employees in his ironworks shop work on a bus stop shelter in the shape of a whale tail (left). A young worker welds components of the bus stop shelter (above).

“Be sure that the two pieces fit evenly together so that the place where they connect won’t curve inward,” said a swarthy, squat man as he inspected the craftsmanship of one worker after another in an ironworks in New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. His voice was neither sonorous nor demanding, but because he could always pinpoint the flaws of a work-in-progress, everyone in the factory followed his directions without protest.

The turnover rate for blacksmiths is relatively high, but this ironworks is an exception. The owner, Zeng Wen-chang (曾文昌)—the swarthy, squat man—is the reason why.

Chen Yu-jia (陳育嘉), 24, is one of the blacksmiths employed at the workshop. His family owns an ironworks, but he had no interest in blacksmithing or taking over his family business until, on the eve of his graduation from university,

he chanced upon some works Zeng had posted on Facebook. “Wow,” Chen thought, looking at the photos. “How is it possible for him to take an ordinary staircase and turn it into a work of art?”

With his father’s permission, Chen applied for a job at Zeng’s factory before he had even completed his compulsory military service. As soon as he was discharged from the military, he reported to work at the ironworks. He was among those men-

tioned at the beginning of this article whose work was being inspected by Zeng. Zeng had asked him to take apart and redo something he had just soldered together. Despite being critiqued for his workmanship, Chen wasn’t in the least bothered. In fact, just the opposite: he savored working under Zeng and learning from him.

Liu Qi-yang (劉啟陽), 25, is another young craftsman in the workshop. He is a creative person, whether he is playing guitar, performing with his band, or making something with his hands. Zeng thinks he has a natural talent for blacksmithing, but like many creative people, he has quite a temper too. One time he was caught red-handed skipping the standard operating procedure prescribed by Zeng. The young man felt so humiliated he quit on the spot.

Two weeks later, however, Liu swallowed his pride and asked to be taken back. He had already landed a new job, but he couldn’t bear working there. “My new boss approved of everything I made,” he explained. “But I knew full well that none of it would ever pass muster with Boss Zeng.” Zeng is quite a perfectionist, and Liu had obviously acquired the same high standards. For Liu, working for someone less discerning just wouldn’t do.

Everyone who knows Zeng knows him to be hard-working, thoughtfully attentive to detail, and bent on pursuing the best. Mrs. Xie was one



of his clients. Zeng's workmanship can be seen throughout her house in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, from the outdoor parking space, the wrought-iron fence around the front yard, the hanging staircase in the living room, and the book case in the study. "We never had to oversee Zeng's work while he was at it because he always demanded more of himself than we did of him."

Mrs. Xie recounted how Zeng would first make a piece and then make repeated adjustments until everything fit perfectly, and how his creations were sturdy and strong without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. When it came to dealing with the arch-enemy of metals—moisture—Zeng shunned the easy solution of using water-proof paint, like many others did. "Instead, after making sure everything fit perfectly and worked well, he'd have the entire assembly—I mean the entire piece," Mrs. Xie repeated for emphasis, "sent in for galvanizing. This was to prevent rust from starting in places like the screws, thus thwarting future hard-to-fix leaks before they could form."

Word spread through the grapevine of Zeng's fine craftsmanship and his conscientious pursuit of quality. As his reputation grew, so did the line of people that wanted to order his creations. Once

Welding is a basic blacksmithing skill. A good metal worker can, with an excellent control of temperature and timing, create a piece that bears few or no welding marks.

in a single neighborhood, more than ten house owners were queuing for his services. They were willing to wait as long as nearly two years—an indication of the craftsmanship he offers.

Everyone who has worked with him, including homeowners, interior designers, contractors, and government workers, has nothing but accolades for him. When asked why everyone raves about his work attitude and the quality he delivers, he said shyly, "I'm just an ordinary metal worker—it's just that I take my work very seriously."

Inconspicuous

If you have ever had your house decorated or renovated, you might remember employing the service of a mason, a carpenter, a plumber, or an electrician. But have you ever encountered a blacksmith? More often than not, the response to this question will be a blank stare in return.

Compared with the other related trade work-



ers mentioned above, the role of an ironsmith in the field of interior decoration seems a lot less conspicuous. This might have to do with the comparatively low percentage of iron materials used in interior decoration. "Besides, to be honest, the work of a blacksmith is also more dangerous than that of the other kinds of workers," said Zeng. "The material we work with is heavy and cumbersome. We can easily get crushed moving things around. The risk of burn injuries from welding is high too. That's why we often feel that our work is the roughest and toughest among all workers in the construction trades."

Given the seeming "unattractiveness" of the work, why did he become a blacksmith in the first place?

Zeng is where he is today because of his impoverished background. He said that his family was so destitute that he was already borrowing money as an elementary school student on behalf of his mother to keep his family going. Later, when an older relative got him a job at an iron-works factory, Zeng went for it, feeling that he didn't have much of a choice.

When he first started and was still getting familiar with the tools he had to use, he'd often

Hot-dip galvanizing is a technology often employed in advanced countries to prevent corrosion and rust in an iron or steel piece. Xiao Sheng-yan (蕭勝彥), who owns a galvanizing plant, says that only people like Zeng Wen-chang, who put a premium on the quality of their work, have their entire pieces of finished metal work processed with hot-dip galvanizing.

burn his face when using a welder, leaving behind patch after patch of frightening pink flesh. But he kept at it, and never gave up. One time, he even fell off a sheet metal roof that he was working on. He hit his head hard and was knocked unconscious on the spot. He still gets dizzy spells as an aftereffect from that fall.

Thankfully, those hard days are now behind him. Building countless sheet metal structures and installing innumerable steel doors has taught him the solid skills required of an excellent ironworker. His days of apprenticeship long past, he's come into his own as a master blacksmith and set up a shop of his own.

For a long time, there wasn't much of a demand in Taiwan for his superior skills and workman-



Metal Pieces That Demonstrate Skilled Workmanship

The creation of refined metal pieces depends on precise measurements and exquisite craftsmanship. Beautiful examples include the hanging staircase (above), the book case made of iron and wood (left), and the wrought-iron fence (below), all of which are Zeng's handiwork.



ship. Before the 1970s, hand-forged wrought-iron windows noted for their decorative appeal could often be seen in the countryside and urban areas of Taiwan. However, when Taiwan's economy began to take off in the 1970s, the ironworks were gradually replaced by standardized, mass-produced metal windows and doors that were better at deterring burglars. Even though Zeng was eager to try his hand at commissions that could allow his skills and creativity to come to full play, such opportunities were hard to come by.

The pendulum began to swing back a couple of decades later when the industrial style began to gain popularity in Taiwan's interior design circles. Many ironworkers started to get commissions for things other than traditional doors, windows, and sheet metal buildings. To a certain extent, Zeng had been preparing for this day for a long time. The spring of his life had finally come.

Taking wing

With the popularity of the industrial style, "the variety of stuff we can try our hand at has become a lot richer," Zeng said. "Take staircases, which have become sort of a signature of my team. There are L-shaped staircases, hanging staircases, spiral, and so on. Each kind is different and brings new challenges." Zeng began to gain fame in his field after successfully completing a few commissions that others felt were beyond their ability and had not dared take on. Increasingly, designers sought him out to transform their wilder ideas into reality.

Interior designer Lin Yin-you (林殷右) has known Zeng for over a decade. He said that because of Zeng's demand for precision, "he always recalculates the measurements we provide him. He carefully deliberates on all the load-bearing elements of a structure, too. More importantly, he is good at balancing a designer's imagination and sensibility with his rationality and practicality. But what makes me admire him the most is that when he encounters designs that are more unusual, he never responds with: 'This is impractical. The idea is impossible to carry out!' Instead, he'll think hard on how to make things work. He regards every assignment as an opportunity to explore his creativity." Out of admiration for him, Lin said, some of his associates in the design circles secretly call him "Iron God."

If the popularity of the industrial style in Taiwan allowed Zeng to break the mold of a traditional blacksmith and gave him the opportunity to explore a new world, the Internet has given

him wings with which he's soared.

Zeng set up his first-ever blog with a friend's help more than ten years ago. Keeping it up to date was natural for him. He had started keeping a daily work journal as an apprentice, in which he'd record what he was learning and feeling. With the launch of his blog, all he needed was to transfer his practice from pen and paper to digital. The blog brought him and his works to the attention of many people. People who needed the services of an ironworker began contacting him directly or telling their designers that they wanted Zeng to craft their metal pieces.

"Traditionally, most of the clientele of an ironworks are passersby," Zeng explained. "Only a small percentage comes through references from designers. But the Internet has opened a door through which we can establish direct contact with the market." Surprisingly, though the opportunities for a blacksmith to demonstrate his skills have become richer, Zeng said one doesn't necessarily make more money from commissions for furniture or designer items than for iron windows and sheet metal buildings. The designer work requires more hours and extra work, especially if a blacksmith has a high demand for quality. Many blacksmiths have therefore gone back to making sheet metal buildings where they can make money more quickly.

A project Zeng's workshop was working on during the writing of this article serves as a prime example. The project was a bus stop shelter in the shape of a whale's tail. Due to budget constraints, the designer's original plan was to make the tail partly of tempered glass and partly of braided steel strips. But after Zeng saw the design, he blurted out: "Wouldn't it be better to make it entirely of braided steel strips? The end product would look so much better." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he realized he'd have to absorb the additional costs if his suggestion was taken. But even so, he didn't regret making the suggestion. In the end, the designer adopted his design, and he had to absorb the additional costs.

Another example was a commission for the entrance gate at Sinpu Elementary School in New Taipei City. Sinpu is a public school and had a limited budget for the gate. They settled for a gate they could afford, but Zeng increased the thickness of some of the steel plates in the door to make the gate sturdier and better-looking. He made the changes without charging the school any extra money for it. He was willing to sacrifice his profit to deliver the best for the schoolchild-



dren. School principal Li Ming-jie (李明杰) said, "We are really indebted to Boss Zeng. Thanks to him, we now have a gate that is both beautiful and easy to push."

"My wife is always asking me how come I'm not making much money even though I seem to be so busy," Zeng said with a wry smile. "I wish things were different too, but I can't help it. I just keep on doing things that look kind of foolish."

The Hong family's living room in northern Taiwan looks livelier because of a slide, custom-made by Zeng and his team.

There must be a screw loose in me somewhere."

The Great Ironworker Age

"In my boss's mind, there are always things more important than making money," said Zhang



Chao-yu (張朝宇), 35, the second oldest worker at Zeng's factory. Once an employee at a design company, Zhang has a lot of fun working with Zeng. "He likes to try new things," Zhang added. "He gets more excited bringing his work to a better, higher level than making money."

What captures Zhang's heart even more is that his boss has the good of his employees at heart. Boss Zeng knows that Zhang is not that young any more and that his fiancé lives alone in Changhua, central Taiwan. "Boss Zeng always encourages me to return to my hometown when I've learned the requisite skills for being a blacksmith here and set up a shop of my own," Zhang remarked.

Another employee, Chen Yu-jia, comes from a family that owns an ironworks in Keelung, northern Taiwan. Zeng knows Chen will eventually go back to his hometown and take over his family business there, but he holds nothing back from him. He shares everything he knows with him, just like he does with everyone who works for him.

"He [Zeng] is the reason why I decided to take up and stay in this trade," Chen Yu-jia declared. In addition to being a good boss, "he set up an unconventional model of success and makes us feel that blacksmithing is a profession we can be proud of."

Making blacksmithing a profession people can be proud of is a goal Zeng has been working toward for decades. Blacksmithing is not a conventionally glamorous occupation, and some may look down on it as lowly manual labor. Zeng's mission is to change that. "I believe that no matter the profession," he said, "one deserves respect as long as one works hard and does his best to cultivate his professional skills and expertise."

Zeng crafted the entrance gate of Sinpu Elementary School in Banciao, New Taipei City.

The desire to change society's traditional perception of ironworkers is a driving force that keeps him improving his workmanship. He has also published a book, the content of which comes from his blog and Facebook page, and has set up a website with other blacksmiths around Taiwan. The website, named "The Great Ironworker Age," showcases examples of metal work and demonstrates how, with the help of refined craftsmanship, a conventional metal item can be transformed into a work of art.

"We don't just meet in cyberspace," Zeng said of the blacksmiths that have joined the website. "We meet in real life too—at dinner parties for example." Participating blacksmiths invite their wives, children, or girlfriends to the gatherings too. By listening to or taking part in the conversations exchanged during the gatherings, family members get to know the professional side of being a blacksmith. They learn that being a blacksmith is not a low-level job, but a dignified occupation that requires professional skills and knowledge.

The website has entered its second year and now boasts a membership of more than 2,800. It bears witness to how a group of blacksmiths are forging a path for themselves and creating a "Great Ironworker Age." Zeng, a major player behind the movement, is happy to see it. In the company of his fellow blacksmiths, he will continue on, seeking to improve his skills, in pursuit of his best work, and to advance the profession for future blacksmiths in Taiwan.

Postal Manager Delivers the Benefits of Vegetarianism

By Zhang Ping

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Wang Yanling

Following his young son's lead, Xiao Bin became a vegetarian. Now Xiao, a post office manager and skillful cook, is winning over his fellow postal employees to vegetarianism too.



Post office manager Xiao Bin purchases ingredients to cook for his colleagues.

It is nearly 11 a.m. The sound of chopping vegetables emanates from the third floor of a post office on Gulang Island, off the coast of Xiamen, southeastern China. It's followed shortly thereafter by the unmistakable sounds of ingredients being stir-fried in a wok. The aroma of food fills the air. Xiao Bin (肖濱), a manager at the post office, is cooking lunch for his colleagues. He typically prepares three or four dishes and a soup for his expectant coworkers.

Xiao is the manager of the mail intake and delivery department at the post office. The post office was one of the few places on the island that remained open when COVID-19 broke out in China at the beginning of the year. With the rest of the stores and restaurants closed, postal employees took to filling their stomachs with instant noodles and milk. But the same fare, day after day, soon got old; everyone began hankering for something different. That's when Xiao started to cook for them.

From first to last, the manager does everything to put a good meal on the table. He shops for the ingredients, washes and prepares the food, and does the actual cooking. He fixes three meals for his colleagues each day he works, and prepares only vegetarian dishes. In order to get his colleagues to accept vegetarian food, he puts a lot of care in planning and cooking the dishes, including surfing the web for inspiration for his menu. His mapo tofu and potato curry dishes are his coworkers' favorites.

Gulang Island covers an area of about two square kilometers (0.77 sq mi). It's a pedestrian-only district; small electric buggies and electric government service vehicles are allowed, but all other vehicles are banned. All mail on the island is delivered by foot. Postal carriers typically walk seven or even eight kilometers in the course of their deliveries. Since the job requires so much physical activity, can eating vegetarian provide the mail carriers with enough energy to sustain them throughout the day?

Postman Deng Cunhui (鄧村輝) said, "I've eaten vegetarian for more than two months now in response to our manager's appeal to adopt a vegetarian diet, but I haven't felt any less energetic." He said that the manager's vegetarian food is very appetizing and that he eats two bowls of rice with the dishes every meal instead of his typical one bowl. Deng added another benefit of having the manager prepare the meals: "We used to eat separately but now we sit at a round table and eat together. It's very homey, very warm."

Xu Songhua (徐松華), another postman, nod-



When COVID-19 broke out in China at the beginning of this year, almost all the stores closed on Gulang Island, southeastern China. The postal service, however, remained open. With nowhere to go to eat, postal employees took to eating instant noodles and milk.

ded his agreement. "I feel healthier eating vegetarian. Even my mind has become less jumbled with negative thoughts. I used to feel that a meatless diet is bland, but now I've found that it doesn't have to be so. Now that I know how delicious vegetarian food can be, I've cut down a lot on my meat intake." When Manager Xiao isn't working, Xu and the other workers cook mostly vegetarian too.

A five-year-old's choice

How did Xiao become a vegetarian? It all started with his son, Shunyu (順宇), now eight years old.

Shunyu was born thinner and frailer than most children. His parents wanted to improve his health, so they bought all kinds of expensive food for him to eat, thinking it must have a high nutritional value. They bought imported food, meat, deep-sea fish, lobsters, you name it. To their dismay, however, the expensive diet didn't improve his health—it actually seemed to make it worse. Shunyu's belly became swollen, he had difficulty moving his bowels, and he was more susceptible to colds and fevers too. A visit to the doctor identified the culprit: an unbalanced diet. The couple learned from the doctor and books they read later that they needed to balance their son's diet. They began to reduce his meat intake, and the boy's health gradually improved.

Shunyu was by nature very kind. When he visited the market and saw animals being killed there for food, he began to refuse to eat meat. Though meat didn't completely disappear from their dining table, the whole family started to lean toward a plant-based diet because of Shunyu.

In October 2017, Shunyu, then five, took part in a "Little Vegetarian" event launched by Tzu



Chi's Jing Si Books and Café in Xiamen, in which participating children took up the challenge of eating vegetarian for 108 days for the sake of protecting the environment. Courses were offered to participants every Saturday afternoon on environmental protection, filial piety, etiquette, etc. Xiao accompanied his son to those courses, and at the invitation of Tzu Chi volunteers, he and his son started volunteering at the bookstore too. They also took part in other Tzu Chi activities. The more Shunyu participated in Tzu Chi events, the firmer his resolution grew to love the Earth and all living creatures. After he and his father took part in a performance in a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony in 2018, he began to insist that his parents eat vegetarian with him.

From meat-eaters to vegetarians

Relatives and friends challenged Shunyu's decision to become a vegetarian. They claimed a vegetarian diet would adversely affect his health and growth, given that he was so young and still growing. But Shunyu had a comeback that was as effective as it was cute: the little boy would bend his arm and flex his biceps. "I'm very healthy!" he'd tell them. He likes in-line skating, playing ping-pong, and lifting small dumbbells, all of which help him keep fit.

A Tzu Chi volunteer asked him, "Does eating vegetarian affect your memory?" Shunyu paused for a second, then launched into a recitation from memory of the *Heart Sutra*. The sutra has 260 Chinese characters, and his recitation was correct

Xiao Bin eats with his colleagues. He started cooking vegetarian for his coworkers during the COVID-19 outbreak. His colleagues love his cooking and the homey atmosphere of sitting down together for a meal. They say that despite the no-meat diet, they get enough energy to carry them through the day.

down to the last character.

The volunteer continued, "Why did you choose to become a vegetarian?" Shunyu replied: "I don't want to cause animals to be hurt. I'm used to a vegetarian diet now. Eating vegetarian makes me feel great."

"How long will you remain a vegetarian?" the volunteer pursued.

"For the rest of my life!" the youngster answered in earnest.

When Shunyu's grandfather learned that his son's entire family had become vegetarian, he nagged and questioned them about the wisdom of their decision. He was especially worried that Shunyu wouldn't be getting enough nutrition. Every time Shunyu visited and ate with his grandparents, Shunyu's grandpa always put meat in the boy's bowl, but Shunyu steadfastly refused to eat it. His grandfather only came around when he saw how Shunyu's health was getting better with a vegetarian diet. That was when he stopped grumbling about it.

Now Shunyu's grandmother cooks only vegetarian when the boy visits with his parents. Shunyu's mother, Yan Shuling (閻書玲), says that since her son adopted a vegetarian diet, his immu-



nity has gotten better. He falls ill a lot less often than his schoolmates. Even when he catches an occasional cold, he recovers in a few days without having to take any medicine. Now they no longer have to worry about his health.

There are other benefits that have grown from Shunyu's vegetarian diet too. One is that he has learned to cherish food more. He has developed the good habit of finishing every morsel in his bowl or on his plate to prevent any food from going to waste. His mother is very happy to see his change.

Shuling's happiness is not just from seeing her son thrive. She and Xiao used to fight a lot due to their differences in personalities and living habits. Their disagreements used to make Shuling very upset—to the extent that her health was affected and she often felt under the weather. However, after Xiao accompanied his son to the "Little Vegetarian" courses and began taking part in Tzu Chi activities—including study groups and making visits to the needy—he softened a great deal. The couple rarely argues now.

A smile spread across her face as Shuling said, "Ever since he [Xiao] joined Tzu Chi and became a vegetarian, he seems to have undergone a transformation. He became more spirited and says 'thank you' a lot. His hours became more regular and he often gets up very early to read. I'm very grateful to Shunyu for leading his dad to Tzu Chi and also for transforming our family into vegetarians. The atmosphere in our family has become very positive. I really like how our family is now."

Xiao Shunyu poses with his parents. Under the boy's influence, his parents became vegetarians and have happily reaped many benefits from it.

Xiao talks about the many benefits he has reaped from becoming a vegetarian. He says that his health has improved, that he's become more peaceful at heart, and that his peacefulness has led him to be more thoughtful towards others. As a result, the atmosphere in his family has become more harmonious. He and his wife get along very well now. To an outsider, their love for each other is obvious in the way they interact with and look at each other.

Xiao often shares with his colleagues at work how eating vegetarian over the past two years has changed him physically and psychologically. In addition to supervising his coworkers to help make sure that they provide the best service to the people they serve, he urges his colleagues to take good care of their physical and emotional wellbeing. "We're getting along better than before," the manager said. "When I talk to them about work-related matters, their attitudes are more positive and they are more willing to share with me what they think."

Shunyu has now stuck to a vegetarian diet for three years. Because of him, his parents became vegetarian, and his father has helped his colleagues warm to vegetarianism. It all started with the boy's love for all living creatures and the Earth, and like a ripple in a pond, the effects of that love are spreading. ❀

A Freedom Forged by Forgiveness

By Gao Zhao-liang

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Zhan Da-wei

After he was released from prison, he became a volunteer to make amends for the wrongs he did to society. His conscience, however, couldn't rest until he had obtained forgiveness from the person he had victimized.



Yang Zhi-wei (right) volunteers in a Tzu Chi recycling station. A reformed former inmate, he feels that he is gaining a new lease on life like the garbage he helps to recycle.

Though it was just after four in the morning, before dawn had even broken, Yang Zhi-wei (楊志偉) was already up, getting ready for the day. He lives in central Taiwan, in the township of Puxin, Changhua County. After chanting the *Earth Treasury Sutra*, he quickly donned a thick jacket—it was a chilly morning—and hurried to an animal farm, where he loaded some bottles of warm goat milk onto his motor scooter for delivery. It would take more than two hours to make the rounds of all his households. When he was done, he had another job waiting for him.

I first met Yang two years ago, just after he'd been released from Hualien Prison, in eastern Taiwan. Gao Wei Ying (高惟瑛), a fellow Tzu Chi volunteer, accompanied Yang back to his home in Puxin, Changhua County, and then brought him to visit me at my home in Yongjing, Changhua County.

Sporting a crew cut, Yang impressed me as a man of few words. He quietly listened to me tell him about the recycling activities and monthly study groups in which he could participate. "It's good to volunteer," I advised him. "But first and foremost, you need to find a job and do your best at it." He nodded at my words and, pressing his palms together, thanked me for my advice.

Yang was born in 1982, the second oldest child in his family, and the only boy. He grew up in an affluent environment, but became rebellious when he entered junior high. He smoked, cut classes, and he even began doing drugs after entering senior high. He took to robbery to get money to pay for his drug use, and he was arrested. He ended up in a youth rehabilitation center at 16, which interrupted his high school education. He was released from the correction facility three years later, when he was 19, just in time to begin his compulsory military service. He served on Kinmen, one of Taiwan's offshore islands.

He returned to Taiwan after his stint in the military, ready to start a new phase in his life. Who was to know that it was just the beginning of another dark period?

He soon landed a job maintaining electrical equipment at a hotel, making a regular income of about 30,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$990) a month. This should have been enough to support himself, but he took to gambling and visiting red-light establishments in his free time. With this lifestyle, he became unable to make ends meet. "At a casino, I could easily win 60,000 Taiwanese dollars a night," Yang recalled. "Once I tasted what it was like to make money so easily, all I could think

about was how to make quick money." As a result, he quit his job at the hotel and began dealing in scrap metal.

To outside observers, he was a legal recycling merchant, but in actuality he was buying and selling stolen goods. When business was good, he could rake in upwards of 200,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$6,600) a month. The "good days" didn't last long though. The police caught wind of what he was doing and began working on leads to arrest him. He had, by that time, run up some debt as a result of his gambling habit. To repay his debt, he borrowed money from loan sharks. He was eventually driven to the end of his tether and committed another robbery at age 26. He was caught and was given a heavy prison sentence of 16 years.

His father's passing

Barely two years into his sentence, he received bad news from his family. His father, who had always showered him with love, had passed away from esophageal cancer. Before he died, he told Yang's mother not to let their son attend his funeral. He made that request because he knew that if Yang attended, he would have to do so in shackles, and he worried that the looks from their relatives would hurt his son's dignity. Yang broke down in tears when he heard that. He thought about how he had never had his father's good at heart or done anything for him, and yet on his deathbed his father was still thinking and worrying about him.

Overwhelmed by grief and the knowledge that he'd never be able to show his love for his father, he was filled with deep remorse for all the bad things he had done and for the sadness he must have caused his parents. A resolution formed in his heart to mend his ways and turn over a new leaf. He decided to finish his high school education to repay his father's love for him. For that purpose, he enrolled in the high school affiliated with Hualien Prison.

In the year he was about to graduate, a series of gas explosions triggered by underground gas leaks occurred in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. During their regular visits to Hualien Prison, Gao Wei Ying and other Tzu Chi volunteers encouraged inmates there to donate to help explosion victims. They said that no matter how much the inmates donated—even if it was just one Taiwanese dollar (US\$0.03)—it was a show of love. Yang donated a five-dollar postage stamp. When he received the receipt for his donation, he



found that a Tzu Chi volunteer had donated 95 dollars (US\$3.15) in his name and round up his donation to 100 dollars.

"Everything the volunteers do is to benefit society," Yang pondered. "I, on the other hand, have done nothing but harm to others." He began to hope that he could join Tzu Chi after he got out of prison. That was why volunteer Gao accompanied him to my home when he was let out on parole in 2017. Since Yang's hometown is in Changhua County, just as mine is, and I, like him, am a former inmate, he was assigned to my care.

Less than a month later, while Yang was still transitioning back to society, he fell from a high place at work and broke his arm. The accident greatly depressed him. I tried to cheer him up and give him a lot of encouragement. His arm needed three months to recover. I tided him over that time financially and drove him around every day to take part in volunteer activities. At my encouragement, he signed up for volunteer training too.

For 70,000 dollars

When Yang's arm was healed and he resumed working, I noticed how hard he was working to

Yang Zhi-wei (holding microphone) and Gao Zhao-liang (高肇良), the author of this article, share their personal stories in a prison. Their presentation helps inmates realize that it is never too late to mend their ways.

WENG HUA-LING

make money. He'd leave home after four in the morning to deliver goat milk. Then, at seven-thirty, he'd arrive at an ironworks to do hourly work. If there was no work for him at the factory, he drove a truck to collect recyclable materials for a recycling dealer. Seeing how driven he was, I asked him one day out of curiosity why he was working so hard to make money. I asked if he was in financial straits and needed help.

His face took on a solemn expression as he answered my questions. He said that ten years before, he had taken 77,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$2,550) from someone in a robbery. Though he had served his sentence for that crime, he couldn't forget the terrified, despairing look on the victim's face. He often thought of what happened that day, and he was full of remorse. After joining Tzu Chi, he came to a deeper realization of the karmic law

of cause and effect. "I want to apologize directly to the victim and return the money I took from her," he said. "I should be able to save 100,000 Taiwanese dollars [US\$3,300] by delivering goat milk for a year."

I was moved beyond words when I heard what he said. He had been in Tzu Chi for just a short time, and he was still struggling to get back on his feet economically. Yet he was already showing himself to be deeply repentant, and he was working hard to redress his mistakes. With time, I also noticed how he was demonstrating a real enthusiasm in his volunteer work. My faith in him grew stronger and stronger.

Please forgive me

More than a year later, Yang had finally scraped together enough money to return what he "owed" to the victim. I contacted an officer I knew, Cai Xin-hua (蔡欣桦), director of the Probation Officers Office at the Changhua District Prosecutors Office, and asked for her help. She assigned probation officer Sun Qi-jun (孫啟俊) to handle this case. Sun went through the files from years ago and was finally able to contact the victim, Ms. Cai. He informed her of the situation and asked if she'd be willing to meet with Yang. She agreed, and so a restorative justice meeting was set up.

Yang and Cai met on November 28, 2019, in a conference room at the Changhua District Prosecutors Office. The Office had assigned a teacher from the Changhua University of Education to serve as a neutral third-party facilitator. The atmosphere in the room was solemn and awkward in the beginning, but the facilitator soon helped break the ice between Cai and Yang. They had a very positive interaction from there on out.

Looking at Cai, Yang said in tears, "Hurting you is the most regrettable thing I've ever done in my life. Though I've served my rightful sentence, I can never forget the wrong I did to you. I've been wanting to apologize to you in person for a long time, but I haven't had the chance until now.

"My dad passed away while I was serving my prison term. It shook me awake and brought me to my senses. It taught me the importance of practicing repentance and gratitude and set me on a path to change myself for the better. I finished my high school education while in prison, and I've been volunteering for Tzu Chi since my release to make up for the wrongs I did to society. I now work at a factory and live a stable life. Ms. Cai, I'm very sorry. Will you forgive me?"



Yang does many odd jobs to make a living. In his free time, he dedicates himself to volunteering. His life now is filled with a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Cai burst into tears upon hearing Yang's apology and his request for forgiveness. She said to him, "The fact that you are now able to return the money to me shows that you must be doing okay financially and are no longer a burden to society. I'm very happy to see you doing well. Keep going and keep up the good work. I forgive you."

Never too late

Yang actively participates in volunteer activities in his free time. He does recycling work, helps clean up the local Tzu Chi office, and attends study groups. He also visits prisons to extend care to inmates. At the end of 2019, he completed his volunteer training and received his certification from Master Cheng Yen.

The Master says that repentance leads to the purification of the heart. Yang keeps these words firmly in his mind. He thanks all those people who have helped him along the way. "I used to be a selfish person who thought only of myself," he said. "I never gave to others, but only received. I've participated in a lot of volunteer work these past two years, and through that I've learned how wonderful it is to live a full life of purpose. My life now is as different from my life in the past as heaven is different from hell." He has seen how sincere repentance can lead to the healing of wounds. He pledges to stick to the path of doing good and to make the best use of the life given to him by his parents. ☸

If the Mountain Will Not Come to You

By Wang Tuan-cheng

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

A prophet said to a crowd of people, “Do you believe that I can get that mountain up ahead to come to me?”

Everyone shook their heads, saying, “No, that’s impossible.”

The prophet said, “Okay, just you wait and see. I’m now calling that mountain over.”

A hush fell over the crowd. Everyone watched with their eyes wide open.

“Come here, mountain!” the prophet bellowed. But the mountain remained motionless. Everyone looked at each other, not knowing what to think.

Unfazed, the prophet called out again, “Mountain, come over here this instant!” The mountain remained stock-still. People began to whisper among themselves. Despite their murmuring, the prophet was unaffected, looking as confident as before. He said to the gathering, “She’ll definitely come to me when I call out to her one more time.”

He tried again, this time in a louder voice. “Mountain, behave yourself and come over.” Still, the mountain didn’t move an inch. This time, the crowd erupted into ruthless jeers and bitter sneers for the prophet.

His smile didn’t waver for even a second. Slowly and surely, he said to the people, “Okay, since the mountain will not come to me, I’ll go to her.” With that, he walked toward the mountain in big strides, his head held high.

What is the moral of this story? Though we may not be able to change our circumstances, we can change our response to those circumstances.

As a matter of fact, circumstances never change for us. It is always we who have to adapt to the circumstances. That’s what the prophet meant

when he said, “Since the mountain will not come to me, I’ll go to her.”

An old Chinese saying, roughly translated, goes like this: “When one comes to a dead end, one must think of change. With change comes solutions and breakthroughs.” With this saying, our ancestors were teaching us the importance of adaptability. If we are flexible, if we learn to look at things from a different angle, even a dead end can lead to endless possibilities. When your perspective changes, the direction of your thinking changes, and a different world is revealed to you. When that happens, the tangled web that traps you unravels and sets you free.

Everyone is familiar with the proverb: “All roads lead to Rome.” If one road is blocked, we can always go by another. No hardship is insurmountable. If you are going through a rough patch, tell yourself, “Don’t worry, it will work out in the end.” And it always does, unless you choose to give up. If you can think positively, the sun will shine into the dark corner of your soul and help you see a beautiful spring day outside the window.

Life doesn’t come easy. Though you may encounter many setbacks and tribulations in the course of your life, they can help you appreciate how good it is when things do go your way, just as you can never know light without darkness. American author Og Mandino (1923-1996) eloquently expressed the wisdom in this perspective: “I will love the light for it shows me the way, yet I will endure the darkness because it shows me the stars.” All it takes is a change of mindset. The mind alone creates everything. A shift of mindset can mean the difference between



heaven and hell, even though the circumstances remain the same.

We often hear news of suicide in the media. Some people might defend those who took their lives by saying, “Who doesn’t love their life? Who would commit suicide if not because they really can’t take it anymore?” Such arguments seem valid on the surface, but they don’t stand closer scrutiny and examination. Pain is just a feeling. When we encounter situations that bring us pain or make us suffer, we have two choices. We can let the pain eat us up and keep us on edge all day long, or we can reinforce our minds with upbeat and affirmative thoughts and channel the pain into a force for good.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen says, “Everyone has unlimited potential; every life has endless possibilities.” Unlimited potential and endless possibilities are borne of a positive, vibrant mindset. We can all develop such a mindset by practicing affirmative thinking, such as “gratitude, respect, and love.” By practicing positive values such as “gratitude, respect, and love,” we can create endless positive energies for ourselves.

A negative mindset, on the other hand, is destructive and weakens us. Greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt give rise to hatred and afflictions and sap our energies. When negativity sucks up all our energies, we lose hope and see no point in living.

Depression is like the pandemic raging across the world. An attitude of cynicism and hostility is spreading across the globe too. This is all due to negative thinking getting the upper hand. Negative thinking is like an invisible yet insidious virus, infecting lives and leading to depression and a climbing suicide rate.

If one’s depression is due to physiological reasons, one should seek medical help. If it is a result of negative emotions, the best cure is by practicing positivity.

Everyone hits a low point now and then, but some people are better at climbing out of the dark pit of depression. Practice gratitude. Be mindful of things that affirm life’s value. Happiness is not so hard to attain because it does not depend on the circumstances—it depends on your attitude. And your attitude is within your control. ♣

Recycling Assistive Devices Keeps Love Growing

By Xie Guo-rong, Huang Chao-chang, Lin Pei-zhen, and Cheng San-ling

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Lin Pei-zhen

Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan recycle and provide second-hand assistive devices and medical equipment to those who need them. Such a service extends the life of the equipment and eases the financial burdens for patients and their families.



What are assistive devices? And who needs them?

Assistive devices help people carry out their daily activities more easily and safely. They are used primarily by persons with disabilities, the elderly, or patients who have difficulty taking care of themselves due to illness or injury. Examples include wheelchairs, walking aids, and electric beds. Such devices can alleviate the effects of disabilities and make a caregiver's job easier.

An assistive device is easy to obtain if one is staying in a medical or nursing facility, but what about those who need such equipment after being discharged from such a facility? An oxygen concentrator or electric bed can cost tens of thousands of Taiwanese dollars (one U.S. dollar is about 30 Taiwanese dollars). A wheelchair is not cheap either. Taking care of seriously ill family members is already emotionally and physically demanding enough—the added financial burden from having to purchase assistive equipment just contributes to the stress of family members, especially for those who are economically strained. Furthermore, buying assistive equipment carries an additional burden of deciding what to do with it should it no longer be needed. Is it better to let the equipment sit idle, or dispose of it?

Let love reach more people

In 2006, a group of Tzu Chi volunteers went to extend their care and support to a Tzu Chi sister whose son had become paralyzed from the shoulders down as a result of a traffic accident. During their visit, another volunteer happened to deliver a used electric bed to the household for the disabled son to use. When this volunteer was leaving, the Tzu Chi sister tried to give him some money to cover the fuel for the delivery, but the volunteer adamantly refused to take it. He left after successfully turning down her offer of money.

One of the members from that group of volunteers was Xie Guo-rong (謝國榮). The incident impressed him and piqued his curiosity about the service the volunteer had provided. A few days later, he visited the volunteer, who due to a lack of space stored the assistive devices and medical

Volunteer Xie Guo-rong (left) and Mr. Zeng (in the gray shirt) help the latter's mother out of a car and into a wheelchair. The Zeng family had requested that volunteers deliver a wheelchair and other assistive equipment to them.

equipment that he had collected on apartment floor landings. When asked about his service of collecting second-hand medical equipment and delivering it to people in need, he said: "Master Cheng Yen says that illness often plunges people into poverty, while the poor tend to develop severe illnesses because they cannot afford treatment for common diseases. I'm just doing what I can to help those who have been stricken by misfortunes and have found their finances stretched thin."

This volunteer, with his elderly mother in tow, drove an old truck everywhere to put assistive and medical devices in the hands of those who needed them. His altruistic spirit and actions moved Xie to no end. He pledged right there and then to follow in this volunteer's footsteps and give the same service. He also decided to work toward establishing an online assistive device platform to help more people.

True to his pledge, Xie began delivering recycled patient beds and other equipment to needy families. Every delivery was a moving experience for him and further strengthened his determination to stay the course. Whenever he learned of anyone in need of his service, he'd put aside his design business and travel to wherever he was needed around Taiwan to make free deliveries. Making five or six deliveries in a day was typical for him. He and his team served countless people over the course of more than a decade.

On March 23, 2017, after Xie's incessant efforts, an online assistive device platform for Hualien, eastern Taiwan, was established. In 2018, with the help of the director of the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development, Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川), and his colleagues, the platform was expanded to serve the entire area of eastern Taiwan. Anyone in Hualien and Taitung, which comprise the mountainous eastern part of Taiwan, can access Tzu Chi's service via the platform.

Immediately afterwards, more platforms were set up for northern Taiwan. Group chats were created on a messaging app to spread and exchange information. The equipment circulating via the platforms came from private sources as well as Tzu Chi recycling stations. Information about what equipment has been provided to which families, and for what reasons, is listed on the platforms to avoid any misunderstanding that the foundation is making a profit from the service.

A cycle of goodness

At the beginning of 2019, a location where recycled assistive devices can be stored and where

volunteers can gather to repair and maintain the equipment was set up in Taipei. It opened for the first time on March 16 of the same year. A small group of volunteers came together to organize equipment by type, and to separate the devices that were in good working order from those that needed repairs and further work.

Zhang Jin-xiong (張進雄) was one of the volunteers doing this work. His late mother had been a dementia patient, and he had once adapted a portable toilet chair for her to use. Before she passed away, his mother had become bedridden due to a fall, so Tzu Chi volunteer Wang Qiu-man (王秋滿) suggested he apply to the Tzu Chi assistive device program for an electric bed for her to use. Zhang submitted the application, and before long Xie Guo-rong and other volunteers delivered the bed to his home, located on the third floor of a walk-up apartment. Zhang was deeply touched



when he saw the volunteers maneuver the bed up the narrow stairs to his home.

When he needed help, the Tzu Chi volunteers, who were strangers to him, reached out to him without asking for anything in return. Inspired by their selfless work, he decided to pay back by helping other needy people. That's how he began helping the program repair and maintain electric wheelchairs. After his mother passed away, he also gave her toilet chair to the program for circulation.

Delivery

One day at noon, a patient's family called and asked for Tzu Chi's assistive device service. The patient was to be discharged from the hospital that very afternoon, and her doctor had told her family that she would need an electric bed, a wheelchair, a portable toilet chair, and other equipment to use at home. Xie Guo-rong and another volunteer, Zeng Li-wen (曾立文), had already made two deliveries that morning, but as soon as they received the request, Xie quickly finished his lunch to get ready for another one. At the same time, volunteer Lai Yun-xin (賴雲新) checked the wheelchair to be delivered to make sure it was in good working order. He also cleaned the toilet chair to be delivered. Volunteers always make sure that every item is in good condition before delivering them.

Xie and another volunteer arrived at the building just as the patient and her two sons arrived back home in a car from the hospital. Mrs. Zeng, the patient, was suffering from cancer. She had developed ascites and was no longer able to walk on her own. Xie pushed the wheelchair to the family's car for her to be transferred into it. One of the sons slowly pushed his mother outwards from inside the car while the other son stood at the car door to lift his mom into the wheelchair. "Mom, put your hands on my shoulders," the son at the car door said. "Mom, I'm lifting you up.... Mom, I'm putting you in the wheelchair."

Once Mrs. Zeng was seated properly in the wheelchair, the son started pushing her towards their home. He looked heavy-hearted. When they reached some steps leading to an elevator, the son insisted on lifting the wheelchair with his mom in it up the stairs on his own. He walked laboriously up the steps, then softly put his mom down and

Xie made a second trip to the Zeng family to deliver an electric bed.



pushed her into the elevator. The volunteers followed silently behind, carrying the toilet chair they had brought, their hearts touched by the son's gentle care of his mom.

Once they were inside the house, Xie went with the son into Mrs. Zeng's room to measure the space available for the electric bed. Then Xie placed a call to volunteer Zeng Li-wen at the assistive device storage quarters to confirm with him the size of the bed for Mrs. Zeng. After that, Xie discussed with the son how to best fit the bed into the room so that his mother, who couldn't lie flat on her back because of her ascites, could have a comfortable place to rest. They also settled on a time when the bed would be delivered to their home.

A bowl of noodles

A bowl of instant noodles once left such a deep impression on Xie that even though he didn't touch a bit of it, he would never forget about it.

On January 1, 2019, Xie was asked to deliver an electric bed to Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, for an 89-year-old Mr. Zhang to use. His daughter-in-law, Liao, had applied for the bed for him.

Volunteers gather to maintain, repair, and organize recycled assistive devices and medical equipment.

This was the second time Xie had served this family.

In 2018, Liao had applied for an electric bed, a portable toilet chair, and other assistive equipment for her husband, a cancer patient. More than a month after the equipment was delivered to their home, Xie received a phone call from Liao asking for the equipment to be taken back since they no longer needed the items. When Xie went to collect the equipment, two children in the family pitched in to help him out. One of them was an elementary school student.

In 2019, when the child saw Xie again, he asked him curiously, "Sir, you work on a holiday too? Is this your job?"

"No," Xie answered. "I'm doing this as a volunteer."

While Xie was discussing with older members of the family where to put the bed, the boy went to get a glass of juice for him. "Sir, take a break



and have some juice.” Xie politely declined the offer, but the boy wouldn’t give up, and he kept trying to persuade him to drink the juice. Then, as if he had suddenly recalled something, the boy ran into the house.

A few minutes later, Xie and the boy’s uncle began moving the bed into the house. When they passed through the kitchen to get into a room, Xie saw the boy inspecting several instant noodle packets in front of him. It looked like he was going to prepare some noodles to eat.

After Xie had helped put the bed in place and explained to the family how to operate it, he got ready to leave. But before he could do so, the boy stopped him, saying, “Sir, I’ve prepared this bowl of instant noodles for you. I know you haven’t had dinner yet. I made sure it’s vegetarian so it’s okay for you to eat.”

Just as with the juice, Xie declined the boy’s kind offer. The boy said to him anxiously, “I know you have your principles, that you cannot accept anything from us. But if you pretended you were

Volunteer Lai Yun-xin cleans a portable toilet chair and makes sure it is in good working order before it is delivered to a family.

buying the noodles from me, then could you eat them?” This sweet, thoughtful child really won Xie over.

“I really appreciate it, child. Eat them for me,” Xie said to him.

The gratitude the boy showed warmed Xie’s heart beyond measure and their interaction became one of Xie’s most cherished memories.

Countless heart-warming stories like the one above have taken place during the delivery trips volunteers make to families. A patient or family member’s grateful look or simple gesture of appreciation is enough to touch a volunteer to no end and keep him going. Hopefully, through Tzu Chi’s assistive device service, more recycled second-hand medical equipment can gain a new lease of life and benefit more people. ❀

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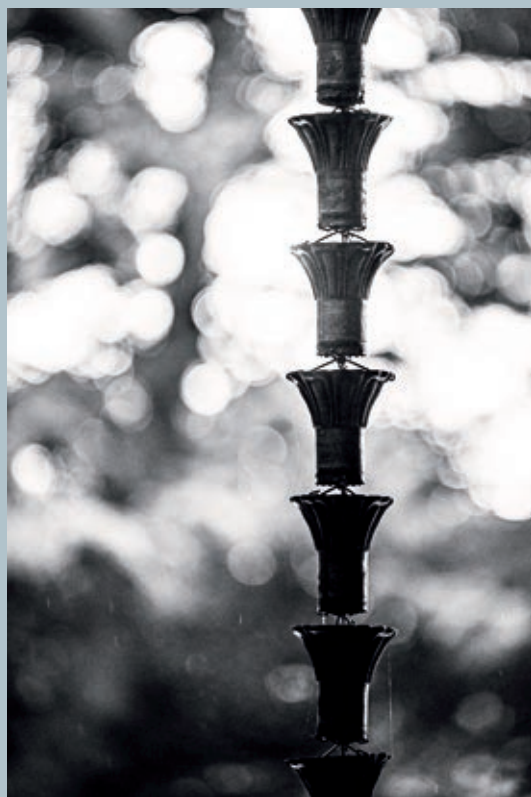
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Although life is filled with pain and suffering, it is also full of hope and love.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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