

# Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Summer 2015

慈濟

**PALO TZU CHI  
GREAT LOVE  
VILLAGE**

Winter Aid in China	34
The Road Back to Normal	46
Transforming by Recycling	54
Walk With Me	68

# A Cycle of Love

Text and photo by Liu King-pong

A mouse named Charlie lived on an Australian farm, which provided a bountiful harvest of barley, wheat, vegetables and fruit. Charlie could select from the best of these foods at the slightest twinge of hunger. He assumed that he could live happily in this “heaven on earth” forever, but his optimistic vision was overshadowed by a macabre omen.

One morning as Charlie was about to dig into a hearty breakfast, he saw the farmer walk by with a bunch of mousetraps in his hands. Panicked at the sight, Charlie decided to ask for advice from his friends: the rooster, the pig, and the bull.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo,” the rooster responded nonchalantly. “Those traps might be risky to you, but they don’t bother me!”

The pig sympathetically replied, “Oink, I can’t help you there, but I will definitely pray for you.”

The bull stated calmly, “Moo, I’m very sorry to hear about your problem, but it has nothing to do with me. Mousetraps can’t hurt my hooves. You’d better figure out a way to help yourself.”

None of Charlie’s friends cared about his gloomy fate, nor did they offer any help to deal with the impending menace. Frustrated and scared, believing his days were numbered, Charlie scurried back into his nest and wept.

One evening, the farmer’s wife heard a mousetrap in the barn go SNAP! She hurried out to the barn to see what it had caught. Because it was pitch-black, she did not realize that the trap had caught an inland taipan—a normally shy and placid snake, but whose venom is by far the deadliest in the world. Filled with fear and pain, the trapped creature bit her on the wrist. Her husband rushed her to the hospital for treatment.

Being a good husband, the farmer slaughtered the rooster to make chicken soup for his wife, but her condition was still far from satisfactory. The farmer then butchered the pig and prepared meals to thank the neighbors who came one by one to take care of his wife. A few days later, his wife died of complications from the snake bite. Friends and relatives came to attend the funeral, and the hospitable farmer slaughtered the bull in order to treat the guests.

In this parable, the victim of the mousetrap was not the mouse after all. Instead, the victims were the seemingly unrelated animals. It reminds me of the adage that a butterfly beating its wings might stir up a hurricane on the other side of the globe. Seemingly unrelated conditions may cause unexpected results when all of them, triggered by a single trivial episode, suddenly become entangled with each other. Undoubtedly, people are like this too. Since we are all citizens of the global village, our destinies are often closely intertwined. That is why we should not only care about our own interests, nor should we act as bystanders when people around us encounter difficulties.

It is far better for us to treat all people kindly and be more concerned for others in times of need. This is the notion of the “cycle of love” that Master Cheng Yen teaches. She believes that if we unselfishly give our love to others, friends and strangers alike, the positive exchange of love will eventually make a full circle and come back to each of us. The bottom line is that everybody will benefit from it.

My first visit to the United States in 1986 took me to Los Angeles, Atlanta, Reno, and Seattle. As I explored the historic city of Atlanta one afternoon, I was approached by a gentleman on a downtown street. He asked if I was from Japan. I told him I was from Taipei. “Which area, Tianmu?” he inquired. This man turned out to be a missionary, once based in Taipei. He kindly showed me around the city, and he even drove me to a farmers market located in a suburb so I could buy some fresh fruit. I was deeply grateful for his amiability and liberality, and the strange city of Atlanta suddenly became homey to me. When I asked him why he treated an unfamiliar Taiwanese person so well, he told me that he had been treated kindly by people when he lived in Taiwan.

Obviously, the man was trying to repay the wonderful hospitality he had received by helping me, a Taiwanese visitor on his first trip to the United States. A good impression of the American people’s warmth and friendliness has been etched in my mind ever since. It just goes to show how rewarding a “cycle of love” can be when it is graciously practiced by all of us. ❀

The extended buttress roots of a huge Ceiba tree in Little Havana, Miami, Florida

# Tzu Chi Quarterly

Vol. 22 No. 2 Summer 2015



1 A CYCLE OF LOVE  
Our destinies are often intertwined, so we should all be concerned for each other.

6 NEW HOMES LIFT SPIRITS  
Typhoon Haiyan, the worst natural disaster in the world in 2013, laid waste to the central Philippines. But at the new Palo Tzu Chi Great Love Village, the residents themselves built their community with their own hands.

16 A PLACE TO LIVE AND MAKE A LIVING  
Now that they have new homes in the Palo village, residents need to find steady work.

26 HIS OWN HOME HAS TO WAIT  
One Tzu Chi volunteer had already demolished his old home in order to build a new one. But then Typhoon Haiyan put his plans on hold.

32 SEARCHING  
A survivor of Typhoon Haiyan searches through the rubble for any memories of her previous life.

34 DELIVERING AID, DELIVERING BLESSINGS  
During a relief distribution for the needy in Guangxi Province, China, volunteers discovered just how needy many people were.

41 THE NEEDY SIDE OF HAINAN  
When Tzu Chi held a relief distribution on the island of Hainan, some local people volunteered to help.

46 THE ROAD BACK TO NORMAL  
Some children whose homes were destroyed by a typhoon are now settled in a new Tzu Chi village, where tutoring programs help them to learn and grow.

54 TRANSFORMING THROUGH RECYCLING  
Volunteers who work to extend the usefulness of discarded things see their own lives transformed at the same time.



59 OUT OF THE OPERATING ROOM, INTO THE HOME  
An anesthesiologist who never had any long-term relationships with his patients left the operating room and entered their real lives.

63 THE MOST BEAUTIFUL IS GREAT LOVE  
We must constantly absorb the cool, refreshing water of the Dharma to put out the fires of affliction in our minds.

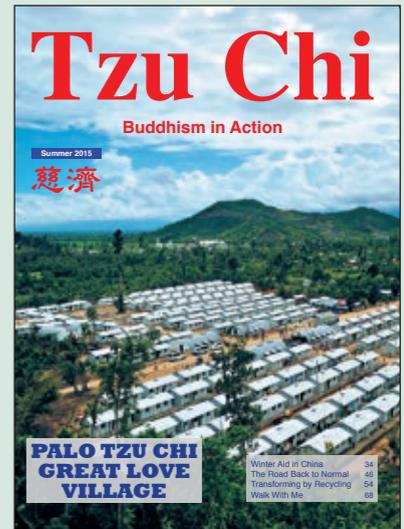
68 WALK WITH ME  
Dedicated young ocean lovers organize treks along the coastline of Taiwan in order to inspire in their fellow islanders a love of their ocean landscapes and a desire to preserve them.

80 NOW THIS IS HOME  
Volunteers find a new home for a woman who had been living in a shed on a chicken farm.

83 TELLING HIS STORY WITH COLORS  
His disability opened doors to colorful new frontiers.

91 THE ILLUSTRATED JING SI APHORISMS  
Wisdom is greater than the whole world.

92 TZU CHI EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD  
Tzu Chi briefs from all over.



The *Tzu Chi Quarterly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address and telephone number.  
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*Tzu Chi Quarterly* is owned and published quarterly by the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, No. 1, Lane 88, Jingshe St., Kanglo Village, Shinchen Hsiang, Hualien County 97150, Taiwan.  
Shih Cheng Yen, Chairman.  
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For a free copy of the *Tzu Chi Quarterly*, please contact your nearest Tzu Chi branch office (see inside back cover).

中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

# After Typhoon Haiyan *Rebuilding Lives*

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

*Typhoon Haiyan, the worst natural disaster in the world in 2013, hit the central Philippines very hard. Tzu Chi has carried out several aid programs since the storm, one of which was building a new village for typhoon victims in Palo, Leyte Province.*





## New Homes Lift Spirits

*Even though these new houses are simple, light-duty structures, they're a lot better than what these people lived in before. They will provide shelter for several years. What makes them even more precious is that the residents built this community with their own hands. The people are not just aid recipients. They are ready to face fearlessly the vicissitudes of life.*



**D**uring World War II, as Japanese forces gradually extended their grip on the Philippines, President Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to withdraw to the safe allied haven of Australia. When he arrived there, the general made his famous statement, "I came through and I shall return."

Two years later, in 1944, that promise was fulfilled when the general and his troops landed in the municipality of Palo, just south of the Leyte provincial capital of Tacloban, and began their campaign to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese. The MacArthur Landing Memorial

National Park, a testimonial to this historic event, has long been a popular tourist destination in Palo.

However, on November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan (known in the Philippines as Typhoon Yolanda) laid waste to the region. Even the memorial was damaged. One of the seven statues, that of Brigadier General Carlos Romulo, was knocked off its base.

People's lives were knocked off their bases, too. But whereas the memorial was easier to repair—within 20 days—victims' lives would take much longer to return to normal.

HAIYAN LEFT A PATH OF DESOLATION in which 7,000 people died or went missing and nearly a million homes were damaged. The damage from the disaster remains indelible. Today many people still live in places with only flimsy metal or plastic sheets over their heads. Their walls are nothing more than what they have been able to scavenge and cobble together.

But Tzu Chi has been working hard to help victims rebuild their lives since the typhoon. Fifteen months after the disaster, the foundation finished building 255 light-duty housing units on a 3.3-hectare tract in the barangay of San Jose,

**These bronze statues, twice life size, depict MacArthur's famous landing in Palo, Leyte, during World War II. Near this memorial, Tzu Chi has built a village for victims of Typhoon Haiyan.**

Palo, just a few kilometers from where MacArthur made his historic return. Fifteen hundred people have moved into the new village.

Joel Daga lived in the barangay of Candahug, where the MacArthur memorial is located. After Haiyan, he and his family were put up in one of the bunkhouses that the government had built for victims of the typhoon. These houses, about



At the construction site for the Tzu Chi village, the ground is muddy after a rain. The village was constructed during the monsoon season.

110 square feet in size, were built one next to another, separated only by plywood. Bathrooms and kitchens were shared by the residents.

Daga shared his small unit with his mother, brother, two sisters and a niece. They had only about 18 square feet per person, just enough for a person to lie flat. The discomfort of the extreme crowdedness was made even less bearable by the sounds of others living in other units. The plywood proved to be a poor sound barrier; every sound, however small, seemed to travel fast and far beyond the walls.

"I couldn't get used to living there," Daga said of their government-issued quarters. "It was hot and there was no electricity. It was also noisy, and you had no privacy. It was easy to get sick."

Against such a backdrop, it was understandable how joyful the Daga family must have been when they learned that they would move into one of the 255 units that Tzu Chi would build. Their 285-square-foot unit would have three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. It would be head and shoulders above the place they had been in, and it would be even better than the house they had lost to Typhoon Haiyan. In addition, of the 255 households slated to move into the new village, about a hundred of them,

like Joel Daga's, used to live in Candahug. Old neighbors would become new neighbors.

If all that was not enough, the news got even sweeter: If they wanted, they could help build their houses and get paid for their service.

Daga started working in September 2014. He was responsible for pulling steel cables and putting anchors into the ground. The cables and anchors were designed to help hold down and strengthen the units against typhoons. He was paid 250 pesos (US\$5.60) a day, just a tad over the local minimum wage. His mother soon joined in and worked too.

About two hundred people in all, including future occupants like Daga, other villagers, and even volunteers from other NGOs, worked together to build the houses. Tzu Chi volunteers were on hand to teach them how to do their jobs.

The first hundred households, including Daga's, moved in on December 17, 2014. One of his sisters is mentally disabled and suffers occasional seizures. She cannot live alone, so her mother shares a room with her. For her safety,

Jason Delector, holding the chainsaw, and his team members cut down dead coconut trees to use at the construction site.



## TZU CHI AID FOR HAIYAN VICTIMS

- Cash-for-work cleanup programs: 300,000 person-times in Tacloban over a total of 23 days; cleaned up major thoroughfares and helped restore communities to normalcy
- Emergency cash aid and supplies distributed to almost 70,000 families
- Provided funding to help repair damaged school buildings and rebuild a church
- Built more than 200 prefabricated classrooms
- Completed 255 units in Palo Tzu Chi Great Love Village, and 2,000 more units under construction in Ormoc
- Funded by donations collected by Tzu Chi in 46 countries dedicated to this disaster



**Wood from dead coconut trees was a common sight at the construction site, such as the planks across the ditch in this picture.**

Daga and his mother had to lock her in her room when they went on duty to build the rest of the houses. They went back to check on her whenever they had a break on the job.

DESPITE A NUMBER OF DIFFICULTIES, the entire village of 255 units was completed in about six months.

It has never been easy to acquire public land from the Philippine government for the purpose of building housing, permanent or temporary, for disaster victims. The nation has sold public lands ever since its Spanish colonial era, so public land is not in abundant supply.

Alfredo Li (李偉嵩), the CEO of Tzu Chi Philippines, pointed out that the Tacloban and Palo governments had offered five tracts of land for Tzu Chi to build temporary housing for Haiyan victims. However, the foundation accepted only the one in Barangay San Jose, Palo. The other tracts did not satisfy one requirement or another.

Teams of Tzu Chi volunteers visited the needy families that were on the government-provided lists to select prospective residents. Some of these families lived in government bunkhouses, and some were still in their own homes which had been damaged and were deemed too dangerous to occupy. During the visitations, volunteers took note of which families contained single parents, elderly, young, disabled, sick, or otherwise disadvantaged people. They gave these households priority as they filled in the list of 255 households.

The Philippines, the 12th most populous nation on the planet, officially became a country of a hundred million people in July 2014. Large families, ones with up to ten children, were quite common among those on the list. Their livelihoods were in serious jeopardy after they had lost everything in the disaster. Even putting food on the table was difficult for many parents. They could really use the relief that their free new homes would provide.

The homes Tzu Chi provided came in two sizes: 285 square feet with three bedrooms, like Daga's, and 215 square feet with two bedrooms. Each unit has a front yard 1.5 meters (4.9 feet) deep and a back yard 2 meters (6.6 feet) deep. Houses are one meter (3.3 feet) apart.



Taiwanese volunteer Pan Xin-cheng (潘信成) stationed himself at the construction site when site preparation began, and he stayed there for seven months. "Two or three typhoons hit during the construction period, but our houses came through with flying colors. They're really sturdy," he said confidently.

BROTHERS KRIS AND GABBY CORPIN, ages 25 and 24 respectively, lived in Barangay Tacuranga, Palo. Besides being siblings, they have several

other things in common: Both of them lived in government bunkhouses after Haiyan, both took part in the work relief program, and both moved into new homes at the Tzu Chi village. Each of them has also had a new child.

In the village construction program, Kris worked on house frames while Gabby installed doors. They enjoyed the work because they were creating a new village for themselves and getting paid for their work at the same time. Kris was able to save some of the income earned from

the work. He wanted to learn to be a hairstylist to make a living.

Kris, his wife, and their child now live in a two-bedroom unit. "It's bigger than the government bunkhouse that we lived in, and it's even bigger than the house we lost in the typhoon." Gabby and his family live next door, so the two brothers can easily look out for each other. Their parents are quite happy about this arrangement.

Jason Delector came from the same village as the Cropins. The father of three children used to

make a living by climbing up coconut trees to collect sap and fermenting it to make coconut wine, a popular local beverage. But he and many others in the industry lost their livelihoods when Haiyan killed hundreds of millions of coconut trees. To support their families, many of them resorted to odd jobs, such as pedaling pedicabs or peddling goods.

When the cash-for-work program started, Delector saw the opportunity and signed up. His job involved using gas chainsaws, something that he had not done before. He needed to learn to mix fuel for the saw, to maintain and keep it in good working condition, and to use it to cut down trees and cut them to size. Those were useful skills, and he was thrilled to be able to learn them under the tutelage of a master technician. This work experience helped him plot a plan for his future: He wanted to be a carpenter.

Now he and his family have moved into their new home in the village, and the money he made from the work relief program has allowed him to buy cooking gas—an upgrade from burning

wood that he scavenged. He even had some money left over to buy school supplies for his daughter. He is grateful for the program and for their new home. “With this home, our lives have become much more stable.”

PAN XIN-CHENG, the volunteer from Taiwan, observed that 28 teams worked on different aspects of the village construction project at its height. Some teams, including the Corpin brothers, put up house frames and doors. Others, including Joel Daga, pulled steel cables and sank anchors into the ground. Still other teams installed skylights, made and laid cement blocks, dug drainage ditches, or landscaped the area.

Among all the jobs, the most noticeable was probably what Jason Delector was involved with, that of wood preparation. His sort of work is not normally seen on a construction site. Delector and his team cut down dead coconut trees, took them back to the building site, and cut them down to different shapes and sizes to be used in the construction. The coconut lumber was used to build things ranging from retaining walls for ditches to dining tables and chairs.

Pan said that at first they found that a coconut tree trunk, if purchased from a store, would

have cost about 650 pesos (US\$14.50). Cutting it down to specifications would have cost an additional 700 pesos (US\$15.65). That came to about US\$30 a tree, shipping not included.

Then they realized that the many dead coconut trees that dotted the slopes around the building site could be used to save them lots of money. Typhoon Haiyan had left them dead but still standing up tall. Tzu Chi obtained permission from landowners to cut down some of those dead trees for use at the building site. Using three gas chainsaws, more than ten participants of the Tzu Chi work relief program felled about a thousand dead coconut trees and hauled them to the work site.

Coconut is a versatile plant. Many Tzu Chi village residents used to work in businesses involving this crop in one way or another. For example, Virginia Daga, Joel Daga’s mother, had sold coconuts for ten years. She would pay seven pesos for a coconut and sell it for 15. She could make 240 pesos a day if she sold 30 coconuts.

But all that was before Haiyan. The sharply lowered supply of the fruit caused by the typhoon killing large numbers of coconut trees drove up the price so much that she had to shut down her business. Her cost increased to 25 pesos per fruit. Even if she charged just 30 pesos a fruit, lowering her profit from eight pesos to five, she would have few buyers. Furthermore, she had no money to purchase an initial supply to restart her business anyway.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that Haiyan destroyed or damaged 44 million coconut trees in the Philippines. It is not an industry that can recover quickly—it takes the plant six to eight years to mature and bear fruit. Since the coconut-related industry plays an important part in the local agricultural economy, the huge impact can only be imagined.

IT TOOK THE EFFORTS of people from different countries to make the project possible. For example, the polypropylene panels used for building the housing units in the Tzu Chi village were made by volunteers in the United States, and the steel frames and parts were made by volunteers in Taiwan.

Tzu Chi’s approach to the construction attracted quite a few visitors from other NGOs during the six-month project period. Some of them came to study the design of the homes, some to help erect the units, some to offer goods,

and some to help design public spaces, such as the playground. Some of these NGOs even talked with Tzu Chi about possible collaborations in the future.

The construction took place during the monsoon season, during which it is common for the weather to be sunny and scorching hot at one moment and raining bucketfuls the next. The construction site, with its exposed dirt, was often very muddy, and the working conditions were very poor. Still, people worked in good spirits. They gathered, sang, and prayed before starting their work each day. The cheerful atmosphere drew the attention of workers from other NGOs.

The Tzu Chi Great Love Village in Palo was completed on February 14, 2015, before the government could supply electricity. Taiwanese volunteer Cai Feng-ci (蔡豐賜) provided solar power panels for the families—one panel for two families—so that they could have electricity for lighting.

In late afternoons, it seemed that all the children in the village were outdoors, playing and frolicking together. Adults visited one another at their homes and chatted. Having gone through the shared experience of the massive typhoon disaster, it seemed easier for them to bond.

Jason Delector told volunteers that his family moved twice after the typhoon, and it wasn’t until they moved into the Tzu Chi village that he finally felt they had settled down. “I feel a happiness that comes from owning my own place.”

Volunteers have urged the residents to keep the village tidy and in good order. “Everybody takes it upon themselves to keep the place orderly, clean and safe,” Delector continued. “We all know that it is everyone’s job.” That discipline has helped make the new village a nice place to live. Many of his relatives and friends who did not get to move there were quite envious of him.

Joel Daga, another happy resident, is a hard-working young man. While he was still in the cash-for-work program, he sold cups of jelly that he made himself in front of his home at night. He sold the snacks at five pesos apiece, making 2.50 pesos in profit. He said that he was trying to make extra money because he needed to buy medications for his sister and to give their mother spending money.

Now that they all have safe homes, village residents have a solid footing on which to build a better life.

**Participants of the cash-for-work program pose for a group picture after the completion of the project.**





Kris (second from right) and his family visit Gabby's house. The Corpin brothers now live next to each other in Palo Tzu Chi Great Love Village.



## A Place to Live and Make a Living

*Children in the devastated area that Typhoon Haiyan left behind responded to a survey in which they named the one thing that they wanted more than anything else. Their desire was not for the latest fads or fashion, but the most lasting backbone of an independent family: jobs for their parents. For better or for worse, adversity has hastened these children to maturity beyond their tender age.*



One recent Sunday morning in the open space at the back of their house in Palo Tzu Chi Great Love Village, Glenda Divino, 35, made a fire with wood scraps to cook breakfast, while just off to one side her oldest daughter, 13, washed a large container of clothes. Though Sunday was traditionally a day of rest, Glenda and her six children did not sleep late. Glenda got up early to do housework, and her children rose early too to help with the chores. The children knew how hard their parents worked to keep the family going. That was true

before Typhoon Haiyan hit, it was true afterwards, and it was still true now that they lived in the Tzu Chi village.

Just after the disaster, living in a bunkhouse that the government had built for Haiyan victims was not an enjoyable experience for the family. There were too many people in too little space, and not enough privacy. Now in their new home, they no longer need to share bathrooms and kitchens with other families. Life has definitely improved for them. But Glenda knows that, new home or not, she and her husband still

need to work hard just to make ends meet. Their children, young though they may be, somehow seem to know that as well.

Through washing clothes for people, Glenda makes 1050 pesos (US\$24.00) a week. The eight people in her family eat three kilograms (6.6 pounds) of rice a day. With rice costing 46 pesos a kilogram, the family spends 966 pesos a week. Buying the rice alone just about depletes what Glenda makes from her work.

For the last 12 years, her husband has pedaled a pedicab for hire. His income has never

**Percival, a resident of the Palo Tzu Chi village, checks on three of his six children in a room in their new home. He runs a grocery store out of a portion of the house, so he can work and look after his children at the same time.**

been all that great. After deducting 60 pesos a day to rent the tricycle, he has barely enough left over to keep his family going.

Even before Haiyan hit, Glenda and her husband had no way of stashing away anything for a rainy day. When that rainy day hit, the typhoon

took away their home and most of their belongings. Their lives went from bad to worse. Fortunately, they have a new home in the Tzu Chi village, so at least they have a place to live. Now they and people like them need to find work that can provide them with steady incomes. They also need to learn how to save some of what they earn.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, Filipinos do not save much for their future. If their ordinary way of making a living is disrupted, they often have little savings to fall back on. That's why, after providing some Haiyan survivors with homes, Tzu Chi volunteers also wanted to help them make a living and manage their income.

Volunteer Sally Yunez (施菱菱), from Manila, worked onsite for several months when the Palo village was under construction. She led several women in the kitchen cooking vegetarian meals for people who were building the new village. The women, like the construction workers, were part of the Tzu Chi cash-for-work program. Also like the construction crew, they were learning skills that might help them launch new careers. Yunez hoped that after learning vegetarian cooking skills, the women could make money selling carry-out meals. If they could win steady orders from companies or schools, it would be a good source of income for them.

Sound financial planning usually involves raising revenues and containing costs, so Yunez attempted to do both for the villagers. In addition to thinking up ways to help the villagers increase their incomes, she tried to help them save on their expenses. One way was by buying in bulk.

A *sari-sari* store, a sort of convenience store in Filipino communities, plays an important part in the daily life of the locals. A customer can buy "units" of a product instead of whole packages (e.g., one can buy a single cigarette instead of a whole pack). This is convenient for people who do not have enough ready cash on hand to buy the whole package. However, the stores charge higher unit prices for their goods when compared with warehouse stores. The poor actually end up paying more overall for their purchases.

**In the evening, village residents cook their dinners, some using firewood, some, those of better means, using gas. The fragrance of cooking fills the air in the new community.**



**After having learned how to weave mats, Arlene Colinayo hopes to take in some extra income with this new skill.**

Yunez therefore bought daily goods in large quantities at warehouse stores, divided them into smaller packages, and then sold them to village residents at lower-than-sari-sari prices. She made no profit providing this service to villagers because she just wanted them to save as much money as possible.

As a result of Yunez's efforts, many housewives saw their expenditures go down. A couple of dozen of them even left the money they saved this way with Yunez for safekeeping. Each of them had a personal goal that they wanted to fulfill with their deposits. Most of them wanted to buy motorcycles or tricycles. Both are important means of transportation in the Philippines and can help bring in income for their owners.

These women also put aside part of the money they earned from the Tzu Chi work relief program or money left over from housekeeping and gave it to Yunez for safekeeping. Arlene Colinayo was an example. She participated in the work relief program, for which she was paid every other day. The day after each payday, she would deposit 200 pesos with Yunez. "Once the money was in Yunez's hands, I didn't want to embarrass myself by making frequent withdrawals," she said, explaining her strategy for forcing herself to save. She had big plans for the money.

Her husband did odd jobs, and he borrowed a tricycle to commute between home and work. She planned to use her savings to buy a bicycle for him. The bike would cost her about 3,200 pesos (US\$72), so she participated in the work relief program when it was offered. Now that the program is over, she stays home so she can care for their three young children. However, she plans to find other sources of income and continue to save money. The new bicycle is intended as a birthday gift for her husband. He has no inkling of her plan, so he is in for a big surprise.

Colinayo and her family used to live in a house built of bamboo and straw. After it was destroyed by Typhoon Haiyan, they moved into a government bunkhouse. The house was so small that she and her family could not sleep comfortably. She and her husband had to sleep on their sides to leave room for their children.

Now they live in a three-bedroom unit in the new village. Their older daughter got her own



room, as did their middle boy. Their youngest sleeps with them. This house is the best home that they have ever owned.

TYPHOON HAIYAN severely damaged local businesses that depended on fishing and agriculture, and many people's livelihoods were impacted. No work means no income. Even young children

were aware of this harsh economic reality. When the Save the Children foundation conducted a survey of children in disaster areas, it found that more than anything else they wanted their parents to have jobs.

Yunez remembers Ethel, a mother of nine children. After buying coffee and rice from Yunez five times, she managed to save 150 pesos. Her

goal was to put away enough to buy a motor scooter, which would cost over 10,000 pesos. Though she still had a long way to go, she worked patiently toward her goal. She hoped to ride the scooter to places that she could not get to on foot so that she could sell more of the snacks she made. She might even do other types of work once she had convenient transportation.



**Volunteers from Tzu Chi and another NGO solicit input from children about the design of the village playground.**

about pooling resources and collaborating for the benefit of the villagers.

Working together, they have organized workshops on how to make sitting mats, sleeping mats, and other handiwork. If villagers can make them in marketable quality, the volunteers are ready to find organizations or companies to help with commercial distribution.

Villagers and volunteers have also worked together to cultivate a vegetable garden on a slope on one side of the village. Elena used to work in horticulture. When she joined the Tzu Chi work relief program to landscape the village, she showed coworkers how to loosen dirt, put up fences and climbing stands, make compost, and plant seeds or seedlings in the garden. She also snipped off shoots from plants and gave them to residents to plant and grow. If successfully cultivated, the plants could be sold to bring in new income for village residents.

A hundred-year-old tree was already on the tract of land that would later be developed into the Palo Tzu Chi village. Though the typhoon had destroyed the old homes of the villagers, it had not killed this tree, which still stood tall and proud. Volunteers decided to leave it alone, leave a sizeable empty space around it, and develop the open space into a playground. Volunteers from Tzu Chi and other NGOs are now working with children to design this space for a playground of their dreams. The space may additionally be used

**Secure in their new homes in the Tzu Chi village, children can enjoy a game of hopscotch.**

Enhanced mobility may open up work opportunities for some people, such as Ethel, but providing mobility for others can also be a source of income.

In October 2014, Tzu Chi provided 200 pedicabs to Haiyan victims who could not afford them in Palo and Tacloban. They can use the pedicabs to make a living.

Rolito Barca, a resident of the Tzu Chi village, used to own a hundred coconut trees. He would scale them to collect coconut sap, and use the sap to make coconut wine for sale. Sadly, that livelihood was destroyed when Haiyan wiped out all his trees. Now hope of making a living has returned to Barca, one of the 200 pedicab

recipients. He has put the gift to good use.

Every morning at six, he takes children from the village to school. These are regular customers that provide him with a steady income. After he drops the children off, he continues to transport adult passengers until the end of his workday at five o'clock. He earns more than 200 pesos a day, enough to make a stable living.

It is hard work though. Pedaling passengers during the half-year monsoon season is particularly difficult, as Barca needs to work alternately under the scorching sun and in unceasing downpours. In addition, because many pedicabs rushed into the market after Haiyan, his competition is that much more fierce.

Still, Barca cherishes the opportunity to make a living with his pedicab. He carefully cleans and checks every part of the vehicle before he starts his workday. The daily upkeep is followed by a more thorough tune-up and make-over on Sunday mornings, when he scrubs and polishes the frame, inflates the tires, oils the chains, and pampers his beloved pedicab. "Proper care will make it last longer," he explained.

YUNEZ, PAN XIN-CHENG, and other Tzu Chi volunteers helped out at the village during much of its construction. In addition to giving village residents direct assistance, they also talked with people from like-minded aid organizations





**Rolito Barca cherishes his pedicab, one of the 200 that Tzu Chi donated to Haiyan victims.**

as a co-op marketplace for villagers to sell things that they have grown or made, like snacks, vegetables, fruit, flowers, and handiwork.

There are also NGOs working with Tzu Chi on nutrition for children, skills training for women, and personal hygiene for villagers. Space has been reserved for a health center, a skills training workshop, and a day-care center. When children are in good care, their parents can work without a care.

The highest level of charity is to help people acquire the ability and means to support themselves: Instead of giving them fish, teach them how to fish. Knowledge and marketable skills are better than riches, and the possession of such things gives the owner more comfort than anything else.

Arlene Colinayo helped at the vegetable garden during the work relief program. She later took a class in mat making, and in just a week

**From the community vegetable garden, village children look down at their new homes.**

she became quite good at it. She figures she can make mats in the evening for some extra income if she can find outlets for her handiwork.

She confessed that she had been quite bitter after Haiyan had wiped out all her worldly possessions. But living in the new village has exposed her to Tzu Chi ideals and teachings, and has rekindled her power to appreciate and count her blessings. During the cash-for-work program, she worked with a woman who had lost her husband in the typhoon and who was raising three small children alone while pregnant with the fourth. Seeing the tough circumstances of other people made Colinayo further realize how fortunate she was.

She was thankful for the fact that her family was well, that her husband was working hard to support their family, and that their children were good and thoughtful. "We're really fortunate," she declared.





## His Own Home Has to Wait

*He had had his home demolished in order to build a new one, but Typhoon Haiyan changed those plans. When the typhoon hit and devastated the central Philippines, the construction of his new home had to wait. In the aftermath of the storm, he and his family spent much of their time on Tzu Chi missions helping victims. This included building a new village in Palo. He and his family were still living in a rental unit in Manila when the village had been finished and 255 families had moved in, but it didn't matter—their minds were at ease seeing the victims of the typhoon settled in their new homes.*



Tacloban was a big mess after Typhoon Haiyan. The streets were littered with debris and damaged goods that people had thrown out of their homes, snarling traffic in many places. It would be difficult for a city to recover from the disaster if people could not even get around easily. Even worse, garbage decaying in the hot, humid weather could contribute to epidemics of contagious diseases. To help out, Tzu Chi initiated a cash-for-work program in which residents were paid to clean up their own homes and the streets in their own neighborhoods. It started on November 20, 2013, and

ended on December 13, during which time participants worked nearly 300,000 shifts and helped return their communities to normalcy.

Such a large-scale clean-up project created mountains of garbage, which required many loaders and dump trucks to clean up and haul away to city-designated dumping grounds. Without thorough logistical legwork beforehand, the project would not have been possible. The man behind much of that preparation was volunteer Henry Yunez (楊國英).

With his business connections, Yunez managed to put together a fleet of 50 trucks, 40 of

which were free for Tzu Chi to use. With the help of these trucks, Tacloban streets were quickly restored to service.

Even before the clean-up project was done, Yunez and other volunteers began surveying damage to schools for a project to build light-duty classrooms. As soon as that was completed, without even stopping for a breather, he threw himself into the construction of a 255-unit village in Palo. In fact, he was busy with Tzu Chi aid efforts nonstop after Haiyan hit the Philippines. He does not remember how many times he flew from Manila, where he

**Work relief participants give a surprise party to bid farewell to their Uncle Henry.**

lived, to the disaster area. He also never tallied how much money he charged to his credit card for plane tickets, but one day in December 2014 he noticed that his airline membership had been automatically bumped up to premium class.

His wife and two daughters were involved with the aid work for Haiyan victims too. The Yunez family put in a lot of effort to help survivors get back on their feet.



**While Yunez is busy with the building of the Palo village, his wife, Sally, shops for ingredients to prepare meals for the workers.**

HENRY YUNEZ WAS BORN and raised in the Philippines, but his family hailed from Fujian Province, China. His father traded goods internationally, but he never made much money at it. Yunez remembers being so poor during childhood that his mother had to go to his school to apply for tuition subsidies.

Aside from a half-brother from his father, Yunez has seven sisters. His mother was very strict toward him, her only son. She saw nothing wrong with using corporal punishment when he did wrong. She wanted to bring up an upright son.

After graduating from the University of Santo Tomas with a bachelor's degree in electronic engineering, Yunez started an import business. Things were going really well for him. His business trips took him to all sorts of places, where he enjoyed eating all kinds of exotic foods. Prices were of no concern to him—his hosts were paying. Before long, he had become a gourmet consumer of all types of animal products, including raw fish, caviar, raw beef, and cow liver.

His import business also presented him with ample exposure to racy sports cars, and sometimes he kept them for himself. At one time, he had 14 of them to give him the thrills that fast cars alone could deliver.

The more profit he made, the more he invested in his business. He borrowed heavily from banks to purchase land, too. He worked hard for many years and amassed a large collection of assets. He was on top of the world.

But then came the 1997 Asian financial crisis. From the top of the world, he fell into a very deep hole. The crisis quickly devalued his assets and sharply pushed up the interest rates on his debts. He humbly renegotiated repayment terms with his creditors. He had to sell one tract of land after another, suffering heavy losses, just to make the payments on his loans.

"Those who had been most creditworthy were hit the hardest," Yunez recalled, "because they had borrowed the heaviest." Once an important client of banks, he now found himself hounded by debts.

IT WAS IN THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD of time that he encountered Tzu Chi. He would go alone to a volunteers' gathering place, then located in a small

apartment in Manila. He would sit there quietly among the people, listening and reflecting.

He thought the group was all right, so he stayed with it. He helped in a weekly program to purchase medications and provide them free of charge to poor patients at Chinese General Hospital. He helped in free clinics. He even took his mother and daughters to join other volunteers on their visit to Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, Taiwan, in 1997.

Yunez's volunteering helped him escape from the gloom that the financial crisis had brought upon him. "I felt good when I served in the free clinics," he said, "but once I was back in my office, my spirits sank."

Visiting the homes of the needy really gave him food for thought. One of the families they visited lived in a shack on the roof of another family's house, with only a few metal sheets serving as the walls and roof. There was not even a door. The occupants covered the floor with flattened cardboard boxes. The structure was so small that the volunteers could hardly stand up straight in it.

Another family they visited was crammed into a space of 110 square feet, which doubled as their grocery store. Even if there had been no furniture or anything else to take up space, there was barely enough room—14 square feet per person—in which the family of eight could sleep.

Though it was common knowledge that there were many poor people in the country and that big gaps existed between the haves and the have-nots, Yunez was shocked by the poverty he wit-

**Yunez and local volunteers go over home visit records to pick families to occupy the 255 units in the new village in Palo.**



nessed. He had lived in affluence during most of his adult life. The sights of such poverty—unmasked and so close—really stunned him.

Even though he had attended a Christian high school and a Catholic college, he had always been curious about the notion of reincarnation in Buddhism. "Why are there so many poor people in the Philippines?" he wondered. "Why do some people have such hard lives? And why do some people seem to have it all?" Through charitable service to others and in Buddhist literature, he found concrete answers to these questions.

After joining Tzu Chi, Yunez gave up his love for gourmet food. He became the first vegetarian in his family. Over the last decade, his wife, two daughters, mother, several sisters, and a brother-in-law, ten of them in all, have followed in his footsteps and become Tzu Chi volunteers.

OVER THE YEARS, Yunez has helped in many large-scale Tzu Chi relief operations in the Philippines. He also contributed a lot when the foundation was helping rebuild schools in Bam, Iran, after a major earthquake devastated that city on December 26, 2003.

Though Yunez's mission to Bam was charitable, obtaining a visa proved quite difficult. But once he got it, he went to Bam no fewer than ten times in a span of three years. He would fly via Dubai to Tehran, where he changed planes for Bam. If the plane could not land in Bam, he had to land elsewhere and take ground transportation. Sometimes he had to spend the night in an airport while waiting for a connecting flight.

The trips to Bam were not easy, so he made the best use of every moment that he was on the ground there. He would work nonstop checking the progress of the construction and meeting with contractors.

Each round-trip airfare from Manila to Bam cost two thousand American dollars. Added to that were expenses for lodging and food. Even so, he willingly paid all those expenses out of his own pocket. He enjoyed volunteering for the foundation to deliver aid to people in need.

During the domestic instability in the Philippines in the 1990s, many Filipinos of Chinese descent were kidnapped. If they could, most people in that ethnic group emigrated to safe havens like Australia, Canada, and United States. The Yunezes were no exception.

At first, the danger of kidnapping seemed remote, something that only happened to others



**On the day of the turn-over ceremony, the Yunez clan poses for this special occasion. The family is bonded not only by blood and love but also by their volunteer work for Tzu Chi.**

or in TV dramas. Yunez's perception changed when several of his friends were kidnapped and had to pay ransom. For their safety, he sent his wife and three children to Canada, but he stayed behind to work. On the eve of their departure, Yunez told his children to return home after they finished their studies so they could serve the nation.

Now both daughters have moved back to the Philippines. Like their parents, they have also become certified Tzu Chi volunteers. They now divide their time between their careers and volunteering.

Henzie Yunez (楊嫻思), the older of the girls, spent more time at Palo than her father did. She stayed at the village as it was being built, worked with participants in the cash-for-work project, and taught children there to sing Tzu Chi songs, whose melodies soon filled the village as the children moved about.

While helping Haiyan victims and working on the construction of the village, the Yunezes had to put a family affair on the back burner. They had planned to rebuild their family home,

so they had had their old home demolished to make room. But then Typhoon Haiyan struck. The family decided to support Yunez as he devoted his energies to Tzu Chi aid projects for Haiyan victims, so they put off the construction of their own home for a while. It never occurred to them that construction would be postponed for more than a year.

As their new home stood idle, without even its foundation completed, the Palo village was finished and 255 families moved into their new homes. Even though the Yunezes themselves still lived in a rental, their minds were at peace seeing victims settled in the new village.

When the village was about finished, cash-for-work participants held a surprise farewell party for their beloved "Uncle Henry," as Yunez was fondly known to them. Yunez, his hair having rapidly grayed over the year, and the villagers, their skins dark and tanned, sang heartily but wiped away tears now and again. They looked just like one big family. There seemed to be no distance between their hearts, a sign of true bonding that could only have been cultivated through a long periods of sincere companionship.

At 65 years of age, Yunez has turned over many stones in search of something priceless, but he finally found it right at that moment—in the middle of songs, tears, and fellowship. ❁

# Searching

Text and photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang



Tacloban, the Philippines, January 15, 2014

A woman in her seventies was looking and digging for something where her home once stood, on the shoreline in Tacloban, Leyte Province, the Philippines. Her home had stood there for more than seven decades when Typhoon Haiyan destroyed it on November 8, 2013. When the winds and the rains had died down, many of her long-time neighbors had also died, without saying goodbye. They had beaten her in leaving this turbulent world. She had always lived alone, but now she was even more solitary.

She kept digging with her bare hands, her palms bleeding from the cuts that she had gotten from broken glass, nails, and bits of wood and bricks.

"Ma'am, go have your cuts treated," I urged.

"Oh, that's nothing," she said to me half absent-mindedly. Her attention was squarely on the rubble.

"What are you looking for?"

"Nothing. What can I expect to find?" she murmured.

She was right. She was combing through piles of debris that had been soaked in sea water

and exposed to the elements since Haiyan hit the area two months earlier. The chance was next to none that she would find anything valuable or useful in those piles of rubbish.

"Ah, my eyeglasses!" she exclaimed.

Then she cheerfully showed me the treasures that she had excavated: a pair of eyeglasses whose lenses were severely scratched and cracked but still set in their twisted frame; a rusty, stopped alarm clock; a few damp photos; a mildewed and aged notebook, its puffy pages stuck together as if glued.

It suddenly dawned on me that what she had been looking for were her memories—70-some years in the making, and unlike those of anybody else in the world.

Apparently, Haiyan had effortlessly destroyed her house and many of her friends, but for all its power it had been unable to take away even the slightest bit of her memories, which remained safely locked in those fading photos, in the clock which no longer told the time, in the stuck pages of the notebook, and in the pair of beat-up glasses through which she still saw her past in amazing clarity but her present only in a blur. ❊



A recipient, distribution claim check in hand, and a Tzu Chi volunteer at a distribution in Fuding, Fujian Province, on January 17, 2015. HUANG ZONGBAO

## Winter Aid Distributions in China

*Between December 2014 and January 2015, Tzu Chi volunteers distributed aid supplies to more than 40,000 Chinese families in 18 provinces and two direct-controlled municipalities. The aid embodies love and caring—something to ease life a little for the needy.*

# Delivering Aid, Delivering Blessings

By Zhang Li-yu

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*They were old, poor, and lived alone...but a little smile surfaced on their faces when volunteers put cotton-lined jackets on them.*



I took my first overseas trip when my husband and I went on a pleasure trip to Europe. It was not until 15 years later—in January 2015—that I left Taiwan again. This time I traveled with a Tzu Chi delegation to Nanning, Guangxi Province, southern China. The main purpose of the visit was to distribute aid to needy families in Wuming District; my chief function was to serve as a documenting volunteer.

When we arrived at Nanning, we went to the office of volunteer Mou Rongting (牟容霆), where we met with volunteers from Guangzhou, Shenjun, and elsewhere in Guangdong Province. We all began planning how to make the event as successful as possible.

## Visiting homes

We visited the homes of some would-be recipients on January 16, the day before the distribution. Riding in the car, I looked curiously out the window at the scenery as mountain after mountain passed us by.

We came to the town of Xianhu, in Wuming District. After meeting with some local volunteers and village and party officials, our group set out for our home visits.

Our first stop was to visit Tang Ping (唐萍), who lived in the village of Sandong. Slogging across muddy ground, we rounded a pond and came to her home. She started crying the moment she saw us. Deng Hanxing (鄧漢興), the village official, told us that her husband had died the previous year and that she had a girl in high school and two sons in elementary school. Her grandmother, 93, also lived with her.

The grandmother was boiling some water over a wood fire when we arrived. She wiped away her tears with her wrinkled hands as she told us how little she could do to help the family. Steam rising from the pot permeated the air, seeming to symbolize the clouds overshadowing the family. Tang continued to cry. The sad atmosphere got to us, and some of us felt our noses sting as tears formed in our eyes too. I tried to comfort Tang by saying that her husband would not have wanted to see her so downcast, and I encouraged her to be strong for her kids and to pick herself up. She calmed down a bit and nodded her head, saying that she understood.

After we left Tang's house, we went to the village of Dengji. Zhong Aiping (鍾愛萍) and her mother-in-law were already waiting for us when we arrived. Zhong told us that she had two children, a 19-year-old daughter in college and a six-year-old boy. Her husband had died of liver cancer a couple of years earlier.

As the sole breadwinner in the house, Zhong does odd jobs here and there. It has been very tough for them to make ends meet, but she has come to terms with her lot. "My children are my

**A 93-year-old woman sheds tears in her home as she talks to a visiting Tzu Chi volunteer.**

JIAN HONGHAI

pride," Zhong said. "I do all I can to give them a good education. Our whole family pins our hopes on them."

I was moved by her optimism, and I said to her, "These are tough days, but they'll pass. Hang in there!"

The village official informed Zhong that she would speak at the distribution the next morning on behalf of the villagers to thank Tzu Chi for delivering the aid to them. Zhong said bashfully, "I'm a little nervous about such a hefty responsibility."

I gave Zhong a small decoration to wish her and her family blessings before leaving her house. She promptly hung it up on a wall and said cheerfully, "Thanks to Tzu Chi Taiwan."

We drove some more on winding, uneven concrete mountain roads. After crossing a purported 200-year-old bridge and traveling a short while more, we reached the village of Liancai. A few local residents were chatting on

**A volunteer visiting a villager in her home holds her hands and warmly asks her how she is getting along.**

ZHAO LIDAN



the roadside. The village official asked one of them to direct us to the home of Yang Lanfen (楊蘭芬). He could not have asked a better person because she was none other than the one we had come to visit. Everybody had a good laugh at the coincidence.

I told Yang the purpose of our visit, and she cheerfully led us to her house, which was not much more than a small room.

There was a bed in the stark room, and a small area in a corner served as a kitchen. The single room was all there was to the house, and it was so very small that I felt like crying. But Yang was all smiles, talking loudly and optimistically. "I used to work at a pottery factory, but it shut down long ago. Now my neighbors and I look out for one another. We make do, and we get by all right."

"You're quite a singer," the party official said. "Why don't you sing for us, especially for the Taiwanese visitors?" Yang immediately belted out a song, her voice sonorous and crisp. She even accompanied her singing with some hand gestures like a professional performer. Everyone praised her profusely.



**Volunteer Shen Bi-hua and a student from Xianhu Central School escort an old woman who has received her relief goods to a place where a vehicle will pick her up and take her home.**

BIAN JING

I asked her the name of the song. She laughed and said, "Oh, it doesn't have a name. I just made it up on the spot. The gist of it is to praise the kind people in Taiwan for bringing necessities to us in the mountains, making this an easier and more comfortable winter and giving us happiness."

Our home visits in the mountains took much of the morning. We drove back to Xianhu and visited another needy family there.

Huang Hanzhong (黃漢忠) lived with his wife, Nianjun (黃年君), and with his daughter-in-law and grandson. Their son, who worked in Nanning, came home once a month.

Nianjun had had a stroke, leaving her with a weakened left hand. She was gloomy and didn't say a single word during our visit. Huang told us he had sought out every therapy possible, Chinese or Western, for his wife, but nothing

had worked. They could only resign themselves to the situation.

Huang thanked the Tzu Chi volunteers for delivering aid to them before the Chinese New Year. He said he had nothing but gratitude in his heart.

There is much misery in the world. The upcoming aid distribution would at least give the needy something tangible and useful. We wished all these families the best.

#### The distribution

The sun shone bright and beautiful on January 17, the day of the distribution. Villagers gathered early at Xianhu Central School and waited eagerly for the distribution to start.

Local leaders kicked off the day with talks and volunteers led participants in singing, accompanied by hand gestures. The sound of the music touched people's hearts. I was surprised to see many of the villagers crying.

Two groups of people caught my eyes. Some five- and six-year-olds were helping in the pack-

ing area. They were the children of some of the teachers at the school. Their little hands busily worked beside the hands of adults. Three little boys said in one voice, "It's great to help."

The second group consisted of seventh, eighth, and ninth graders working in the waiting and packing areas. They were helping villagers carry their goods to areas where they would wait for vehicles to take them home. One of the students said of their service, "Sure, moving this stuff is a little tiring, but being able to help others makes us happy."

Pan Junwu (潘俊武), a seventh grader, lived with his grandfather while his parents worked in Nanning. Pan used a handcart at the distribution to move things for villagers. It was hard work, and he sweated profusely despite the cold weather. But he still wore a bright smile. "I came here on my own initiative," he said. "It's a good thing to help others. It's hard work, but I just don't feel it." I wrote down his every word, impressed by the good-heartedness of the mountain boy.

Pan Meigui (潘美桂), a teacher at the school, and her seventh-grade daughter were on hand to help too. "Giving our own folks a hand brings us joy," she said. "And my daughter gets to experience the bliss of volunteering. Learning to serve others is a very good thing."

I saw Wen Xingji (文型基), a polio victim, amidst the crowd waiting to receive supplies. He looked a bit forlorn, so I chatted with him. "This is the first time that I've ever received help from a charity like yours," he said shyly. "Thanks to your care, many poor families can have a warmer winter. Not only do you give out relief goods, but you also sing and perform for us and serve us snacks and hot tea. That's very special."

Chen Caiqian (陳彩千) suffered from dwarfism. She looked at me and smiled. I walked with her to the school entrance to wait for a neighbor to pick up her and her supplies. While waiting, I listened to her story. "My husband passed away six months ago and my only daughter is 15," she said. "The recent drought resulted in two poor rice harvests in a row, so it's been tougher for us lately." Now the two of them would have their first steamed rice in a long time. The other necessities would help them too.

Chen had also received a pink scarf. I wrapped it around her for some festive cheer. She reached into her bag and brought out a purple scarf, which volunteers had asked her to give to her daughter as their gift. "She's going to love it," she commented.

Liang Haiying (梁海英), a radio station reporter, was on the scene to cover the event. She had seen many needy people in Wuming in her six-year career, but this was the first time she had seen such a large distribution. She said she was impressed and would use the power of the media to let more people know about the event and to help create a ripple effect of goodness.

The distribution this day benefited 1,156 people in 606 families. Aid items included cotton-lined jackets and cotton underwear, cooking oil, and rice.

#### More home visits

After the distribution, we Tzu Chi volunteers split up into 12 teams to visit the homes of more needy people.

Our path was adorned with colorful flowers swaying in the gentle breeze. The blooms looked all the more exuberant under the bright afternoon sun, but despite their beauty, they could not arouse my interest. My mind was ruffled by worry that the families we were about to see would be in as much misery as those that we had visited the day before the distribution.

We came to the home of a Mr. Liang in the village of Siyu. Spider webs dominated the underside of his roof eaves, and his kitchen was full of old pots and pans. I tried hard to breathe in fresh air, but a foul, sour smell was all I could inhale.

I was overwhelmed by emotions. It was hard for me to imagine that in this day and age, Mr. Liang still lived in a way reminiscent of the life of impoverished families in Taiwan 50 years ago. In fact, the living conditions at the next five households we visited were more or less like Mr. Liang's. Those houses were also all occupied by old people. They lived alone, some bedridden and very sick, and they were all very poor. There were no refrigerators or TVs. But smiles appeared on the faces of these old people when we put cotton-lined jackets on them and gave them other relief goods.

We conducted all the visits on foot. I have no idea how many miles we covered. My heavy backpack made my steps more laborious; my legs ached and felt like solid lead. As I struggled to take the next step, I kept an eye out for cow and chicken droppings in case I might slip on them.

Before we ended each visit, we sang a song to convey our blessings. Tears welled in my eyes as I wished the villagers all my best.

## The Needy Side of Hainan

By Hu Qing-qing

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*Income disparities between the haves and have-nots seem especially noticeable in cold winter. Many residents of Hainan, China, work with Tzu Chi volunteers to distribute necessities to the needy so they may have a more comfortable winter.*



**At about five in the morning of January 10, 2015, around 50 volunteers relayed 22 tons of rice out of the activity center of Haikou No. 29 Elementary School, where the rice had been stored, to the area where it would be handed over to distribution recipients later that morning. Volunteers had unloaded the rice off a truck and relayed it into the activity center two days earlier.**

ZHANG QING-WEN

After a flight of more than two hours from Taiwan, our Tzu Chi distribution delegation arrived at the Haikou Meilan International Airport in Hainan Province, China. Dusk had fallen. It was January 7, 2015.

The island of Hainan is located in the South China Sea, off the coast of the southernmost tip of mainland China. In 1988, the region was declared a province and established as a special economic zone. It has experienced rapid economic growth ever since.

A bus took us from the airport into Haikou, the provincial capital. The densely packed tall buildings, continuous flow of automobiles, and bright advertisements made the city appear every bit on a par with the largest cities on the mainland seaboard.

"Hainan has in recent years experienced rapid growth, and with it inflation," Jiang Fujun (蔣付軍), a Hainanese Tzu Chi volunteer, said to

us. "This time our distribution will be held in the Meilan District, the oldest in the city." His remarks shifted my mind from the prosperous city scene before me to the other side of the tracks, which we would soon see.

### Helping

"The rice will arrive at the school at seven o'clock...." said Jiang into his phone. He was working on the upcoming distribution as the bus ferried us to our destination. When he hung up, I asked him, "Where is it? Is anybody recording it?" He shook his head, smiling, as he shot a glance at the camera in my hand. Xu Xue-zhi (許學智), who sat next to me, looked around at the volunteers whose job on the mission included

**Volunteers chat with Mrs. Cai at her home. The Cais were one of the families that benefited from the Tzu Chi distribution.**

HUANG CHANG-YU



documenting the distribution, and he asked, "Want to go?" We nodded our heads eagerly.

An hour later, we reached Haikou No. 29 Elementary School. The wind was blowing and, with the moon hidden behind clouds, the campus was rather dark. Close to a hundred people had formed two lines and were moving bag after bag of rice from a 25-ton truck into the activity center of the school.

Only a few uniformed Tzu Chi volunteers were there. The rest of the group wore street clothes, some were in suits and ties, and some women even had high heels. The heels did not appear to diminish the women's ability to do the job, however. The rice bags were being moved along smoothly. Despite the low temperature of ten degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit), some of the people had taken off their outerwear—but they were still sweating...and smiling. The rhythms and enthusiasm of the participants' motions made me warm inside.

In less than 90 minutes, they had finished unloading and moving 22 tons of rice. Now all 1,500 bags, each weighing 15 kilograms (33 pounds), were stacked neatly in the school activity center.

"I heard that only a couple of dozen people came last year to help move the rice," I said to a local volunteer. He answered, "Yes, it took us all night to unload the rice."

In light of that experience, Tzu Chi volunteers started inviting people earlier than before to help with this year's event. They put out the word, and called on people who had helped last year to return. Many more people signed up this time around.

Many hands make light work. When the work was done, everybody stood in front of the stacks of rice bags and shouted, "Serve the people!" This slogan, one that I had long thought trite and banal, suddenly came alive against the backdrop of this evening, and much to my surprise moved me to tears. It was no longer just a slogan; the actions of many kind-hearted people had given it real meaning.

### Distribution and home visits

Two days later, on January 10, the school bustled with people participating in the Tzu Chi aid distribution. Recipients received goods including rice, cooking oil, blankets, toothbrushes, toothpaste, towels, soap, and socks.

Sister Chen Wen (陳文) reminded the volunteers of a recent stampede in Shanghai during a

public New Year celebration. Her reminder made me extra careful to help keep order in the distribution area.

The recipients were very warm to us. When my accent betrayed me, an old woman asked and discovered my Taiwanese roots. That knowledge prompted her to take my hand and blurt out a series of sentences that I did not understand. I turned to a local volunteer beside me, my eyes asking for help. Understanding my helplessness, the volunteer said, "She was asking you if you're cold and if you're doing okay here."

"I'm not cold, and I'm doing well. Are you cold?" I asked back. The old woman just pointed at her cotton-padded jacket, lightly patted my face and smiled, revealing a partially toothless mouth.

Later, I looked around the distribution site and observed, "It seems that there are many seniors in Meilan." Local volunteer Chen Yanjian (陳燕簡) said in reply, "People who can move away have all done so."

It was not until the home visits, which we conducted that afternoon, that I got to know the situations of the recipients better.

In Shangpoxia Village, alleys were very narrow, from about a meter (3.3 feet) wide to half that much. We often had to turn sideways to get through, and sometimes we had to bend down to avoid hitting low eaves. Not only did the neighborhood have narrow paths, but its alleys often branched into many more alleys. The homes there were old and clustered so tightly together that it was very difficult for sunlight to penetrate. The whole place was like an endless dark maze to me. I stayed close to my group to avoid getting lost.

Finally, a volunteer at the front of our little procession stopped and said, "This is it." I took a look at the house we had come to. Some windows were broken, and the front door was missing. The volunteer that had guided us here called out, "Is anybody home?"

Someone responded from inside the house, and the seven of us proceeded forward. Just then, a black hairy creature the size of a small cat suddenly dashed across our path and crawled over my shoes. Before I could even think, I let out a sharp scream. Everybody turned around to look at me. "What's wrong?" they asked with concern.

No sooner had I begun to answer than my eyes met those of Mr. Fu, the owner of the house. He looked at me apologetically and uneasily,



**Huang Qiri, a Tzu Chi scholarship recipient, hugs his father in their home. The father has been a farmer all his life and hopes that his son can have a better life than he has had.**

ZHENG YU-ZHUAN

perhaps because he knew what the creature was. I swallowed the words that were about to come out of my mouth and said, "Oh, nothing. I just bumped into something." Whatever that animal really was, there was no reason to make our host any more uneasy than he already was.

Mr. Fu had a bad heart, which prevented him from working gainfully. His wife did odd jobs to support the family. I looked around the house and saw wardrobes doubling as dividers between spaces, in each of which was nothing but a bed and scattered clothes.

Mr. Fu pointed at the goods that he had received that morning at the distribution and said to us, "Thank you." A volunteer noticed that there was only a thin blanket on a bed, so she reminded Mr. Fu to use the blankets made from

recycled PET bottles that he had received. "Those blankets are very warm," the volunteer said. Mr. Fu lifted a corner of the thin blanket on the bed to expose a new blanket underneath and said, "I've already tried one. It's very warm."

We asked after his son, a high school student, and we encouraged Fu to take good care of himself and to be sure to get plenty of rest for the sake of his health. Then we left.

We turned a few corners and came to a house bearing the marks of age. "Is Mr. Cai home?" a volunteer called out. We looked in the courtyard and saw an old woman sitting there.

We told her why we were visiting, and she greeted us warmly. Soon she began to tell us about her family. When she talked about her oldest son, who had passed away two years earlier, her eyes brimmed with tears. Her family had moved here 50 years before. More than a decade ago, the plot of land that they had always farmed was confiscated by the government under eminent domain. With the taking

of their land, the family lost their primary source of income.

"None of my five children ever went to school, so they could only farm," the woman said. "With the land gone, they've been out of work all these years. Their wives work to support our family now." One of her sons happened to walk through the door right at that moment and heard his mom's remarks. Sensing his mom's disappointment and worry, he walked back out into the alley and paced there, his face clouded with shame and unease.

Volunteers softly comforted the woman until she cheered up, and a male volunteer went outside and said to her son, "She's just worried. Don't read too much into it." The man squeezed out a wry smile and nodded his head.

I looked back a few times as we walked away from the Cai house. Just a short distance ahead was the bright world of mainstream Hainan, but behind me was a world of darkness and desolation. Pondering the circumstances of these families, it suddenly occurred to me that every house back there had on its wall a red spray mark, a flag for demolition. The government has planned for many years to clear these houses from the land and to relocate the residents elsewhere, but it has not gotten around to executing that plan. Nobody knows for certain what impact the eventual relocation will have on these poor families.

No matter what happens in the future, I am sure that our volunteers will accompany these families in the days ahead.

### Scholarships

In addition to the homes of some distribution recipients, we also visited the homes of scholarship winners. These visits further heightened my appreciation of the divide between the haves and the have-nots in Hainan.

Guoxing Secondary School is an exemplary school in Haikou for seventh through twelfth graders. The school's students, before coming to Guoxing, were all at the top of their classes in their previous schools in all parts of Hainan. Some of them come from poor families or from families of minority groups from the far corners of the island. They strive for better lives through better education. They are motivated, and Tzu Chi volunteers want to help.

On January 9, the day before the goods distribution, we paid home visits to some of the needy students. One of them lived in Chengmai, a

40-minute drive from Haikou. We could see that the student's father, a farmer, had really pinned his hopes on his son. We also went to Danzhou, two hours from Haikou. The breadwinner of that family ferried clients to their destinations for a fee, much like a taxi driver, except that he used a scooter instead. He had to care for his sick wife at home. Here we saw a father, stretched on several fronts, striving to provide food and care for his family.

We learned that Huang Qiri (黃起日), another student, had a sister who had to quit school and work to help support the family. "She was a very good student, too," Huang said. "But we simply couldn't afford the cost of schooling for both of us." He felt guilty that he was going to school at the expense of his sister.

He Qiuli (何秋麗) had always worried about her mother, who had to work despite being sick. Fighting back tears several times during our visit, she told us that she just wanted to study hard, get into a good college, find a good job after college, and support her family.

Through the home visits, I came to better understand the students' struggles, their hard work, and their need for an education. I truly felt for these children and their families, who were fighting to lift themselves out of poverty.

On January 12, 2015, volunteers handed over scholarships to 38 students at Guoxing Secondary School. Volunteers visit the school every month and give 500 renminbi (US\$80) to each of these students, money that helps propel them closer to their goals.

I embraced the children who had accompanied me on the visits to their homes. Like a mother, I advised them to bundle up against the chill. I pulled the scarf off my neck and wrapped it around one girl. She tried to decline the gift, but I insisted and said to her, "Be a good girl, keep it. I'm going back to Taiwan tonight." She stiffened and said, "So soon? But you..." I held her tight before she could finish her sentence, but I could not stifle the flow of my own tears.

After I returned to Taiwan, I went through the pictures I had taken during the trip to Hainan, and once again I was caught up in the emotions that I had felt during the visit. I'm grateful to the families we visited, to the students who received our financial aid, and the volunteers who gave so happily to others. I cherish every encounter because I believe that they were brought about by the karmic affinities we had formed during past lives. ❀

# The Road Back to Normal

## After-School Supplementary Classes

By Zheng Ya-ru

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Lin Yan-huang

*In 2009, Typhoon Morakot devastated their homes in the mountains. They relocated to Shanlin Great Love Village, where a tutoring program has been established to help the children learn and grow.*

In 2009, Typhoon Morakot heavily damaged some mountain communities in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Among those areas hit hard were Namaxia, Taoyuan, Jiaxian, and Liugui. The typhoon made many homes here uninhabitable.

"We lived in Liugui," said Zhang Xiang-wen (張湘雯), one of the displaced. "When the slopes near our house gave way, our house was split down the middle." Some regions of the mountains in that area are now geologically unstable and unfit for human habitation.

In the aftermath of the disaster, Tzu Chi built Shanlin Great Love Village, a community of permanent homes for typhoon victims. Just over a thousand families relocated there, including Zhang, her husband, Lu Feng-ming (盧豐明), and Chen Li-hui (陳麗惠).

Chen grew up in Shanlin. She and her husband had suffered property losses from natural disasters several times in the past. They were hit by a great earthquake in 1999 when they lived in Taichung, central Taiwan, and by Typhoons Kalmaegi in 2008 and Morakot in 2009.

After settling into Shanlin Great Love Village, Chen began noticing disconcerting behaviors among some of the children in the village. She saw a boy, about seven, calling a driver bad names after the driver honked at him; an eight-year-old was shunned by his schoolmates because he smelled; some children

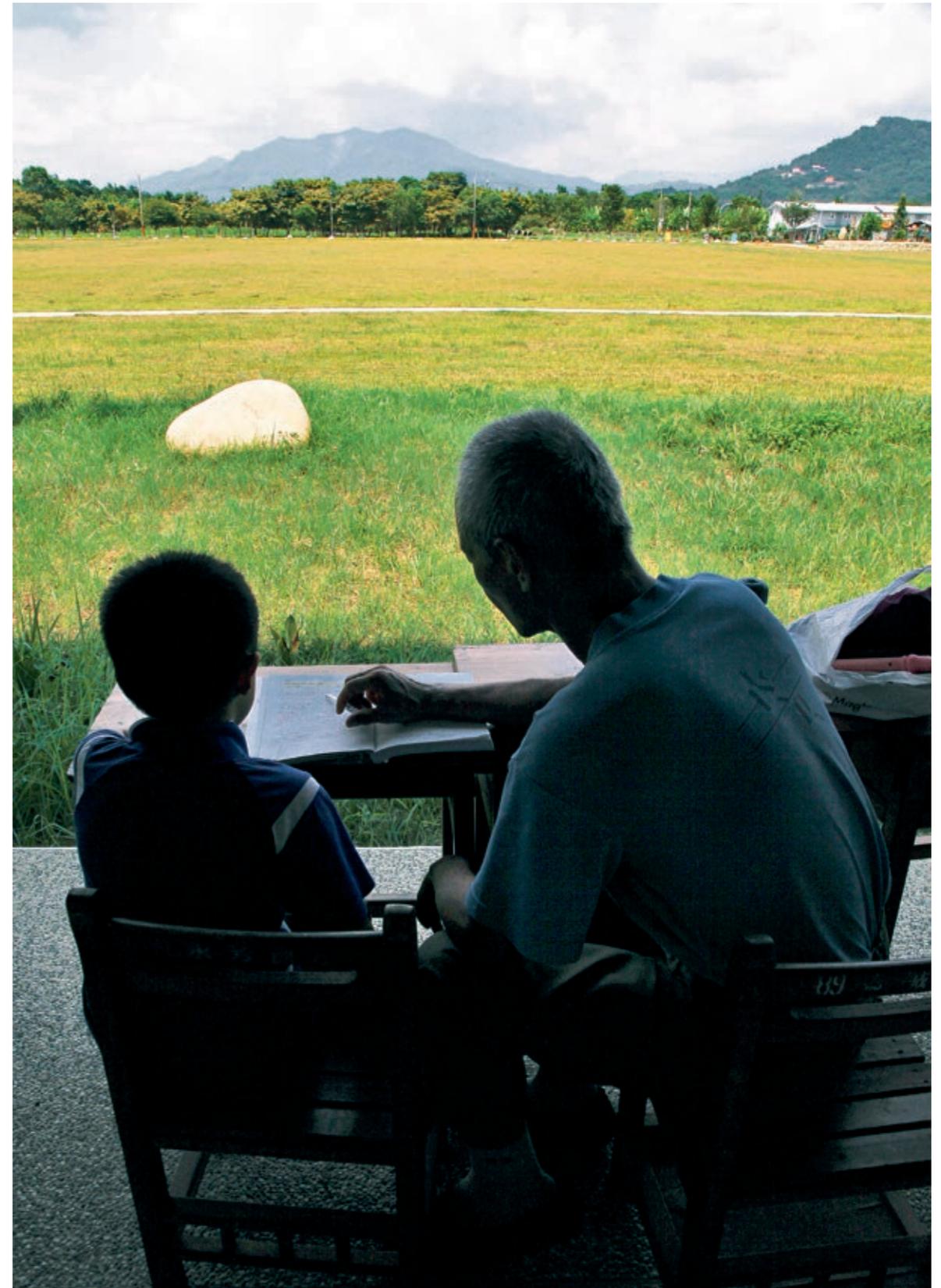
wandered around very late at night, and some peppered their speech with swearwords. Many of these children were from single-parent or low-income families, or were being cared for by their grandparents.

After Typhoon Morakot forced them from their homes, some of the children drifted from place to place, living in temporary accommodations. Such children are especially susceptible to developing negative attitudes to life if their families cannot provide them with the sense of security and certainty they need during this formative time in their lives.

Chen and Zhang had been volunteers at elementary schools, as well as teachers in after-school programs. They could not sit idly by and watch these kids; they wanted to help in whatever way they could to get the children back on track.

In 2010, after residents started moving in, a development association was formed. The association applied for government grants to help pay for the many needs of the new community, including helping residents settle and find jobs. A tutoring program was set up in 2011 with money from these grants. Teachers were paid for their service, but the program was free to students.

**Lu Feng-ming tutors a child in Shanlin Great Love Village in Kaohsiung.**



Zhang and Chen joined the program and helped recruit students. They knocked on one door after another in the community, told parents about the program and asked them to sign their children up. However, despite being free, the program was not enthusiastically embraced at first. Most residents at the time, being new to the area, were not familiar with each other, nor did they generally grasp the potential benefits of the program. Therefore, few of them showed much interest.

Even those who did sign their children up did not really buy into the program. Some dubious parents would hover outside the classroom to observe how the class was going. Some just showed up at the end of the class to pick up their children without bothering to greet the teachers.

**From left, Chen Li-hui, Lu Feng-ming, and Zhang Xiang-wen work with village children in their evening class. Students in the foreground practice Chinese calligraphy.**

Even worse were some hot-tempered parents, who were outright rude to the teachers.

Zhang understood the unfriendly attitudes of the parents. "We all used to live in the mountains, where there were few neighbors and everyone knew each other," she explained. "When I first moved to this community, which is huge to us, I felt out of my element too. In addition, starting a new life here came with financial pressures we had to deal with. That put us on edge too."

But despite the initial difficulties, Zhang stayed with it. She kept explaining to parents the contents of the after-school supplementary classes. Eventually, her patience paid off as she gradually won their trust.

### The program

Most students in the classes are between seven and ten years old and do not remember much about Typhoon Morakot. If they have any impression of that typhoon at all, it is something like, "I rode in a helicopter," referring to the

vehicle that evacuated them out of their hometown to safety.

Nguyen Yen Anh, who originally hails from Vietnam, came to Taiwan to marry her husband. They used to live in an aboriginal tribal settlement in Liugui, but it was practically annihilated by Morakot. After they escaped, they moved from rental to rental, forcing their daughter to transfer from one elementary school to the next. That finally stopped when they settled in the village of Shanlin.

Nguyen works on a farm near the village. The work is demanding and exhausting. She cannot help her daughter with her schoolwork, so she signed her up for the tutoring program.

"Teachers came to our home and invited my daughter to join the program. They even take her to the tutoring sessions on their motor scooters. I'm very thankful," Nguyen said. "My daughter liked the sessions and she made a lot of progress in her lessons, so I later signed my son up as well."

At the height of the program, there were more than fifty students and five teachers, including Zhang and Chen. "The five of us worked together to design and plan the courses," Zhang recalled. "We wanted to make the program fun and educational." A happy look appeared on her face as she recalled the enthusiasm of the teachers.

However, at the end of 2013, the application for the government grant upon which the program had been launched and sustained for two years was turned down. No funding meant no pay for the teachers. As a result, all of the teachers, except Zhang, left. They had to make a living after all.

"I thought that it would be a pity if the classes ended just like that, so I kept it going," Zhang said. She did it as a volunteer, and lived only on her income from doing handiwork at a work-

**Children from the tutoring program play basketball after the classroom courses.**



shop in the village. Later her husband and Chen joined her. The tutoring program was thus sustained on the backs of these three volunteers.

In June 2014, Tzu Chi established a special project to fund the tutoring program. The three volunteer teachers began to receive pay for their work, which eased their financial pressures.

### Guiding with patience

It's past 6 p.m., but bicycles pack the area outside the tutoring classroom. The class, which will last three hours, is under way.

Students do their school homework here. Lessons in English, calligraphy, story time, movies, and arts and crafts are rotated to keep students engaged and interested. A "play area" is nestled in a corner of the classroom for those who need to recharge their batteries. Snack time and exercise time are enduring favorites of the children.

The three teachers complement each other, each doing their own part. Chen is easygoing, so the children tend to go to her if they have questions or want to chat. Zhang is more strict, and the children are a little scared of her, but they know that she cares about them a lot. They love Lu's English vocabulary lessons because they signal the end of in-room time and the beginning of outdoor basketball time.

Chen jokes around often and is more childlike, so she teaches more playful sessions. Her approachability has even led some children to confide in her. "My daughter tends to keep her feelings to herself," said Chen Xiao-qiao (陳小巧), a parent, "but she shares a lot with Chen. Sometimes I rely on Chen to learn about what's going on with my daughter."

The teachers try their best to help the students. For example, Chen once found that second grader Xiaoxin was being ostracized at school because he often did not wash himself. "Whenever I noticed that he was smelly, I would ask him to go home and wash first before coming into the class again," Chen said. "If he came in washed but with the same clothes, I'd find a change of clothes for him."

One time Chen found him very nicely washed, so she praised the boy. "Wow! You smell good, and you look good!" Hearing the praise, the boy looked shy but pleased with himself. Chen believes that all he needs is a little pat on the back.

There are over 20 students in the program. Guiding and caring for them, the teachers find

them faced with different challenges: Some children are inattentive, some have foul mouths, and some are unruly. While they may exhibit various problems, Zhang believes that the underlying cause for their behavior is their desire to be noticed, to be loved.

That's why she often says and shows that she loves them. "I often say 'I love you' to students, and I often embrace them or hold their hands," Zhang said. At first, not accustomed to this way of expressing affection, some children say that it is disgusting. But after some time, Zhang can tell from their facial expressions that they actually revel in the affection and love the teachers show for them.

Zhang is good at designing games that are fun, meaningful, and behavior-molding. In the game of "a pinch of love," for example, a child gets a gentle pinch on his cheek if he says a bad word. Soon children get the idea and become more mindful of how they talk.

"Children learn very fast. They absorb everything you teach them," Zhang says. Therefore she reminds herself to always watch out for what she says or does. Even so, Zhang contends, the circumstances at the kids' homes are such that they may very quickly forget the proper way of doing things they have just learned in the program, and revert right back to their old ways, the ways they learned at home. Facing such stubborn and negative family circumstances and influences, all that a teacher can do is to repeat the lesson all over again and give them unconditional love.

### Good influences

In addition to the night program that Zhang, Chen and Lu teach, members of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association from Kaohsiung have been holding another kind of after-school program every Wednesday afternoon for more than five years. This program focuses on nurturing good character in the children by sharing Master Cheng Yen's teachings.

"The volunteers come all the way from Kaohsiung," said Zhang, "and they have done more than just teach the children. When they first started, they saw that our restrooms were filthy, so they cleaned them up. There was a volunteer who prepared beverages for us. She had to drive a scooter, ride on a bus, and then ride in a volunteer's car to get to the village." The volunteers would also go to students' homes and bring them one by one to the class. Zhang was very touched by the volunteers' giving.



Members of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association teach a Wednesday afternoon class.

With the help of a Tzu Chi volunteer, a boy learns to ride a unicycle, which helps him to develop a sense of achievement and gain confidence.



Their spirit spilled over to her. "Later, I cleaned our restrooms, got drinks for students, and got students to the classroom beforehand so the volunteers could just come to the classroom and teach their lessons," she said.

The Tzu Chi volunteers have also developed in Zhang a new perspective when it comes to working with students and parents. She has become more receptive and tolerant of behavior or people that she once deemed objectionable: difficult, naughty students or unreasonable, rude parents.

Instead of getting ruffled by such people, "now I concentrate more on keeping the children in class," Zhang commented. "So long as they show up in the classroom, I have a chance to teach and influence them." That is why whenever she hears students say "I'm bored" in class, she racks her brains when she gets home to come up with lesson plans that are fun and educational.

With guidance from the Tzu Chi volunteers, students have learned many Jing Si aphorisms—

**The three teachers at the tutoring program at the village: From left, Chen Li-hui, Zhang Xiang-wen, and Lu Feng-ming**



short sayings by Master Cheng Yen. "We read them aloud in class," Zhang said, "and a student must recite an aphorism before he or she may leave the classroom for recess."

Tzu Chi promotes recycling and environmental protection, so in that spirit Chen leads children each Sunday morning in picking up recyclables around the village and sorting them out. Then she takes the children to breakfast. In this process, the children gradually form their ideas about preservation and they grow closer to Chen.

"They're simple," Chen remarked, referring to the kids. "When I told them, 'It's time to call it a day,' they often said, 'But there's still so much more to pick up and sort!'" Eventually they began to ask Chen why there was so much garbage and why people threw their rubbish on the ground instead of into garbage cans. These were great occasions for her to engage the children in thought-provoking conversations.

Second grader Hong-an has been with the tutoring program for more than two years. He loves the classes "because I can do my homework, learn English, and play." His mother, Nguyen Yen Anh, has noticed his growth, and



**A corner of Shanlin Great Love Village**

she proudly recalled some notable examples of maturity in her son: "When I had a fever, he put a wet towel on my forehead, brought me water, and reminded me to take my medicine. Since I taught him how to use the washing machine, he's often done the washing for us. Even when his sister dumps chores on him, he does them."

Though they have settled into their new homes, Chen and Zhang still need to keep an eye on their livelihoods. "Because we only get short-term work, it's hard for us to do long-range planning, and I'm worried sometimes," Chen said. She and Zhang sometimes help pick tomatoes in farmers' fields to earn a little extra income.

Despite the uncertainties facing them, they feel abundantly rewarded with the satisfaction that many children have changed for the better and are better prepared for the game of life.

Commenting on her four years with the tutoring program, Zhang smiled as she said, "These mountain children are free-spirited and very creative, so they can really make great prog-

ress if they can only settle down. I believe that the lessons on Jing Si aphorisms and calligraphy are greatly beneficial to them. Now children can actually sit down with me and sensibly discuss any issue that they may be facing."

It is 9:00 p.m. The three-hour class has come to an end, but some children are not ready yet to call it a day. Though quite tired, Chen watches them play basketball at the side of a basketball court. The three teachers, all older than 50, often have a hard time keeping up with the boundless energy in the children, but they often just dip deeper into their energy store in order to stay with them.

"I'm over 50, but I don't want to just sit around not doing anything good—I want to help," Chen said. "I really don't know how much longer I have left to do this, but I know I'll do my best. I just love to spend time with the children."

"Though we suffered great losses in Typhoon Morakot, we were lucky enough to get a new house to live in," Zhang observed. "I feel blessed that I can accompany these children, and this is my way to pay back to society."

The village is home to them now. While they still can, they want to help make it a better place to live. ❁

# Transforming Through Recycling

By Lin Bi-zhi and Xu Li-hua  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*Unwilling to resign herself to her fate, she started all over, helped set up a new recycling station, and developed it into a gathering place where people work to extend the usefulness of discarded things. Volunteers that have worked to transform discarded items have witnessed their own lives transformed at the same time.*

At the Dingmei Recycling Station in Tainan, southern Taiwan, volunteers came in early, some at the crack of dawn. One of them backed up a truck while another stood nearby and yelled out to the driver to help guide the truck into position. Once it was in place, others helped unload it. Off to one side, still more volunteers were folding up newspapers, cutting plastic bags, and sorting out other recyclables.

Su Yu-yun (蘇玉雲) was rinsing bottles when a volunteer walked by. "Morning, A-fen," Su said warmly. "Have you eaten? There's breakfast over there." She is like a mother to many people who volunteer at the station.

As usual, Su had been up since three that morning. She had ridden her motor scooter down many streets in the city, collecting recyclables. She arrived at the station a little after five with her goods and continued to work there.

The Dingmei Recycling Station, which opened six years ago in 2009, is like a protective umbrella under which volunteers work together to help reclaim used goods and preserve the earth.

## An emotional outlet

Su and her husband, Lin Zhou-guan (林周管), used to run an electric appliance shop. They worked very hard, often well into the night, to earn enough to raise their three children.



Over ten years ago, their oldest son fell in with some bad friends who abused his trust in them and broke his heart. He was down for a long time. Later on, he started a business with his girlfriend—only to have his girlfriend run away with their money. These successive blows led to severe depression; he could not even eat or sleep.

His depression cast a pall over the whole family. Lin blamed Su for their son's problem, saying that she had not been a good enough mom. He sought out a Tzu Chi volunteer to help them out. That was how Su was introduced to Tzu Chi and began volunteering.

She volunteered at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, where she saw the unavoidable pain associated with illness or advanced age. She took up recycling, and there she also learned a lot. She began to see for herself that many things, even at the end of their usual lifespan, could still be used again. She saw that the fate of those things could be altered. In the same way, she figured the fate of her family could also be changed for the better. They had only to adjust their own outlook on life. Instead of dwelling on their son's depression, they could learn to be happy by counting their blessings. Thus the couple decided to alter their own fate. After all, thinking negatively would not help things at all. With Lin's support,

Su became a very dedicated volunteer. She especially focused on recycling.

In July 2009, volunteers Huang Nan-ming (黃男溟) and his wife, Yang Hui-wen (楊惠雯), set aside a portion of their banana field for Tzu Chi to set up a new recycling station, which they named Dingmei. Su assumed the responsibility of managing it.

All she had to work with in the beginning was a space about the size of two freight containers, about 320 square feet. The site was unpaved, so it would become really muddy after a rain, making loading or unloading very messy. She had no regular helpers, and she was often the only person working there. She often wondered why so few people were interested in doing the wonderful work of recycling. To keep up her spirits, she kept reminding herself what Master Cheng Yen taught: "When you know something is right, just do it." "As a Tzu Chi volunteer, I must not flinch from giving my time and effort," Su told herself. "I have to bravely commit myself and learn as much as I can about environmental protection."

She would rationalize for others who would not join her in her work: "That's all right, they have more to do and I have more time. The more responsibility I take on, the more I'll grow." She hoped that gradually people would see the light and join in. Her persistence and good attitude paid off, and soon more people joined her.

## Sure steps

The Dingmei Recycling Station was located near many clothing wholesalers in Tainan. The wholesalers generated prodigious amounts of empty plastic bags from the clothes that they handled. These bags took up a lot of space and were a big headache for the merchants. Selling them was not a good option because they were not worth enough to warrant the trouble. The merchants often disposed of them elsewhere.

In 2010, Su and other volunteers hit the streets to promote the recycling of plastic bags. When they asked businesses to donate their used and otherwise useless bags to the recycling station, many merchants eagerly agreed. Plastic bags have since become the most common item handled by the Dingmei station.

With a regular inflow of bags, more volunteers joined the station to help and the station became livelier. Volunteers paved the ground of the station and built up the place. They also continued to invite more like-minded, eco-friendly people in the community to join their ranks.

In addition to plastic bags, volunteers collected glass bottles, but some volunteers suggested to Su that they stop collecting them. They were so heavy, and they could be hazardous to transport too. When volunteers were trucking them to a buyer, their nerves were often on edge. A truck full of glass bottles could cause a lot of damage in an accident.

Su would have loved to skip collecting bottles, but she believed they should keep collecting them for the benefit of the Earth. She learned from other recycling stations that commercial establishments would come to the recycling site and pick up bottles if there were sufficient quantities, so she decided to work toward that.



Huang Xi-lin, right, and Wu Guo-cheng on a recyclable pick-up route

First, she scavenged more than a dozen builder's bags. Each was rated to hold up to between 7,000 and 9,000 kilograms (15,000-20,000 pounds). Then they began filling them up. Even though volunteers worked extra hard to collect bottles, it took them three months to fill those 12 bags. When all the bags were finally full, Su asked the buyer to come collect them.

Then one day when Su was riding down a road, she saw seven big baskets of empty beer bottles in front of a barbeque shop. She traveled

#### Volunteers at the Dingmei Recycling Station

farther down the road and saw more stores that had also put out their empty bottles. She felt like she had stumbled on a treasure. With permission from the owners, she got volunteers to come on a truck and collect all the bottles.

She had found new sources that would provide a steady supply of glass bottles: bars, BBQ stores, seafood restaurants, and KTV parlors. What she needed now was strong backs to regularly collect the goods.

Cai Chuan-hui (蔡串輝) and Wu Guo-cheng (吳國城) responded to the call. They checked with the stores that had agreed to give their bot-

tles to Tzu Chi to arrange a pickup schedule. The store owners were happy to have reliable helpers pick up their bottles for free, and Tzu Chi volunteers were happy to do them a good turn for the sake of the environment. The city sanitation department required that bottles be removed by six o'clock in the morning or the businesses would face a fine, so Cai and Wu started their daily pickup at four. That gave them enough time to finish all the stores by the deadline.

Because large amounts of glass bottles now regularly flow into the station, the recycling station bustles with the clank of glass and the chat-

ter of people. That commercial company used to come in to pick up bottles once a month, but now it needs to come seven times a month. Su and the other volunteers at the Dingmei Recycling Station recycle up to 50 metric tons (110,200 pounds) of glass each month.

#### The three amigos

Su Yu-yun is petite, not quite five feet tall, but she certainly appears anything but petite when she handles heavy things. Her dedication adds to her apparent stature. She is a giant who happens to be little.

Huang Xi-lin (黃錫麟) began volunteering at the station after his youngest son took him there one day. When Huang saw Su dragging and lifting heavy loads of glass bottles, he was awed. "Wow, how does she do that?" Moved by her dedication, he decided to do his best to help protect the Earth too. He joined Wu Guo-cheng and Cai Chuan-hui, who had been picking up the glass bottles at stores. Since Wu is quite old, Huang felt all the more that he should help out. He now goes to bed at 11 p.m. and gets up early enough to start working the four o'clock collection route. He gets up even earlier on weekends to allow more time for pickups.

Hong Su-rui (洪素蕊), Huang's wife, is thankful that Su's inspiring example has induced her husband to change. He used to smoke and drink, and he would gamble all night. "He used to return home at four in the morning to sleep," his wife said, "but now he goes out at four to work." His daily routine has been turned upside-down. He's also quit smoking and drinking.

"Su's dedication to recycling touched a deep chord in me," Huang said. "If it weren't for that, I'd still be living aimlessly." He added that he used to feel that liquor tasted like nectar, but now it smells repulsive, and that smell alone is enough to make him dizzy. "Now I go to bed early and get up early, I sweat, and I drink a lot more water. I just feel healthier now."

Su, however, is very grateful to the three-man team. "Loading and unloading glass bottles is very hard work," Su said. "I don't know what we would do if they weren't around."

#### A big family

Su goes all out when it comes to volunteering for Tzu Chi, and she never turns down any work. She said that she used to put in such long hours that when she went home she was so tired, she literally had to crawl up the stairs. She recalled



**Su Yu-yun hefts a basketful of glass bottles probably heavier than herself. The Dingmei Recycling Station collects an average of 1,500 kilograms (3,300 pounds) of glass bottles a day.**

another sign of her dedicated work: “When I lay down and settled into bed, I’d begin feeling needle pricks in my fingertips. The skin there was so worn [from handling things] that I could see layers of new skin at different stages of growing back. Dirt became trapped under my fingernails all year round.”

Yet despite the exhausting work, she remains wholeheartedly committed to her mission. All she needs is a night’s sleep, after which she wakes up refreshed and ready for another day’s work. “I’d be lying if I said that the work isn’t tiring, but I just love recycling. I just can’t help it.”

She has been hurt twice in traffic accidents during her years of service. One morning she was transporting glass bottles on a scooter when a taxi making a sharp turn caught her off guard and caused her to fall off her vehicle. Another time, she got hit by a drunken motorcyclist when she stopped her scooter not far from the recycling station to straighten and secure some recyclables that had shifted during the trip. “Fortunately, I wasn’t hurt too badly either time,” she said.

Her feet were injured in one of the accidents, but she still limped into the recycling station afterwards to take care of things before she went to see a doctor. Later, her husband helped paste medicated patches on her to relieve her pain and soreness. “He did that for me over 30 times before I finally got better.”

He was worried about her health, but she took the pain in stride. “I had much to learn about managing a recycling station. Besides, as manager, I had to set a good example for the others.”

As she works, so do other volunteers. Early in the morning, they make their rounds to pick up glass bottles; during the day, they collect plastic bags at clothing wholesalers or beverage stores; around noon, they pick up fruit wrappers at markets.... The list of what they do goes on and on.

In 2012, volunteer Wang Yue-xiu (王月秀) made a signboard that raised the visibility of the station. A lot more people have dropped off their recyclables at the station since the sign went up, so volunteers do not need to make their collection rounds so frequently.

“There’s no way that I alone could have done what we’ve accomplished as a group,” Su



said. “I’m grateful to everyone whose help has made the station what it is today.” She especially mentioned Huang Zheng-bang (黃政邦), a retired police officer. She thanked him for being the go-to person who supports every last need of the station.

The volunteers at the station possess many talents. When the station needed Internet access, a volunteer emerged with just the right skills to set up the network. Since then, volunteers have been able to listen to Master Cheng Yen’s Dharma talks via videoconferencing.

Jiang Yi-fen (江挹芬), a volunteer at the station, once underwent surgery for lung cancer. She felt very depressed about her illness. However, she found a new anchor for her life at the recycling station and has stopped pitying herself. “We sort things at the station while sharing Master Cheng Yen’s recent talks with each other,” Jiang said. “I’ve learned from those talks how impermanent life can be, and I’ve also come to realize that [compared with more unfortunate people] I’m actually quite lucky. I’ll make the most of my time by giving of myself.”

“I’m grateful to the Master for giving us strength to carry on,” Su summed up. “We’ll continue to do our best and recruit more like-minded people to join us.”

# Out of the Operating Room



# Into the Home

*The path of Yang Yao-lin (楊曜臨) has taken him from a large medical center to a small-town hospital, from the sides of operating tables to the sides of sickbeds in people’s homes in the countryside.*

*Instead of avoiding any involvement in patients’ lives, he is getting closer to them—contrary to what he wanted when he chose to be an anesthesiologist. But he’s found that he has gone too far to return.*

By Yang Yao-lin, M.D. Translated by Tang Yau-yang Photos by Chen Hui-fang

Generally speaking, it's unheard of for anesthesiologists to establish long-term and stable working relationships with their patients. I myself am an example of this. A typical patient would come to my clinic for a pre-surgery consultation to learn about the potential risks of the operation and the anesthesia, and then sign consent forms to acknowledge the information in order to receive anesthesia. The patient would usually be gone in less than 20 minutes. The next time I saw him would be in the operating room. He wouldn't really see me because I would be wearing a scrub cap and a mask. In a few minutes I would put him to sleep. The only connection between us from that point on would be his biological readings on the monitor.

After the surgery, he would wake up in the recovery room, and I would see him trundled away. We would most likely not see each other again. He wouldn't have any impression of me or know that I'd closely monitored his condition throughout the surgery. He'd recover and go home, and totally forget about our brief and uneventful encounter...and so would I.

The interaction between anesthesiologists and their patients is by nature light and transient. This nature was what attracted me to specialize in anesthesiology. I wanted to stay in the impersonal safety of the operating room; I didn't want to see or become involved in the world in which the patients lived, coped, and struggled. I knew that prolonged involvement would lead me to become emotionally attached to them, causing me to worry about their worries and agonize over their agonies.

A few years ago, I was promoted to be an attending physician at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, in eastern Taiwan. At that time, I was planning to leave the medical center to work in a rural area. However, it just so happened that a colleague in my department, a pain management specialist, left. That left us short-handed, so I naturally took over his work.

That decision was a stark departure from my initial goal of becoming an anesthesiologist, but in eastern Taiwan, a relatively undeveloped area, few physicians were able or willing to work in pain management. I knew that I could improve the quality of life for some patients, so I decided to walk out of the operating room, so to speak.

I took another step away from my anesthesiology aspirations in July 2014, when I transferred to the anesthesia and pain management depart-

ment of Guanshan Tzu Chi Hospital. This is a small, rural facility which has even fewer resources. The hospital has 60 special patients who need regular medical care but who aren't sick enough to be hospitalized. Since they cannot come to the hospital very easily, the hospital sends physicians and nurses out to care for them at their homes. Guanshan Hospital doesn't have any resident doctors in family medicine, so this responsibility falls on all physicians there, even the superintendent.

I remember seeing doctors, wearing white gowns and carrying their tool bags, making home visits to patients who couldn't get hospital care because of their restricted mobility—but that was in TV dramas. Now I'm doing exactly the same thing in real life.

#### Real life

On a typical home-visit day, a nurse and I drive through streets and alleyways and past rice paddies toward patients' homes. Though I know the local area quite well, I'm often surprised to drive on paths so out of the way that I didn't even know they existed.

One of the homes that I've visited was a rundown traditional Chinese courtyard house. The original tiled roof, too old and leaky, was covered with a layer of sheet metal to keep the rain out. In the living room, two lit red lamps adorned the shrine for their family ancestors. The furnishings were of very early vintage, including a portrait of sorts—a drawing of a person with a photograph of his face inserted. All this was typical for a family in the countryside a long time ago.

In this old residence lived a female patient, paralyzed from the waist down due to

a spinal injury. Her room was about 140 square feet in size. The red sheet she was using for her comforter—adorned with red flower patterns popular long, long ago—was probably 30 years old. Everything in the house seemed old. It reminded me of visits to my own grandmother's home when I was a child.

The woman greeted me warmly, probably because all of her family was out working and she rarely had a chance to talk to anyone else during the day. I chatted with her before I

**Yang Yao-lin examines a patient during a home visit. It is the 14th year in which doctors and nurses at Guanshan Tzu Chi Hospital have visited patients in their homes. These patients generally use nasogastric tubes, gastrostomy tubes, etc., which all require regular examinations and changing.**



changed her catheter, checked her cystostomy site for signs of infection, and checked her backside for bedsores.

I looked around the room and saw that there were places that were filthy. In her condition, it was probably beyond her to keep the room very clean.

Ever since I started working, I've lived in large, modern houses that were bright, airy, and clean. I rarely witnessed the lives of less fortunate people. Therefore it was somewhat of a shock for me to see that somebody was actually still living in such an old-fashioned environment.

Some of the patients we visit have had strokes and are permanently bedridden. They generally suffer from atrophied muscles and joint contractures. I change their breathing and feeding tubes, check their pressure sores, and change their dressings. The patients are usually deadpan during the whole process; the only interaction that I have with them is through their empty stares, which is really not much of a communication channel.

The best treatment for a bedsore is a surgical cleansing of the sore followed by a skin graft. But a successful skin graft requires a lot of care, which bedridden patients are unlikely to be able to provide. The best help I can offer these patients is to keep changing their dressings and pray that the lesion will somehow cure itself.

Sometimes I encounter complaints from family members. They are unhappy about the extent of long-term care their loved ones have been getting, and they vent about what a monumental undertaking it is simply to get the patient from home to a hospital. I mostly just listen as they pour out their pent-up emotions, and I occasionally say a few words here and there. I know better than to take over the conversation—they need an audience more than a lecturer. With nothing more that I can do for these patients, I do the best I can to be a good emotional dumping ground for them or their families. It's hard, however, to maintain neutrality in this engagement. Too often, their helplessness becomes mine.

Once I was at the home of a stroke victim who was confined to bed. His limbs had atrophied as was normally the case, but his head was clear and he had complete command of his speech. I saw ants crawling all over his body, but he was powerless to drive them away. He could only allow them to keep pestering him as they wandered around on his skin, taking occasional bites. I tried to wipe the ants away for him, but

there seemed to be an endless number of them and my pitiful attempts failed to make much of a difference.

His wife started talking to me. "I haven't seen you before. You're a new doctor, right? If you've never seen the tough life of a farmer, you're seeing it now. He used to work too hard in the field, even on hot days. He had high blood pressure, and I kept telling him to go see a doctor, but he just wouldn't listen. Then he had a stroke when he was in his 40s, and I've taken care of him ever since. He's in his 60s now..." She kept talking, but I couldn't bear listening to their sad story any more.

### My choice

I sometimes feel I'm not cut out to practice this type of family medicine. In these home visits, the most I can do is help patients control their illnesses, not cure them. I am destined to watch patients fade away and die. The process of dying can be so painfully long, long enough for me to care for them and develop emotional attachments to them.

This is very different from what I was familiar with. As an anesthesiologist, I have also lost patients to death, but only occasionally. Those deaths came swiftly, in hours or even in just a few minutes. The patients were mostly still under anesthesia, and I was not familiar with their circumstances. Since I didn't know them very well, I shed fewer tears when they struggled or died.

But that paradigm fundamentally shifted when I transferred to Guanshan Tzu Chi Hospital in July 2014. After I started my home-visit duties, I soon saw far more lowly and miserable existences than I had during all my years as an anesthesiologist. I've come to realize that perhaps death is not always all that painful or horrifying, but a slow, suffering death is.

During my visits, the world of miserable patients and their families—a reality that I had tried to stay away from and pretend did not exist—came to full life right in front of my eyes. Many patients have sorry stories behind them, and often each story is too pungent for me to remain neutral.

I know that I'm not brave enough to face their sorrow, but I have somehow wandered out of the operating room into the fields of the real lives of these patients. Looking back, I realize that I've strayed from my original path, but I have no regrets for having gone too far to return. ❁

# The Most Beautiful Is Great Love

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Translated by Teresa Chang

In early April this year, Somali militants burst into a university in Kenya and killed nearly 150 people. Their justification for this horrific act was to get revenge on Kenya for sending troops into the civil war in Somalia. Ten days after the tragedy, a power transformer explosion at another university sent students panicking in fear of another attack. One person died in the ensuing stampede, and over a hundred students were injured.

It is sad, heartbreaking, to see disasters happening in this world as a result of hatred. These man-made disasters, coupled with frequent natural disasters induced by erratic climate conditions, are causing much suffering in the world.

We should never underestimate the power of a seemingly insignificant bad thought or let our unchecked minds blurt out bad words. Bad deeds, however small, accumulate over time and can trigger disasters. Once hatred is stirred up, it is difficult to stop it. Likewise, we must not pass up any chances to do good deeds just because they seem trivial. The accumulation of small kind deeds can bring about a peaceful world. When you harbor kindness in your mind, you will find every moment a good moment and every day a good day.

### Drought of the mind

Western Taiwan is facing a serious drought. Third-phase water rationing is being enforced in some areas. California, in the United States, is in

the fourth year of a record-breaking drought. Snowpack used to be a major source of water for California, but not much snow fell last year. Like Taiwan, the area is now facing water rationing.

In a drought, everything loses vitality. Even seeds planted in the soil will not sprout. Similarly, if our minds are "arid" and lack spiritual nourishment, the dust of affliction will easily rise and searing mental fires can rage. The Dharma, the Buddha's teachings, is like water.

When we frequently expose ourselves to the Dharma, our minds will be well-nourished and our wisdom will grow.

There is a Buddhist story:

The Buddha traveled to Magadha to spread the Dharma. Among the disciples who went with him was Uruvela Kassapa, who had been a renowned fire-worshipper before he took refuge in the Buddha. When people saw that both the Buddha and Uruvela Kassapa were present together, they were not sure which one was the teacher.

The Buddha could see the people's uncertainty, so he asked Uruvela Kassapa to speak to the crowd.

Uruvela Kassapa then talked about his past ascetic practice—how, under the blazing sun, he would stay close to a burning fire as a form of spiritual cultivation. Such a severe practice, however, did not free his mind of desires and afflictions. Though his body endured the great heat, his mind did not find peace. After he was exposed to the Buddha's teachings, things changed. Receiving the Dharma gave him a soothing coolness he had never experienced before. Knowing that he had found the path to liberation in the Dharma, he abandoned fire-



TZU CHI ARCHIVES

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from April 1 to 20, 2015.



**The Dharma is like water. We must constantly absorb it to nourish our minds and put out the fires of our mental afflictions.**

worshipping and became a follower of the Enlightened One.

What Uruvela Kassapa said dissolved the crowd's hesitation. They took the Buddha as their teacher.

Try standing on hot sand under the scorching sun—you will feel extremely uncomfortable. But if at such times some clouds obscure the sun and a breeze rises, you will immediately cool off and feel soothed.

The same happens when rain falls on land that has endured a long drought. Nature needs the relief and nourishment of water. The rain falls on everything equally. Be it big trees or small blades of grass, all things receive the soothing moisture. The destructive heat is dissipated and everything absorbs the life-giving water. Our minds, like nature, need such nourishment too. When bad things happen to us, we might fly into a rage. If we allow such fires of rage to spread, we might bring disasters to our families, society, or even the whole of humanity. We must constantly absorb the Dharma to put out the fires of affliction in our minds. As long as the direction in which we are going is correct and we don't go astray, we will be able to endure all hardships with peace of mind, no matter how rugged our path is.

**Light up the darkness**

Typhoon Haiyan devastated the central Philippines in November 2013. Jerry and Jane

Canonigo, a married couple who lived in Tacloban, lost their home in the disaster. All they had left was 5,000 pesos. Life became difficult for this family of five. When Tzu Chi launched a cash-for-work program to help clean up devastated communities, the couple joined in. At the end of a workday, they each received 500 pesos from the foundation. Later, when Tzu Chi distributed cash aid to typhoon victims, the couple received 15,000 pesos. With these funds, the Canonigos started a lumber business.

The couple worked hard and rested little. Their hard work paid off and their lives finally got back on track. As their lumber business got better and better, they didn't forget the help they had received from Tzu Chi. They wanted to repay such kindness by giving back to society, so they sold their lumber at reduced prices to help typhoon survivors rebuild their homes. They even began saving their spare change in a coin bank to help the needy.

Though Haiyan brought large-scale devastation, it also awakened the goodness in people's hearts. Many survivors who received aid from Tzu Chi later signed up to be volunteers. They realized that even small amounts of money when put together can do a lot of good, so they began saving up their petty cash to do charitable work. They also took up recycling, one of the causes of the foundation, to help protect the Earth. Such goodness has helped the devastated land to heal.

Tzu Chi is building prefabricated houses for survivors in Ormoc, another of the areas hard-hit by Typhoon Haiyan. Over a hundred families have already moved in. The mother of one family said that she fell asleep with tears in her eyes the first night after she moved in. As she lay on the folding bed that they received from Tzu Chi and looked around at the roof and four walls, she thought about how she and her family finally had a home again, and how they would be able to sleep soundly, even during rainy nights. At these thoughts, she just couldn't hold back her tears.

Why did Tzu Chi volunteers reach out to the typhoon victims, people who were complete strangers to them, to help their lives regain stability? It's all due to love, due to an inability to stand by while people suffer.

This loving compassion brought Tzu Chi into existence 50 years ago, and it has also taken our volunteers from Taiwan to many countries around the world to relieve suffering. This inability to see people suffer is a love that transcends nationality, religion and ethnicity. As our volunteers give joyfully, people receive our help gratefully. What could be a more beautiful picture than this?

A single lamp can lighten up a room that has been shrouded in darkness for a thousand years,

just as the Buddha's teachings can bring light to people's minds and drive out the darkness of their mental afflictions. When our hearts are filled with light, that inner light will shine forth and expel the darkness around us. I hope that our world has an inexhaustible supply of love and an endless reserve of the inner light of wisdom so that happiness can be brought to everyone.

**Tzu Chi bone marrow registry**

In 1993, Taiwan's Health Department and medical community entrusted to Tzu Chi the establishment of a bone marrow registry that would promote bone marrow donation to unrelated recipients.

Some medical professionals at that time tried to dissuade me from embarking on this huge undertaking. They said, "Master, don't do it by any means. The pressure will be too much for you to bear."

Data from at least 10,000 potential donors was required to establish a meaningful marrow donor registry. Taiwan did not have an immunogenetic laboratory at the time, so all the blood specimens collected from potential donors would have to be sent to the United States to be processed. The cost needed would be huge. Moreover, where would we find all those poten-

**This group of women participated in the cash-for-work program at the construction site of the Ormoc Tzu Chi Great Love Village. After Typhoon Haiyan, Tzu Chi launched reconstruction projects to help victims, including building prefabricated houses in Ormoc.**



tial donors? [Back then, there were some common misconceptions about marrow donation in Taiwan which would make it harder to promote the cause.] Even if we did find a match, there was always the possibility that the potential donor might back out of his or her commitment to donate. Difficulties and challenges truly abounded in such an undertaking.

Despite the difficulties, I knew that marrow transplantation was often the last hope for blood disease patients and that Taiwan had the needed technical skills to perform such operations. All we needed were people willing to be donors.

Life is priceless. I really could not bear to see people die when the possibility of saving them was still there. When we know something needs to be done, we should just go all out to do it. Therefore, after I ascertained that a marrow donation would not harm the donor, I decided to go for it.

In mid-October that year, I started out on my regular trip to Tzu Chi branches around Taiwan. When I reached our Taidong branch, I told our volunteers of my intention to set up a bone marrow registry. People in Taidong, which is a relatively rural area, were generally more conservative, and our volunteers there were more advanced in age. Despite all that, they gave me their full support without any hesitation. They said that although they did not know what a bone marrow donation was, they believed that I would never harm a healthy person to save a sick person. They had implicit faith in me. "No matter what you want to do, we'll be behind you," they said.

I saw love and courage in these simple, pure-hearted volunteers. Later, when my trip took me to Pingdong, Kaohsiung and Taichung, the volunteers in those cities gave me the same support. "When it comes to doing the right thing, just do it," they said. That was truly a shot in my arm.

One day, after I had finished giving a talk at the Taichung office and was walking out, I met a young volunteer. Another volunteer who was present said to him, "The Master is establishing a bone marrow registry—a strong, young man like you would make a perfect candidate." The young man promptly replied, "I'm willing to be a donor if I qualify."

No time can be wasted when it comes to saving lives. It just so happened that Tzu Chi, the Council of Labor Affairs, and the Government Information Office were holding a mountain clean-up event and charity bazaar in Zhanghua, central Taiwan, on October 24. A booth was quickly added to the bazaar to promote bone marrow donation. On that day alone, more than 800 people signed up to be donors and had their blood samples drawn.

Tzu Chi volunteers supported the cause by signing up to be donors themselves and by thinking up different ways to encourage people to sign up. Some wore signboards that read: "Be a bone marrow donor. You can save a life without affecting your health." There was even an elderly volunteer who would cry out, "Help! Help!" to attract people's attention. Once she had their attention, she took them to our bone marrow drive site and asked other volunteers to explain the cause to those people.

To act in the spirit of religion is to love others as we would love ourselves. When others hurt, we feel their pain; when others suffer, we feel their sorrow. We live out Great Love when we give to others without discrimination, without selfish intentions. In establishing a marrow registry, I believed that my intentions were selfless and that innate love resided in

**Near an MRT station in Taipei, Tzu Chi volunteers encourage passersby to sign up as bone marrow donors. In 1993 Tzu Chi established a bone marrow donor registry to help save lives.**



SHIN-JING-FAN

everyone. Therefore, even though I knew that challenges abounded, I went for it. I hoped to help save lives and to bring out the love in people. Thankfully, with Tzu Chi volunteers' full support, we have been able to sail through the many difficulties.

Over the past two decades, Tzu Chi has put tens of millions of Taiwanese dollars into the bone marrow donation program. The effort and energy our volunteers have devoted to it are immeasurable. Since the establishment of the Tzu Chi Bone Marrow Registry [renamed the Buddhist Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center in April 2002], over 3,800 donations have been completed. Blood cancer patients in 29 countries have benefited.

I am full of gratitude to all donors for giving unconditionally, for helping save lives with love and courage. When they were told they were a match, they did not back out; instead, they worked on getting healthier in order to provide higher quality bone marrow for their matches. Many donors have told me the same thing: "It feels wonderful to save a life."

Since Tzu Chi was founded half a century ago, all of our missions have been launched for a simple and pure reason—we cannot bear to see others suffer. Though the path we have traveled has not been an easy one, we go about our work with a heart of joy.

In walking the Bodhisattva Path, we must make the Four Great Vows and strive to fulfill them: "I vow to save all living beings however countless they are, to get rid of all worries however innumerable they are, to study the methods of the Dharma however endless they are, and to attain the Buddha Way however transcendent it is." We must also live out the spirit of the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

I thank all Tzu Chi volunteers for working together to relieve suffering. They do so without complaint and without expecting anything in return, and they employ the best methods they can think of to do their work. All they hope is to bring peace to people's minds. I'm truly grateful to see them give so willingly and with such unwavering resolution and unconditional love. My gratitude to them will last lifetime after lifetime.

Sukantonga, 75, lives in Medan, Indonesia. He used to teach Chinese. Six years ago, when his wife suddenly passed away, he kept her body in

the house. When a bad smell arose, his neighbors asked him where his wife was. "She's sleeping," he replied. He really thought so. Later, his relatives came to help him arrange the funeral. After all was taken care of, Sukantonga, unable to accept the loss of his wife, began closing himself off. He remained shut off for six years.

Tzu Chi volunteers learned of Sukantonga's situation and went to visit him, but he refused to open the door. Our volunteers did not give up though. They visited him whenever they got the time and tried to talk to him from outside his home. Three months later, Sukantonga finally let down his guard and let the volunteers into his house.

As soon as they entered the house, the volunteers saw large amounts of garbage inside. Their hearts went out to Sukantonga for living in such appalling conditions. After obtaining his permission, a group of volunteers began visiting his house to clean up. It took them three whole months to finish the work. They also taught Sukantonga's mentally challenged foster son how to do laundry, clean up the house, and do other chores.

Recently Sukantonga wrote me a letter in which he said he was very thankful for and touched by our volunteers' help. He also said that because of the care he had received from Tzu Chi, he was more at peace. He said he had walked out of darkness and seen light ahead of him.

This story shows love in action. Without love, how could our volunteers have worked so patiently to help lift Sukantonga out of his misery? Embracing Great Love with a religious spirit, our volunteers willingly contribute what they can to make a difference in others' lives.

I founded Tzu Chi when I was 29 years old. In what seems to be a blink of an eye, I am now close to 80 years old. I have completely dedicated my life throughout all these years to the well-being of humankind. I hope to bring out the most genuine and purest love from people and pool together that love to help the powerless, the needy, and those affected by disasters. I hope we not only relieve people's suffering, but accompany them and cheer them up until their minds are uplifted and they are no longer enslaved by mental afflictions.

Everyone experiences mishaps in life. When people are in need and we reach out to them and help them sincerely, we can help free them from suffering. Let us all strive to make a positive difference in others' lives. ❀

# Walk With Me

## Trekking the Coast of Taiwan



*He quit his job in 2008 and walked the coastline all the way around the island of Taiwan. Since that unforgettable journey, he has been leading people on trips to see Taiwan's ocean landscapes, hoping to inspire in his fellow islanders a love for the oceans and to sow seeds of ecological preservation in them.*

By Lin Jia-he  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos courtesy of Taiwan Association for Marine Environmental Education  
Used with permission of *Rhythms Monthly Magazine*

Rain was falling, but it was blown away by a howling wind before it could hit the ground. The crash of the rising tide breaking on the shore added to the noise created by the rotating blades of nearby wind turbines. This morning on the beach in Houlong, Miaoli County, west-central Taiwan, did not appear to be a good time for outdoor activities. But despite the rain and wind, a tour bus pulled over near the beach at around ten o'clock. A group of middle-aged people and a younger man, Guo Zhao-wei (郭兆偉), got off. "[Considering the strong wind,] I recommend that you proceed with a stagger—sort of going with the wind," Guo told the group over a loudspeaker.

As they walked on, Guo stopped to talk about things they saw on the path. He talked about the barnacles he saw clinging to a rock, and he picked up a few pieces of plastic garbage at varying stages of decay as he described the problem of waterborne refuse. Then he spotted some *Sargassum horneri*—a thick, weedy algae that can grow ten feet tall. He told his group that when the vessel Morning Sun had run aground in 2008, spilling heavy oil and fouling up a wide area of the coastline in northern Taiwan, it was this algae that helped clean up the pollution when human efforts fell short.

Guo is the secretary general of the Taiwan Association for Marine Environmental Education (TAMEE), and he was one of the first people to walk the coastline all the way around Taiwan, a 1,400-kilometer (870-mile) journey.

He loves the ocean. Any mention of the word is enough to get him on his soapbox. Once he starts talking, he does so with supercharged and inexhaustible energy.

Since his walk around the island, he has, among other things, guided group tours like this one. This group, coming from a continuing education class in Taipei, was there on the beach for a day trip covering a stretch of less than six miles of the shore, an easy job for Guo. Despite the short trip, he was able to educate the participants on topics ranging from sedimentary strata, coastal ecology, beliefs in marine gods, and salt cultures.

He mixes science with culture in his tours. He seems to be able to talk on anything about the seas and oceans with amazing ease. His work is so easy for him that it does not seem like work.

### The calling

Guo was about to start his postgraduate study at the Institute of Marine Biology at National Taiwan Ocean University when he met Huang Zong-shun (黃宗舜), a PhD student at the same institute. The two men's paths first crossed more than ten years ago during a research project about green sea turtles on Orchid Island. Huang was the man who changed the direction of Guo's life.

Huang used to teach in secondary school, but he was so concerned by the disproportionately brief coverage of marine biology in textbooks that he quit his job to pursue his doctoral studies. He knew that he could not promote marine environmental education under the constraints of the prevailing education system, so he left to find another path.

Huang persuaded the green sea turtle research team at the institute to add tour guide responsibilities to the work of its members. Providing free guides to tourists was a responsi-

bility that suited Guo just fine. He had always been a people person.

Guo and Huang shared a love for the ocean and a desire to get more people to care for it, so they clicked quite naturally. Huang believed that the best way to influence people's opinion about something was to take them right into that thing. "When they experience it firsthand and see the problems for themselves, their conscience is aroused and they're more ready to take action."

After Guo received his degree, Huang invited him to start an association with him with the mission to show people the coastline of Taiwan and to inspire in them a love for the ocean. "I've always loved to talk to people about the ocean," Guo recalled, "so I went for it."

At the time, Guo was working somewhere else at a job that he did not enjoy. Despite strong opposition from his family, he quit his job and joined Huang in setting up the association.

In the summer of 2008, he set out to do the first task for TAMEE after its opening: He shouldered a 30-kilogram (66-pound) backpack and started to walk the coastline of Taiwan. His mission was to explore and establish basic information about hiking routes.

"TAMEE was very nearly penniless then, and of course it couldn't make payroll," Guo said. "I borrowed just about all the equipment that I needed. Even the maps were copied from an atlas that the Taiwan Thousand Miles Trail Association loaned to me."

He went on: "Before the trip, I only knew a few things about green sea turtles, so I was really scared. I wondered what I was getting myself into. I had no idea how to teach people about marine environmental protection." He decided to learn as much as he could on the trip.

He carried the maps for each day of his travel in his pocket, and he wrote down his observations directly on the maps as he hiked. He also asked people he met for help, which included directions, things he didn't know about, etc. In this way, he walked, learned, walked and learned more. "The trip transformed me from uncertainty to confidence and taught me how to work towards the mission of TAMEE. I also discovered what I needed to learn more about." He returned from that walk firmly convinced about his chosen career.

However, he soon found out that it was one thing to truly want to do something, and quite another to actually do it. More specifically, how

could they lead a group of people to walk along the Taiwanese shoreline, keep them entertained, prevent accidents, and feed and shelter them for days and nights on end? These challenges would be less daunting if there was a lot of money to work with, but they did not want to charge people too much for the experience. They reasoned that making the trips more affordable would encourage more participation. Though they decided they could spend less on food and lodging, they could not skimp on safety and basic supplies. They figured that if they would be in the red anyway, they might as well go for broke, so they set a ridiculously low price for participants and let the word spread for their upcoming journey. They wanted people to join them, and their low price reflected their desires.

### The first TAMEE guided tour

On April 17, 2009, participants of the first public TAMEE tour gathered in front of the rail station in Keelung, a port city near the northern tip of Taiwan. The group of about 50 people, ranging in age from the early 20s to late 60s, was split into two teams. One team set out down the eastern coast of Taiwan, and the other team started on the western coast. Their



On a visit to Shitiping in Hualien, participants of a TAMEE-sponsored shore walk take pictures of the beautiful Pacific Ocean.



Guo Zhao-wei and his shore walkers have witnessed much during their walks, including polluted, dirty creeks and embankments invaded by pipes for fish farms.



plan was to walk southward and meet at Kenting, near the southern tip of the island, 38 days later, on May 24.

Huang and Guo had collected entry fees from the participants. After making advance payments for supplies and services that the teams would need along the way, the two of them split the money they had left—3,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$100). Each of them ended up with only 1,500 dollars (US\$50), and they had to make that last for the duration of the trip. “That was not even enough to buy a single meal for my group, so I was really scared,” Guo said. “But I led the procession off the starting line as if nothing was the matter, and none of the participants knew about our finances.”

Things would have gone badly if Taiwanese hospitality had not come into play again and again. There were many occasions where the participants actually played hosts and picked up the tabs for meals at restaurants that were located in or near the towns where they lived. There were even times when local people just showed up on their routes to give food to the groups. These locals had gotten wind of the walk from media reports and wanted to help.

Some participants, who had signed up for just a few days, extended their participation because they found the walk more interesting than they had expected. That brought in more funds for Guo and Huang to keep the walk going.

After both groups had reached the destination and Guo and Huang had said good-bye to the participants, they settled the bills. They were prepared for the worst, even ready to wash dishes at restaurants if necessary to pay off the charges. “But we ended up with 800 Taiwanese dollars left over,” Guo said. “I still don’t have a clue how that happened.” Huang chimed in, “We were very much like mendicant

monks all along the way, but we did it. Thinking back, I still can’t believe how daring we were to launch the trip.”

#### Different chords touched

The participants of that first expedition were undoubtedly glad that Guo and Huang did not get cold feet and cancel that walk. It was the duo’s can-do spirit that had enabled them to conceive, plan and carry out the unprecedented coastal trip. Nearly 20 people completed the entire journey.

Wu Ru-ling (吳如陵), 68 at the time, was the oldest participant. When he learned about the trip, he invited Xu Jun-qing (許俊卿), a friend since elementary school, to join him.

“I took part in the walk just for fun,” said Wu, a seasoned walker. “When I first started, I wasn’t mentally prepared to finish it. I was very tired at the beginning, to the point of wanting to quit. But then we all got to know each other better, and we cheered each other on. I actually didn’t feel particularly fatigued when I finished it.” He was hooked after that trip, and he has since gone on almost all the other walks hosted by TAMEE.

What might have made Wu forget the toll from endless walking? What hooked him and people like him to come back again and again for more?

When people ask Guo what makes walking the shoreline so attractive, he often responds: “Just walk at your own pace to see and to know your motherland, and you’ll find the answer.”

On TAMEE walks, Guo does not tell participants how to allocate their time during a given day. Every night, he goes over the schedule for the following day with the participants: the route, hours and locations of his guided tours, where they plan to stop for a group lunch and dinner, and where they will spend the night. Participants can take their time and arrange their own schedules, as long as they can be reached by phone and show up for meals or lodging. This arrangement has allowed participants to get the best of group tours and individual journeys. They may, for example, stay with the group for Guo’s tour of a spot and then go off on their own to explore something else. They do not need to make arrangements for lodging, meals, and



A supply truck is always close by on a TAMEE shore walk. The big, bold, yellow message says, “We’re walking around the island.”



**Guo talks about sea god worship in front of a Mazu temple in Baishatun, Miaoli County. Mazu is a Chinese goddess who is believed to protect seafarers.**

other logistic matters, and they still get the freedom of an individual trip.

TAMEE has developed new routes each year since that first trip in 2009. They vary in duration, from a few days to mega walks. In 2014 the association held its first round-island walk, which took 67 days to finish.

After that trip, participants co-authored a book, *Human Sounds on the Shore*, which provided a daily chronicle of the event and collected the observations and thoughts of about 30 walkers.

Xu Jun-qing, Wu Ru-ling's schoolmate, was one of them. Before his retirement, he was an engineer on projects that included dams, levies, and other hydraulic engineering works. Like Wu, he has taken part in many walks hosted by TAMEE since the 2009 trip, so he has seen just about every inch of Taiwan's shoreline. He does not like some of the sights he sees. In particular,

he does not like the negative impact man has made on nature in the name of development.

"Forcefully reclaiming land from the ocean and building unnecessary facilities on it have not created the promised economic benefits," Xu said in the book. "I used to think that man could always triumph over nature, but now I see how mistaken I've been."

Hong Ling-ya (洪鈴雅) came up with the idea for the book. She wrote in it, "TAMEE, true to form, firmly believes that when people get close to the shore, what they see and feel—good or bad—will make them ocean lovers."

Hong, a veteran in conservation, is a doctoral student at the Graduate Institute of Environmental Education at National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei. She observed that the 67-day walk had a transformative impact on participants far greater than she had thought possible. "I saw participants work to protect this island in their own way after that walk," she said. "Some of them give talks about their walk, introducing to others the beauty and sorrow of the ocean. Some of them organize beach clean-



**TAMEE staff members often visit schools to promote the importance of reducing garbage in the ocean. They also conduct activities that include a game about the management of marine resources.**

up events, believing that marine environmental education starts with daily life. Others take part in surveys of marine life, hoping to gather more information on the current marine ecology and raise people's awareness of it." The list of how people respond goes on and on.

Guo Zhao-wei has persisted year after year, walking the shores of Taiwan, one step after another. At first he was all alone, but now he has with him a broad array of people. They do not merely follow Guo, but, as Hong pointed out, they lead in their own ways in helping the earth.

"This experience has given me a much deeper appreciation of environmental education," Hong concluded.

### **Ocean—their lifelong mission**

The success of the shore walks put TAMEE on the map and put Guo more firmly on the path of his choosing. However, it has not been an easy journey.

Any organization, however small, must attend to all sorts of things. That is particularly true for a new one like TAMEE. Guo has had his share of hard work as the association endeavored to establish itself.



"For more than a year, he was paid a pitiful \$10,000 [US\$333] a month," Huang said of Guo. "However, he's the kind of person that when he believes that something should and can be done, he just goes for it. The task called for a person like him."

Guo worked out of his room at his parents' house when TAMEE was first established, but that did not sit well with his parents. They thought he was too much like a boomerang.

Shoreline walks can induce changes in people, such as making them more environmentally friendly.



“To them, working for an NGO isn’t serious work at all, but an odd job at best,” Guo remarked. “They’ve only begun to accept what I do in the last few years, since the association became more established.”

TAMEE indeed has grown. It has been able to win grants and other external resources. Though its revenues are still unpredictable, Guo and Huang have been able to add two more workers.

Chen Ren-ping (陳人平), one of the new workers, had studied fisheries science. He and Guo go back to their college days when they were buddies in a school club. To join TAMEE, Chen had quit a job “that offered stability, and honestly nothing else worthwhile” to him—the job of a public servant. He had wanted to do “something different.”

Guo Fu (郭芙), the other new worker, used to study green sea turtles in the same lab as Guo. Once she learned about the grave ecological damage to the Taiwanese coastline, she wanted to help change that. She believed that change would come more effectively if it involved the public, so she decided to dedicate

herself to environmental education. That is why she joined TAMEE.

### Approaches

In addition to leading walks along the shoreline, the TAMEE team also visits schools and organizations to promote the importance of marine environmental protection. During their presentations, they often have their hosts play FishBank, a computer-based game that simulates the interplay among stakeholders in marine ecology. TAMEE has also reinvented the game with simple props so it can be played without a computer. Even little schoolchildren can have fun while learning from the game.

Through role-play, the games show players the need to balance fish harvests and marine ecology, and give them a chance to appreciate the importance of and the difficulties in managing marine resources, given that stakeholders invariably have conflicting interests.

“Negotiations are very important in playing the games,” Guo said. “Like in the games, fishing negotiations between nations are happening for

**Shore walkers pick up garbage on their path. However, Guo stresses that reducing waste at the source—that is, cutting down on the use of plastic products—is a more effective method to reduce seaborne garbage.**



real as we speak. If good, sensible agreements are struck and everybody holds up their end of the bargain, sustainability is indeed possible.”

Guo went on to say that though the games have been played hundreds of times, so far only one team has ever succeeded in reaching the goal. “If one player didn’t over-catch or cheat, others surely would, and in the end many of them lost their shirts. That was then an opportunity time to reflect on and discuss the games. It’s been very effective.”

Besides shoreline walks and visits to schools and organizations to promote marine environmental protection, the association has started putting the Japanese concept of *satoumi* into practice. *Satoumi* is defined as marine and coastal landscapes that have been formed and maintained by prolonged interaction between humans and ecosystems.

Guo found an ideal location for *satoumi*: Wangan, the fourth largest island in Penghu, an archipelago of 64 islands and islets in the Taiwan Strait between China and the main island of Taiwan. During the summer, TAMEE holds ecological tours and camps on Wangan. Just like in their shoreline walks, they emphasize the harmonious interaction between marine ecology and humans. The team holds activities concerning the preservation of green sea turtles, traditional fishing methods, and local cultures and customs. These have one thing in common: They are all rich in locally abundant ingredients.

“Our operations have evolved into a pattern,” Guo said, as he reviewed the TAMEE calendar. “We do shore walks in spring and autumn, we reach out to other organizations to speak in winter, and summer is for Wangan and *satoumi*.”

He wants to conduct responsible eco tours at Wangan and help make this small community a showcase for sustainable island community development. “I think Wangan is the best place in Taiwan to experiment with *satoumi*, just as Taketomi Island is in Okinawa,” said Guo. “We’ve been quite successful in what we’ve been doing in Wangan.”

### Here is the sea

While the association seeks new conduits through which to connect people with the ocean, walking Taiwanese shores remains an important part of the team’s work. After all, it is the foundation upon which TAMEE has been built. “A thorough knowledge of our seashores is an advantage that we enjoy over other groups. We

even know of changes that have taken place over the years,” Guo reflected.

Beyond the obvious point—seeing things firsthand—what does shore walking do to an average person? To that question, Guo offered a somewhat indirect answer: It changes you without your knowing it.

TAMEE has put in a lot of effort to promote reducing garbage and waste in oceans. According to Guo, the best and most effective method to achieve that is to cut down on the use of plastic products. Once participants of the walks see for themselves the pollution along the shorelines, they reflect on their daily habits and on the quantity of garbage they produce every day. Guo said that after taking part in TAMEE walks, people realize that every day a person just needs a little clean food and water to subsist and a shoulder-width of floor space to sleep on. Once people realize that they can live so simply, they might reduce their desires for the unnecessary trappings of life, which could in turn lead them to take more civic-minded actions, such as producing and throwing away less garbage.

Picking up garbage on beaches is what most Taiwanese people do when they feel like doing the earth a good turn. This all seems well and good, but Guo warns, “After all the garbage has been picked up from the beach, another big wave brings more right back to the beach in a heartbeat.” Guo believes that picking up garbage on the beach is far less effective than producing less garbage to start with.

Participants are often transformed during shore walks, and they learn to live more eco-conscious lives.

“Bicycle riding is all the rage now,” Guo said. “I hope that one day soon shoreline walking, like bike riding, can be what people consciously choose to do, and that it will become part of their lives.”

“The ocean is right there, so please help yourself,” Guo continued with his signature smile. He suggests that people pick a holiday, get out their backpacks, throw in some water and snacks, jump on a bus or a train, get off at their destinations, and walk the beach they have picked. “Walk and walk, quit when you feel you’ve done enough walking, then find a way back to a road and figure out a way home. Getting close to the sea is just as simple and uncomplicated as that.”

# Now This Is Home



YOU XI-MEN

Wang Hui-fen, right, ties a red decoration to Zhuo's shoulder bag.

*This residence may not be the coziest, but it is a clean and safe shelter with a roof to keep out the wind and rain—a home that you really want to go back to because it is filled with love.*

**By Hu Qing-qing**  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Wearing a red hat and a light-blue surgical mask, Ms. Zhuo pulled the rusted metal gate shut, turned around, and got into a car with Tzu Chi volunteers. The car pulled away from the chicken farm where she had lived for some time. She was headed to her new home—and a brand-new future.

Having suffered one stroke of bad luck after another over a period of time, Zhuo had learned to keep her hopes low. But a group of kind-hearted people were changing her dim perspective on life and brightening it with hope.

## The chicken coop

One afternoon in late April 2014, some Tzu Chi volunteers from Gushan, Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, set out to visit the home of a potential care recipient in Dashu, another district in Kaohsiung. The address they had led them to a chicken farm. Amidst the din and stench of thousands of chickens, they approached a nondescript metal shed. That was where Ms. Zhuo lived.

"Anybody home?" the volunteers called out.

"Yes, please come in," replied a weak voice.

The volunteers walked into the shed. Zhuo, 54, had just returned home a few days before from her chemotherapy treatments, and she was resting to regain her strength. She labored to prop herself up, not believing that these people were actually standing before her to answer her prayers—prayers upon which she had pinned little hope.

"I didn't think that my phone call would get you to come," Zhuo commented. Then she began to tell the volunteers her story.

When she was younger, she was too busy working to help support her family to get married. She has remained single to this day. She put her life savings into real estate investments more than two years ago at the suggestion of a friend, but those soon went bad. She ended up losing all the money she had put in, and more besides. She even ended up in debt. That was in June 2012.

To make matters worse, she had no place to live. In May 2013, a friend's brother let her move into that metal shed on his chicken farm. As if her financial downfall and shabby living conditions were not bad enough, Zhuo found a lump in her breast three months later.

Her disease would have been covered under Taiwan's national health insurance if she had kept up her premium payments. But she had not, so her health insurance had been suspended, leaving her without any coverage. Consequently,

she did not seek medical help immediately. When she finally went to see a doctor—over two months later—she was told that she had stage IV breast cancer, meaning it was an invasive cancer that had spread from the breast to other parts of her body.

Treatment ensued, but she had to borrow money to pay for it. In March 2014, she lost her nerve to borrow from her friend again. She had to stop her treatment regimen, but the cancer did not stop damaging her. In April, she became so sick that she had to be rushed by ambulance to a hospital emergency room. She was hospitalized. Now on top of being so sick, she was worried about her hospital charges too.

The caregiver for the patient in the next bed told Zhuo to try Tzu Chi. She slept on that suggestion for several days. Without any other option, she finally called the Kaohsiung branch of the foundation. In less than a week, volunteers showed up at her metal shed.

## Sorting things out

Lu Chen Feng-zhu (盧陳鳳珠) and other volunteers returned to see Zhuo again the next day, and they gave her some emergency cash. "This is not an illness whose treatment you can afford to put off," they warned Zhuo. They began helping her pay off her delinquent health insurance premiums in installments. They also involved Zhang Sheng-feng (張勝峰), the village head, to help apply for social welfare.

Zhuo's shed sat right on top of a drainage ditch, so insects like mosquitoes were rampant, and with the chickens so close, there was no escaping from the extremely offensive smell of their droppings. During a later visit, Lu Chen observed that the place was unfit even for healthy people, much less for a patient in chemo.

Volunteers asked Zhuo if they could look for a better place to rent for her, but she reluctantly declined. They pressed her for an explanation. She told them that she would not be able to afford it. "I know you worry that I might get infected here," Zhuo said, "but I'll be careful." The volunteers would not take no for an answer though, not on this issue. They said to her, "You just take care of yourself, and let us see what we can do about the rental."

Zhuo received regular cancer treatments over the following month, and bounced back quite nicely. At the same time, the conditions at the chicken farm worsened as the summer reached its peak. The rising temperatures amplified the odor

### Volunteers move a soft spring mattress into Zhuo's new home.

problem. Finding new lodging could not wait another day.

Zhang, the village head, quickly found her a place. However, when volunteers were rounding up people to clean up and paint that place so Zhuo could move in, the somewhat superstitious landlady learned about her illness and decided not to rent it to her. Disappointed, the volunteers nonetheless understood the woman's reaction. They would rather be upfront about everything than try to hide the truth.

Fortunately, Zhang found another place for Zhuo just a few days later. Volunteers looked over the new place to decide what furniture and appliances Zhuo would need. Then they shopped at the thrift stores at various Tzu Chi recycling stations for the needed items. On the big day, Wang Ming-hui (王明輝) and nine other volunteers drove to the recycling stations to pick up the items before they headed out for the chicken farm.

### Moving in

When they entered Zhuo's shed, she was sitting on the bed with two black plastic bags lying beside her. "Is that all? Is there anything else you need to move?" they asked her. "This is it. I just have a few clothes," she replied.

They all drove to the new place, where another team of volunteers was waiting for them. The group unloaded the furniture and things and moved them into the house. Zhuo's excitement was obvious. Lu Chen put her arm around her shoulder and said, "Let's go in and figure out where to put the furniture and the bed."

"How about putting this here?" volunteers asked Zhuo before they put things in their places. Teary-eyed, she kept nodding her consent to their questions as she walked from the bedroom to the living room. Then the village head and a few volunteers hustled in a refrigerator; Zhuo bowed to them to express her thanks.

Just as she was walking into the kitchen, a man delivered a gas tank for cooking. (Many Taiwanese kitchen stoves run off propane tanks, which are delivered to households.) "Let's ask



LIU FENG-GE

the gentleman to connect it to the range," said A-ying, the landlady. She took Zhuo's hands and said to her, "Don't worry too much. Just settle down here and fight the illness."

The volunteers thanked A-ying for taking in Zhuo during the time of her illness. "It's nothing. Everybody gets sick, so that's no taboo to me," said A-ying. "I'm glad to know you all. Considering how many people there are in this big world, we've all beaten incredible odds to be in this room together. Just think about that."

When everything was set up, it began to thunder and rain cats and dogs. Volunteer Wang Hui-fen (王慧芬) hollered for all to hear as she walked out of the kitchen carrying some sweet rice dumplings, "Let's have some *tangyuan* to celebrate the move, along with the music of the rain and wind."

Everyone surrounded Zhuo and gave her their best wishes. She could not contain her emotions as she said through her tears, "You've been so kind to me. I must be strong and carry on." Wang hung a red decoration, representing good fortune, on her shoulder bag.

It had been about two months since Tzu Chi volunteers in Gushan had begun caring for Zhuo. After her move, volunteers in Dashu would take over and look after her.

Someone pushed open a window and exclaimed, "The rain has stopped." Zhuo went to the window and looked out. Rows of pineapple plants, still quite green, came into clear view. She took a deep breath and said, "I haven't breathed so freely in a very long time!" ❀

# Telling His Story With Colors

*Zeng Qi-xiong says that his paintings do not come from any talent, but from lots of hard work. Instead of knocking him out, adversity has opened doors to colorful new frontiers.*



By Qiu Ru-lian   Translated by Tang Yau-yang   Photos by Lin Yan-huang

Zeng Qi-xiong (曾啓雄), 36, strains his hands to pick out some paint tubes, twists off the little lids with his teeth, and works with difficulty to squeeze the paint onto a palette. Holding a specially adapted brush in his mouth, he adjusts his wheelchair this way and that until it feels just right. Finally, after all that work, he puts one stroke of paint on the canvas, followed by another, then another.

Painting is not easy for him. He has to use nearly every ounce of his strength just to complete a single work. He's only in his mid-30s, and if not for an accident 13 years ago, in 2001, he would be busy making money in a good

career. But that's not how life turned out for Qi-xiong. Instead of working at a job, he tells his story through colors, with paint.

### The big fall

Qi-xiong's parents divorced when he was in fifth grade. His father, Zeng Ze-qing (曾澤清), took him and his older brother to live in Taipei. Though the father worked day and night in leather processing and never seemed to have time for the brothers, he was strict in disciplining them. That's probably why Qi-xiong stayed out of trouble and behaved himself properly, even though he wasn't a stellar student.



It is actually quite an involved process for Zeng Qi-xiong to hold a long brush in his mouth and paint. He has had to learn to overcome drooling and to turn the brush with his tongue. In addition, prolonged exertions make his neck sore.

After he graduated from junior high school, Qi-xiong felt that he had had enough of school, so he started working as an apprentice construction laborer. His father objected to his son's decision, not because he wanted him to stay in school, but because of the inherent risks of bodily injury in that line of work. Qi-xiong defended his choice, saying that the pay was better.

For that better pay, he had to get up early, ride his scooter to work, and hustle about on dusty construction sites. An example of the hard work was shoulder-poling bags of cement up portable ladders. Such back-breaking work left his hands blistered and callused, but he persisted because he earned good money, and he stashed away whatever he could. A few years later, he pooled his savings with those of his father and brother, and the three of them bought a house in Luzhou, near Taipei.

On October 30, 2001, he woke up earlier than usual. Unable to fall back asleep, he got up, said good-bye to his grandmother as usual, and went to work early. The chilly autumn wind made him drive his scooter slower than usual. A truck suddenly passed him, caught the hood of his jacket, and threw him up into the air. He hit the foundation wall of a house and landed beside a ditch.

"I thought it strange that I didn't feel any pain," Qi-xiong recalled. "But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't move an inch." As the ambulance rushed him to the hospital, he gradually lost consciousness.

He finally regained consciousness several days after the accident. He was awakened by a sharp jolt of pain, but he still found himself unable to move. A doctor was fastening his neck to hold it in place. Another jolt of pain knocked him out again.

The accident had injured Qi-xiong's spine, resulting in the paralysis of his four limbs.

After the accident, his father quit his job and stayed at the hospital with his son, accompanying him as he went through rehabilitation by day, and sleeping in a cot beside his bed by night. The doctor told Ze-qing that his son might never walk again, but Ze-qing did not relay the message to Qi-xiong. He didn't want to dampen his spirits. He wanted him to stay with the rehabilitation regimen.

Though the rehab was tough, Qi-xiong stuck with it. His girlfriend visited him often, and his father took care of everything for him, so all seemed fine. He did not feel that he was facing an enormous challenge in his life. He thought

that he, only 22, would eventually recover as long as he worked hard at rehabilitation.

A little incident some time later cracked his optimism. He was sleeping at the time, and in his semi-conscious state he heard his father talking to the family of the patient in the next bed. From the corner of his eye he saw his father wiping away tears. That scene threw him into a panic. His father had always been serious and strong, like a soldier, and Qi-xiong had always stood in awe of him. Now his hero was crying, undoubtedly over his condition and prognosis. That scared him. He quickly shut his eyes, pretending that he had seen nothing, pretending that he would eventually be fine. He was in denial.

### Coping

Denial or not, he was making little progress while expenses for his care continued to mount. Fourteen months after his fateful accident, Ze-qing had to sell their house to help raise money for his son's care. He also tried to call in loans that he had earlier made to others.

More than a year passed, but Qi-xiong still relied on his father to take care of his every need. He was losing heart. He decided to end his relationship with his girlfriend.

Their house was gone, his girl was gone, and he seemed to be going nowhere with his rehabilitation. His frustration built until he could not contain it any more. He finally collapsed one day.

"Dad, let me just die," he said.

"Okay, let me go with you," his father replied resolutely, and he promptly gulped down the medical alcohol which he used to sanitize his son.

"No, no, stop it," Qi-xiong shouted. "I'll never say I want to die again!"

He did not say such nonsense again, and for the first time, he felt his father's deep love for him. Such love had probably been obscured by past clashes between them, which were not uncommon because they both had short fuses.

They moved to Taichung, central Taiwan, to put the past behind them and get a fresh start on life. Qi-xiong started going to a center for disabled people to study computer-aided design (CAD).

He met many people at the center, people injured and disabled just like himself. Though the location and severity of their spinal injuries differed, all of them had restrained mobility. The people he met, however, were able to move

about much more freely than he could. They took care of themselves, and took public transportation on their own to go to places or for excursions. Qi-xiong thought that they were doing pretty well, and that gave him hope.

### Dignity

An acquaintance brought the Zeng family's situation to the attention of Tzu Chi volunteers, who subsequently visited the family at their home. Ze-qing, however, was not receptive to their visits. He insisted that he could still take care of his son and that they did not need outside help. After that, Ze-qing would quickly leave whenever Tzu Chi volunteers came to their house. "We had to be a bit thick-skinned, and we just kept going back," said volunteer Sun Yu-gui (孫玉貴), speaking of the early days of their involvement with the family.

The volunteers encouraged Qi-xiong to keep at his rehabilitation therapy so that he could support himself one day and give his father a break. Sun repeatedly contacted a board director of the local chapter of the Spinal Cord Injury Association and asked him to visit Qi-xiong and cheer him up. Though the board director agreed, he was so busy he had no time to make a visit.

That man finally called Sun one night. He wondered if he and Sun could visit Qi-xiong right then. That was the night of Chinese New

Year's Eve—a night traditionally reserved for family reunions. However, the visit was too important to be put off again, so Sun jumped at the offer. She enlisted two other volunteers, and the four of them met at the Zengs' place.

This time Ze-qing did not leave the house to avoid the volunteers. He was touched by their visit at this time of year, when most people would rather have been at home with their own families. "You are the only people who have come to visit Qi-xiong since we moved here," he said to the volunteers.

The ice had finally been broken. Ze-qing had warmed to the volunteers, but he still insisted that they did not need monetary assistance, even though they had had to sell not only their house in Luzhou, but also the family home in southern Taiwan that their ancestors had left them. The medical expenses for Qi-xiong had truly been a great burden for the family. The volunteers respected Ze-qing's decision about the financial help, but they kept up their visits.

When Sun learned that Qi-xiong was learning CAD, she told her son, who happened to work in that line of business. He gave Qi-xiong tips and advice for the trade and even promised to subcontract work to him in the future. Sun was thrilled knowing that Qi-xiong would have work to do upon completing his training and that he would be able to support himself.



Qi-xiong once dreamed of setting out on a boat to travel the world. He cannot very well do that now, so he put his dream in this painting, *A Small Island in the Sea*.

With encouragement from his father, Ze-qing, and painting teacher, Ruan Li-ying, Qi-xiong emerged from the shadow of his injury and embarked on a painting career.

But that plan hit a snag. Weakened by his injury, Qi-xiong's hands, even after repeated attempts, were unable to manipulate the computer input devices required for CAD. Eventually he had to give up. Sun was severely disappointed. She was at her wits' end as to how else to help Qi-xiong.

Qi-xiong was depressed for quite a while too, but he knew that life had to go on. His friends suggested that he take up painting. Having never had any training in that area, he hesitated.

One morning in 2006, Ze-qing went to his son's bedside and said, "I'm done for." "What's wrong?" Qi-xiong asked. His father answered that he had thrown up blood and had had bloody bowel movements. Then while trying to transfer Qi-xiong from his bed to his wheelchair, Ze-qing passed out.

Qi-xiong tried to wake his father by repeatedly shouting, "Dad, Dad," but Ze-qing remained unconscious. Qi-xiong couldn't phone to get help either because his cell phone was out of reach. "I could only yell for help," he said, as he recalled that tense moment. Luckily, Ze-qing later regained consciousness unassisted. He used all the strength that he had left to put his son in the wheelchair, and then he took a taxi to the hospital. He was diagnosed with a duodenal ulcer.

This episode awakened Qi-xiong to the fact that his father had gotten old and could get sick, just like everybody else. He told himself he had to work harder to become independent as soon as possible so that he could take care of and support his dad and his grandmother, who was in her 80s and suffering from dementia.

He picked up his pace at rehabilitation. He worked and worked, and finally could turn him-

self, get out of bed unassisted, and even drive a car. He decided to give painting a try and signed up for a class.

### First exhibition

In his first class, he tried to hold a brush with his hand. However, when he raised his arm, he lost his balance and fell backward. Repeated tries proved futile. He had no choice but to use his mouth, not his hand, to hold a brush.

Qi-xiong really struggled with his mouth and brush during the first month of his lessons. Running into challenges at every turn, he kept asking himself, "Can I really make a living with painting? Can I support Dad and Grandma with it?" Failing to get affirmative responses to his own questions, he lost heart and stopped going to the class.

His teacher, Ruan Li-ying (阮麗英), called him many times to urge him to come back to the class. She even asked other students in the same class to phone him and cheer him on. Running out of excuses and unable to say no to so many people, he finally resumed the class.



ZOU ZHONGHONG



From 2007 to 2009, Qi-xiong submitted his works for inclusion in the Taichung County Art Exhibition, but his submissions failed to make the cut. The exhibit did not have a separate category for artists with disabilities, so he had to compete with able-bodied artists. Later, a concert inspired this work, *Life's Rhythm*, which Qi-xiong submitted for the 2010 Taichung County Art Exhibition. The piece sailed through the selection process and went on display.

Qi-xiong's special needs called for special painting tools. For example, without the benefit of an arm, he had to use brushes that had extra-long handles so that he could reach the canvas without having to lean his neck and upper body too far forward. His father used a bamboo chopstick to lengthen a brush. Qi-xiong would bite on the chopstick and turn it with his tongue. This was not a perfect solution though, because the chopsticks soon began to fray and splinters would prick his mouth and raise blisters.

Nevertheless, he persisted. A year later, he finally finished his first creative work, one all his own. He showed it to Ruan, and the teacher told him that he had done a very nice job. He was surprised to hear the praise. He thought to himself, "What's good about this painting? How come I can't see any merits?"

Despite that, he was happy. The teacher's praise gave him confidence to create more paintings. When Tzu Chi volunteers learned

that he had derived a sense of achievement from his art, they began thinking about ways to help him along.

Sun knew of a famous mouth painter called Xie Kun-shan (謝坤山), who often gave talks to encourage people. She asked all the volunteers in central Taiwan that she knew to notify her the next time Xie came to the area to give a talk. She was hoping that he could give Qi-xiong a few pointers.

That day came, and Sun went to the event at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. Xie agreed to visit Qi-xiong, so after the speech Sun drove Xie to Qi-xiong's house. Man to man, Xie cheered him

**Since his first exhibit, Qi-xiong has often been invited to schools or organizations to share his experiences. He especially enjoys his time with schoolchildren, who usually treat him even as they would anyone without a disability. The experience reenergizes him.**





In *Time*, Qi-xiong depicts their family's ancestral home in Yunlin, which his father had to sell to pay for his medical bills. It was his first submission to the Taichung County Art Exhibition.

on and suggested that he draw inanimate objects like fruits to hone his fundamental skills.

After that Tzu Chi volunteers often brought fruit when they visited the Zengs. They hoped that painting would help him find a way forward with his life. His father could feel the volunteers' expectations for his son, and when they visited he always showed them Qi-xiong's works and asked them if they were better than earlier ones.

More than two years after Qi-xiong had started his lessons, Ruan felt that he was ready to show the world, and she helped stage an exhibition for him. Qi-xiong's paintings were well received, and he sold enough of them to make him feel good. "Now I can paint and support my father and grandma," he said confidently.

He has painted assiduously ever since to make a living.

"I sometimes think that maybe my injury was a blessing in disguise," Qi-xiong reflected. He said that though he was able-bodied before the accident, he could not take frustration well. In the face of setbacks, he was quick to throw in the towel. He has since gained quite a bit of resil-

ience. He has also matured in his approach to life. Now he always tells himself that he has an inescapable responsibility to support his father and grandmother, and that he is not about to shun that duty.

It has been eight years since he first started painting with his mouth. Things have gone well for him, but he has also had his moments when he just cannot paint another stroke because of "painter's block." Instead of staying stuck and getting frustrated though, he has learned to handle the situation.

Nowadays when he feels unproductive at the palette, he goes out for a drive. He may go to the mountains or the seashore, or he may just spend an afternoon at a coffee shop, idly observing passersby. It's his way to settle and recharge himself.

He has become less hot-tempered. In fact, he has mellowed so much that, instead of yelling back, he smiles through his father's nagging when he sometimes returns home very late at night after getting together with old friends or people whose mobility is also curtailed.

He has found a path forward. He has opened up his heart, and light has come into his life just as the rays of the sun highlight his canvases. ❁

# The JING SI A Illustrated APHORISMS



## The Buddha says:

Enlightenment does not exist in the body, but in wisdom. The body will disappear, but wisdom will last forever. Therefore, those who only see my body do not see me. Those who understand my teachings really see me.

HUMAN LIFE IS COMPLETELY INSIGNIFICANT, BUT THERE IS ONE THING THAT IS GREATER THAN THE WHOLE WORLD—WISDOM.

WISDOM LASTS FOREVER. ALL GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE CAN FOLLOW IN ITS FOOTSTEPS.



Most people are only concerned about themselves and are completely self-centered. They can't find any deeper meaning in life, and so they are trapped in confusion and conflict. If they could turn their selfish "small selves" into "big selves" that can help others, they would find a new purpose in life and they would learn to give of themselves. This is the way to cultivate oneself and help others.

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

# Tzu Chi Events Around the World



A 7.8-magnitude earthquake rocked Nepal on April 25. Tzu Chi has been providing aid to the country since the disaster.

## Nepal

An earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale rocked Nepal on April 25, resulting in horrendous damage. More than 8,800 people perished and over 23,000 were injured. The first Tzu Chi relief team arrived in Nepal on April 28 with one ton of medicine and medical supplies and 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of instant rice. The delegation consisted of 15 members and included four doctors from Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan.

The team stayed in Nepal until May 4. The doctors treated the injured while the rest of the team assessed the damage and investigated how Tzu Chi could best help survivors. A total of 1,106 patient visits were served during this period. The medical team used LINE, a messaging app, to send x-ray images to orthopedists in Taiwan. Needed materials to treat broken bones arrived in Nepal with the second Tzu Chi relief team on May 1.

Before the first team of Tzu Chi doctors returned to Taiwan on May 4, they gave a lot of medicine and medical supplies to the Bhaktapur municipal health department, Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital, and a tuberculosis and AIDS hospital.

Dr. Prakash Raj Neupane, director of Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital, gave each Tzu Chi member a gift khata, a symbol of purity and auspiciousness. Dr. Neupane thanked the medical team from Taiwan, whose members had given a great deal of help to the suffering Nepalese. Dr. Chien Sou-hsin (簡守信), superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, remarked that he was happy to bring love from Taiwan to Nepal.

Tzu Chi has sent six relief teams to Nepal as of late May. In addition to providing medical care, volunteers have been distributing aid, providing hot food, and conducting work relief programs. The following is an overview of the aid provided by Tzu Chi from April 28 to May 29:

**Goods distributed:** 12,147 families in Bhaktapur and other areas whose homes totally or partially collapsed have received goods including rice, dals (beans), cooking oil, sugar, and daily necessities.

**Medical treatment:** Tzu Chi doctors served 7,379 patient visits, performed 11 operations, and helped deliver a pair of twins.

**Hot food:** 51,410 meals served.

**Cash-for-work programs:** 2,149 shifts, in which survivors cleaned up streets, cooked meals, set up tents, or helped in distributions

**Shelters:** 60 tents (853 square feet each), 500 family-sized canvas sheets, 500 single-person plastic sheets

**Emergency power:** 10 solar-powered lighting sets

**Water:** Tzu Chi purchased a 10,000-liter water tank for victims living in tents and a water purification machine for a temple.

A total of 173 Tzu Chi volunteers from eight countries helped out in the disaster areas. Volunteers paid their own expenses. Other expenses were funded by donations from 32 countries.

## Sierra Leone

Augustine Baker, a care worker at the St George Foundation orphanage in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, died of Ebola on February 25, and his wife, Bundu, died a week later. Though the staff and the resident children survived a quarantine, they did not have enough food. Instant rice, donated by Tzu Chi, arrived at the orphanage in March and helped relieve the situation.

The current Ebola epidemic, the largest ever, broke out in West Africa in March 2014. As of May 24, 2015, the World Health Organization said that the disease had killed 11,149 people. Sierra Leone led all nations in the number of confirmed cases of Ebola.

Tzu Chi worked with the Healey International Relief Foundation and Caritas

**To support people affected by the Ebola outbreak, Tzu Chi donated folding beds, instant rice, and blankets to Sierra Leone, a country in West Africa that leads all nations in confirmed cases of the disease.**



Freetown to deliver aid to the needy in the country. Tzu Chi donated 1,512 folding beds, 15 tons of instant rice, and 2,094 blankets made from recycled materials, while the other two organizations provided logistical and distribution support for these donations. Among the beneficiaries were Ebola treatment centers, hospitals and families affected by the disease.

The Ebola outbreak inflicted a heavy toll on the nation. Hospitals were thronged with patients, and there were not enough beds to accommodate them all. The portable Tzu Chi beds were a welcome addition to the hospitals. Now fewer patients and their families had to sleep on the floor.

The three foundations have successfully completed their first joint project. They will continue to provide aid in the areas of health care, education, and nutrition.

## Hong Kong

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is holding an event today to promote the use of fewer plastic bags for the benefit of future generations," called Tzu Chi volunteer Wong Coeng-gin (王長堅) to people living near the Tzu Chi North Point Road Number 8 Recycling Point on April 1. "As you know, the Hong Kong Government has instituted a policy to charge people fifty cents [six U.S. cents] per plastic bag. We encourage you to use fewer plastic bags."

That policy actually began in 2009, and covered 2,000 stores. However, despite the policy, people continued to use plastic bags without restraint, sending over eight billion plastic bags each year to landfills. As a result, the government expanded the regulation to cover every store in Hong Kong.



LEO MEI-YAN

**On April 18, Tzu Chi and the Incorporated Owners of Hin Keng Estate in Hong Kong held an event to promote the reduction of plastic bags.**

Tzu Chi volunteers decided to take advantage of the attention focused on plastic bags to step up their advocacy for environmental conservation. They wanted to remind people to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The North Point Road recycling point opened on November 3, 2010. Volunteers go there every Wednesday to promote environmental protection and collect recyclables from neighbors. On this day, volunteers held up signs that said, "Use fewer plastic bags," and walked along the streets to remind people of it. Wong Wai-cyun (黃偉泉), chairperson of the North Point business association, walked with the volunteers.

Wong said that Tzu Chi volunteers have done a good job of promoting recycling in the community. Volunteers could only collect around three bags of recyclables each time when they first started, but now they collect so many recyclables that they need a truck to take them away. It shows that the community is now better educated about environmental protection and is very supportive of it.

Tzu Chi volunteers in the New Territories also warmly responded to the policy. On April 18, they joined hands with the Incorporated Owners of Hin Keng Estate and held a carnival at the Hin Keng Market, in Tai Wai, to promote the reduction of plastic bags. Booths were set up to help people learn about recycling, why they should use their own reusable shopping bags, and the benefits of vegetarianism. There was also a booth on how to make eco-enzymes. Eco-enzymes can be made at home with fruit peelings and vegetable scraps. This can reduce the amount of food leftovers in landfills. Eco-enzymes can also be used to wash dishes, fertilize plants, etc.

Tzu Chi volunteers hoped to drive home the importance of conservation by holding these awareness campaigns. Their message was simple: Everyone can and should work toward leaving a cleaner world to future generations.

#### **Canada**

On April 10, 11 Tzu Chi volunteers went to Admiral Seymour Elementary School in

Vancouver for a book donation ceremony. A strong bond has formed between the school and Tzu Chi. This was the fourth year that Tzu Chi gave books to the school.

A couple of weeks earlier, Diane Shepherd-Dynes, a school teacher, met Tzu Chi volunteers Ying Bi-yu (應碧玉), Peng Mei-ping (彭美萍) and Han Jia-hui (罕佳慧) at a Kidsbooks store to purchase books selected by teachers at the school. Kidsbooks praised Tzu Chi for giving books to students, and showed their appreciation by giving a 15 percent discount to support the event.

The ceremony started at 1:45 p.m. with Shepherd-Dynes giving a short speech. She said Tzu Chi donated \$503 (US\$409) this year to buy 64 new books for the school library. Of those, 25 would be used in English and social studies classes. The students applauded enthusiastically upon hearing the news. They were eager to check them out and read them at home.

The volunteers performed a song titled "A Clean Earth" during the ceremony, accompanied by hand gestures. April was Earth Month and Earth Day, which fell on April 22, was coming

up. Sister Peng reminded the students to remember whenever they used water that some people on Earth do not have enough water to use. Some areas in Taiwan, for example, where Tzu Chi is based, were suffering from a drought. People in Canada are fortunate because they do not have a shortage of water. They should therefore cherish water and use it with care.

Shepherd-Dynes assigned the 21 students to four tables. There were five to six new books on each table, and the students could browse each book for two minutes. On the first page of every book was a Jing Si aphorism by Master Cheng Yen. Gracie, one of the students, liked this aphorism: "Recognize, appreciate and repay your parents' love."

After the students had browsed the books on their table, five of them shared with others the books they liked the most and why. Students then thanked Tzu Chi volunteers for giving them these books. They expressed their delight that they could now borrow and read new books. Many students had already grabbed the ones they wanted to borrow. This event ended at 2:30 p.m.

**This is the fourth year Tzu Chi has donated books to Admiral Seymour Elementary School in Vancouver, Canada.**



HAN JIA-HUI



Representatives from Tzu Chi, the military, and Yayasan Dana Sosial Priangan walk on this rickety suspension bridge to experience the fear that residents feel when walking on this bridge every day.

Most students at the school come from low-income families. The teacher said the books donated by Tzu Chi encourage students to read and learn new knowledge and to develop good reading habits. The library has become a place that the students like to visit.

#### Indonesia

Tzu Chi volunteers from Kota Bandang and military representatives from Kodam III Siliwangi, a division of the Indonesian army, held a groundbreaking ceremony on April 7 for a new bridge between the villages of Cisewu and Neglasari.

The current simple suspension bridge between the two villages has a deck made of wooden boards and handrails made of wire. The bridge has been very important for local residents, especially those of Neglasari, because Cisewu has all the public services that Neglasari villagers need, such as traditional markets, schools, and medical facilities. Using the bridge, it takes people only one hour by motor scooter to reach the other village. Without the bridge, they would have to make a wide detour and the

journey would take them four times as long. Residents of nearby Kabupaten Cianjur district also use this bridge often.

On February 6, 2015, Tzu Chi volunteers, representatives from Kodam III Siliwangi, and volunteers from Yayasan Dana Sosial Priangan, a welfare foundation in Kota Bandung, surveyed the bridge and found it in very poor condition. For the safety of local residents, Tzu Chi decided to build a new suspension bridge that people could use safely. The new bridge would be 42 meters (138 feet) long and 1.5 meters (4.9 feet) wide. The road leading to the bridge would also be paved with asphalt.

It was decided that Tzu Chi would provide the materials and the work would be done by the military and residents. Lieutenant Colonel Letkol B. Hadi Suseno said during the groundbreaking ceremony that the new bridge would benefit the residents very much. He also remarked that since residents would be personally involved in building the bridge, they would take better care of it in the future. Tzu Chi volunteers hoped the bridge would contribute to the development of local communities.

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*A truly successful person is accepted by everyone and  
accepts everyone.*  
—Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY LI BAI-SHI