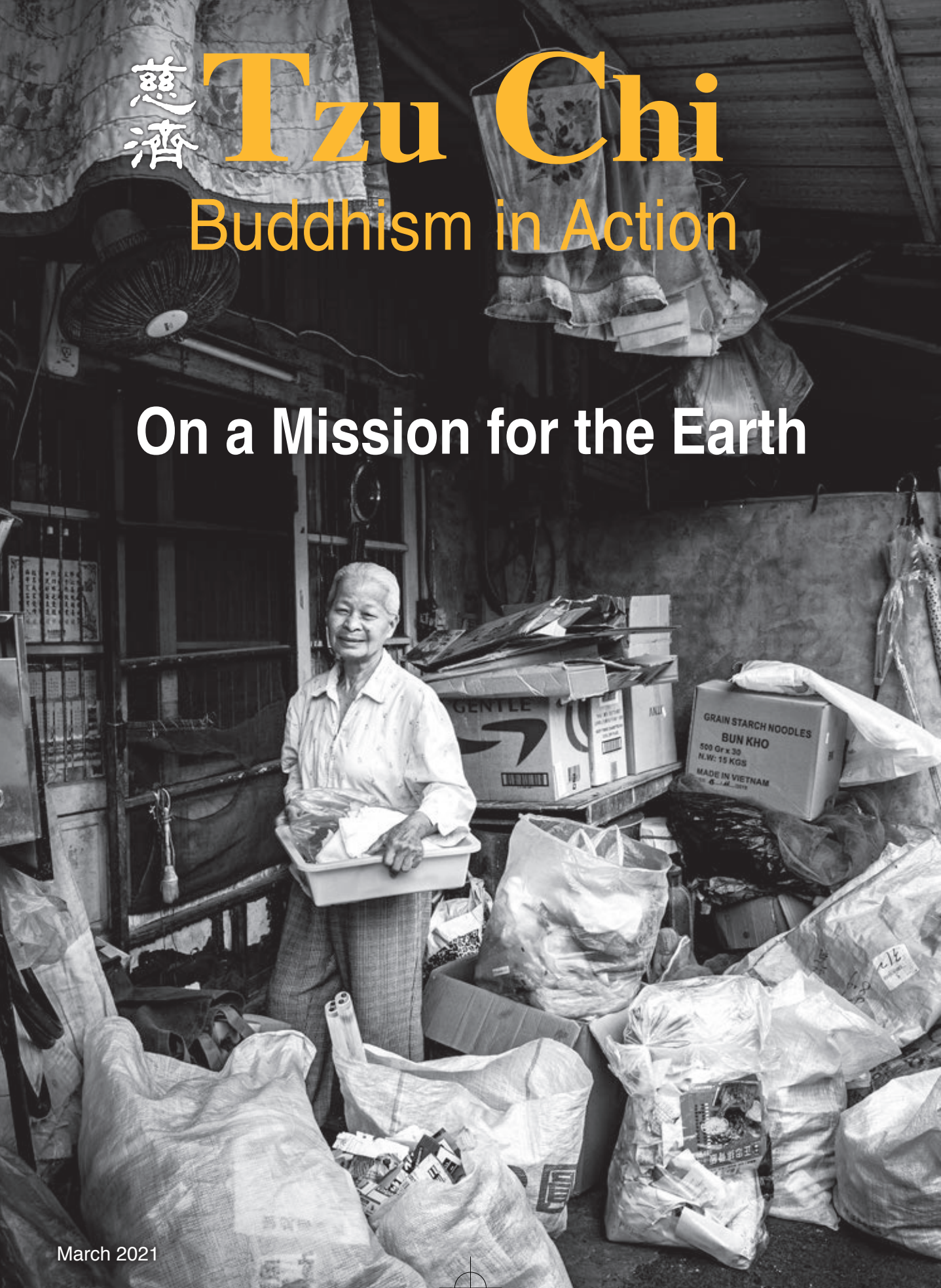


慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

On a Mission for the Earth



It's Time to Be a Vegetarian

Translated by Teresa Chang



HSIAO YIU-HWA

The immense fear and anxiety due to COVID-19 has been with us for a year, and yet the pandemic continues. What can we do? I believe now is the best time to abstain from eating meat to cultivate blessings for the world. Not killing animals for food prevents bad karma, nurtures our compassion, and sows blessings for humankind. Let's put our love into action in this way for the good of the world.

Our craving for meat leads us to slaughter and eat animals. But many people, while satisfying their palate, forget or ignore that animals are a source of epidemics and other diseases. Illness can find its way into your body simply by eating meat.

Just as humans are afraid of pain and dying, so are animals. Resentment can arise in them when their lives are forcibly ended. Such resentment builds up as more animals are killed. This will eventually trigger a backlash and cause harm in the world.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, more than 220 million animals are killed for human consumption each day. That works out to 2,500 animals per second. These numbers do not even include marine creatures or wildlife. Eighty billion animals are raised each year just to meet the global need for meat. Imagine the amount of waste so many animals must produce, and how that contributes to pollution around the world.

If more people would adopt a vegetarian diet, fewer animals would need to be raised, kept, and killed for food, which would reduce pollution. This would lighten the burden of the Earth. I expect every Tzu Chi volunteer to set a good example by eating vegetarian and encouraging others to do the same. The Buddha taught that all living creatures have a buddha nature. All living beings deserve to be cherished and protected. Thus, it's our inescapable duty to protect and save all lives.

Eating vegetarian is not just a wonderful way for us to show our love for all living creatures—it is also good for our own health and spirit. Many doctors in our Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan have switched to a vegetarian diet, and they remain strong in body and sharp in mind, capable of performing operations that last up to 20 hours. Some

Tzu Chi volunteers used to be big meat eaters, but they've become vegetarian too. They said that many health conditions that used to bother them had improved or even disappeared after they became vegetarian. Because they've personally experienced the benefits of such a lifestyle choice, they are the best spokespeople for vegetarianism.

Many vegetarians have found it hard to get their families to switch to vegetarianism too. If you are in the same boat, don't lose heart. Try to focus your family's attention on the benefits of vegetarianism and the good it will do them and the world. In our year-end blessing ceremonies last year, we viewed a video with a segment showing a six-year-old urging everyone to eat vegetarian. He said it's no use to fear the pandemic, and that the best way to help end it is by eating vegetarian. Though very young, he doesn't yield to the temptation of delicious meat dishes. His classmates have even made fun of him, but he remains unwavering in his embrace of vegetarianism. He sticks to his diet of choice and does his best to promote it.

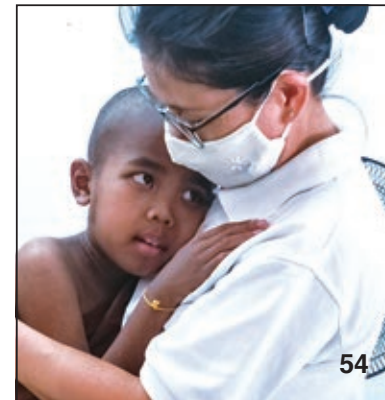
Many people in the world do whatever pleases them and eat whatever they desire without thinking much about it. But this child is different. He holds to what he believes is right. He tells us to harbor love in our hearts, to protect animals and not to eat them. If even a young child can do this, I believe we can too.

It's my deepest hope that everyone will adopt a vegetarian diet. It is a hope I have held in my heart for 60 years. I realize that it can be hard to become a vegetarian, but I'm urging people to take it up more strongly than ever before. That's because the situation is different now. The pandemic is a wake-up call for all of us. It's time for everyone to make the switch. It's time we step up our efforts to promote vegetarianism. Eating vegetarian is not as difficult as you imagine. I want everyone to understand the health benefits of a such a diet and how much good we can do to the Earth by refraining from raising and killing animals for food. Let's expand the love we have for our fellow human beings to include all other living creatures. Working together, we can create a multitude of blessings for the world and help keep disasters at bay. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

March 2021



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All living beings deserve to be cherished and protected. Master Cheng Yen urges everyone to love animals and sow blessings for the world by eating vegetarian.

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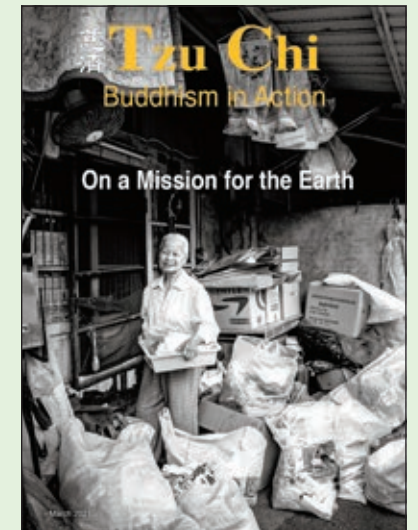
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Tzu Chi brings aid and love to the underserved around the world.

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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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The Year That “Normal” Stopped

The COVID-19 pandemic has spanned two winters, upending the world as we knew it and disrupting the lives of billions. People the world over have reshaped their daily routines to cope with the challenges brought by the coronavirus. It is everyone's hope that life will soon return to normal.

Zimbabwe, in southern Africa, suffered from a lack of personal protective equipment after the pandemic broke out. Some children at Murerekwa Primary School in Masvingo Province had no choice but to wear makeshift masks. Tzu Chi volunteers donated a thousand medical masks and an infrared thermometer to the school in November 2020 so that the lives of students and staffers there could be better protected.

HLENGISILE JIYANE



HENGSALE JIYANE

HE ZHI WEI



COURTESY OF TZU CHI SOUTH AFRICA

New Norm

Wearing a mask, washing your hands often, and maintaining a social distance are the basics in the battle against the coronavirus. Personal protective equipment has as a result become a daily necessity, whether in hospitals or personal lives.

- 1 After lockdowns were imposed in Zimbabwe, a rising incidence of malnutrition among children was reported in Epworth, an area in Harare Province with many destitute people. Tzu Chi volunteers, after obtaining permission, resumed their meal program for children in the area to help tackle this issue. A child is pictured here washing his hands with water and soap prepared by Tzu Chi volunteers before receiving his meal.
- 2 Patients sit at least one meter (3.3 feet) apart on long benches in the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.
- 3 When a shipment of Tzu Chi-donated personal protective equipment arrived in South Africa in mid-April 2020, Netcare Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg sent an ambulance to a local Tzu Chi office to transport some masks and protective clothing back to the hospital.



2



1

The New Poor

Whereas COVID-19 has affected the world on a global level, different places have shown different degrees of suffering. People working in tourism haven't seen any signs of their industry making a comeback yet, and many have become the new poor. At the same time, lockdowns and other preventive measures that governments have put in place to contain the virus have pushed many low-income families to the brink of hunger.

- 1 Tourism was an important mainstay of the economy in the Malaysian state of Melaka before COVID-19 took the world by storm. The Stadthuys, in the city of Melaka, is a historical landmark built by the Dutch in 1650. Tricycles could often be seen weaving around the landmark before the pandemic, but after the coronavirus started keeping tourists away, the livelihoods of local tricycle operators were severely impacted. Tzu Chi volunteers reached out to this group of people in December 2020 by providing them with financial aid.
- 2 Myanmar is among the Southeast Asian countries that has been hit hardest by the coronavirus. In November 2020, Tzu Chi worked with the Yangon provincial government to distribute rice to 10,500 underprivileged families in Thaketa Township, Yangon, to help them through the crisis. Government pandemic restrictions had made it difficult for these families to get by. Many people in the township are from out of town. They can't afford the rent due to unstable incomes, and have built illegal, makeshift homes to live in. ☸

A Different World

By Yap Chai Hoon and Chan Shi Yih

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely damaged economies the world over, including that of Malaysia. In response, Tzu Chi initiated a relief program that offered money to needy families for three months. Volunteers wanted the timely help to ignite a spark of hope and help the disadvantaged cope with the challenges facing them.

Mohd Irzwan Zulfitri bin Hamzah, 28, lives in Ampang, Selangor, Malaysia. He was laid off by his employer after the Malaysian government implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Without a full-time job, Irzwan became a delivery man. He believed that so long as he worked hard, he would be able to put food on the table for his family. Unfortunately, he lost his job again after the government implemented the Recovery Movement Control Order in June and the demand for delivery personnel dropped as a result of more businesses returning to more or less normal.

With two children and a third on the way, Irzwan desperately needed help. "My son brought home a flyer from school about a Tzu Chi COVID-19 relief program. I read it and immediately decided to apply," said Irzwan. His application was approved, entitling him to three monthly installments of financial aid. He received the first payment in September 2020, with which he bought powdered milk and diapers for his children and daily necessities for his family. He used the second payment, in October, to start a business in front of his home selling ready-to-eat Malay food. He said in a phone conversation with a Tzu Chi volunteer that his business was doing well, which would at least help keep his family afloat while he

continued to look for a job.

Irzwan's situation is representative of those of many others in Malaysia and around the world. The pandemic triggered a recession unprecedented in its severity. It seems that no country has been left untouched by either the disease or its economic ramifications.

Wong Chin Yoong (黃錦榮) is an associate professor in the Department of Economics, Faculty of Business and Finance, at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman in Malaysia. He pointed out that it would be difficult for the major industries most directly impacted by the pandemic—aviation, retailing, lodging, and tourism—to return to their past glory. He said this impact would extend also to small neighborhood stores. This is because people's routines have been reshaped by the pandemic; many people have acclimated to cooking at home or having their meals delivered to them. It's hard for people to go out shopping now or to spend money. Even when the economy is allowed to reopen, things will not be the same. Many companies have downsized, cut staff, or cut pay, taking down with them the livelihoods of many people.

Under such dark clouds of uncertainty, Tzu Chi volunteers visited residents of government low-cost flats to extend their care. They learned during such visits that many people were struggling with unstable incomes. To relieve their eco-



nomie difficulties, the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor branch decided to launch an aid program to help. The program was called "Kita1Keluarga," meaning "we are one family."

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation. The diverse cultures and languages of its people are a source of advantage and pride for the nation. After the pandemic broke out, the Malaysian government urged its citizens to live out the spirit of "Kita Jaga Kita" (We take care of us). In other words, the government hoped that people of all ethnicities could help one another in their joint fight against COVID-19. In line with this spirit, Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor launched the "Kita1Keluarga" program.

Lim Mei Mei (林美美), one of the persons in charge of this program, said, "In this worldwide crisis, we can't look to others for help. We should help ourselves instead. Those who are more fortunate should help those who are worse off. We hope that our project can set in motion a cycle of goodwill in society."

Mohd Irzwan Zulfitri bin Hamzah, on the motorcycle, lost his job twice because of the pandemic. He and his wife (left) decided to use some of the relief cash from Tzu Chi to start a business in front of their home.

KEVIN TAN KOK SIEONG

Go to where the needy are

The government had, via various relief packages, tried its best to help businesses and people, but it couldn't meet everyone's needs. Every family had different problems, and the time they needed help and the kind of aid they required might be different. Therefore, it was necessary for private charitable organizations to supplement the government's aid.

After Tzu Chi decided to launch the program, volunteers bought newspaper ads to announce it. They followed that with 172 informational sessions in communities to further spread the news. Their goal was to help every family that needed assistance but had no other way of obtaining any.

Volunteers in Klang even set up service counters at several locations to help prospective aid recipients with their applications for Tzu Chi's assistance. These included service counters at Pelangi Court apartments, a health clinic in Bukit Kuda, and the Tzu Chi tutoring center at PPR Padang Jawa (PPR is public low-cost housing). Volunteer Chong Sui San (鍾瑞珊), of Klang, said: "When the needy can't come to us, we must go to them. How else can we understand the difficulties they face, day in and day out? It's a blessing to be able to take help and warmth to people whose lives have been plunged into distress or who don't even have enough to eat."

The application period for the program ran from July 12 to 28, 2020. Volunteers visited each applicant's home to evaluate and determine whether they were eligible for the help. The volunteers raced against the clock to get the money into the hands of the underserved. During the first two weeks of August, volunteers logged 10,769 shifts and completed more than 4,000 home visits.

Of the nearly 4,400 applications received, 2,178 were granted, entitling the families to three months of financial assistance, from September to November. Each family received aid ranging from 300 to 800 ringgits (US\$74-197) per month, depending on their situation.

Before volunteers visited the applicants, members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) explained to them a comprehensive protocol prepared by TIMA for protection against the COVID-19 virus. Such procedures were for the benefit of volunteers and participating families alike. The risk of an infection during the visits could not be overlooked.

Volunteer Goh Kim Lan (吳金蘭), 71, convinced her family to let her participate in the home visits by promising them that she would be very, very careful in the process. Accompanied by her husband, she went to a police station to apply for a permit so that she could go on the visits. She was assigned to call on four families. The visits gave her a lot to think about. She learned how the economic situations of people, regardless of their race, had been affected by the pandemic. The pandemic is blind, impacting all—whether you are Chinese, Malay, or Indian.

Shine a light in dark corners

Brickfields is known as Kuala Lumpur's "Little India." Indian shops and restaurants of all descrip-



tions line the streets there. In their midst are more than 20 massage parlors which have provided a livelihood for many visually impaired people over the years. Seventy-six-year-old Yap Chee Ming (葉志明), a beneficiary of Tzu Chi's "Kita1Keluarga" program, lives and works here too.

Yap, his wife, and their two sons live on the third floor of a shophouse. Climbing the stairs up

to his place was a little difficult for the Tzu Chi volunteers visiting him, even though they were much younger than Yap. They could not help thinking how much more difficult it would be for Yap—both elderly and blind—to negotiate the stairs. Once the volunteers had reached his home, volunteer Ho Sook Kuen (何淑娟) greeted Yap. He responded to her in a sonorous voice: "You're Ms.

Volunteers disseminate information in a market about a Tzu Chi COVID relief program.

NGIAO SWEE PING

Ho, right?" The volunteers were surprised and taken aback at his sharp hearing, since he had no way of actually seeing Ho. He explained with a smile that he had been blind for nearly 50 years



and had long since learned to tell people apart by their voices.

Yap's older son, 27, is a college graduate and holds a steady job. His wife and younger son earn some money doing simple packaging work out of their home. After the MCO was imposed, Yap went four months without any income. His older son had to provide for the whole family during that time.

Yap resumed working in July, but only made half of what he did before. Apparently, the caution to maintain social distance may have made people view massaging with a wary eye and consider it too close for comfort. His wife learned about Tzu Chi's relief program from the newspaper, so she

With precautions taken against the coronavirus, volunteers made home visits to learn about the situations of applicants for a Tzu Chi COVID relief program and provide them with appropriate aid.

SAM PIN FOOK

asked their first son to apply online. Their application was granted.

"I'm grateful to Tzu Chi for noticing us disabled people in Brickfields and for sending people to help us," he said. "I'm really very happy." Despite being a recipient of the Tzu Chi aid, he worked hard to make money. Whenever a customer ordered his service, he took a taxi to work. Leaving his home raised his risk of infection, but

he said, "I can't be choosy if I want to survive. Look at it this way: many restaurants in this area have shut down, and I'm lucky to still have work to do, so I must work extra hard."

After the "Kita1-Keluarga" program was initiated, volunteers from the Tzu Chi Entrepreneurs' Group worked hard to help raise money. Tzu Chi's efforts to help the underserved resonated with many company owners. They believed that businesses should at this time of crisis take up their social responsibilities to pay back society, so they readily chipped in to help.

To further support the program, volunteers held 56 charity sales and conducted 95 gatherings to which people brought their coin banks and donated the money inside. (Tzu Chi gives out coin banks and encourages people to save money in them and donate it to help the needy. This practice has its origin in the early

days of Tzu Chi, when 30 housewives each saved 50 Taiwanese cents [1.2 U.S. cents] every day in a bamboo coin bank to help launch the foundation's charity work.)

Like the people who donated the money they had saved in their coin banks, Yap and his wife have since started putting their spare change into their bank for future donations. Yap shared a story: "A beggar had a dollar, but he donated 50 cents, or half of his entire wealth. On the other hand, a rich man donated a million dollars, which was only a fraction of his vast fortune. Of these two people, who do you think was more meritorious? My 50 cents may not have been worth much, but it was donated with my utmost sincerity." ♣



Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun (陳志遠) is a noted Malaysian-Chinese businessman and investor. He hosted a charity banquet during which he shared with the attendees the core values of Tzu Chi's charity mission and solicited their support for the foundation's "Kita1Keluarga" program.

CHUA TECK CHING



Volunteers conducted 95 gatherings during which people donated the money they had saved in their coin banks to help with Tzu Chi's "Kita1Keluarga" program.

SAM PIN FOOK

Giving Pandemic Aid on a Tourist Island

By Chen Li-an

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos courtesy of Masako Ono

Tzu Chi volunteer Masako Ono was both happy and worried when 10,000 medical masks arrived on Saipan. That the masks could be used to protect frontline workers made her very happy. But what worried her was how she, the only Tzu Chi volunteer on the island, was going to manage the distribution of so many masks.

Saipan, in the western Pacific Ocean, is the largest island of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), a territory of the United States. With an area of 122 square kilometers (47 sq mi), the island is about half as large as Taipei. It boasts beautiful natural scenery, year-round tropical weather, and stunning diving and snorkeling experiences, making it one of the top vacation spots on the globe. The brilliant sunlight, white sandy beaches, and all manner of water activities attract tourists from all over the world.

Tzu Chi volunteer Masako Ono, originally from Taiwan, moved to Saipan in May 2019 with her husband, Kazuhiko Ono, the Japanese consul to Saipan. Newly arrived, she savored the vacation ambience on the island evoked by the omnipresent coconut trees and clear blue oceans.

The pandemic

Less than a year after their arrival, however, the novel coronavirus began to impact the world. In early February 2020, to prevent the spread of the virus, Saipan banned the entry of flights from China as well as people who had traveled to

China in the previous 14 days. On March 23, the government shut down the borders as a further preventive measure.

The pandemic eased in May. The government allowed some flights to resume, but limited them to those between Saipan and the nearby island of Guam. Saipan's main industry is tourism, so the prolonged closure of borders and cancellation of flights had affected the livelihoods of most people on the island. Some islanders began to worry about how they were going to make it through this period.

Like everywhere else in the world, masks had become a necessity on Saipan by that time. However, a medical mask sold for at least one U.S. dollar. Though the average local hourly wage was seven U.S. dollars, not much money was left after the rent and utility bills were paid. For those who had lost their incomes or jobs, a medical mask had become a luxury.

The pandemic had affected Masako Ono's life as well and allowed her to see the plight of the underserved. On a visit to a nursing home, she noticed that the masks the workers there wore were of very poor quality. She had also learned that a local member of the clergy had tested positive for the coronavirus. She eagerly wanted to provide good quality masks to those working on the front lines.

Acting on her desire to help, she applied for 700 masks from Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan. She ended up receiving a total of 11,850 masks.

She was happy to have received so many masks, but was worried too. She was happy the masks could be used to protect lives, but worried how she was going to manage their distribution. After all, she was the only Tzu Chi volunteer on Saipan. She didn't know how to sort so many masks in a short time or how to set up videoconferencing with Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan when the mask donation ceremonies were taking place. Thankfully, a fellow volunteer in Taiwan, Peng Xiu-jing (彭秀靜), contacted her during that time with some welcome news. Peng told Ono that her son, Liang Wei-yuan (梁維元), was studying on Saipan and that he would be able to give her a hand.

"I'm so thankful to have the young man's help," said Ono. With Liang's assistance, Ono was able to quickly distribute the masks to hospital workers, nursing home workers and residents, members of the clergy, students, and others. Ono sincerely hoped that the protective gear would



Tzu Chi volunteer Masako Ono delivered masks to a convent on Saipan where several retired nuns over 80 lived.



Saipan Tribune reported on the food distribution conducted jointly by Tzu Chi and Friends of CWs for underserved foreign workers on Saipan.

help safeguard frontline workers and other people who had received the donation.

The convergence of goodwill

In June 2020, the American federal government distributed relief cash—1,200 U.S. dollars per person—to all eligible individuals on Saipan. Stimulus packages for the unemployed followed. However, the large number of foreign workers on the island who did not possess American citizenship were excluded from the pandemic unemployment assistance. Foreign workers with children who were natural-born citizens could at least receive monthly food stamps due to their children's citizenship status, but those who didn't have such children weren't so lucky.

With assistance from Tzu Chi headquarters, Ono originally planned to work with local organizations to distribute daily necessities to those foreign workers who were particularly hard pressed to get by. However, that plan was disrupted by Typhoons Goni and Vamco. The two typhoons slammed into the Philippines in November 2020, wreaking havoc in parts of the nation. The relief plan for Saipan was put on hold while the Tzu Chi Foundation poured their resources into aiding



Volunteers from Friends of CWs pose with Tzu Chi volunteer Masako Ono.

typhoon survivors in the Philippines.

Though the plan had changed, Ono thought of what Dharma Master Cheng Yen had often said about the need to reach out to the needy in a timely manner. The end of the year and the holiday season was drawing near, and Ono really wanted to help people have a better time during this time of the year. She therefore decided to take money out of her own pocket and purchase rice, cooking oil, eggs, and other food to distribute. She also ordered a large amount of fresh produce to distribute to promote vegetarianism. She even packaged the vegetables and fruits with old newspapers to avoid creating more plastic packaging waste.

Ono teamed up with a local organization, Friends of CWs, to compile the recipient rosters and distribute the goods. CWs are foreign workers with CNMI work visas. Friends of CWs focus their efforts mainly on aiding unemployed foreign workers on the island.

Ono explained, "Members of Friends of CWs are not rich themselves, but they are better off than those who are unemployed. They still have jobs and can maintain their livelihoods." Just like Tzu Chi, funded mostly by small donations from its members, Friends of CWs rely on donations from members to accumulate funds and buy necessities to help the needy.

"We didn't have many goods to distribute," said Ono, "so we needed to make sure that what we were giving out would go to those most in need of help." Strict oversight was exercised throughout the process—from obtaining lists of

the unemployed, making home visits, to carrying out the distribution itself. In addition to the goods purchased by Ono, Friends of CWs also provided rice, canned foods, and eggs.

The distribution was held at the end of November 2020. One hundred and thirty-eight care packages were distributed during the event. Recipients included foreign workers from the Philippines and a small number of workers from Turkey. Ono shared the origin of Tzu Chi during the event and gave away mini "Words of Wisdom" scrolls carrying aphorisms by Master Cheng Yen. She made those small gifts herself, hoping that the inspiring messages on them could bring encouragement to people experiencing a difficult time due to the pandemic.

Love never goes away

In 2015, Typhoon Soudelor hit Saipan, causing severe damage to businesses, homes, and infrastructure on the island. Upon receiving requests for assistance, Tzu Chi provided rice and 1,000 pots for those affected. That was the first encounter Tzu Chi had with Saipan.

Five years later, the pandemic connected Tzu Chi with Saipan again. Even though there was only one Tzu Chi volunteer on the island, by working with a local charity group, she was able to help relieve the plight of people impacted by the coronavirus. Ono said, "When I saw the aid recipients' expressions soften during the distribution, their eyes showing gratitude and appreciation, I felt everything was worth it." ❀

Helping the Homeless Through Winter

By Chen Jing-hui

Edited and translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Sun Su-qi

Nishinari, in Osaka, Japan, once prospered as a hub for day laborers, but it became a gathering place for the homeless after the economic bubble in Japan burst. The restrictive measures that the government took to combat the COVID-19 pandemic increased unemployment and heightened the plight of the underprivileged.

The COVID-19 virus spread so fast in Japan in early 2021 that confirmed infections reached record highs. The situation was so severe the Japan Medical Association warned that medical care in Osaka Prefecture was teetering on the brink of collapse. On January 9, 2021, the Japanese government declared its second state of emergency in response to the pandemic. By early February, diagnosed cases in the country had exceeded 400,000.

The coronavirus has done more than cause sickness and death—it's also taken a toll on the economy. NHK, Japan's only public broadcasting system, quoted the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare as saying that the raging pandemic had led to the layoffs of nearly 80,000 people in Japan by the end of 2020. This was a hard blow for a country that has for the last several decades witnessed a steep climb in the number of people relying on part-time or temporary work. Now, with the addition of the newly unemployed, the government has an urgent and thorny issue on its hands: how to prevent these vulnerable people from becoming homeless.



Tzu Chi volunteers, accompanied by staffers from the Airin Nighttime Shelter in Nishinari, Osaka, distribute curry rice to the homeless after a hot food distribution at the shelter in June 2020.

Street people and day laborers in Osaka are mostly concentrated in the Nishinari district. The job market for day laborers in Nishinari began soaring with the boom of the Japanese economy in the 1960s. However, when the economic bubble in Japan burst in the 1980s, the district became a hub for the homeless. Though work isn't as abundant as it used to be, the local day labor industry has continued to give the unemployed a glimmer of hope and a link to potential work. It's a tenuous lifeline, one without which many people would certainly face homelessness.

The Airin Nighttime Shelter in Nishinari provides free, short-term accommodation for street people and day laborers. (The shelter was set up by the Osaka city government, but its management is outsourced.) After COVID-19 broke out, the shelter implemented strict virus prevention measures. Such steps included reducing the number of people it accepts from 500 to about 300; changing from assigning beds on a first-come-first-served basis to a fixed assignment system; installing partition curtains around each bed; and providing temperature checks and hand sanitizer at its entrance.

Love in the midst of pandemic precautions

COVID-19 infections in Japan kept hitting record highs after the start of winter in late 2020. In response, the Osaka Prefecture government declared a red-light state of emergency on December 3. The government urged residents to refrain from non-essential outings or traveling across prefecture lines. Announcements were posted at all transportation stations, calling on everyone to wear a mask, be alert, and avoid close contact.

Tzu Chi volunteers kept a close eye on the number of confirmed infections that the government announced every day. They also kept in close touch with Hidetoshi Yamanaka, manager of the Airin Nighttime Shelter, to discuss the annual winter distribution to be held there on December 6. This would be the fifth winter distribution Tzu Chi volunteers had held at the nighttime shelter.

Volunteers debated whether to go ahead with the distribution as scheduled for December 6, given that the infections were increasing. They considered postponing it until mid-December. But then they thought: if they postponed the distribution, would the pandemic be more stable and manageable by that time? They also knew another cold front was approaching, and now was the time that vulnerable people most badly needed winter clothing. In the end, they decided to go

ahead as scheduled, despite all the uncertainties. Love couldn't wait.

Two hundred and fifty sets of thermal undergarments, socks, and towels were delivered to the Airin shelter on the day of distribution. Shelter manager Yamanaka said that the laborers were looking forward to the distribution. They were grateful to Tzu Chi volunteers for not postponing the event.

Shogo Nakamura, a Japanese Tzu Chi volunteer, instructed two young, first-time volunteers how to conduct themselves during the Tzu Chi event. He taught them to bow at 90 degrees and use both hands to present supplies to each recipient. Jiang Yi-cheng (江侑澄), one of the first-time volunteers, was in Japan for a working holiday. Because his parents are Tzu Chi recycling volunteers, he sought out Tzu Chi in Japan and expressed his desire to volunteer. "Helping others is creating blessings for yourself," he said. He appreciated that he could help others during this event.

The other young man, Zhuo Zhang-wen (卓樟汶), had come to Japan to work. He said that he had never understood why Tzu Chi conducted its distributions in such a formal way. Now that he had seen firsthand those formalities in action, he could feel the power of the 90-degree bows, which allowed the warmth of the volunteers to go straight to the recipients.

Distribution goods were placed on long tables in the open space outdoors. The event was staffed by only five volunteers, which included the two young men, Jiang Yi-cheng and Zhuo Zhang-wen. Interestingly, their presence brought a spring to the steps of the other, older volunteers. Shelter staffers controlled the number of people and enforced safe distances inside the shelter. Tzu Chi volunteer Yu Qiong-zhu (余瓊珠) smiled and said, "Day laborers come one after another, but proper spacing keeps the virus from spreading."

Yamanaka appreciated Tzu Chi's continued support for the day laborers, so he once again made a donation box into which recipients could drop their pocket change. "We can give back only this little bit," he said. "Even so, I still hope that this helps."

Having known Tzu Chi for years now, most day laborers donated their spare change after they had received their share of the distributed goods. Masuo Akiniwa, 77, wished for a harmonious society after making his donation. The pandemic regulations prohibited anyone over 70 years of age from living in a shelter, so he had been forced to live outside for six months now. "I work part-



Volunteers distribute warm under-clothing to day laborers at the Airin Nighttime Shelter. This was their fifth winter distribution. The warm clothing was much appreciated in the cold of December.

time jobs such as cleaning, but still I don't have enough to eat. I'm too old; getting a job is difficult for me. Thank you so much for your help!" he said.

Warming their stomachs

Work became even scarcer during the pandemic, making it more difficult for many people to support themselves. The Osaka Prefecture government made its first emergency declaration over COVID-19 on April 7, 2020. Many charity groups, including Tzu Chi, suspended their soup kitchens or hot food distributions as a result, greatly disrupting the food supply to day laborers and street people. Volunteer Yu Qiong-zhu often talked on the phone during this time with Yamanaka to convey Tzu Chi's care. Between March and May 2020, when it was difficult to procure face masks, Tzu Chi still managed to send masks, disinfectant alcohol, sanitizer, and rice balls to Airin.

On June 1, 2020, after learning that the state of emergency had been lifted, volunteers contacted Yamanaka about resuming Tzu Chi's monthly hot food distributions. Although it was just a meal a month, the volunteers wanted to convey their love.

Even though the state of emergency had been lifted, the epidemic was not yet under control. Everyone knew they needed to stay vigilant and avoid getting too close physically. Yamanaka recommended that boxed meals be served at the distribution to avoid a prolonged, crowded gathering. The night before the June 14 event, volunteers Keiko Manabe and Yu Qiong-zhu transported the ingredients for a 220-person meal to their own homes where they washed, cut, and readied them for cooking. The next day, they took the ingredients to Airin to cook. Volunteer Chen Mei-yue (陳美月), who lived nearby, rode a bicycle to join the

effort at about 1:30 in the afternoon. A total of six Tzu Chi people served at the event.

Yamanaka had anticipated that not as many volunteers as before would show up for the event, so he had invited ten shelter staffers to help with the cooking. Airin had been very busy these months. "During all these months, we only served hot food to the laborers once," Yamanaka said. "Despite the pandemic, you came here to cook hot food for them. I'm very thankful."

As the pandemic rates went up and down that summer, the restrictions made it hard to even offer a hot meal. Volunteers had to switch from giving out hot food to rice balls at their July event. The Dragon Boat Festival had just passed, so volunteers also made 200 vegetarian *zongzis*, a traditional Chinese food served wrapped in bamboo leaves, typically eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival. Volunteers gave out the *zongzis* along with the rice balls.

Yamanaka had collaborated with many groups to provide lodging and work for people in the Osaka area who had become homeless after the pandemic broke out. "This group of people is often the first to be forgotten by society," he said, "but all lives are equal. I have to work harder to continue to help them."

After each distribution at the Airin shelter, volunteers walked the neighborhoods nearby to search for street people who had missed the distribution. If the homeless could not come to them, they tried to reach out and take the supplies to them. The volunteers hoped to deliver some warmth and their best wishes to those who slept out in the streets. Since the world is still in the grip of the pandemic, the volunteers will stay vigilant and continue to give out their love. ●●

Cold Temperatures, Warm Hearts

By Li Lixin, Li Yanhong, Liu Yiying, and Tang Xiaohui

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

In January 2021, seven million people in Shenyang, China, were required to receive coronavirus tests. It was a colossal undertaking. Doing what they could to support the effort, Tzu Chi volunteers helped with testing residents and donated protective gear to frontline workers to safeguard their health.

On December 23, 2020, ten days after she was released from quarantine, a woman returning from abroad to the city of Shenyang, Liaoning Province, northeast China, tested positive for COVID-19. Within a week, more than a dozen new infections were diagnosed. On December 30, the city entered “war-time” mode. The next day, an effort was launched to conduct COVID-19 nucleic acid tests for every person in the city.

On January 2, 2021, the government of the Huanggu District in Shenyang decided to lock down the Minglian Subdistrict to stem the spread of the virus. The borders of the subdistrict were closed that very same day. People could enter, but not leave, the area. Only two businesses that provided daily necessities remained open in the controlled area; all other stores were shut down. Residents began panic buying, not knowing what to expect next.

Since the entire population in Shenyang was required to undergo COVID-19 testing, temporary tents were set up in Minglian where medical professionals and community workers could work. The tents were not heated, and though the

flimsy walls could block the wind, there was no way to prevent the freezing winter coldness from creeping in. Sometimes it was even colder inside than outside because the tents also kept out the sun.

Community workers maintained order outside the tents. Residents wearing masks and gloves stood one meter (3.3 feet) apart in line in the open air, waiting to be tested. Later, to prevent crowds from forming, workers began making home visits to collect test samples instead of requiring people to come to the tents. Medical professionals and support workers visited one building after another and climbed floor after floor to reach each resident for testing. It’s easy to imagine how hot they were in their protective isolation suits during their seemingly endless rounds.

Early in the morning on the 14th day of the lockdown, Tang Xiaohui (唐曉輝), a resident of Minglian, looked out her window to see snow drifting down and the ground covered in white. At that very moment, she heard someone knock on her door and announce: “Please get your ID card ready. We’re here to do nucleic acid testing.” Tang opened her door to see a group of people



decked out head-to-toe in white protective clothing.

A sense of respect rose in her heart as she saw how the healthcare and community workers were braving the snow and frigid cold to collect the samples. “Without their hard work, it would be impossible for us to stay safe in our warm homes,” Tang thought to herself.

Tang is a Tzu Chi volunteer. Just two days earlier, moved by the service of frontline workers, she had overcome her fear and visited Lianshui, a community where confirmed infections had been reported. She talked to the party secretary there about the desire of Tzu Chi volunteers to help combat the coronavirus. “You’re all wonderful people, doing charity work,” said the official. “It’d be great if Tzu Chi could provide face masks for us.” Tang told the secretary she’d deliver the promised medical masks to him as soon as they arrived from the city of Suzhou, east China, where Tzu Chi China headquarters is located.

Medical professionals and community workers visit household after household in Huanggu District, Shenyang, China, to collect samples for COVID-19 testing.

TANG XIAOHUI

Let me help

Tang is the only Tzu Chi volunteer in her community, so she asked a couple of neighbors in her building to help her pick up the masks and other supplies when they arrived. She was scheduled to pick them up at noon on January 16. When Tang and her two neighbors arrived that day to collect the supplies, she was overjoyed to see the four Tzu Chi volunteers that had brought the goods to her: Sun Huiying (孫慧穎), Liu yiying (劉乙穎), Li Yanhong (李艷紅), and Liu Ge (劉革). She was overcome with emotion seeing her fellow volunteers during such a difficult time.

A large box of medical masks and some rice, noodles, cooking oil, and other necessities intend-

ed for Tzu Chi care recipients in Minglian were passed over a metal barrier to Tang and her helpers. Tang and her neighbors loaded the goods into a car, then headed to their first stop, the Lianshui community, to deliver the masks. When the party secretary in Lianshui saw her and the masks, he exclaimed warmly: “Many thanks to Tzu Chi! Your help is so timely, it’s like sending charcoal during a snowfall.” The trio then proceeded to their next stop: care recipient Chen’s home.

Chen had to undergo two dialysis sessions each week. After Minglian was put on lockdown, arrangements were made to move her to a hotel

Volunteers delivered supplies to Tang Xiaohui for distribution to medical workers and Tzu Chi care recipients. Tang, in blue to the left of the barrier, was assisted by two of her neighbors, in yellow. They live in an area that was in lockdown and could not obtain the supplies without the help of the volunteers on the right. LIU YIYING



outside the controlled area so that her treatments could continue uninterrupted. So, Chen’s brother, Dazhong (大忠), came downstairs to receive the goods from Tang on behalf of his sister.

Dazhong often attended Tzu Chi events before the pandemic, so he already knew Tang. He was as happy and excited as a child when he saw her that day. Under other circumstances, the two might have taken some time to chat and catch up, but such a visit would have to wait for another day. Tang posed for a quick photo with Dazhong, then continued on her way.

That afternoon, volunteers from outside the controlled area delivered more goods to Tang: 20 gift packs containing multi-grain powder and herbal tea bags. The gifts were intended for frontline workers. Tang said that when she learned how her fellow volunteers in other areas were working



hard to extend care to frontline workers in the city, she wanted very much to show care for pandemic workers in her area too. She had contacted the Tzu Chi office in Shenyang for the gift packs, and was very grateful when volunteer Cao Yong (曹勇) immediately delivered them to her.

The efforts to test everyone in Shenyang for COVID-19 began on December 31, 2020. Frontline workers had to brave temperatures as low as -20 degrees Celsius (-4 degrees Fahrenheit) and the possibility of contracting the virus to serve residents. To show their support for these frontline workers, Tzu Chi volunteers delivered masks, gloves, and other supplies to many communities for the workers, starting on January 8.

In mid-January 2021, news spread that several buildings in the Shandongbao community in Shenhe District were experiencing difficulties in mobilizing residents to man the entry/exit posts. This was due to the large number of migrant and elderly people living there. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers stepped up to help. Participating volunteers took turns working two-hour shifts out in

the cold, taking temperatures and registering visitors to the buildings. Within a week, they had logged 71 shifts.

Challenges on the frontline

On January 11, a third round of COVID-19 testing was launched in the Tiexi, Huanggu, and Yuhong districts. The testing site in Qigong Subdistrict, Tiexi, was located at the Chinese Industry Museum. Medical professionals and community workers there began working 20-hour days in low temperatures.

Tzu Chi volunteers joined the effort at the testing site on January 13. Volunteer Cao Yong briefed everyone on what they would be doing, which included guiding people, registering people to be tested, and maintaining order. About 5,000 people

Tzu Chi volunteers donated medical masks and gloves to frontline workers to help safeguard their health after a COVID-19 test was mandated for all the residents of Shenyang on December 31, 2021. LIU YIYING





to be tested arrived that day. Cao reminded his fellow volunteers to stay vigilant and not relax their protective measures. He said that even though it was a good thing to volunteer and serve others during this difficult time, it was just as important to stay safe. A community officer helped the volunteers put on protective clothing. He told them to write their names on their clothing first because it'd be nearly impossible to distinguish one person from the next once they were identically clad head to toe in the protective gear.

People stood in orderly lines waiting for their turn in the lobby at the testing site. They cautiously maintained a distance of one meter between themselves. Tzu Chi volunteers, after familiarizing themselves with the computerized procedures, carefully verified each testee's identity to avoid any mistakes. Because the weather was so cold, condensation soon began to appear on the medical workers' face shields. They appeared unaffected, however, and pressed on with their work.

For nearly six and a half hours, from 3:30 in the afternoon to ten, the testing center was besieged

Tzu Chi volunteers serve at a COVID-19 testing site at the Chinese Industry Museum in Tiexie District, Shenyang. They verified people's identities and explained the testing procedures to them.

LI LIXIN

by an endless stream of people queuing to be tested. The outdoor temperature hovered around -20 degrees Celsius, dropping even lower at night. There was no central heating indoors, so it was freezing inside too. Volunteer Gao Xiuli (高秀麗), who was helping maintain order, said the sub-zero temperatures were making things very difficult. "Winter in northeast China is so freezing cold," she said. "My hands and feet are icy. My feet are especially bad—they keep having cramps from the coldness." Low temperatures weren't the only problem she had to deal with. "I've been on my feet for over four hours now. My back hurts and my feet are stiff. My movements are confined by the protective clothing I'm wearing, and it's difficult to breathe through my face mask. My face shield is so fogged up I have trouble seeing things." She said that being a volunteer on this

day had really made her realize the challenges frontline medical professionals face every day.

She added that healthcare workers have their own families and personal lives too, but when they don their protective clothing, they have to temporarily put everything else aside to focus on their mission to save lives. "I feel I have a responsibility and obligation to contribute my bit to society too," she said.

Lu Minggang (呂明剛) was another Tzu Chi volunteer serving on-site. He noticed that the workers responsible for recording and collecting test samples at the testing location each had a space heater under their desks, but they still stamped their feet to keep warm. Such an observation drives home how low the temperature was and its impact on the workers.

Lu lives close to the community that had the imported case. He said he had queued for testing before too. At the time, he hadn't felt much of anything for the people serving them and had complained about the long wait. But all that changed after he volunteered at this day's event.

"When I first put on the protective clothing to work today, I felt pretty good," he said. "I felt proud of myself, thinking, 'It's more of a blessing to serve others than to be served.' But after about half an hour, those good feelings started to fade. My face shield had fogged up with my breath and the cold had started creeping up my back." Like volunteer Gao, he helped maintain order at the event. When older people with limited mobility showed up, he sometimes had to step forward to give them a supporting hand. Misgivings were inevitable when such close contact couldn't be avoided. Only then did he realize what frontline pandemic workers were going through. His respect and admiration for them rose.

"If I hadn't practiced Buddhism under the guidance of Master Cheng Yen over the last several years," he said, "I wouldn't have had the courage to go among people during this critical time to give of myself, and I'd have missed out on this chance to cultivate wisdom and blessings for myself. I can now give joyfully because I know better."

Lighting up inner lights

From January 7 to 26, 2021, Tzu Chi volunteers in Shenyang worked 243 shifts extending care to 25 communities. Volunteer Sun Huiying, reflecting on this experience, said that when the coronavirus first started to spread in China in early 2020,



Volunteers, dressed in isolation suits, caps, and booties, deliver daily necessities to Tzu Chi care recipients in the lockdown Huagong community in Tiexie District, Shenyang, on January 24.

LI LIXIN

she and other volunteers in the country sat trapped at home, feeling helpless and at a loss for what to do. It was only when Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan, overcoming many difficulties, arranged to have personal protective equipment sent to them from other countries that they were able to step out of their homes, properly protected, to help in the battle against the pandemic. Now, a year later, another wave of infections had emerged, but she and other volunteers already knew very well what they needed to do. Taking warmth and love to the places that needed them the most had become their shared commitment.

Sun summed up the force that drives them in a simple yet profound statement: "It's our mission to take every opportunity to spread goodness, inspire love, and light up the inner light in everyone's heart."



Three Decades of Commitment

Recycling Volunteer Huang Mei

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

I learned of Huang Mei (黃梅) years ago from a program on Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV that features Tzu Chi recycling volunteers. I was impressed at the time with her dedication to recycling work, but it wasn't until 2020 that I had the opportunity to visit her personally for the magazine I worked for, *Tzu Chi Monthly*. That year marked the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi's recycling work. Our magazine was publishing a special issue commemorating that milestone, so we began looking for volunteers who had been engaged in recycling work from the beginning. We narrowed our search to those who started recycling work after hearing Dharma Master Cheng Yen speak at a school on August 23, 1990, in Taichung, central Taiwan. It was in that speech that the Master first called upon people to do recycling work to protect the Earth. With the help of senior volunteers in central Taiwan, we eventually found one such volunteer. To my very pleasant surprise, it turned out to be Ms. Huang Mei.

Huang was born in 1942, which puts her at nearly 80 this year. Despite her age, she runs a stall every day selling traditional Chinese *Zhuangyuan* cakes. (In ancient China, a Zhuangyuan was the person who earned the highest score on an imperial civil servant examination.) In addition to her work as a vendor, she recycles, visits the needy, and does other volunteer work for Tzu Chi. Her life is as full as can be.

When Huang was young, her husband had an affair, which led to their divorce. She began raising their child on her own afterwards. It was a tough time in her life that left her depressed and sad. It wasn't until she was exposed to Buddhism and came to understand the law of karma that she was able to open her heart and come to terms with it all. She now chooses to live a simple life, focusing her energies on doing good and giving of herself.

One fine day, Huang posed for a photo with piles of recycling in front of her home. She smiled shyly at my camera. It's hard to tell in the photos that she was actually quite tired. She lives every day so fully that she challenges the limits of her physical and mental power.



A fixture near Mount Bagua

Huang has sold Zhuangyuan cakes near Mount Bagua, a famed scenic spot in central Taiwan, for more than 40 years. She's been at it so long that her stall has become a fixture there. On the day I visited her, I saw her working constantly at her stall making Zhuangyuan cakes. She'd first stuff ground *Penglai* rice (a type of rice widely eaten in Taiwan) into a wooden mold, add sesame or ground peanuts, and then steam it. When the mixture was cooked and cooled, it became a delicious, firm-to-the-bite dessert. Many of Huang's customers have eaten her rice cake since they were children. Some have become grandfathers or grandmothers but still patronize her stall. Her cake, redolent of their childhood memories, is flavored with another special ingredient: nostalgia.

When Huang first heard Master Cheng Yen's appeal to take up recycling more than three decades ago, she responded readily. Her hands, so dexterous in making her delicious cake, began to collect and sort recyclable garbage. She also began sharing with her customers the importance of environmental protection. By and by, people began taking their recyclables from home to Huang's stall. At the end of the day, Huang would haul them home and sort them out.

Tzu Chi recycling stations hadn't yet been established when Huang began her work, so she had to take her sorted recyclables to a dealer for sale. She didn't earn much for her efforts, just a few dozen Taiwanese dollars per trip. (Thirty Taiwanese dollars is about the equivalent of one U.S. dollar.) Since it was never much, she'd save the money from each trip in a container, and when the container was full, she'd take the money to the Tzu Chi Taichung office and donate it.

Thirty years have since flown by—so fast it seems like the blink of an eye. Huang's black hair has grayed. Her hands have become wrinkled and spotted. But her stall is still there, her rice cake as tasty as ever, and her dedication to recycling work as steadfast and firm. In this ever-changing world, her persistence has a special power to move and inspire.





A typical day

While visiting her, I saw how Huang tended to her stall all day while sorting the recyclables that had been brought to her in her free moments. After a full day, she closed up her stand and headed home. She walked her bicycle, now laden with recyclable garbage, next to her. Ten minutes later she stood in front of her house. Heaps of recyclables had been piled in front of her home. I learned that some locals drop off their recycling at Huang's home too. In fact, she receives so much recycling each day that her two younger sisters help share her burden. They come each evening to help her sort the recyclables.

I thought Huang would call it a day when they were done organizing the recyclables, so I was surprised when she mounted her bicycle and headed out into the neighborhood after dinner to work some more. It was already past eight by that time. She made stops at homes and stores and collected even more recyclables. It was after ten when she was done with her rounds and had returned home. But she still wasn't ready to retire for the day—she had to prepare the ingredients for the rice cakes she'd sell the next day. Washing the rice, soaking it, grinding it, and then dehydrating and putting the ground rice through a sieve would take her another couple of hours. By the time she had finished the preparation work and tidied up her house a bit, it was past midnight. This is a typical day for Huang.

She was born in winter, so her grandfather named her "Mei," meaning "Chinese plum," a plant that flourishes in the winter. The colder it gets, the more this species of tree blooms. Huang is just like her namesake. Though her life hasn't been easy, she has "bloomed" magnificently. Her strength shows in her attitude towards her recycling work too. Instead of being daunted by the large amount of recycling she has to tackle day in and day out, she persists at the work willingly and selflessly, rain or shine, day or night, demonstrating a spirit of "If not me, then who?" You can't help but be impressed.

A life of frugality

Not only was I moved by Huang's spirit of giving, I was also impressed by her simple, frugal life. Her house is small and shabby, and she keeps her three meals as simple as can be. Because she works during the day, she pre-cooks some rice and a pot of vegetable soup or a few dishes, then puts them in the refrigerator. When she comes home for lunch, she heats up some of the food for a quick meal. A bowl of vegetable soup and some plain rice is all she needs. Her dinner is just as simple. What sets it apart from her lunch is that she watches Master Cheng Yen's televised Dharma talk when she eats. The Master's teachings are her indispensable spiritual food; she can't go a day without them.

It's hard to imagine a person her age willingly living like an ascetic, especially when she could afford a life of comfort and ease. When I asked her about it, she said that she keeps her needs to a minimum so that she can focus her energies on recycling and other volunteer work. For Huang, doing good for the world and helping the needy constitutes the happiest and most blessed life—not a life of ease and comfort.





Day in and day out for 30 years

When Huang attended the speech in 1990 during which the Master made her appeal to everyone to recycle, she was accompanied by her two younger sisters, Huang Su-zhen (黃素貞) and Huang Shu-he (黃淑禾). After hearing the Master's appeal to cherish our environment and help reduce the pollution caused by garbage, the three sisters took up recycling, and haven't let up since. Even though it hasn't all been smooth sailing, they managed to overcome whatever difficulties they encountered and kept at the work. Even now, when old age has brought aches and pains and illness and made their movements much slower, they are staying the course, supporting and taking care of each other not only in life but on their path of recycling.

When I look at the photographs I took that day, I still can't help but admire my subject. One of the pictures shows Huang traversing the alleys in her neighborhood on a bike laden with recyclables. It was late at night when I took that photo, and the lights in most households were out. Their occupants had long gone to bed, but Huang was still busy at work. It took just a moment to capture that shot, but behind it are three long decades of steadfast, unwavering commitment to a worthy environmental cause. ❀

The Boon and Bane of Online Shopping

By Weiwei Chen

Abridged and translated by Chang Yu Ming

Photos by Tzu Cheng Liu

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Cheap and convenient, online shopping is quickly reshaping the dynamics of the retail industry. Further fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, ecommerce brings in billions and billions of dollars for the economy, but at what cost?



An online seller has turned a room in her home into a studio for her live-streamed shopping sessions. While convenience is driving ecommerce growth, the large amount of packaging waste that results is adding to the environmental burden on the Earth.

Online shopping is growing at an incredible speed. Ecommerce sales in Taiwan, for example, have doubled to 200 billion NT dollars (US\$6.8 billion) in just ten years. The COVID-19 pandemic has just accelerated this trend. One of the online shopping platforms in Taiwan, PChome, recorded a revenue of 20.9 billion NT dollars (US\$715 million) in the first half of 2020, a 16.33 percent growth from the year before. Tony Huang (黃偉東) is director of public relations for Kuobrothers Corp, another ecommerce

business in Taiwan. His statement echoed what other online retailers were experiencing: "When COVID-19 cases in Taiwan shot above a hundred, we sold two million packs of tissue paper in just four days. That's 25 times our sale volume over the same period last year."

Rosa Chang (張筱祺), a senior industry analyst at the Institute for Information Industry, suggested that "The pandemic provided an opportunity for those who had never shopped online before to give it a try, and some may have been hooked by

its convenience." But what is the cost of that convenience? As more and more people shift their shopping online, issues such as carbon footprint and excessive packaging begin to surface.

Higher or lower carbon footprints?

According to a study done by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the carbon footprint of a traditional store shopper is almost two times that of an online shopper. An article on GreenBiz stated that a typical delivery run of

online purchases in the U.K. constitutes a 50-mile round with 120 drops, and produces 50 pounds of carbon dioxide. If the shopper drives to the shop himself, a typical round trip would be around 26 miles, generating 24 times more carbon dioxide.

However, these carbon footprints can vary greatly when different transport options for the "last mile" are employed, or when different shopping behaviors are taken into consideration. For example, if the consumer walks or bikes to

the shop and buys more than one item, the carbon footprint for each product decreases significantly. In contrast, small separate online orders with speedy deliveries, or having to deliver twice or thrice to succeed, asking for returns, all greatly increase carbon footprints. In addition, the increasing popularity of inter-country online shopping is also generating more carbon dioxide. International online shopping doesn't just require delivery trucks, but the use of planes or cargo ships.

In terms of storage, the book *The Story of Stuff* pointed out that online shopping simplified the steps between manufacturing and selling, thus reducing the need for stockpiling. This saves energy from lights and air-conditioning of storehouses. Carbon footprints could be further reduced if deliveries could be made by bike. The Ford car company, for example, developed an app that enables bike couriers to do the last mile deliveries for trucks, thus lowering the carbon footprint from relying on vehicle delivery alone.

Though there are too many variables to say for sure whether online shopping or traditional shopping is more eco-friendly, some choices can definitely help, such as merging different orders into one shipment, opting out of speedy deliveries,

cutting down on returns, and trying to buy from local online retailers.

More waste

Though the overall impact of ecommerce on the environment is up for debate, one thing is crystal clear: the rise in online shopping has increased packaging waste. By 2050, the volume of plastic packaging in the world is projected to be triple that of 2000, surpassing the volume used in the entire plastics industry today. Packing materials such as poly mailers, bubble wrap, air cushions, etc. are all contributing to the rise in plastic use.

To ensure the product is not damaged during transportation, shipped items are usually wrapped in layers and layers of protective materials, with cushions occupying nearly every inch of the box. However, these packing materials are often thrown away immediately after unwrapping. Liu Jui-hsiang (劉瑞祥), deputy director-general of the Department of Waste Management at Taiwan's Environmental Protection

An online seller promotes and displays a product via live streaming on Shopee.



Administration (EPA), explained that "Some shops use a lot of packing tape and ropes to secure their boxes. All of these become waste afterward."

"The packaging needed to send thousands of products directly to thousands of households is very different from sending the same products to hundreds of shops for people to purchase," said Herlin Hsieh (謝和霖), secretary-general of the Taiwan Watch Institute and a staunch activist in waste management issues.

According to statistics from the EPA, online shopping in Taiwan accounts for a hundred million packagings per year, generating up to 18,000 tons of waste. Ye De-wei (葉德偉), founder and CEO of PackAge+, shared that ecommerce trade in Taiwan is growing at a rate of 7 percent every year. More online shopping means more resources consumed and more waste generated.

Reducing packaging waste

In light of the problem, Taiwan's EPA issued a three-step approach in late 2019 to tackle the rise in packaging waste, collaborating with online shopping platforms such as PChome, Shopee, Momo, ETMall, and Kuobrothers.

The first step of the EPA's three-step approach includes imposing limits on the proportion of packaging in total weight, tape length, etc. "Ideally, the outer packaging should be no more than 10 percent bigger than the packaged contents," said Liu Jui-hsiang, of the EPA. As a result of this effort, there has been much less waste generated.

"Our packing boxes come in more than ten different sizes," said Lin Yuan-zhong (林元中), a logistics manager at ETMall. "Our workers used to decide what box to use, but now a computer does the job and suggests the appropriately sized box to use. We have since improved from filling 70 percent of the box to 80 percent, but reaching 90 percent has proved difficult. We can't just pour our products into the right-sized box. It's more like a game of building blocks—you have to study how to arrange them to allow the best use of available space." Maximizing the use of space in a box

As it is cheap and convenient to send and collect packages through convenience stores, the combined shipping volume of 7-Eleven and FamilyMart in Taiwan has grown to hundreds of millions of packages a year.



by packing it efficiently is just one way to cut down on packaging waste. Online shopping platforms can also save on packaging by combining orders from the same customer and shipping the items together.

“The second step of the EPA’s strategy is to limit how much printing is applied to cardboard boxes, which increases their recycling value,” said Liu. Major players in the ecommerce market such as PChome and Momo have switched to using uncolored cardboard boxes with less printing.

On the surface, cardboard boxes seem to be more eco-friendly than poly mailers. However, if they are both incinerated after a single use, a cardboard box generates more carbon dioxide. “Manufacturing and incinerating a poly mailer creates 1.2 kg [2.6 lb] of carbon dioxide, while a cardboard box creates 1.92 kg [4.2 lb],” said Ye De-wei of PackAge+. According to statistics, Taiwan incinerates around 210,000 tons of cardboard boxes every year. It’s not an issue to be taken lightly.

Due to the increasing popularity of online shopping and fueled by the coronavirus pandemic, the daily number of shipped items from ETMall’s warehouse in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, grew from 30,000 to 40,000 in just three years.

Reusable packaging

The third step of the EPA’s plan is to move toward reusable packaging materials. A reusable packaging system—returning the packaging to the supplier so it can be used again—might be the best strategy when it comes to tackling the issue of packaging waste.

To that end, PackAge+ designed a reusable, padded, and easy-to-clean shipping bag made from recycled PET bottles. Consumers can choose to have their orders shipped using this reusable shipping bag, then return the bags at return boxes placed in restaurants, cafes, etc. Each bag is designed to be used more than 50 times. “We held test trials around universities in Taipei for three months. More than 3,000 people participated, with a return rate of 82 percent,” said Ye De-wei. PackAge+ has started using this type of bag in partnership with ecommerce companies in Taiwan.

Another company, Picupi, uses waste fabric to make shipping bags for their products. This helps avoid the use of new resources to make packaging materials, and the shipping bags can be repurposed as shopping bags afterward.

Sing Home Polyfoam Co., Ltd., on the other hand, has designed a durable and collapsible box made using expanded polypropylene. They are waiting for interested clients to start volume pro-

duction. It is paradoxical that a supplier of disposable packing materials is designing reusable boxes. Wu Jia-kun (吳家坤), vice-president of Sing Home, said: “We may not incur a loss from this, but we won’t make a profit either. That’s because these boxes can be used, and re-used, for a long time. We make our money on the disposable packing material. However, this box is better for the environment, so we still have to do it.” On a similar note, Taiwan’s post office offers discounts on postage when its shipping box is reused.

The EPA hopes that ecommerce platforms can increase the use of reusable packaging to 10 percent of their total shipments within the next two years. However, some ecommerce platforms doubt its feasibility. After all, “the couriers and the consumers play a part in this too. What if we don’t get our boxes back?” said Lin Yuan-zhong of ETMall. Tony Huang of Kuobrothers asked, “People shop online for the convenience. Would they really take the trouble to return the packaging?”

To address this issue, PackAge+ suggests a discount and deposit policy. For example, when consumers return a shipping bag at a partnered shop, they can get a discount from that shop. A deposit system is also one way to encourage returns. Many Taiwanese collect their deliveries at convenience stores, so if these stores can have return



Some online shopping platforms have established their own courier service to provide better service and faster deliveries.

stations, people can unwrap and return the shipping bags on the spot, which would also greatly boost return rates.

The rise of ecommerce

“Online shopping is like the Anywhere Door in *Doraemon* [a popular Japanese cartoon series],”





To prevent products from being damaged during transportation, they are often swathed generously in protective materials, which are often discarded after just one use.

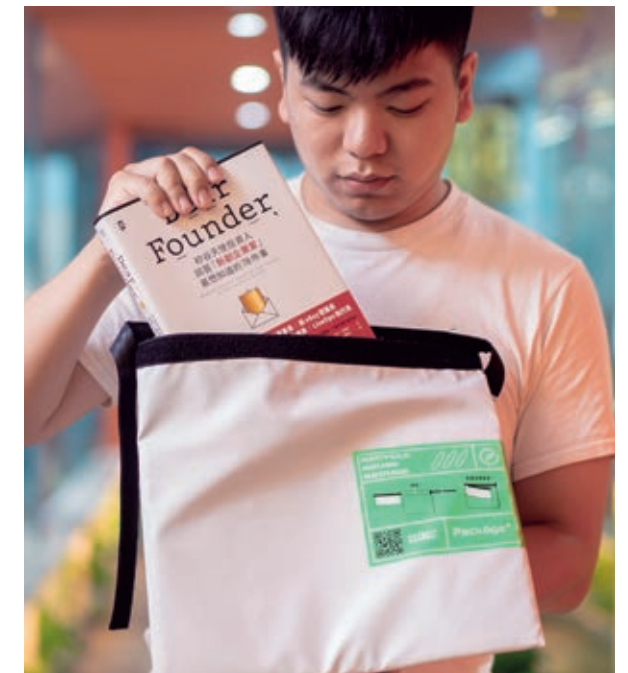
Tony Huang said. The Anywhere Door transports the user to whatever location they desire to visit. Similarly, without restrictions such as business hours, locale, and the limited capacity of a brick-and-mortar space, shopping online can be like stepping through the Anywhere Door at the click of a button. The item can reach your doorstep in just a few hours, and at a lower price. Your privacy can be protected by opting for encrypted credit card payment or cash on delivery. A proper return policy can also safeguard against falsely advertised products. With so many benefits, Huang said confidently, “it’s nearly impossible for those who have shopped online to ditch it and return to brick and mortar shopping.”

Advertisements and enticements are ubiquitous on the internet. Targeted ads are now embedded in online news articles, social media platforms, and videos on YouTube. What’s more, the advertisements are tailored specifically to the user. What people see, what products they are exposed to, vary with each user.

“We may not know what our consumers look like, but we are among those who understand their purchasing habits the best,” Huang added. “There are no records of what a customer has browsed in a physical store, but every movement online is recorded.” Compared with traditional stores, ecommerce is much more active. “Customers used to be the ones searching for products, but now advertisements follow them everywhere online even after they leave a shopping website and move to another platform,” said Huang.

According to statistics, Taiwan’s ecommerce market is the 7th largest in the world, but local online shopping accounts for just ten to 20 percent of total expenditures among Taiwanese. This indicates a huge potential for growth in the ecommerce industry. As online shopping becomes more prevalent in the future, the government, ecommerce platforms, couriers, and consumers must work together to reduce its environmental impact as much as possible.

A shipping bag made from waste fabric used by Picupi. The bag, when turned inside out, can be used as a shopping bag.



PackAge+ founder, Ye De-wei, aims to reduce packaging waste by replacing disposable packing materials with reusable ones.



New Homes for Quake Victims in Indonesia

Compiled by Huang Xiao-qian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Anand Yahya

In 2018, an earthquake resulted in soil liquefaction and a tsunami in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Over 4,000 people perished, and many more were left homeless. Two years later, victims moved into new homes to start their lives anew.

In September 2018, a magnitude 7.4 earthquake rocked Central Sulawesi in Indonesia. The massive earthquake resulted in ground liquefaction, landslides, and a tsunami. More than 4,000 people lost their lives, and many more lost their homes.

In response to the disaster, three organizations stepped in to help survivors find their footing again. Tzu Chi Indonesia, the Eka Tjipta Foundation, and Indofood, an Indonesian food company, banded together to build two housing communities for survivors. Village I included 1,500 homes. It was built in Palu, the capital of the province of Central Sulawesi. Village II, located in Sigi, comprised 500 housing units.

In October 2020, a group of Tzu Chi volunteers arrived to look around Village I in Palu. They had just finished the third phase of a qualification evaluation for people moving into the village, though by that time most residents had already moved into their new homes. The handover of the housing units had begun several months earlier, on May 18.

During their tour, the volunteers stopped at a home fronted with a wonderful display of plants. The greenery made the home look very appealing. The homeowner, Dr. Hasan, warmly greeted the group of visitors. "Come in and have a seat," he invited. "When did you arrive in Palu?"

"We've been here for two days," volunteer

Zhuang Ying-he (莊英荷) responded. "We're here this time to conduct the third phase of the resident qualification evaluation. How do you like your new home? Are you happy with it?"

"Thank our good lord, Allah! Of course I'm happy!" Hasan exclaimed. "This is a gift from many people. I'm grateful for it and will definitely take good care of it." He said that it was still a little hot during the day because the trees he had planted at his new home hadn't grown tall yet, but other than that, everything was good.

Hasan and his family had lived in temporary housing provided by the government before moving into the village in August 2020. Tzu Chi had provided beds, a dining table, and a set of toilets for each home. The Palu city government had laid interlocking paving bricks on the roads in the village and set up power lines. Running water was being installed. Hasan was happy. "This is more than 'adequate' for us," he said.

Back on their feet

Nyoman Sutrisno, another resident, was born on the Indonesian island of Bali before moving to Palu in 2002. He bought a house in the village of Petobo in 2009, where he lived with his family until the devastating earthquake struck in 2018. Unlike many homes that had collapsed during the disaster, Sutrisno's house still stood where it had been built—but that was all that could be said for



it. It had been buried under heaps of soil, the roof warped and misshapen under the weight. Since the area where the house stood had been designated as a danger zone, reconstruction there was forbidden by the government.

Sutrisno recalled that he and his son were taking a shower when the temblor hit. They immediately wrapped themselves in towels and dashed out of their home, along with Sutrisno's wife and mother. "Our home sat right on a street corner. Once we were outside, I saw our neighbors' homes and cars moving in front of me." He was witnessing a phenomenon called "soil liquefaction," during which the solid ground loses its stiffness and strength as an earthquake shakes, giving it the properties of a liquid.

Sutrisno and his family took temporary shelter after the quake at a nearby mosque, where a neighbor gave him a pair of pants to wear. Later, they moved into a provisional housing unit provided by the government, but it wasn't very satisfactory. They had no running water or bathroom,

Tzu Chi volunteers visit a housing village in late October 2020. The village, which can accommodate 1,500 families, was built for displaced quake survivors in Palu, Indonesia. Tzu Chi started handing over the homes there to survivors in May 2020.

nor were they close to a school. When the rainy season arrived, they even had to contend with flooding.

After they had lived there for a while, Sutrisno's wife wanted to restart her tailoring business, so the family moved in with her father. Sutrisno, a police officer, returned to his job soon after the disaster. With his wife working again, the family was soon able to get back on their feet, and they began looking to move into a home of their own.

A local disaster relief agency offered three permanent housing locations from which Sutrisno could choose. He picked the village where he currently resides because it was near Tadulako



↑ The 2018 earthquake set off a tsunami and landslides. This seaside mosque was hit by the tsunami.

ARIMAMI SURYO ASMORO

→ The strong earthquake triggered soil liquefaction, which devastated the village of Petobo. Roads and buildings were badly damaged or destroyed.



University, and he had his son's education in mind. After passing the screening by the agency and Tzu Chi, the family moved into the village in August 2020. The village was well planned with landscaping, conference facilities, and soon-to-be-open schools. (A kindergarten and elementary school were under construction when Sutrisno and his family moved in.) Though the village was

not one hundred percent completed, Sutrisno was very grateful that he could become a resident there.

"Thanks to Tzu Chi, we now have an ideal place to live and can embark on a new life," he said. "The Great Love spirit of the foundation, which transcends race and religion, moves me to no end. It has also inspired me to do my best to



A Timeline of Tzu Chi's Aid after the 2018 Sulawesi Earthquake



- Sept. 28, 2018 ➤ A magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, generating a tsunami and soil liquefaction. The areas of Palu, Sigi, and Donggala were devastated. Thousands of people were killed, and more than 10,000 were injured.
- Oct. 1, 2018 ➤ Because roads to Palu were badly damaged, Tzu Chi volunteers visited hospitals in Makassar, South Sulawesi, where some injured people from Palu had been delivered. The volunteers extended care and distributed emergency cash and daily necessities to victims.
- Oct. 3-31, 2018 ➤ A 12-member team, consisting of medical professionals from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and support volunteers, flew to Palu on military aircraft on October 3. After that, volunteers took turns traveling to the disaster areas to provide more care and aid.
- Oct. 15, 2018 ➤ Tzu Chi Indonesia, the Indonesian military, the Eka Tjipta Foundation, and Indofood signed a memorandum of understanding to build 3,000 permanent housing units in Central Sulawesi and Lombok for quake survivors. (Lombok had been hit by an earlier quake, in August 2018).
- Mar. 4, 2019 ➤ Ground was broken for Village I (Perumahan Cinta Kasih Tzu Chi Tadulako) in Tondo, Palu. One thousand five hundred housing units and public facilities were planned to be built.
- July 1, 2019 ➤ Ground was broken for 500 housing units at Village II (Perumahan Cinta Kasih Tzu Chi Pombewe), located in Pombewe, Sigi.
- Aug. 24-26, 2019 ➤ The first phase of Village I resident qualification evaluation was carried out.
- Sept. 28-29, 2019 ➤ The first phase of Village II resident qualification evaluation was carried out.
- Oct. 7, 2019 ➤ Indonesia's vice president Jusuf Kalla visited Village I during a trip to Palu to inspect the recovery work in the city after the quake.
- Oct. 29, 2019 ➤ Joko Widodo, the president of Indonesia, Doni Monardo, the head of the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management, and Longki Djanggola, the governor of Central Sulawesi, visited Village I.
- Nov. 7-12, 2019 ➤ The second phase of Village I resident qualification evaluation was carried out.
- Jan. 11-12, 2020 ➤ Contract signing for people moving into Village I
- May-Oct. 2020 ➤ A total of 1,364 families moved into Village I (right photo).
- Oct. 25-26, 2020 ➤ Contract signing for people moving into Village II. One hundred and five families moved into the village.



Total Emergency Aid :



help others.” The police officer added that he had noticed that residents of the Tzu Chi village were happy to help and encourage each other. “It’s probably because we’ve been through the same disaster,” he mused.

From being helped to helping others

Like many other survivors, Suudia Ramlia lost family members and her home in the disaster. When the quake struck, her home moved 800 meters (0.5 mile) before collapsing. Both her husband and younger child were killed. She and her other child, on their way to attend a seaside carnival, survived because they were not home at the time.

Ramlia’s spirit plummeted to the depths after her beloved husband and daughter were killed. It took her a long time to pull herself together. Two years had passed since the earthquake, and she had become much stronger. She now runs a bakery, named Zaza Cake and Cookies, in the Tzu Chi village. Learning from her late husband, who liked to help others, she provides job opportunities in her bakery for people living nearby. She treats her seven employees as if they were her own family. “The soil liquefaction disaster changed me,” she said. “It prompted me to use my own way to benefit others.”

“Tzu Chi helped build such a good place to live,” she added. “We have all the facilities we need in the community, and the landscaping is beautiful. We’re very thankful.” Ramlia commended Tzu Chi for helping people without regard to race or religion. Out of gratitude and wanting to serve others, she assisted in several Tzu Chi events before moving into the village.



Police officer Nyoman Sutrisno, his son to his right, tends to potted plants at his home in the Tzu Chi village. He promised he would take good care of his house.

“Though everyone is different, our goal is the same: to help people become better.”

After witnessing how Tzu Chi volunteers had helped people in Palu, Ramlia became even more convinced that people should love and help each other. “Our deepest gratitude goes to Tzu Chi for coming to Palu and easing our burden. Every Tzu Chi volunteer is kind and friendly. May God bless you all.”



A Life Transformed

By Zeng Xiu-ying

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Misfortune happens, but with enough care and support, we can make sure that no one gets stuck in the rough.

Tzu Chi volunteer Sun Yu-gui (孫玉貴) was shocked the first time she saw Jiang Yong-xu (江永旭) at his home in 2015. Jiang, a spinal injury patient, was a Tzu Chi care recipient. He conducted all of his daily activities on his bed; he ate, drank, went to the bathroom, and had himself washed without leaving his bed. He suffered from a bad case of leg ulcers, so much so that almost no skin on his legs was intact. He had been confined to his bed for over ten years. At age 34, he would have been in the prime of his life if it hadn’t been for a tragic accident that had left him permanently disabled.

Jiang was 19 when his cervical spine was injured in a fall from a high place at work, paralyzing him from the chest down. Deprived of his mobility, he had no choice but to depend for his every need on his parents, who cared for him without complaint. However, as time went by, his legs gradually began to atrophy and deform due to lack of activity and poor circulation. The skin on his legs became taut and cracked with dryness, leading to lesions, infections, and bleeding. The lesions were stubborn and refused to heal, even with the application of topical medicine.

He was in physically poor shape, but he wasn’t emotionally well either. Devastated by the loss of his physical independence, he felt that his life had lost all hope. He had started working after graduating from junior high school so that he could lighten his parents’ financial burden, but now, instead of helping them out, he had made their lives harder. His mother, Zhuang Qiong-hua (莊瓊華), even had to quit her job to take care of him. His family’s financial situation deteriorated as a result. Jiang couldn’t get past the unfairness of it all. “Why me, why me?” he asked over and over. Despair weighed him down like an anchor too



Jiang Yong-xu shares his life story during a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony in 2020. ZENG XIU-YING

heavy to throw off. He withdrew more and more into his own world and rarely spoke to others.

Volunteer Sun said that it was at their repeated cajoling and urging that Jiang finally agreed to medical intervention for the sores on his legs. They asked for help from Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, in central Taiwan. In response, Superintendent Chien Sou-hsin (簡守信) personally visited Jiang at his home on September 19, 2015. He was accompanied by nurse Zhang Hua-ru (張華茹). The two examined him first and then set to work cleaning and dressing the lesions. As he worked, Dr. Chien, a plastic surgeon, explained to Jiang’s parents the proper way to care for the sores.

Jiang was deeply touched by the superintendent’s visit. “I was stunned actually,” Jiang said.



"I couldn't believe the superintendent would show up personally at my home, and even clean and dress my sores for a nobody like me."

Nurse Zhang visited Jiang again the next day to show his mother how to care for her son's leg sores. To help Jiang regain some level of independence, personnel at the Rehabilitation Department of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital also began to arrange for him to undergo physical therapy at the hospital. Dr. Cai Sen-wei (蔡森蔚), a physiatrist, visited Jiang's home to understand his physical condition and determine if a barrier-free environment was warranted. Such an environment might make it easier for Jiang to leave his home and go to the hospital for regular physiotherapy sessions.

On October 13, 2015, a bus for the disabled arrived at Jiang's home to take him to the Tzu Chi hospital. The young man thus embarked on his path of physiotherapy—and a new life. That trip was the first time in 12 years he had seen the world outside his home. His hometown had changed quite a lot. The roads were different, and the scenery more beautiful than he remembered. Looking up at the azure sky, Jiang felt his mood

Jiang (left) receives a *hong-bao* at a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony from Dharma Master De Chan (德禪) of the Jing Si Abode. The Abode is the Buddhist convent founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, and the *hong-bao* is a small, artistically designed red packet carrying blessings from Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi.

ZHOU SHI-LONG

lift immensely. He decided to work hard at physical therapy so that he could say goodbye to those dismal days of being cooped up in his bed staring up at the ceiling.

Jiang was hospitalized for a week. He underwent physiotherapy, and medical workers attended to the sores on his legs. Volunteers invited another spinal injury patient to visit Jiang and cheer him on. Social worker Wu Wan-yu (吳宛育) helped him apply for an in-home care provider as well as subsidies from the Tzu Chi Foundation to help him purchase a power wheelchair. Everyone worked together to help Jiang rebuild his life.

"When it comes to spinal injury patients," said Superintendent Chien, "it is important to help them regain the ability to take care of themselves.



It's like opening a window of hope for the patients and their families."

With everyone's help and his own effort, Jiang was eventually able to break free from a dark period in his life. The sores on his legs healed with care, just as the wounds in his mind healed with everyone's love. Continuous physical therapy, aided by acupuncture, helped him regain some of his physical functions. Today, he is well on his way to independence. He is a mouth painter, and earns extra money selling dried fruit online.

Looking back, Jiang said that it was something volunteer Sun said that shook him awake and prompted him to emerge from his dark interior world and actively seek medical help. "She told me bluntly, 'How much longer do you want to stay bedridden like this? How much longer can your parents live and care for you?'" Her bluntness was like a wake-up call for him.

At Superintendent Chien's encouragement, Jiang began training in 2020 to become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer. He was invited to share his story during a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony that same year. His story was very powerful.

A woman named Yang in the audience couldn't

Jiang's mother, Zhuang Qiong-hua, presents a painting Jiang created to Chien Sou-hsin (right), superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. The gift was to thank Chien for his encouragement and assistance to help Jiang rebuild his life.

LIU ZHE-LING

keep her tears from flowing as she listened to Jiang. She said that four of her family members had died in the past five years. As if that wasn't bad enough, her brother had been diagnosed with spinocerebellar ataxia, a condition characterized by progressive problems with movement. Overwhelmed by it all, she fell into self-pity. But Jiang's story gave her courage. Listening to his story of courage, she decided she'd do her best to be her brother's emotional support and help him stay positive.

Jiang says he will continue to share his story to encourage more people to overcome their challenges in life, just as Tzu Chi has helped him transform his life. "Never bow to fate, no matter how difficult things are," Jiang summed up. "Never give up hope, and you'll come out a winner."



Sai Sai's Three Wishes

By Malaysian Tzu Chi documenting volunteers

Compiled by Cecelia G. C. Ong

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Teoh Bee Ling

Sai Sai, a young Burmese boy, had three wishes as his life drew to an end. He wanted to donate money to a nursing home, visit a mall, and become a monk.

In January 2020, Tzu Chi Malaysia received an inquiry from Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) asking if Tzu Chi could help a refugee boy receive dialysis treatment. That was how Tzu Chi volunteers in Penang came to meet Sai Sai. The boy was going to celebrate his seventh birthday when the volunteers first visited him at Penang General Hospital. Though he was severely ill, his face and four limbs swollen, he was all smiles that day.

The connection between Sai Sai and Tzu Chi lasted for more than a year. It was in January 2021 when the hospital notified Tzu Chi volunteers that the central venous catheter that had been placed in the boy was blocked again. If the problem couldn't be solved, they'd be forced to stop giving him dialysis.

From Myanmar to Malaysia

Sai Sai's parents are Burmese Shan people. They were lucky to emerge unscathed from devastating Cyclone Nargis in their home country in 2008 only to get caught up in a civil war. U Sai Tun, Sai Sai's father, fled to the mountains to escape from the war. The young man laid low for a time, but decided that he couldn't remain in hiding forever. At the urging of some fellow villagers, he made up his mind to leave Myanmar. The party of people set off on foot from Htantabin Township, Bago, heading to the border of Thailand. They arrived two days later. They were originally planning to stay in Thailand, but some people they met convinced them it would be better to travel further by car to Malaysia. The group finally arrived in Penang, northern Malaysia, after traveling a total of 1,881 kilometers (1,170 miles).

Once in Malaysia, U Sai Tun started working in a restaurant near where he lived. His wife, Daw

Nang Owmar, worked there, too. The couple led a relatively stable life until their second son, Sai Sai, came along.

Sai Sai was diagnosed with congenital kidney failure as soon as he was born. His doctor decided in early 2020 that the boy needed to undergo immediate dialysis to save his life. The medical cost, however, was beyond the family's means—though they were registered refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), they were not citizens of Malaysia, and thus would have to pay a large medical bill if Sai Sai underwent regular peritoneal dialysis treatment. Their boy's life was on the line. What could they do?

Just as the family was on the verge of plunging into despair, a group of strangers came to their rescue.

On January 2, 2020, Dr. Tan Kiat Beng (陳吉民) and Nurse Teoh Bee Ling (張美玲), volunteers from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, visited Sai Sai at the hospital after the boy's situation was brought to their attention. His birthday was on January 22, just three weeks away, but he was experiencing the most difficult time in his life. Even so, the smile on his face was so sparkling and innocent it pulled at the heartstrings of the two visitors.

As soon as they left the hospital, Dr. Tan began contacting other Tzu Chi volunteers to discuss how to help save Sai Sai's life. They quickly reached a consensus to pay for the boy's medical treatment. Without wasting any time, they notified the UNHCR that Tzu Chi would work hand in hand with Sai Sai to help him fight his disease.

Unfortunately, U Sai Tun lost his job in the economic downturn that followed the outbreak of the

Sai Sai poses with his parents in a ward at Penang General Hospital on January 2, 2020. It was the first time Tzu Chi volunteers met the boy.

COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Tan and Nurse Teoh visited the family on May 21 to see how they were doing. As soon as U Sai Tun saw the physician, he greeted him warmly with a hearty, "Dr. Tan!" The normally shy Burmese man didn't hide his excitement at seeing the volunteers. He was visibly emotional in the bright afternoon sunlight.

U Sai Tun and his family lived in a tightly packed housing unit. There was almost no furniture in their home. Their bedrooms were similar to those in Myanmar, and the kitchen was simple. The bare living room contained a Buddhist altar and boxes of dialysis solution neatly lined up. Pieces of paper inscribed with Burmese and English words were posted on the four walls. They listed Sai Sai's daily dialysis schedule and the amounts of dialysis solution used.

The young boy was energetic and vivacious. If not for the catheter on his neck, no one would have guessed that he had had a close brush with death. As soon as he saw the visiting Tzu Chi volunteers, he held up his hand and flashed a "V" sign at them. Everyone then sat down in a circle on the floor. Sai Sai nestled like a docile lamb against Teoh. The nurse often phoned or visited the young patient when the latter was hospitalized. Their main languages were different so they couldn't understand each other very well, but genuine care and love can be conveyed without words. Sai Sai could tell that Nurse Teoh really cared for him. Aside from his parents, it was her in whom he placed the most trust.

A room in the family's home contained a chair and a nearby IV stand. It was where Sai Sai underwent his dialysis treatment at home. The child had no timetable for play or tutoring sessions; the only schedule he had was for his dialysis sessions. When it was time for another session, his weight and blood pressure were measured, and then he would perch on the chair to undergo the treatment.



When he was done with his treatment that day, Dr. Tan and Nurse Teoh checked his abdomen. Sai Sai's youthful face didn't for a moment reveal any discomfort.

The boy's mother told the volunteers that although her husband was temporarily out of work, they could still manage by living frugally. She just hoped the rest of the family remained healthy—they didn't have any extra money to spare on more doctors' visits.

Please save my child

U Sai Tun, a devout Buddhist, performed his morning and evening rituals without fail. The only things on the altar in his home, besides the photos of his late parents, were three Buddhist scriptures. His devotion to Buddhism was obvious. Following his example, his children prostrated themselves before the statue of the Buddha on their altar every day, and recited the Three Refuges.

When asked if he harbored any hatred after experiencing so much pain in his life, U Sai Tun said, “I left my hometown with hatred in my heart over ten years ago. Throughout that arduous journey away from home, I told myself never to forget the reason why I left. When I arrived in Malaysia, I started practicing Buddhism to find an answer to the doubts I had about life. Through Buddhism, I came to realize that instead of embracing hatred, I should cleanse myself from inner impurities. My parents and siblings have all left the world. The welfare of my children is my only concern now. Nothing else matters to me.”

In late August 2020, Sai Sai began to experience one health issue after another. First he was diagnosed with peritonitis. Even after treatment in the hospital, he wasn’t completely healed, which resulted in even more frequent visits to the hospital. Then his peritoneal dialysis catheter became dislocated, making it difficult for him to undergo dialysis. The boy’s doctor informed his parents that if they couldn’t fix the problem, they’d have to stop giving him dialysis, meaning that death would get closer and closer to their boy. In November, he suffered a minor stroke and required brain surgery. When it came to his health, it never rained but poured.



Sai Sai’s routine visits to the hospital became routine visits to the intensive care unit. Every time he was admitted, his parents would prepare themselves for the worst. However, their boy surprised them time and again by repeatedly making it through. Every medical crisis he survived rekindled the couple’s hope.

Even so, the doctor reminded U Sai Tun and his wife not to get their hopes up. That message was hard for them to take, as it would be for any parent. They begged and implored Sai Sai’s doctor to do everything in his power to save their child, to do everything possible to not to let their child be taken away from them.

Tzu Chi volunteers did their best to soothe the parents. They pleaded with them to trust the doctor, and stood by them with love.

After that, U Sai Tun became more diligent in studying Buddhism. Volunteers arranged for him to talk on the phone with Daw Thida Khin (李金蘭), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Myanmar. U Sai Tun poured out his heart to her, saying that he felt he was experiencing the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism: “suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to freedom from suffering.” Even though he loved his son very much, his attachment to him felt like a burning coal. As much as he wanted to hold on to it, he couldn’t. All he could do was let go.

U Sai Tun said that it was only by learning more Buddhism that he could change his mindset towards his son. He thanked Tzu Chi volunteers for helping his family too. All he could say was “Thank you,” but those two words were inadequate to describe the depth of his gratitude for them.

Three wishes

When Sai Sai was discharged from the hospital after undergoing brain surgery for the stroke, his parents granted him three wishes. The boy happily told them what he wanted: to donate money to a nursing home, to visit a mall, and to become a monk.

To fulfill the first wish, Sai Sai visited Peace and Harmony Home, a nursing home, on December 3, 2020. The visit was arranged by Tzu Chi volunteers. When they first contacted the nursing home for a visit, they were told that the institute was closed to visitors due to the pandem-

U Sai Tun dexterously sets things up at home to give his son Sai Sai dialysis.

TAN KIAT BENG



ic, but when the volunteers explained Sai Sai’s situation to administrators at the facility, they were finally granted a visit. The director of the home personally received Sai Sai when they arrived. Although the boy was seriously ill, he still wanted to help others. When he presented his donation to the director, the latter saw the long surgical scar on his head and how fragile and weak he was. Moved beyond measure by the boy’s kindness, the director held his hands tightly in his and burst into tears.

To fulfill Sai Sai’s second wish, volunteer Teoh and a fellow nurse accompanied him and his older brother to a shopping mall one day after work. The adults knew that Sai Sai loved Legos, so they took the siblings straight to the toy section for their first stop. Sai Sai was enthralled by the great variety of Lego products on display. The nurses told him and his brother they could choose two favorite construction toys to purchase. The boys carefully browsed the shelves lined with brand-new toys as they contemplated their choices. They would pick up an item, take a close look, and then gingerly put it back. Such a chance to choose any toy they wanted came by so rarely they didn’t want to settle on just any toy. The selection process was especially lengthy as a

After undergoing brain surgery, Sai Sai (right) fulfilled his wish of becoming a monk at a Burmese temple in Penang, Malaysia.

result. But it was worth it, no matter how long it took them to choose their toys.

Sai Sai’s third and final wish was fulfilled too, with relatives, friends, and Tzu Chi volunteers as witnesses. At a Burmese temple in Penang, Sai Sai was given the Dharma name “San Dimah,” meaning “the moon.” When the ceremony was over, U Sai Tun told the volunteers present: “Sai Sai is no longer my child. He has become the Buddha’s child. The Enlightened One will make the best arrangements for him.”

Social workers at the Tzu Chi Penang office compiled a photo album documenting the time volunteers had spent with San Dimah and gave it to him as a present. Flipping through the pages in the album, San Dimah pointed to a picture and said, “This is me.” His mother, right next to him, broke into a smile. Everyone else smiled too. Though no one knew how much time Sai Sai had left in the world, everyone around knew they would be there for him through the remainder of his journey in this world.

I'm Happy

By Teoh Bee Ling

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

With a sparkle in his eyes and a warm smile on his face, Sai Sai said quietly to me after receiving a gift from us: "Happy!"

In early 2020, Dr. Tan Kiat Beng, a fellow volunteer from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), phoned me and asked me to go with him to Penang General Hospital to visit a refugee boy named Sai Sai. The Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor branch and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had signed a memorandum of understanding to work together to help refugees in the nation, so Tzu Chi volunteers had been visiting and offering whatever assistance was needed to

refugees across Malaysia. I read some information about Sai Sai before visiting him at the hospital, and learned that his family was preparing to be interviewed for immigration to Canada. I thought this visit would be a one-off event.

Sai Sai looked bloated when we met him at the hospital. It was the result of kidney failure: failing kidneys don't remove extra fluid, which causes swelling in the face and other parts of the body. I knew the venous catheter his doctor had installed in his neck for dialysis must have been causing him a lot of discomfort, but the boy greeted us cheerfully, with a beautiful smile on his face. He immediately captured my heart.

Sai Sai's father, U Sai Tun, told us that Sai Sai had been hospitalized for treatment when he was just one year old. As a mother myself, I could fully empathize with the pain the boy's parents must have been going through.

Though Sai Sai already had a central venous catheter installed when I met him, he wasn't a good candidate to receive hemodialysis on a long-term basis due to vascular access problems. As a

Sai Sai in the arms of the author, Teoh Bee Ling

CECELIA G. C. ONG



result, his doctors recommended switching to peritoneal dialysis instead.

After we got to know U Sai Tun better, we found him to be a very responsible, patient, and loving father. He never made negative remarks or complained about anything. He believed in the karmic law of cause and effect, that everything happened for a reason. From him I learned how to face difficulties, suffering, and illness with an open mind. A positive mindset like that prevents one from getting trapped in negative thinking and helps one learn and grow through difficulties.

The Malaysian government initiated the Movement Control Order in March 2020 to rein in the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. As a result of the order, we couldn't go to the hospital to visit Sai Sai. Even so, we kept in touch with the family via phone calls, establishing very friendly relations with the family and winning their trust. I became the first person U Sai Tun called whenever Sai Sai was hospitalized.

Even though faced with difficult circumstances, U Sai Tun and Sai Sai remained upbeat and optimistic. The positive energy they exuded made them popular at the hospital and allowed them to form great bonds with medical workers there.

I saw courage, resilience, and gratitude for his parents in Sai Sai's eyes. He is an obedient, well-mannered child who respects his elders. I never heard him complain or throw a tantrum despite his treatments. What an endearing, winning child he is!

Sai Sai experienced a lot of health problems in the second half of 2020. At one point, his peritoneal dialysis catheter became dislocated, requiring him to switch back to hemodialysis using a central venous catheter. All this meant Sai Sai had to suffer more pain than normal, and it required multiple surgeries to fix the dislocation problem.

One day I received a phone call from a UNHCR physician telling me that Sai Sai's condition had deteriorated to such an extent that he could no longer receive hemodialysis. He couldn't go back to peritoneal dialysis either because the multiple surgeries had resulted in abdominal adhesions. He and Sai Sai's doctor both agreed that switching the boy to palliative care would be best.

U Sai Tun told us Sai Sai wanted to donate to a nursing home. We knew what the family's financial situation was like, so we decided to help out. We arranged a trip to a nursing home and made Sai Sai's wish come true. We also accompanied



Sai Sai, his parents, and his older brother in the living room at their home. The family came to know Tzu Chi because of Sai Sai's illness. The neatly lined up boxes next to the Buddhist altar contain dialysis solution for Sai Sai's kidney condition, courtesy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. TAN KIAT BENG

him to a shopping mall, a memorable trip full of joy and laughter. A warm smile lit up his face, and his eyes twinkled. In response to the small gift we gave him during the trip, he said quietly to me in my arms: "Happy!"

Sai Sai has taught us how to cope with illness with ease. We've also learned from him the spirit of kindness and how one should never delay in doing good. He accepts what has happened to him with a broad mind and a tranquility borne from the influence of Buddhism. His wise father has likewise been able to accompany his child with peace through the last stage of his journey on Earth due to his strong religious faith. It's a blessing getting to know the family. ❀

Calming the Digestive System

By Ng Hooi Lin

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Illustration by Lin Jia-sheng

If you want to know what foods make you gassy, just ask your body. It knows best. Changing the way you cook or reducing your serving sizes may help keep gas in check, but if you discover a particular food doesn't agree with you, you may just have to let that food go. Let's hear about it from a dietician.

On the days I don't have to work, I spend most of my time reading. When my eyes tire, I take a walk in the park. When I'm hungry, I eat. When I'm tired, I lie down to rest, regardless of the time of day. When I live like this, I don't seem to have any gastrointestinal issues. But it's a different story on days I work. Dealing with people, racing against the clock, and delaying trips to the restroom can upset my digestive system. Sometimes my gastric acid production goes into overdrive during my sleep.

I'm not alone in my experiences. Abdominal bloating and intestinal gas are a problem for some of my friends as well. We've shared with one another the approaches that we have tried to soothe our intestinal irritations. Bloating makes each of us feel uncomfortable in different ways, and so we have taken a variety of approaches in dealing with our problems. Some of us think that, unlike heart problems, a few gas attacks now and then are nothing to lose sleep over. Others, on the other hand, actively seek medical attention and take medicine to solve their problems. They will visit a specialist whenever they learn of a good one.

I'm not against seeing the doctor in and of itself, but I'm not the type to rely only on doctors and medications. It's wishful thinking to me to believe that a doctor alone can thoroughly eradicate my gastrointestinal problems. After all, the human

body is extremely complicated, and the disease we face is likely to have multiple causes. Instead of relying on medicine, I've been paying attention to the messages my body is sending me to identify a dietary strategy that helps me effectively prevent flatulence or excessive intestinal gas.

There are ways to help

Ever since I became vegetarian, my diet has included more legumes, nuts, and vegetables. Initially, I tried using dry beans to substitute for meats, including them in two of my meals each day. Although I soaked the beans before cooking them, I still suffered from flatulence. Some people have successfully alleviated their gas problems by cutting down on beans, but that didn't work for me. My abdomen continued to feel distended even though I cut down on my intake of legumes.

One day I pureed food for my child and kept some of the blended chickpeas for myself. I was pleasantly surprised to find that processed chickpeas did not make me gassy.

I've heard some new vegetarians complain about bloating when they added nuts to their food. Nuts cause me gas problems, too, so I have tried to modify their texture before I eat them to tackle this issue. For example, I blend cashews with nut milk or rice milk before I drink the mixture. That has proved easier for my stomach to

digest than whole cashews.

For the same reason, I choose almond butter in place of whole almonds. If you like to eat almonds whole, make sure that you chew them thoroughly. Nutritionists generally suggest that people eat a handful of mixed nuts a day, but I believe that people who have gas problems should observe the reactions of their body to find the best food textures and serving sizes for themselves.

People who are often bothered by flatulence may also wish to consider eating their vegetables cooked rather than raw. They may also want to go easy on cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage, which tend to cause gas. But even that advice should not be followed blindly, as some people have problems with cauliflower but can eat broccoli without any ill effects. If you can monitor the foods you eat and how your body reacts to them, you can identify the foods that are more likely to trigger

indigestion for you. If a food doesn't agree with your body, try to avoid that food. After all, your body will always be honest with you.

People disposed to bloating should avoid carbonated beverages, and restrain from drinking with a straw. Do not leave candy in your mouth for an extended period, especially sugar-free mints, because this leads to more air entering your stomach.

Bloating and gas are just symptoms. Although many causes of bloating and gas are harmless, there may be a more significant reason for such symptoms. Don't take such symptoms lightly. Although your problems may be alleviated by listening to your body and adjusting your diet, it's also wise to do so under the guidance of a gastroenterologist. Working together, you will be able to tailor a lifestyle that is both healthy and brings you bodily comfort again. ❀



Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Cambodia

The year 2020 was especially hard for Cambodia. The country was impacted by the coronavirus early in the year, followed by a serious drought that lasted from May to September. The drought was followed by tropical storms that led to severe flooding. Not long after the storms had passed, the pandemic situation in the country worsened.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital, originally planned to distribute aid to flood victims in the province of Battambang in December 2020, but that plan was derailed by the pandemic restrictions reinstated by the government in November. When the restrictions were lifted at the end of 2020, volunteers jumped into action. They held nine distributions in six districts in Battambang from January 5 to 12, 2021, during which rice and cooking oil were given to 20,131 families. To speed up distribution, three lines were organized at the venues: one for people who had come on foot, another for those on motor scooters, and a third for people

From January 5 to 12, 2021, Tzu Chi Cambodia distributed aid to more than 20,000 families in Battambang that had been affected by flooding. LINA PHA

arriving on farming tractors.

Conducting so many distributions in such a short time required cooperation from several groups. Tzu Chi volunteers worked with the police and military, as well as people from the Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association and the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia. All told, 1,487 shifts were logged.

Tzu Chi volunteers had visited the disaster areas in Battambang twice in 2020 to assess damage. They learned that some regions had suffered from flooding for as long as a week, and some for even more than a month. Flood victims said they had already seen their incomes shrink as a result of the pandemic, and the drought and flooding just added insult to injury. They had had to take out loans to rent farmland and buy rice seeds and fertilizers to farm, but with their crops severely

reduced by the natural disasters, they were now hard pressed to repay the loans. Some tried to supplement their incomes by fishing or working odd jobs, but it wasn't enough. They were very grateful to Tzu Chi for easing their burden. They were also thankful that the foundation had thoughtfully considered the sizes of recipient families when they planned the events, so that larger families could receive larger portions. Many dropped money into the donation boxes placed at the venues out of gratitude.

Taiwan

A COVID-19 cluster infection erupted at Taoyuan General Hospital in northern Taiwan in January 2021, resulting in 21 confirmed cases, one of them fatal. The first two infections were reported on January 12. As the number of diagnosed cases continued to rise, an increasing number of medical and administrative workers at the hospital, as well as patients and families, were tested for the virus and ordered into quarantine on-site or elsewhere. At least 5,000 people were affected by the cluster infection. In response to the crisis, the Ministry of Health and Welfare launched a plan on January 22 to evacuate inpatients and reduce outpatient services. The hospital didn't resume normal operations until February 19, when the cluster had been successfully contained.

On the morning of January 27, about 40 Tzu Chi volunteers gathered at Tzu Chi's Taoyuan Jing Si Hall to prepare a thousand gift packs to be delivered to Taoyuan General Hospital. The packs contained herbal drinks, multi-grain porridge and powder, instant rice, *Jing Si Aphorisms* by Master Cheng Yen, and other items. With so many volunteers helping, the packing was completed in just two hours. The gift packs were delivered to the hospital at two thirty in the afternoon. As a precautionary measure, volunteers avoided any physical contact with hospital workers when they delivered the gifts to the hospital. They placed the gifts at one location to be taken away by hospital personnel.

"We're very thankful to Master Cheng Yen for cheering us on by donating a thousand gift packs to us," said Yu Pei-yu (余珮瑜), director of the social workers office at the hospital. "Empowered by such love and care, we'll have more strength to tackle the challenge we are facing and take good care of patients."

Tzu Chi also donated a thousand gift packs to the Taoyuan city government for distribution to people under quarantine in the city. As per the



Volunteers make face shields at the Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall, southern Taiwan. The face shields were provided to frontline workers in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, after a hospital cluster infection broke out there in January 2021. HUANG XIAO-ZHE

government's request, the foundation also provided face shields, gloves, and other medical supplies to frontline workers. The face shields—more than 10,000—had been made by Tzu Chi volunteers, and could be reused after sterilizing. The first batch was made from January 27 to February 3 and immediately sent to the Taoyuan city government for distribution to frontline police officers. The second batch of 9,000 was produced during the Chinese New Year holiday after manufacturers had rushed out the materials to make more. Participating volunteers didn't mind working during the New Year holiday; they were simply happy to have the chance to give and help people weather this crisis.

Indonesia

A suspension bridge connecting the villages of Depok, Paas, and Sinar Bakti in Garut, West Java, was destroyed by floods in October 2020. Without the bridge, villagers trying to go to work or school were forced to take detours or wait until the river was low enough to cross. Not only was this inconvenient—it could be downright dangerous.

When they learned about the situation, Tzu Chi volunteers in Bandung decided to work with the military to rebuild the bridge. Local residents



Tzu Chi worked with the military, villagers, and volunteers from Vertical Rescue Indonesia to rebuild a bridge in Depok, Garut, Indonesia. The new bridge was inaugurated on January 6, 2021.

MOCH GALVAN

and additional volunteers from Vertical Rescue Indonesia, a non-profit organization, pitched in to help with the project. The new bridge, 50 meters (260 feet) long and 1.2 meters (4 feet) wide, took more than a month to construct and was inaugurated on January 6, 2021. It's made of stainless steel to be more durable.

Villagers were overjoyed at the completion of the new bridge. They were happy they could now go to work and back much more easily. They were also happy to see local business returning to normalcy. "Thank you, Allah! Thank you, Tzu Chi!" one villager exclaimed. "We hope all your volunteers remain safe and healthy!"

The United Kingdom

On January 4, 2021, Boris Johnson, prime minister of the United Kingdom, announced a third national lockdown in England. Schools and colleges would be closed to all pupils except for those who were vulnerable or whose parents were critical workers. All other pupils and students would receive remote education.

In mid-January, Clare Morgan, headteacher at Hanborough Manor CE School, in Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire, wrote Tzu Chi requesting a donation of computers. The headteacher said she had received many phone calls from parents asking for help. These families didn't have enough computers at home for all their children to receive remote education. In some families where there were no computers, parents had been letting their kids use their cell phones to learn remotely. Even so, their children were having difficulty completing their school assignments without the help of computers.

After evaluation, volunteers decided to donate 15 laptop computers to the school to help address the need. It took a while for the computers purchased by volunteers online to arrive because remote learning during the pandemic had resulted in a higher demand for computers. When the computers finally arrived, volunteers took them to the school on February 2. The headteacher sincerely thanked the foundation for making it easier for children at the school to learn during this difficult time. ☸

The pandemic in the U.K. forced many students to receive remote education at home. Some families, however, didn't have computers at home to allow their children to learn during this critical time. Tzu Chi volunteers in England donated 15 laptop computers to Hanborough Manor CE School in Long Hanborough in February 2021 to help address the need.

PENG YI-ZHEN



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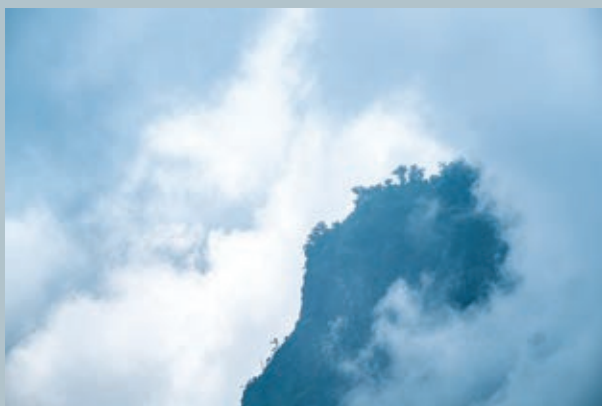
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*With a tranquil and peaceful heart, our path
is smooth. With a broad and open heart, our
path is wide.*

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HUANG XIAO-ZHE

