

慈濟

# Tzu Chi

## Buddhism in Action



Empowering Education  
in the Buddha's  
Birthplace





**Tzu Chi volunteers visit a destitute family in Lumbini, Nepal, who have relied on begging for their livelihood for generations.**

KHOO KEAN YEE



# Follow the Path of Compassion

Translated by Teresa Chang

It has been my long-held aspiration to give back to the birthplace of the Buddha. The pervasive poverty in the region calls for compassionate people to plant seeds of goodness and bring about change. I'm grateful to the Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia who share this aspiration with me. They initially paid short visits to Nepal and, since April of last year, have established a long-term presence there. Their efforts encompass missions of charity, healthcare, and education. For instance, they have introduced vocational sewing classes to equip local women with skills that can improve their families' economic well-being. Our volunteers work with sincerity, taking each step steadily, in their mission to create a positive impact in local communities.

Earlier this year, they extended their philanthropic endeavors to Bodh Gaya, India, the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment. One heartwarming example of Tzu Chi's impact there is Gain Manjhi, an elderly resident of Sujata in Bodh Gaya. He previously lived by begging at tourist spots, often struggling to secure his daily meals. Worried neighbors informed our volunteers of his plight. Once he had enough to eat, he shifted from a recipient to a giver, joining our volunteers in aiding others.

Our volunteers didn't just assist Gain Manjhi in rising above his beggar status; they aspired to bring about more positive transformations. Their goal is to foster self-sufficiency and ensure everyone has enough to eat.

Tzu Chi originated in Taiwan, a tiny dot on the world map. Our foundation has more than 55 years of history, yet it is also a mere droplet in the grand expanse of the world. Despite being a mere droplet, we have been doing our best to bring light to the world. Our journey began with 30 housewives, each saving a small amount of their grocery money every day for charity work. We've evolved from that humble beginning by combining bits and pieces of help. For decades now, we've been able to extend our care to suffering people around the world.

Life is impermanent and full of suffering. When faced with misfortune, some people lament, "I've been doing good deeds, so why do I still encounter such hardships?" But harboring resentment towards adversity will not offer a solution and might even hinder one's spiritual growth. Wise individuals understand the unpredictable nature of life. When adversity strikes,

they recognize it as a shared human experience. They perceive life as an ongoing journey of learning, intricately woven with karmic connections. With this understanding, they embrace life as it unfolds, facilitating the resolution of karmic debts. They uplift themselves and find the strength to help many others.

The world is indeed full of suffering, but it is only in this world that we can follow the Bodhisattva Path. Life's suffering leads to the emergence of bodhisattvas. Because this world is full of trials, we must, even more so, make profound vows of dedication to help those in need. We must commit ourselves to remaining determined and steadfast in our mission, undeterred by obstacles.

As we walk the Bodhisattva Path, we should inspire others to join us on this path. This was one of the reasons why Tzu Chi volunteers took to the streets to raise funds for survivors of the February quakes in Türkiye. The essence of fundraising lies in raising people's awareness of others' suffering, reminding them of their own blessings, and inspiring them to tap into their inner wellspring of love. Though each individual's strength or contribution might be limited, they can make a significant impact when pooled together.

In Türkiye, more than 8,000 kilometers from Taiwan, there are residents enduring the consequences of natural disasters and Syrian refugees displaced by man-made calamities. These refugees lost their good lives in their homeland due to the ignorance and delusion of a few. Such ignorance and delusion give rise to disputes, conflicts, and ultimately, devastating wars that bring untold suffering to countless people. It is only through pious sincerity, the cultivation of kind thoughts, and the practice of positive deeds that we can hope to dispel such disasters.

Disasters stem from the human mind. A virtuous thought can create heaven, while a malevolent one can lead to hell. The slightest shift in thought can make all the difference. Though observing the turmoil of the world may raise worries, it's important not to succumb to anxiety. Instead, we should redouble our efforts to transform human hearts and minds. By nurturing the love within people's hearts, and by encouraging everyone to give to the less fortunate, we offer a potent remedy for the world's ills; we not only bring relief and joy to the needy, but also find fulfillment and happiness ourselves. Let us be ever more mindful. ❀



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Bimonthly

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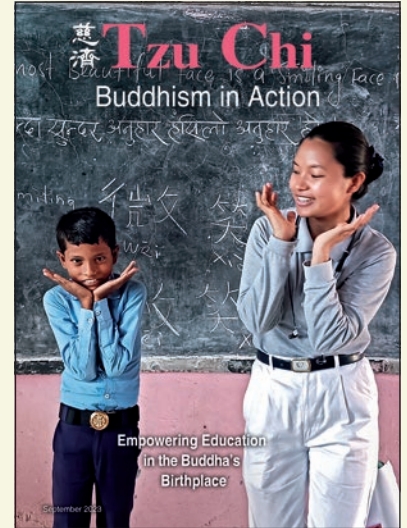
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Tzu Chi brings aid and love to the underserved around the world.

**ON THE COVER** A Tzu Chi volunteer and a student at Shree Tarkulha Basic Level School in Lumbini, Nepal, demonstrate “The most beautiful face is a smiling face.” Tzu Chi volunteers are promoting the School for All initiative and sharing Master Cheng Yen’s aphorisms in the Buddha’s birthplace, using education to transform children’s futures.  
Photo by Zhu Li Feng

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Tzu Chi volunteers Yang Qing-yun (left) and Xu Shi-mei (center) visited Quinn on a rainy night, bringing her warmth and support.





# Eighteen Years of Steadfast Companionship

**By Hong Jing-jing**

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*For 18 years, Tzu Chi volunteers have consistently supported a family with mental disabilities and schizophrenia, refusing to give up despite the challenges.*



Jade, an 80-year-old single mother, once had five children. Unfortunately, one of them has passed away due to illness, and three others suffer from multiple coexisting conditions, including schizophrenia, mental disabilities, and diabetes. The only exception to these challenges is Jade's third daughter, who is married and unaffected by these health concerns. Tzu Chi volunteers, including Yang Qing-yun (楊清雲) and Xu Shi-mei (徐柿妹), have been providing care and support to this struggling family since 2005.

Despite the challenges they face, Jade never once spoke about her children's mental health issues when volunteers first started visiting the family. Yang Qing-yun and her fellow volunteers were aware of the family's situation but refrained from broaching the sensitive topic, mindful of the pain it might cause Jade.

That changed during one of their visits to the family, when the volunteers noticed bruises around Jade's eyes. At last, the mother opened up and confided that her second daughter had had an episode that day, throwing offerings from the living room altar to the floor and even physically harming her.

Volunteer Xu Shi-mei explained that after Jade's husband passed away in 1995, she single-handedly supported their four children without any complaints. Her profound motherly love deeply touched those around her. Rather than focusing on her challenges, she always asked others not to worry about her, mentioning that she and her children managed well by relying on government support for low-income households and individuals with disabilities, as well as her earnings from collecting recycling and assisting neighbors with garbage disposal.

Sadly, Jade fell ill herself in 2010, diagnosed with depression and experiencing difficulty in eating. As a result, she had to be placed in a senior care center, unable to continue caring for her eldest son, who at the time still heavily relied on her support. He was subsequently sent to a mental health facility. However, within this family, there are still individuals whom Jade can't help but worry about.

### Behind the closed door

"During the years when we regularly visited Jade at her home," Yang recounted, "we only saw Quinn, Jade's fourth daughter, a few times. Quinn and her two daughters mostly stayed locked in their room during our visits, leaving us with no

chance to talk to them." Yang explained that Quinn has a mild mental disability and had endured domestic violence from her ex-husband, which ultimately led to their divorce. Afterward, she returned to her mother's home with her two young daughters, who had not yet started elementary school at the time. However, when Jade was placed in a care facility, Quinn's older sister, who suffers from schizophrenia, sometimes hit Quinn during her episodes. Consequently, Quinn had no choice but to move out of her mother's home again and rent a place to live with her daughters.

Quinn later revealed to Yang and other volunteers that her younger daughter, An'an, had experienced episodes similar to those of her older brother and sister. It feels like an unbreakable shackle, an inescapable destiny—three generations of Quinn's family affected by mental issues.

Quinn originally worked in a school kitchen, but her income was affected when the kitchen closed during winter and summer vacations. The situation improved after she switched to a job as a housekeeper at a hotel. Quinn is quiet and reserved, with delayed reactions and a tendency to feel nervous and anxious. When Yang and Xu express their concern for her, asking questions like, "How is work going?" or "How are your children doing?" Quinn often just responds with nods or shakes of her head, or asks them to repeat their questions: "What did you say? Say it again." Sometimes, she provides a brief response: "There isn't much to share," before retreating into silence again.

Whenever volunteers visited Quinn, they always noticed her two daughters hiding behind her, reluctant to let them get close to them and unwilling to respond to any questions. The mother and daughters seldom received visitors and preferred staying at home. The younger daughter, An'an, had been diagnosed as being mildly mentally challenged and attended a special education class at school. The older daughter had problems of her own and sought psychiatric help, but it wasn't consistent. The two daughters frequently clashed with each other. Eventually, the older daughter, Lijuan, dropped out of school and ran away from home in 2018. She now rarely returns home. Though Quinn loves her children deeply, she feels powerless to be a better parent.

Before Lijuan ran away, Yang and Xu had spared no effort in encouraging the two sisters to participate in Tzu Chi's tutoring classes and activities for teenagers. They also helped An'an, who





Quinn was deeply worried during her daughter's hospitalization, experiencing insomnia and loss of appetite. Xu Shi-mei (left in the photo above) and Yang Qing-yun (center in the photo above) frequently visited her to offer their support. On one occasion, they brought an electric cooker and ingredients (left photo) and taught her how to prepare simple meals with the device.



was falling behind in her studies, apply for Tzu Chi's New Shoots Scholarships. However, the two sisters showed little interest in these opportunities.

An'an has since graduated from a vocational high school, but has grown even more quiet than before. Every time volunteers visit her and her mother, she remains seated on the edge of her bed, gazing intently at the volunteers without making any movements. Xu encourages An'an to help with household chores and invites her to volunteer at a local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall, hoping to increase her interactions with others and enhance her opportunities to find work. Regrettably, after three visits to the Jing Si Hall, An'an declined to go there again.

Yang and Xu had once hoped to learn more about An'an from Quinn so that they could better provide care for her, but to no avail. When An'an was still in school, Yang and Xu speculated that she might have been bullied by classmates. However, Quinn's understanding and ability to express herself were limited, and she couldn't provide a clear account of the whole incident. The best she could offer about her daughter was: "She throws tantrums and cries a lot," and "She doesn't wear clothes after taking a shower."

"During the past few years, I had this unsettling feeling that something bad might happen to this family," said Yang, as she observed An'an growing increasingly withdrawn, with vacant and lost eyes. Her concerns eventually became a reality.

A few months ago, An'an suddenly experienced a violent outburst, losing control and damaging items in the house, even throwing money out of a window and tugging hard at a steel roll-up door downstairs. In a state of panic, Quinn called the police, and An'an was forcibly taken to the hospital. During her hospitalization, An'an adamantly resisted any form of treatment and neglected her personal hygiene. The hospital had no choice but to recommend a transfer. At the second hospital, An'an began displaying self-harm behaviors.

Whether it was accompanying An'an for medical treatment, seeking a temporary shelter facility for her, applying for social welfare assistance, or helping the mother and daughter find a new place to rent after their landlord gave them an eviction notice, Tzu Chi volunteers and social workers have collaborated repeatedly to support them in overcoming the challenges.

### **There will always be a way forward**

Xu said that over the 18 years of caring for Jade, Quinn, and their family, the volunteer team has often encountered a lack of engagement, leading to feelings of powerlessness. When confronted with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, she sometimes feels like giving up. However, upon reflection, she always encourages her fellow volunteers to persevere, stressing that their collaborative support brings hope for the family's future.

"Children suffering from mental illness bring lifelong pain to their parents," Xu said. She deeply empathizes with families that have members with mental illness due to personal experience. Among her in-laws' eight children, the second eldest was the most intelligent and performed the best academically. However, the pressure of academics might have been too much for him, leading to the onset of schizophrenia during his sophomore year in high school.

After getting married, Xu and her husband lived with her in-laws. She watched how her father-in-law took care of her brother-in-law. Later, she herself assumed the responsibility of caring for him, a role she fulfilled for 25 years. The frustrations and emotional pain she experienced were indescribable, which deepened her understanding and compassion for families facing similar situations.

There was limited understanding of mental illness in Taiwanese society many decades ago. Xu's mother-in-law mistakenly believed that Western medical treatment for mental illness invariably involved electric shock, causing her and her husband to delay seeking help for their son due to the fear of the treatment's supposed cruelty. They were unaware that their son not only had schizophrenia but also obsessive-compulsive disorder. The latter condition caused him to spend a lot of time in the bathroom washing his hands, leading to frequent conflicts between him and his father. Despite his mental issues, his father loved him dearly. When the latter was on his death bed, he worried about who would care for his son once he passed away. It was only after Xu assured him that she would take up the responsibility of caring for him that he found peace and passed away.

Xu took her brother-in-law to seek medical help, and his condition stabilized with medication. However, his compulsive habits of hand-washing and wiping water on himself remained unchanged, leading to cellulitis infections and persistent ulcers on his ankles. Xu diligently

applied medication and dressed his lesions twice a day, but he often immediately resumed playing with water, undoing her efforts. She had to continually clean up after him, such as thoroughly tidying a bathroom only to find it a mess again the next day. Such challenges were both frustrating and emotionally taxing.

As society changes and life pressures increase, volunteers are encountering more families with members who have mental disorders. They regularly participate in discussions about relevant social welfare issues and caring techniques, seeking help from professional social workers when faced with difficult situations.

Wang Shu-ye (王淑暉), a social worker at the Tzu Chi Taipei office, emphasized that in the case of An'an, medical treatment is currently the priority. Preliminary assessments by doctors indicate that her condition might not be limited to a mild mental disability, necessitating a reevaluation. Meanwhile, a government resource center for the

disabled is helping the family apply for low-income subsidies and to assess the possibility of arranging a day care center for An'an upon her discharge from the hospital. If the family encounters any difficulties during this process, Tzu Chi is ready to provide assistance.

Volunteers have steadfastly accompanied this family for the past 18 years, witnessing Jade reach the age of 80, while the volunteers themselves, who once had black hair, now sport gray hair. The causes of mental disorders are intricate and diverse, requiring the volunteers to proceed with utmost caution, navigating each step as if crossing a river on foot. Despite the challenges, Yang firmly believes: "There will always be a way forward!" ❀

**Yang Qing-yun and Xu Shi-mei support and encourage each other on the path of providing care for Quinn and her family. They know that if they give up, this family might have a bleaker future.**





# Bringing Light Into Dark Lives

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*Empathizing with the inner agony and suffering of individuals with mental illness, Huang Xiu-yan extends a helping hand, striving to foster positive change.*

“I knew the nursing home was trying to find me via the public speaker system, but I was busy talking to the ants,” said Weng.

“You spent so much time talking to the ants, I waited for you for so long!” responded Huang Xiu-yan (黃秀燕).

Weng, battling schizophrenia, experiences absurd and bizarre delusions from time to time. Huang, a Tzu Chi volunteer living in Keelung, northern Taiwan, has been caring for him for 30 years. Recognizing that he was having an episode again, she responded with a calm and understanding demeanor.

Huang vividly remembers the first time she met Weng, in 1993. His head was wrapped in a plaster used for burn patients, leaving only his eyes visible. Not long after completing his compulsory military service, distressing changes in his mental state emerged. He was plagued by hallucinations and delusions, in a state of deep despondency. He even contemplated ending his life. Tragically, during an attempted gas suicide, an unexpected explosion inflicted extensive burns all over his body, distorting his face. He had to undergo more than 20 surgeries to regain the use of his hands.

Huang had been a certified Tzu Chi volunteer for just over a year when she began visiting Weng with other volunteers. It was her first experience with individuals grappling with mental illness. She watched how the more experienced volunteers gently and kindly encouraged the young man. “At that time, he was truly feeling hopeless and despaired,” she recalled, “but thanks to the genuine support from the volunteers, he eventually found the courage to face the world.”

When Weng was a little child, his parents divorced, and he was raised by his father. After

the gas explosion destroyed their home, the father and son were forced to rent a place to live. His father resigned from his job at a factory warehouse to care for Weng. Tzu Chi volunteers promptly intervened, providing care and financial support for their living expenses and medical fees.

“Weng doesn’t exhibit any violent tendencies,” explained Huang. “When he takes his medication, he can engage in meaningful conversations with us.” After his father passed away, he lived alone, and Huang took over from the more experienced volunteers to help ensure his continuous care and support.

## Building trust through empathy

“Interacting with individuals with mental illness, just like any other care recipient, requires genuine sincerity in our approach,” said Huang. She has offered compassion and understanding to Weng for 30 years now. When he broke his leg in a car accident, she diligently delivered three meals to him almost every day during his recovery. When he moved into a nursing home in Taoyuan, she and other volunteers made regular monthly trips from Keelung to that city, taking him out to bookstores or for meals, and attending Tzu Chi’s year-end banquets for the foundation’s care recipients together. When he suffered from a severe case of scabies all over his body during a stay in a nursing home in Yilan, Huang accompanied him to seek medical treatment and meticulously disinfected all his clothes by boiling them.

Weng has no living family members, and Huang is the only person he trusts. On one occasion, during a severe bout of schizophrenia, Weng wandered aimlessly in his community and spoke incoherently, causing distress among other residents. His landlord urgently contacted Huang, seeking her assistance in handling the situation.



Weng's gaze was unfocused when Huang found him, but he still recognized her. She asked him, "Are you feeling very uncomfortable? Are you being greatly disturbed?" Weng nodded, but immediately his speech became incoherent again. "Shall I take you to see the doctor?" Huang continued. "You might feel better." Weng nodded his consent.

Huang stressed the importance that individuals with mental illness adhere to their medication schedule, as discontinuing medication can lead to relapses. Fortunately, Weng does not pose harm to others when he has a bout; his main symptoms are mumbling to himself and having a distant gaze.

Even so, Huang's journey of providing support for him has been filled with incidents that required her vigilance. One time, during a cold snap and heavy rain in Keelung, Weng went missing from the nursing home he was residing at in

**Tzu Chi volunteer Huang Xiu-yan talks to an older woman who struggles with a mental illness, along with hearing and visual impairments.**

that city. Huang was concerned that he might venture into the mountains, making it difficult to find him. Thankfully, that didn't happen. The next day, the police found him naked, holding an umbrella, directing traffic on a street. "He explained his behavior by saying that a deity was descending from heaven, and he needed to remove his clothes to receive the deity," Huang said. She understood that she could avoid triggering his emotions as long as she empathized with him without dismissing his beliefs. "I won't ever say to him that he is abnormal. I just smiled and replied, 'You are truly devout!'" she recalled.



Weng currently lives in a nursing home in Yuli, Hualien, which is quite a distance from Huang's home in Keelung. Despite their geographical separation, Huang sends him food, copies of *Tzu Chi Monthly*, Buddhist scriptures, and other supplies every month. Weng can truly feel the sincere care from her, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic: he was the first person to call and express concern for Huang. He was genuinely worried about her well-being, advising her to wear masks properly, wash her hands with soap, and avoid crowded places. "He writes me letters too, expressing his gratitude for the care I've provided him," Huang said, looking gratified.

### **Ailing minds**

"Not every person with a mental illness is the same," emphasized Huang. She stressed that when caring for people with mental conditions, one must always be attentive to their words and facial expressions. If they appear kind and amiable, it indicates that their inner states are relatively stable. However, if they are experiencing an episode, they may have negative and chaotic delusions that are difficult for others to grasp, requiring careful handling.

Huang recalled a situation when she and other volunteers arrived at a new care recipient's home to visit. When they rang the doorbell, it inadvertently startled the care recipient, causing him to break into a furious outburst at the volunteers outside the door that lasted for half an hour. Undeterred, Huang astutely peered through the partially open door and noticed a tea set cabinet inside the house. "You seem to be skilled in brewing tea," she said to the man, trying to engage him in conversation. Eventually, the person calmed down and welcomed Huang and the other volunteers into his home.

Over her many years of extending care, Huang has also encountered individuals who exhibit violent behavior. "One time, a man went berserk and was ready to attack us," she said. "We had to make a hasty retreat." She emphasized that in such situations, instead of continuing to provide care, it is essential to involve government agencies for assistance, enforce compulsory treatment for the individuals, and find suitable institutions in which they can be placed.

Huang pointed out that just as the physical body can fall ill, the mind can also experience illness. When one is sick, seeking professional treatment is essential. "In assisting individuals with

mental disorders," she said, "the primary focus should be on helping them seek medical care, followed by connecting them with relevant social welfare resources."

In her efforts to aid individuals with mental conditions, Huang also offers her care to their family members. She has observed family members who grapple with the overwhelming challenge of "coexisting with the illness," experiencing emotional and mental anguish as they try to support their loved ones amidst the complexities of the condition.

She once helped an 84-year-old woman with a mental illness. She also suffered from severe hearing impairment and blindness in both eyes. Regardless of how loudly Huang shouted, the woman couldn't hear her. "Who are you? What are you saying?" the woman asked. "I am from Tzu Chi," Huang replied. "What did you say? Who are you?" the woman asked again.

Huang and other volunteers became aware of the woman through a neighborhood chief. The woman's home was overflowing with garbage, inside and out, prompting the chief to seek help from Tzu Chi. Approximately 60 volunteers came to assist with the cleanup. The elderly woman was extremely emaciated, confined to her bed, suffering with bedsores. She originally slept on a wooden bench in the living room. Volunteers later provided her with an electric hospital bed to help her rest more comfortably.

The woman's daughter shared her struggles with Huang. "Every day, my mother tries to remove her own excrement manually," she said. "No matter how much I try to talk to her, she won't listen. I can't take it anymore. Yesterday, I hit her out of helplessness. I really want to kick her out. I feel like I haven't taken good care of her." The elderly woman often shouted loudly. Her daughter had been taking care of her for a long time, enduring immense psychological stress and emotional burden, leading to a deep depression. The exhausted daughter complained and vented her grievances to Huang, who patiently listened, offering comfort and encouragement.

### **Unwavering care**

Huang has devoted over three decades to caring for the needy, accompanying numerous families afflicted by poverty and illness. When asked if she had ever been impacted by negative emotions, since she had to face families with problems often, she confidently replied in the negative. She said it



was because her complete focus is on how to assist others and solve their problems, leaving no room for her to get entangled in pessimism.

She acknowledged that in the care of and interaction with individuals with mental disorders, one inevitably experiences fear, frustration, and helplessness. However, she expressed gratitude that Tzu Chi's care for the needy for over half a century has been a collaborative team effort, supported by professional social workers' guidance and assistance. With such teamwork and support, their journey can be described as "challenging but manageable."

People with mental illness experience turmoil and disruption in their lives; their road to recovery is both long and challenging. Huang said that some people might fear or reject them, but she always treats them like family or friends, accompanying them to medical appointments, remind-

**Huang Xiu-yan attentively listens while a family member of a person with a mental illness shares her challenges of being a caregiver. Huang also helps such family members seek resources to alleviate their excessive physical and emotional burdens.**

ing them to take their medication on time, and making them feel understood and accepted, not alone and unsupported. This approach prevents them from becoming worse and enables them to keep progressing on the path to recovery.

Volunteers like Huang compassionately enter the lives of many poor individuals and families struggling with mental issues, effectively bridging the gaps and limitations of government social welfare resources. Their tireless endeavors radiate a beacon of hope and may even serve as a lifeline for those in dire need. ❀



# When Schizophrenia Hits

**Narrated by Lee Jia-fu, psychiatrist, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital**

Interviewed and compiled by Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Huang Yong-fu

*People with schizophrenia do not show a higher inclination for violence than the general population. Their hallucinations and delusions are caused by excessive dopamine secretions. They require medical treatment and rehabilitation.*



**Dr. Lee Jia-fu (李嘉富, center) conducted a home visit to an individual affected by a mental illness when the Tzu Chi International Medical Association held a free clinic in New Taipei City in 2017. CAI SHU-QING**

## **How can you identify if someone is suffering from schizophrenia? When is it essential to seek medical attention?**

In clinical practice, the term delusion refers to the state of inventing things that do not exist, believing them to be true, and steadfastly clinging to these beliefs, despite others' attempts to persuade or provide evidence to the contrary. Hallucinations, on the other hand, occur when one's sensory perceptions receive stimuli that do not actually exist. That's why others cannot perceive another's hallucinations. For instance, a patient may hear voices that others cannot hear. When these symptoms of disordered thinking and perception persist and significantly impact a person's sense of reality and judgment, the condition is identified as schizophrenia.

There is a simple method for assessing a person's mental state known as ABCD. "A" stands for Affect, Attention, Appearance, and Attitude. This involves observing whether a person appears emotionless, excessively excited, depressed, or experiences rapid mood swings.

"B" represents Behavior. Patients with schizophrenia may display acute and contradictory states of confusion, such as smiling while talking about their recently deceased father or speaking incoherently and providing unrelated answers to questions.

"C" stands for Cognition. In a delusional state, individuals may experience heightened suspicion, leading them to doubt the intentions of strangers and fear that they might be plotting against them. The most prevalent symptoms include visual hallucinations, in which the patient sees things that do not exist, and auditory hallucinations, where they hear voices when no one is speaking. These experiences cause them to become detached from reality.

"D" represents Drive. For instance, a person may feel disinclined to interact with others and appear emotionally indifferent when expected to express emotions. You might notice someone you know becoming more withdrawn and isolated. He or she might have once been a top-performing student in class but now shows a lack of interest in attending school or participating in any activities, becoming more lethargic and unmotivated.

Usually, when people recognize the need for assistance, they recommend professional counseling. In Taiwan, involuntary hospitalization is reg-

ulated by the Mental Health Act, which provides a specific definition for severely ill patients. This includes individuals who exhibit significantly detached thoughts from reality or bizarre behaviors to the point where they cannot handle their own affairs. Moreover, it necessitates an evaluation and decision by a compulsory examination committee, authorizing hospitalization only if there is genuine evidence of dangerous behavior towards others or self-harm.

## **Why do schizophrenics experience hallucinations or delusions?**

Individuals with schizophrenia experience hallucinations or delusions due to excessive levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, in the brain.

When dopamine activity is too strong, it causes excessive sensitivity. The brain cannot selectively focus attention, and unwanted information floods in, making concentration difficult. It's like hearing someone hissing insults and accusations in your ear, even if you don't want to listen.

The sensory experience of a person with schizophrenia is as if you were to record the bustling environment of a metro station, capturing numerous voices and ambient noises, then play back the recording at a high volume while wearing headphones. The overwhelming cacophony, especially if experienced at night, can induce feelings of fear and anxiety.

Schizophrenia is diagnosed when hallucinations or delusions persist, and behaviors become chaotic, for a period of more than six months. The condition is more likely to develop between the ages of 15 and 25, with a higher incidence around 19 or 20. For example, some young men who usually lead a secluded life may experience increased stress when they fulfill their mandatory military service and undergo group living, leading to a worsening of symptoms.

## **Is recovery possible for patients with schizophrenia?**

Based on past clinical statistics, around one-fourth of individuals with schizophrenia have a good chance of recovery. Half of them may experience recurrent episodes, requiring long-term medication management. Another quarter of patients may have limited recovery even with drug treat-



ment. The primary challenge arises from patients' lack of insight into their condition during the initial stages, resulting in resistance towards seeking treatment, which becomes a significant hurdle in the therapeutic journey.

There exists an optimal golden period for treatment in the first two to five years after onset. Early detection and intervention are strongly advised to prevent severe brain damage. The latest generation of antipsychotic medications has reduced side effects, fosters improved functional recovery, and provides the option of long-acting injections. Recent research indicates that due to substantial advancements in treatment effectiveness, the number of patients requiring hospitalization, including long-term stays, has decreased.

### **Is schizophrenia hereditary?**

In the realm of mental disorders, conditions like anxiety and depression are more closely related to psychological and social stress. Their occurrence is more likely influenced by external stressors. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a 25 percent surge in global cases of anxiety and depression. On the other hand, while schizophrenia may have some connection to stress triggers, it is primarily associated with one's inherent constitution. Thus, the likelihood of schizophrenia occurring in the general population remains relatively constant, at approximately one percent.

If one parent is affected by the illness, the likelihood of their child being affected is about 12 percent. If both parents are affected, the probability increases significantly to 40 percent, but it is still not a certainty that the condition will be inherited. Focusing too much on the hereditary aspect may cause individuals with a genetic predisposition to feel helpless against their fate. Instead, the emphasis should be on whether individuals with genetic susceptibility can develop strong resilience to stress, potentially preventing the onset of the condition during their lifetime.

It's important to stress that not everyone with a family history will develop the condition. Additionally, diseases associated with genetic factors related to dopamine have been found to be connected to increased creativity. Thus, some individuals with the genetic trait become university professors or innovative inventors as a result. Others with the trait are more susceptible to issues

like alcohol addiction or antisocial tendencies. The outcome depends on how this genetic trait is channeled.

### **When someone exhibits symptoms of schizophrenia, how can those around them help?**

Patients do not exhibit a higher tendency for violent behavior. When they experience hallucinations or delusions, it is crucial for those around them not to immediately dismiss or actively reinforce these experiences. These hallucinations and delusions feel genuinely real to the patient, so denying them can foster feelings of mistrust. On the other hand, some people, in an effort not to invalidate the patient's perceptions, may even claim to have had similar experiences, unintentionally reinforcing the delusions and exacerbating the symptoms. All of these responses should be avoided.

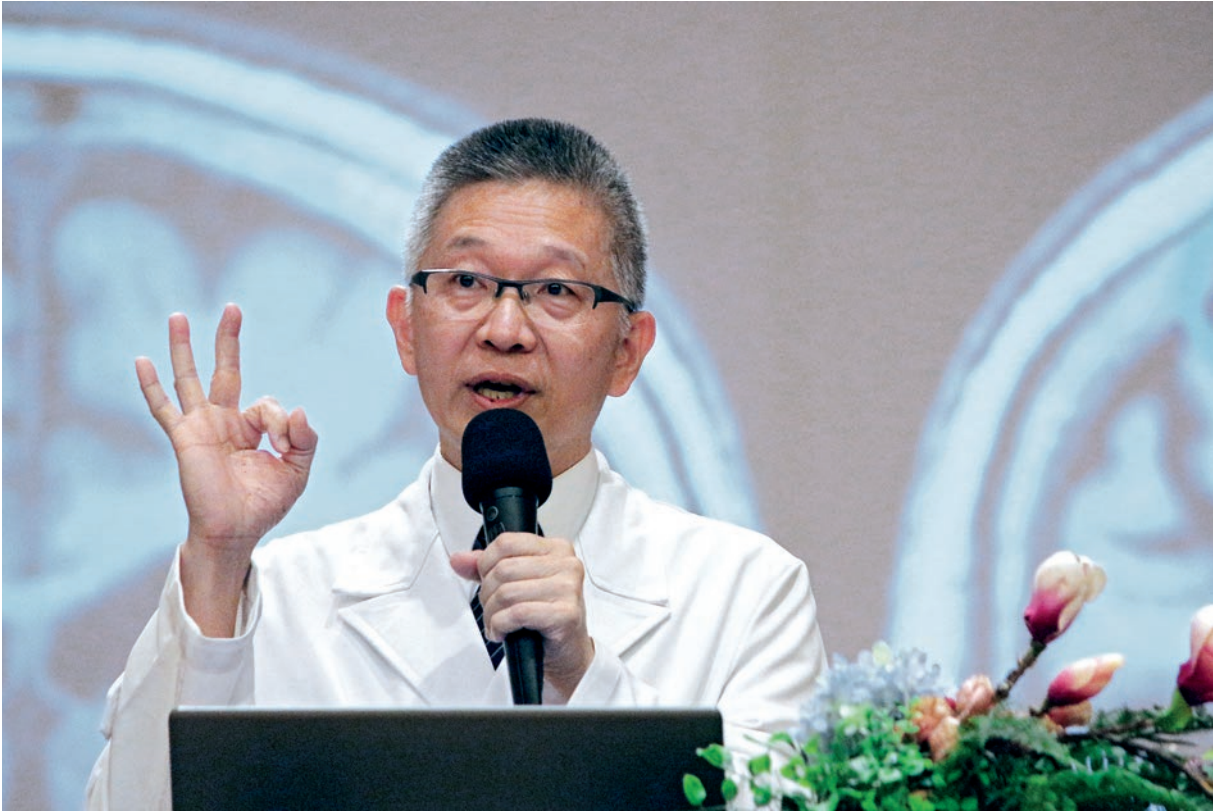
Suppose the person experiencing hallucinations or delusions says, "I personally saw an alien. Do you believe in aliens?" In such a situation, it is advisable to first understand the reasons behind their statement. You can ask, "Have you had a direct encounter? What happened during that experience?" or "So you've been feeling like aliens have placed a listening device on you, and that must have made you uncomfortable, right?" Instead of reinforcing the belief, show empathy by understanding their emotional experience.

### **What is the best way to assist individuals with schizophrenia in their rehabilitation?**

The core principles for individuals with schizophrenia to achieve recovery or improve well-being include "accurate understanding of the illness, early medical intervention, consistent treatment, adopting a healthy lifestyle, and returning to work." Taiwan now has a well-established community mental health and rehabilitation system, encompassing daytime hospitalization, community rehabilitation centers, and recovery homes. Through the implementation of daytime ward rehabilitation, we are now able to annually provide life training to ten percent of chronic psychiatric patients, helping them reintegrate into the community or the workforce.

Medical predictions suggest that there is a possibility of a gradual decline in hospitalizations for





### Reminders From a Specialist:

**When supporting individuals with schizophrenia, remember to offer care and companionship while also encouraging them to seek medical treatment for their condition.**

- The brain's overproduction of dopamine can cause heightened sensitivity, akin to wearing headphones with the volume turned up, making it challenging to shift attention or concentrate. This heightened state can lead to feelings of fear and anxiety.
- The newer generation of antipsychotic medications has fewer side effects and promotes better functional recovery. The primary hurdle in effective treatment arises from patients lacking insight into their condition during the early stages of the illness, as they may not acknowledge their sickness and display resistance towards seeking medical help.
- The likelihood of developing schizophrenia is influenced by genetic predisposition, but not everyone with susceptibility will necessarily develop the condition. A crucial factor lies in whether one can cultivate better resilience to cope with stress.

new acute psychiatric patients in Taiwan within the next ten years, due to an aging population and declining birth rate. Furthermore, the continuous advancements in medication and injectable treatments are expected to reduce the number of patients in chronic psychiatric wards. Community healthcare policies will promote the establishment

of more recovery homes or rehabilitation centers in local communities. Skilled professionals, including psychologists, social workers, and occupational therapists, will play a crucial role in helping patients prepare for their return home and assisting those with stabilized symptoms on their journey towards employment. ❁

# *Gifts From the Heart*

**By Li Qiu-yue, Tzu Chi Teachers Association**

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Zhong Ting-jia

*Gift-giving can be a challenge, especially when it comes to parents. This article offers tips for a delightful exchange of giving and receiving gifts.*





A student was stumped by what gifts to give his parents. “It’s easy to find gifts for classmates, but I’m not sure what to give my mom and dad to truly make them happy.”

This situation reminded me of what happened a month before my birthday this year. My younger son called and asked me what gift I wanted. I told him I needed a new hairdryer and asked if he could get me a pink one. On my birthday, I received a hairdryer jointly gifted by both my sons. I was overjoyed and couldn’t stop admiring it, as the color and design were both my favorites.

I faced a similar dilemma in the past as the student when selecting a birthday gift for my mother-in-law. Whenever I asked her what she wanted, she would often say, “Anything is fine.” So, for a while, I bought her gold jewelry. But then later she said she was getting older and didn’t wear accessories often. So, I switched to giving her clothes. But she then said she couldn’t wear all the clothes. Eventually, I had no choice but to opt for the hassle-free option of giving her money.

Based on my experiences, I have a few suggestions to ease the worries of gift-givers and bring joy to gift-receivers.

### **Intergenerational communication**

During my younger days, as I headed off to college and relocated away from home, I found myself yearning for my mother’s cooking. Memories of her culinary prowess haunted me, and I would catch myself unconsciously licking my lips, yearning for her mouthwatering dishes.

To soothe this longing, I would always call my mom one week before returning to my hometown, letting her know the date I’d be coming home and the dishes I’d love to eat. Upon arrival, I’d savor the dishes I had missed, and my mother’s happiness was evident in her smile when she saw the empty plates. It was a delightful cooking experience for her and a satisfying meal for me. Every time I went home, it was a joyful reunion between my mother and me, and it eased my homesickness.

Recently, I came to the realization that the act of pre-ordering meals during my college days was a form of “intergenerational communication,” now being promoted by experts. To spare yourself the headache of not knowing what gifts to give your parents and to bring them happiness, I encourage you to utilize intergenerational

communication effectively. Clearly and specifically express your thoughts to your parents, explaining your intentions. I trust that your parents will be more than willing to cooperate, leading to a delightful exchange of giving and receiving gifts.

Take myself as an example. To help our children avoid the dilemma I used to experience with my mother-in-law, once they started earning an income, both my husband and I openly and clearly expressed our most desired gifts for the year. Thanks to transparent communication, our children can fulfill our wishes without any uncertainty and spare us the disappointment of receiving unwanted gifts.

### **Sincerity and mindfulness are the key**

That said, gifts for parents don’t always have to be bought with money; you can create heartfelt homemade cards or showcase your culinary skills by treating them to a delicious meal.

I once designed a worksheet for students to write “One Hundred Good Things About Mom [or Dad]” and personally sent this special gift to each parent a week before Mother’s or Father’s Day. When parents received this unique present, many of them were deeply moved and called me to express their gratitude, saying, “Thank you so much! This is the best gift I have ever received in my life. I will frame it as a keepsake!”

My two children also wrote a list of “One Hundred Good Things About Mom” and gave it to me. As I looked at the list, it made me laugh and cry in turns. It turned out that in my children’s eyes, besides taking care of their basic needs, I was also a mom who nagged, was decisive, and could be playful!

This gift means so much to me I still keep it in my safe, and I often take it out to reminisce about my younger self. I am deeply grateful for my children’s love and keen observations. Their list to me created beautiful and timeless memories for me.

In the end, the essence of gift-giving lies in sincerity and mindfulness. As Dharma Master Cheng Yen said, “Proficiency comes from mindfulness.” By being mindful and genuinely thoughtful, you can make people feel the depth of your care through your gifts. Inquiring about preferences and observing with care will undoubtedly lead you to find gifts that bring joy and leave a lasting impact on your recipients. ❁

# A Little Angel

By Liu Xiao-fen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Zhan Da-wei

*Despite all the challenges she has faced due to brittle bone disease, Xiao-zhen shines like a little sun, touching and warming the hearts of those around her.*

On January 7, 2023, a small group of us from Tzu Chi visited Xiao-zhen, 11, and her family. We brought food, a gift card, drawing paper, and colored pens. The little girl warmly greeted us with polite manners as soon as she saw us.

Xiao-zhen loves drawing. Her art style is lively, characterized by vibrant colors. Her drawings on display in the living room exude a sense of joy and happiness.

We first met Xiao-zhen and her family two years ago. Xiao-zhen's mother, Ci-rui, told us at that time that she began having regular monthly check-ups when she learned that she was pregnant with Xiao-Zhen, along with additional self-funded examinations. She said she and her husband faithfully followed the healthcare advice of medical professionals. They were filled with anticipation as they eagerly awaited the birth of their first child.

After the child was born, the couple stood by the glass window of the nursery, observing their baby's pale lips and feeble cries. In comparison to the other newborns, their beloved appeared somewhat different. Following an examination, the doctor couldn't hide his shock as he delivered a grim diagnosis: "Your child has been diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta and requires a referral for further treatment."

Osteogenesis imperfecta, commonly known as brittle bone disease, has an incidence rate of one in 20,000. Instead of being able to fully embrace the joy brought by the arrival of their newborn, the couple's lives became shrouded in a cloud of worry and despair.

They couldn't understand why this was happening to them, especially since neither of them had a genetic history of this condition, and the monthly prenatal check-ups had been normal. Questions like "Why me? Why us?" reverberated

in their minds. The mother, in particular, was overwhelmed with doubts and sadness. She didn't want to believe it, causing her inner self to continuously scream. Despite the belief among the older generation that tears could have a negative impact on a new mother's health, she found herself crying every day.

"However, as I gazed upon my child's innocent face and sweet smile, I came to accept my fate," the mother said. "Despite the many unknown challenges that I knew awaited us, she was still my precious daughter."

Perhaps it was a small consolation from a higher power that the child was easy to care for right from birth. She seldom cried without reason and never threw tantrums. As the child's peers grew, learned to stand and walk, and started playing with their neighbors and classmates, Xiao-zhen, confined to a wheelchair, could only look on with envy. Nevertheless, she made a wish: "One day, I will stand up too."

In November 2022, the girl made a decision and told her mother, "I want to stand up." Unable to resist her child's request, Ci-rui arranged for her to undergo a surgical procedure after consultation and assessment by doctors. The surgery lasted over seven hours. It involved correcting her leg curvature and inserting bone screws, all with the hope of giving her a chance to stand up.

After the effects of the anesthesia wore off, the girl couldn't bear the intense pain and cried out, "It hurts so much!" The side effects of the medications she had to take made her constantly nauseous, and if that wasn't bad enough, her legs were encased in hard plaster casts, causing discomfort and itchiness. She was just an elementary school student, but in her strong determination to stand up, she bravely endured all of it.





Accompanied by her mother, Xiao-zhen went to live with her maternal grandmother for a while. The affectionate grandmother provided the girl with attentive care, and they became the closest of companions. Whenever the grandmother attended choir practice, she brought Xiao-zhen along. During our visit, the grandmother and granddaughter joyfully sang the first song they had learned together.

"Today, another child wanted to play with Xiao-zhen, but unfortunately, she ended up fracturing a bone again," her mother said with a helpless tone. As I looked at Xiao-zhen, my heart filled with sorrow and heartache. The thoughtful little girl seemed to sense my thoughts. She reached out and held my hand to comfort me, saying reassuringly, "Don't worry, I'm not in pain. I'll be fine in a few days."

I couldn't help but wonder: "Could this girl be an angel descended from heaven, with a heart full of love and forgiveness despite the trials she's had to endure?"

**Volunteers hold the hands of Xiao-zhen, a victim of brittle bone disease. They empathize with all that she has suffered, while wishing her the best.**

When I returned home, I started writing the visit report: "Xiao-zhen, at the age of 11, appeared incredibly thin and frail due to her illness. Despite weighing only 16 kilograms [35 pounds], her legs remained too weak to support her body's weight after the surgery..." The echoes of laughter and the sweet melodies sung by the grandmother and granddaughter lingered in my ears, evoking the wisdom of an aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "Happiness does not come from having more, but from having a big heart."

As I wrote the report, I made a heartfelt wish for the little giant's dream of standing up to be realized soon. I also hoped that her warmth and radiance, like that of the sun, could touch and warm the hearts of everyone around her. ❀





# Empowering Education in Lumbini

By Lee Lay Sim, Leong Yit Yu, Goh Lam Kia, and Wu Xiu-ling

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Despite Nepal's offer of a decade of free education for its children, only 60 percent finish tenth grade. This is due mainly to poverty and traditional gender bias. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers are collaborating with Lumbini's public schools to promote school attendance.*





Principal Altaf Husen Khan teaches at Siddhartha Primary School in Lumbini, Nepal. Student attendance at local public schools fluctuates greatly during busy farming seasons.

HONG DE QIAN





**I**t wasn't yet noon, but the temperature in Lumbini, Nepal, had already climbed to 38 degrees Celsius (100.4°F). Despite the strong sun and a hot wind blowing sand, a group of people forged ahead along a rural path devoid of shelter, their footsteps unwavering.

It was April 2023. Madan Poudel, the vice principal of Shree Tarkulha Basic Level School in Lumbini's Fifth Ward, was leading a team of teachers and Tzu Chi volunteers on a visit to the local village. With his infectious enthusiasm and approachable demeanor, he called out to the villagers when they arrived, urging them to step outside their homes. His voice resonated so well that a megaphone was unnecessary.

"This is how we can attract the children and inspire their attendance," the vice principal declared.

Arriving at a small grocery store, Poudel stepped inside and purchased some candies. He then offered each child he encountered in the vil-

lage a candy, saying, "Here's a treat for you. Once school begins, make sure to join us in class. If you miss out, I'll come looking for you, and then you'll have to give me back two candies!" This amusing strategy for motivating students to attend school brought smiles to everyone around.

Meanwhile, the teachers from the group posted enrollment flyers in the village. They reminded villagers of the impending start of school and urged them not to forget to send their children back to school.

A five-year-old boy named Mukess Pasi, whose father works in Malaysia, stood by his mother's side and hesitantly uttered, "I don't have a birth certificate." (A birth certificate is required to register for enrollment.) He longed to attend school, yet regrettably, his parents were unaware of his aspiration. Poudel gently touched the boy's head and said to his mother, "If you're willing to let your son go to school, we will help him register by asking the local leader to help





with the application for his birth certificate.”

The amiable vice principal had a great time interacting with the village children. “Are you familiar with them?” he asked a group of children, gesturing towards the Tzu Chi volunteers dressed in blue shirts and white pants. The children responded in their innocent voices, “They all live here. We recognize them!” The atmosphere was lively and heartwarming; even the grocery store owner, touched by the dedication everyone displayed toward children’s education, offered biscuits as a treat.

### Working to improve attendance rates

Nepal provides ten years of free education for its population, which includes primary schooling for Grades 1 to 5, lower secondary education for Grades 6 to 8, and secondary education for Grades 9 and 10. After successfully completing the Secondary Education Examination, students have the opportunity to pursue higher secondary educa-

**Prior to the start of a new semester in April, Tzu Chi volunteers collaborated with principals and teachers in Lumbini to visit villages and promote student enrollment. Their goal was to ensure that children of eligible age did not miss out on educational opportunities.** PHOTO ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE BY YONG MUN FEI; PHOTO ABOVE BY RAJKUMAR

tion, in Grades 11 to 12. Access to university-level education becomes available after the 12th grade.

Despite the availability of a free education, ensuring that children actually enroll and attend school remains a persistent challenge. A 2021 government economic survey revealed that only about 60 percent of students complete Grade 10; less than 30 percent successfully complete Grade 12.

Rural children have a lower enrollment rate, mainly due to poverty. Parents often require their children to contribute to the household income from an early age, so many children stop going to school in order to work. Limited parental educa-





150 kilometers

Nepal

China

Kapilvastu

Lumbini

Kathmandu

India

Bodh Gaya

## Tzu Chi's Education Aid Work in Nepal and India

- Oct.13, 2022 Initiated school visits in Lumbini for educational aid planning.
- Dec.15, 2022 to Jan.24, 2023  
Conducted distributions at 28 Lumbini schools, benefiting 11,263 students.
- Dec.15, 2022 Launched Jing Si aphorism and life education program in Lumbini schools, now active in ten.
- Dec.25, 2022 Commenced four rounds of training for Jing Si aphorism program teachers, involving nearly 200 educators.
- January 2023 Initiated the School for All campaign to enhance enrollment and attendance.
- Feb.20, 2023 Established the Nepal chapter of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association in Lumbini. Fifteen school principals and teachers had joined by mid-July.
- Feb.24, 2023 Visited six schools in Kapilvastu, Nepal.
- Mar.8, 2023 Held the third meeting with school principals; representatives from 70 percent of Lumbini's public schools attended.
- Mar.13, 2023 Visited seven schools in Bodh Gaya, India.
- April 2023 Collaborated with personnel from five Lumbini schools, visiting local villages to bolster enrollment.
- May 25, 2023 Concluded Tzu Chi's first vocational sewing course in Lumbini.
- May 30, 2023 Formed the India chapter of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association in Bodh Gaya.
- June 2023 Launched Tzu Chi study groups for educators and local residents, with the first session held in Laxmipur, Lumbini.





tion leads to a lack of awareness about the importance of education, causing parents to steer their children toward careers like farming, labor, or overseas manual work. Additionally, traditional gender bias often favors sons for educational opportunities, while daughters are expected to stay home to assist with household chores and prepare for marriage.

The poverty of the schools themselves, lacking basic infrastructure and facing substandard learning environments, further contributes to low enrollment rates. The Lumbini Cultural Municipality, with a population of over 88,000, illustrates this reality. The entire municipality has 32 public schools, of which just four offer classes up to Grade 12 and only nine offer classes up to Grade 10. Some schools have over 70 children crowded into a single classroom due to insufficient classrooms or teaching staff.

“The local middle and high schools aren’t independent entities; they follow a progression from the first grade. Therefore, if the school you’re enrolled in only goes up to the eighth grade and you wish to pursue further education, you need to seek schools offering higher grades in other towns,” explained Goh Lam Kia (吳南凱), a Tzu Chi volunteer from Singapore stationed on a long-term basis in Nepal.

Running schools in Lumbini is no easy task.

**Tzu Chi donated two school buses in late September 2022 to Karuna Girls College in Lumbini. The donation was prompted by the challenges some students faced in continuing their studies due to the significant distances they had to travel. The donation serves as an example of the foundation’s educational support efforts in Lumbini.**

TULSI NARAYAN MATANG

Even if schools are public, staff must venture into villages to recruit students, try to motivate them to attend classes, and highlight the value of education to parents. In April 2023, shortly before the start of a new semester, school principals and teachers in Lumbini tirelessly visited villages, even extending their efforts to neighboring ones, in a bid to boost enrollment and attendance rates. Tzu Chi volunteers, actively promoting the School for All initiative in the region, collaborated with school personnel for home visits and enrollment drives, united in their mission to reintegrate children into the school environment.

During one instance, volunteers joined forces with personnel from Ram Janaki School in Lumbini’s Fourth Ward for a visit. Among the volunteers was Altaf Husen Khan, the principal of Siddhartha Primary School. The Manaora village in the Fourth Ward is predominantly Muslim, so Principal Khan’s Muslim background proved

instrumental in the enrollment drive in the village. With his encouragement, many residents presented their children's birth certificates to enroll them in Ram Janaki School.

Volunteers also teamed up with staff from Buddha Adarsha Secondary School to visit local villages. Hari Mohan, the school's vice principal, stressed the importance of personally visiting students' homes to truly understand their challenges. He hoped that people or organizations from outside Nepal hoping to support local education would also gain a clear understanding of the challenges faced by local children. This understanding would then enable them to contribute more effectively to enhancing educational resources in the region.

Shivshankar Yadav, 25, finished 12th grade at Buddha Adarsha Secondary School in 2019 but didn't pursue further education. Although he aspired to study engineering at a university, financial constraints compelled him to halt his education and take up farming.

Phulkumari, 18, had no choice but to forgo continued schooling after finishing ninth grade in part because her family needed her help at home. The disappointment of not being able to continue her education weighed heavily on her, causing her to cry for several days.

Tzu Chi volunteers asked her while visiting her home, "Would you like to continue your studies?" She immediately nodded in agreement. Her mother, who stood beside her, spoke up to intervene, bringing up plans for her marriage. Nevertheless, Phulkumari stood her ground, stating firmly, "I want to study." With Tzu Chi's support, she was determined to seize this chance to pursue her education.

### **Sparking transformation**

"In Nepal, only one out of every three students completes the 12th grade, which is a very low ratio. We deeply sympathize and really want to help," said Malaysian Tzu Chi volunteer Sio Kee Hong (蘇祈逢) during a meeting with principals and teachers from over 20 schools in Lumbini on March 8, 2023. He expressed Tzu Chi's desire to bring each and every student forced to discontinue their education back to school as part of the foundation's School for All campaign. "If there are families where poverty or illness has prevented children from attending school, please provide us with a list. Tzu Chi stands ready to provide assistance, including providing subsidies or transportation, to help them overcome educational difficulties."

Tzu Chi volunteers from Malaysia and Singapore have been stationed in Lumbini since April 2022 to help the foundation carry out philanthropic work there. In addition to offering assistance in other areas, they provide subsidies to help students continue their education, distribute school supplies, improve the nutrition of school meals, and assist students with transportation to schools. One of their key initiatives is the School for All campaign. Sio Kee Hong explained that since the campaign's launch, 23 schools in Lumbini, accounting for 70 percent of the local public schools, have joined.

Additionally, Tzu Chi has funded equipment for multiple schools, including water pumps, to tackle issues related to drinking water safety and water supply. Volunteers are also promoting hygiene education, such as proper handwashing practices. Sio emphasized, "While material provisions offer a temporary solution, nurturing humanistic values requires sustained dedication." Volunteers have partnered with ten schools as of July this year, conducting weekly visits to the schools to share Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si aphorisms and promote life education.

Expanding on the experience garnered in Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, volunteers extended their efforts in February this year to Bodh Gaya, India. (Bodh Gaya is another significant location in the Enlightened One's life journey.) Sio Kee Hong explained, "Many local children have unfortunately resorted to begging and living on the streets due to their status as Dalits [formerly known as untouchables]. They face even greater hardships than children in Nepal." Volunteers have been stationed in Bodh Gaya since mid-March, offering care in the Dalit villages of Sujata and Silaunja. They have administered both charitable and educational aid in these underserved communities.

Education broadens horizons, prompts shifts in thinking, and has the potential to improve a family's financial situation. Despite language barriers, climate challenges, and the cultural differences they encounter in Nepal, Tzu Chi volunteers unwaveringly adhere to Master Cheng Yen's guidance to serve the underprivileged. Unfazed by difficulties, they are determined to embrace every opportunity to bring about meaningful change. The positive transformations they've seen in partner schools bring encouragement to the volunteers. Sio added, "Regardless of how dry a land may be, with the nourishment of rainwater and the Buddha's teachings, we can witness the birth of hope." ❀





**A young girl studies after school hours. Children in Lumbini often confront various challenges in their pursuit of education. They have to juggle agricultural and household duties while grappling with transportation difficulties in getting to school. Tzu Chi volunteers are dedicated to improving these circumstances and enhancing local children's educational prospects.**

LEFT PHOTO BY YONG MUN FEI; PHOTO BELOW BY LEE LAY SIM



# A Day at Siddhartha Primary School

By Lee Lay Sim

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Yong Mun Fei

*He tends to untidy appearances, ensuring everyone looks their best. When a pencil breaks, he lends a hand in sharpening it. He stands at the doorway at day's end, bidding farewell to all. Through his actions, the principal has nurtured an environment where students eagerly anticipate each new school day.*

Regular school classes begin at ten in the morning in Nepal, but at Siddhartha Primary School on the northern side of Lumbini Garden, a group of children can be seen waiting at the entrance even before the school gate opens. Some of the more slender ones are so eager that they can't wait and squeeze through the gaps beneath the gate to get inside.

Once the gate opens, students make their way to the classrooms, set down their bags, and begin cleaning their rooms. Others team up to pick up litter on the playground. With everyone's efforts, the small campus is now neat and tidy, a contrast from what it looked like just last year.

When Tzu Chi volunteers made their first visit to the school in August 2022, they found the campus overgrown with weeds and classroom windows broken. In the cold winter months, the school improvised by hanging woven bags to shield against the cold wind. Fifty percent of the students had ceased attending, partly due to insufficient teaching staff and lack of basic facilities. These and other challenges left Principal Altaf Husen Khan feeling overwhelmed.

Since then, Tzu Chi volunteers have played a steadfast role in supporting the school. They have helped with classroom repairs and distributed essential supplies. Education has also been a key focus. They've taught the children handwashing, dining etiquette, and self-care. They've even used interactive games to convey the wisdom of Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si aphorisms. Ajay, a science and math teacher at the school, has observed positive changes in the students since Tzu Chi became involved in the school. "The children's disheveled appearance we used to see has

disappeared," he remarked.

Due to a shortage of teaching staff, Siddhartha Primary School could only offer classes up to the fifth grade, so Tzu Chi helped hire two additional teachers. As a result, the school was able to extend its teaching to the sixth grade, starting from the new school year in April of this year. This positive change means that children at the school no longer have to search for education elsewhere to advance to the sixth grade, increasing the chance they will continue with their education. With more students attending, the school repurposed the kitchen into a classroom. The staff now prepares lunch behind the classrooms.

One afternoon, the sky was covered with dark clouds. Principal Khan let the students out half an hour early. He stood at the school gate, seeing the children off as they headed home. One by one, each of the children gave him a high five and said, "Bye-bye!" as they left.

The principal has encouraged many other schools to participate in Tzu Chi's School for All initiative. He even donned a Tzu Chi Teachers Association uniform and joined volunteers on home visits to promote enrollment. When asked why he had such faith in Tzu Chi, he expressed amazement that a group of individuals from Singapore and Malaysia would leave behind their families and careers, spend their own money to travel to Nepal, visit the school, and even help clean up the school grounds. "Many religious followers advocate performing good deeds, but they often fall short in practicing what they preach," he observed. "The example set by Tzu Chi volunteers is worth more than gold."

The school's climate under Principal Khan's





leadership has experienced quite a transformation. He transitioned from a disciplinarian approach to education to one characterized by compassion and care for the students. Driven by his passion for education, he even volunteered to serve as the chairperson of the Lumbini teachers union, with hopes of inspiring more schools to work together to address educational challenges.

Sanjana is a third-grade student. Her father works in Malaysia. Her mother, Sunita, greatly appreciates the changes she has witnessed in her daughter. “Previously, Sanjana would simply drop her bag anywhere at home after school and immediately start playing with her dolls,” the mother said. “Now, she organizes her belongings, takes the initiative to review her homework, and no longer quarrels with her brother.”

She added that since volunteers began visiting the school, her daughter has shared with her about the importance of caring for things, practicing good hygiene, and wearing a smile. What brings her the greatest joy is witnessing her daughter actively applying these principles in her daily life.

**Students at Siddhartha Primary School clean their classrooms every day when they get to school. The cultivation of positive habits and values extends beyond mere textbooks; it is subtly woven into the fabric of everyday life.**

Sunita said that Sanjana never wants to miss a day of school because the principal says going to school is about becoming a better person. When volunteers asked the young girl why she enjoys going to school, she replied, “Because the principal and teachers have become better. They no longer scold us or raise their voices at us. My classmates also readily share their school supplies with one another now.”

Sunita holds high hopes for Siddhartha Primary School: “I may not be able to shape my daughter’s future, but education has the power to help her achieve her dreams. I hope the school can one day offer classes up to the 12th grade so that all the children in the village can study with peace of mind, without having to worry about discontinuation due to transportation issues.” ❀

# Sewing for Change

By Du Hui Xi, Lee Lay Sim, Cecelia GC Ong, and Shen Ya-hui

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Tzu Chi launched sewing classes in Lumbini, empowering local women with practical skills. Volunteers have also helped graduates without sewing machines or who were struggling to find work. Establishing stable incomes transforms families, fostering stability and enabling children's education.*

“I really enjoy coming here for class. When I first began, I didn’t even know how to use sewing scissors, but now I’m proficient!” said Anita Bhooj, who had never thought of going to a class to learn sewing before Tzu Chi offered sewing courses in Lumbini. She had married at 16 according to her parents’ wishes. After the birth of her children, her days were filled with childcare and household chores. How could she find time to learn a skill?

On October 17, 2022, Tzu Chi launched its first vocational sewing course for women at its Lumbini office. The course lasted six months. The majority of participants hailed from a village about a kilometer (0.62 miles) away. There were no buses available to transport them, nor did they have bicycles, so the women had to walk to class. Though they were sometimes late, they never missed a session. The first sewing class graduated on May 25 this year.

A month before the graduation ceremony, Tzu Chi volunteers invited students to sew clothes as their graduation projects. The students were amazed when they learned that Tzu Chi would provide funds for fabric for the projects. Initially quiet and reserved, they eagerly discussed it among themselves and then searched online for preferred styles. In the end, they decided to make light green outfits in the trendy “Umbrella Style.” They said wearing the outfits in local villages could even attract orders for sewing work.

On their graduation day, the students, wearing the clothes they had made, cheerfully conveyed their appreciation for their teacher’s selfless instruction in cutting and sewing skills. They also

thanked Tzu Chi for providing them with the precious opportunity to learn free of charge. Some were moved to share that they had been confined at home without any skills before this experience. Now, they could sew clothes, and perhaps even earn an income and become self-reliant.

“Learning sewing has truly transformed my life,” remarked Puja Khadka, the instructor for the sewing class. “I’ve become independent and no longer rely on my family for financial support.” She further emphasized that the acquired skill is a lifelong asset and expressed her wish to inspire more women by sharing her experience.

For the participants of the sewing course, acquiring a skill was just the first step; they also needed the means to earn a living. Their underprivileged backgrounds hindered their ability to afford a sewing machine. The suitability of their living spaces for housing sewing machines was also a concern. To ensure that they didn’t face unemployment after graduating, volunteers found an appropriate community space to establish a sewing workshop. Sewing machines were set up there, equipping the participants with tools to generate income. On their graduation day, Tzu Chi’s first local sewing workshop was inaugurated.

Tzu Chi helps graduates secure orders too. In June, with the foundation’s help, several graduates joined a cloth sanitary pad project organized by the Health Environment and Climate Action Foundation (HECAF360). They earn income through the project by making cloth sanitary pads, which are then handed over to HECAF360 for packaging design, market promotion, and school-based health education programs. ❁



Graduates from Tzu Chi's first sewing class at its Lumbini office showcase their handcrafted attire during their graduation ceremony (photo below by Unish Khyaju). In June, a group of graduates joined a project to create cloth sanitary pads, providing them an opportunity to supplement their household finances (right photo by RajKumar).





# My Mission in Nepal

By Goh Lam Kia

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Li Guo Xiang

*Knowing that Dharma Master Cheng Yen has unfulfilled wishes, I understand that it's my responsibility as a disciple to help fulfill them. I haven't accomplished anything significant in my life, so I'm determined to seize this opportunity and make a meaningful impact.*

I'm a member of a Tzu Chi volunteer team from Singapore and Malaysia, stationed on a long-term basis in Lumbini, Nepal. To be honest, I never anticipated finding myself in Lumbini for such an extended stay. The shift from the fast-paced, efficiency-driven lifestyle of highly-developed Singapore to the unhurried and tranquil pace of Nepal has been a wholly novel experience. From daily surroundings to dietary customs, everything requires a thorough adjustment.

There is a Chinese saying that says, "If the mountain doesn't yield, attempt a detour; if the path remains unpassable, adapt your course." Often, changing our surroundings and the people we come into contact with proves challenging. However, when we initiate change in ourselves, everything else begins to fall into place.

Coming from Singapore and Malaysia, we sometimes approach situations and handle matters here in Nepal based on our experiences from our home countries. This can lead to feelings of frustration and complaints when things don't align with our expectations. To avoid such feelings of frustration, we must make a sincere effort to see things from the perspective of the local people.

Nepal is a landlocked nation without ports, which presents transportation challenges. Capitalists don't usually come here to invest. The general population is not highly educated, which hampers technological progress, but they are kind-hearted and unassuming. Most people are involved in farming.



Driving on the roads, you don't have to deal with "road bullies" but "cow bullies"—cows occupy the roads. In such situations, all you can do is slow down, honk the horn, and patiently wait for the cows to leisurely make way for you to pass.

During home visits, we have to bend down to enter the people's low thatched houses. These modest dwellings have openings on all sides, and leak when it rains. People and animals share the same rooms, and the floors are coated with cow dung. Observing this, I couldn't help but reflect that the impoverished way of life appears to have remained largely unchanged since the time of the Buddha, approximately 2,500 years ago.





### Five prerequisites

How did I end up in Lumbini? It all started during a weekend in May 2022, when Tzu Chi Singapore's CEO, Low Swee Seh (劉瑞士), arranged a meeting with Deputy CEO Khoo Kean Yee (邱建義) and me. During that meeting, he shared with us Dharma Master Cheng Yen's deep desire to give back to the birthplace of the Buddha, uplift those in need there, and shine a light on the teachings of Buddhism at its very source. (Though the Buddha was born in Lumbini, less than ten percent of Nepalese are Buddhist. Hinduism is the predominant religion, followed by more than 80 percent of Nepalese.) Our CEO inquired if we

Singaporean Tzu Chi volunteer Goh Lam Kia (吳南凱, far right), stationed in Nepal on a long-term basis, appreciates the opportunity to serve in the country and make meaningful contributions.

were willing to contribute time and effort in Lumbini.

My immediate reaction to our CEO's inquiry was that this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance. Recognizing that the Master had unfulfilled aspirations, I saw it as my responsibility as her disciple to fulfill her wishes and carry out her vision. I hadn't accomplished anything significant in my





life. With this remarkable opportunity to serve now before me, I decided I had to seize it to make a meaningful impact.

Since I arrived in Lumbini last July, I've come to realize that not everyone could have joined this mission as enthusiastically as I did. There are five conditions that must be met to enable you to serve here:

1. You need to have time: It's challenging for those with work or family obligations to take extended breaks.

2. You need to have extra money: Tzu Chi volunteers finance their own trips for all missions, including international disaster relief, aid distribution, and medical assistance.

3. You need to be in good health: You must be able to endure temperatures of 38 to 40 degrees Celsius (100-104°F) or even higher, and also be able to cope with cold winter weather.

4. You need your family's blessings: Even if you meet all the other requirements, staying might not be feasible without your family's support.

5. You need strong determination: It's crucial to make a sincere commitment to aiding suffering beings.

The arrival of the Buddha in this world over 2,500 years ago marked a significant moment. His mission was to illuminate the truths of life. I sometimes wonder, did he have any regrets before attaining nirvana? When he left behind his royal

**Volunteers use Lumbini as their operational base and conduct visits to the nearby rural areas in Kapilvastu. The households there exhibit a range of living conditions—some richer, others poorer. Many families have brick houses, albeit sparsely furnished.**

life to embark on his spiritual journey, it was to discover the path of liberation, alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings, and guide them toward enlightenment. Yet, today, more than 2,500 years later, an abundance of suffering still persists, encompassing not only physical afflictions but also inner spiritual unrest.

Similarly, the arrival of Dharma Master Cheng Yen in this world 86 years ago marked a momentous occasion. She teaches and guides everyone to walk the Bodhisattva Path and perform acts of benevolence for the benefit of humanity. She was an unknown Buddhist nun in 1966 when she founded Tzu Chi in Hualien, Taiwan. Now, the footprints of our humanitarian missions have reached 128 countries and areas. It's evident that the Master is fulfilling the unfulfilled aspirations of the Buddha.

Our own arrivals in this world also hold great significance. It was a remarkable confluence of circumstances that allowed us to attain a human existence, join Tzu Chi, walk the Bodhisattva Path, disseminate the Buddha's teachings, and even



bring the teachings back to the very birthplace of the Buddha. As disciples of the Enlightened One, our mission is to spread his teachings and foster the well-being of all sentient beings.

### **Grateful for being born in Singapore**

Lumbini, located 250 kilometers (155 miles) from the capital city of Kathmandu, lies at the border of Nepal and India. The Maya Devi Temple in the local Lumbini Garden marks the place where the Buddha was born. It attracts many devotees and tourists.

I often stroll near the temple in the serene hours of dawn and dusk to nurture inner peace. My life in Singapore was usually fast-paced, leaving little time for my mind to settle. But here in Lumbini, my days are dedicated solely to Tzu Chi work, allowing me more time for introspection.

My duties in Lumbini include recording our work here. As a documenting volunteer, I often need to participate in and witness events firsthand, recording touching stories, capturing video footage, and creating news content to share with a wider audience. I keep a daily work journal too, chronicling the footsteps of our volunteers in Lumbini. Each day here unfolds with its own heartwarming stories worth documenting.

For example, there was a woman who begged near the Maya Devi Temple every day. I often crossed paths with her on my walks and would offer greetings. Later, one of the woman's neighbors informed us that she really needed help. A team of us paid her a visit and discovered that she had a congenital disability in her left forearm. Her husband and older son had passed away a few years earlier, leaving her and her younger son to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, the younger son was burdened with a congenital heart condition, and they lacked the means to afford his medical treatment. Despite the best efforts of neighbors to help, they couldn't come up with enough money to have him treated at a major hospital.

As she shared her heart-wrenching story with us, the beggar woman became emotional and burst out crying. We noticed that her rice container was empty, so we quickly bought rice and other food for her. Our assistance moved her to tears, prompting our volunteers to offer comforting hugs. She seemed to sense our genuine care, and a glimmer of hope appeared in her eyes. Afterwards, we coordinated with our medical team to provide further assistance and support.

Serving in Nepal, my fellow volunteers and I are often deeply touched by our experiences here.

Those of us from Singapore have also come to appreciate the privilege of being born in our home country, where the government takes care of every citizen. This stands in contrast to many impoverished regions around the world, where resources are scarce, and assistance is often out of reach.

### **Count your blessings and sow more**

Another touching event took place at a government primary school. Last December, during the harsh winter, Tzu Chi initiated distributions to help students in over 20 schools. Our volunteers, bundled up in thick jackets against the cold, noticed a young girl at one school shivering uncontrollably. Approaching her, they touched her hands and were surprised to find that her clothes were wet. They immediately provided her with warm winter clothes, one of the items to be distributed, and held her close to share their warmth.

Our volunteers discovered the girl's challenging circumstances the next day, during a home visit. Her parents had passed away, so she was being raised by her grandparents. But because her grandparents were quite elderly, she had taken on all household responsibilities at the tender age of 12. Our volunteers felt great sympathy for the girl.

The young girl explained that the school principal had announced that an organization would be visiting the school to distribute gifts, and he instructed all students to wear their school uniforms. She had only one uniform, which had been washed but hadn't dried in time. Consequently, she had no choice but to don the damp uniform and go to school, enduring the chilly, gusty winds. Initially puzzled about why her mother had dressed her in wet clothes, our volunteers now felt deep remorse for their earlier assumptions. A few days later, on an early morning, they delivered food to her home before school and brought gloves for her and her grandmother.

The volunteers couldn't help but express their heartache at her situation. Children in Nepal experience vastly different circumstances compared to those in more affluent nations. For example, in Singapore and Malaysia, children as young as this girl are cherished and showered with love by their parents. But here, they begin assisting their mothers from a very young age. We've learned of a family where, only three days after giving birth, a mother returned to the fields to harvest wheat, leaving her three-day-old infant in the care of older siblings at home. Shouldn't those of us born into more fortunate circumstances learn to count our blessings and sow more?





### From one comes infinity

Every day, our team of volunteers from Malaysia and Singapore, along with local volunteers, split up to conduct home visits, distribute aid, and discuss collaborations with government and local authorities. Obviously, a single documenting volunteer cannot cover all our activities, necessitating mutual support among team members. Those of us responsible for documenting our philanthropic efforts take photos, write reports, and share them on an online platform, from which we compile news. We also send daily journals back to Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan, complete with both text and photos.

Being a documenting volunteer comes with its own pressure. We accompany our team on visits during the day, often extending into late afternoon. As a result, we often can't begin writing our journals until after dinner. At times, physical and mental exhaustion make it a challenge to articulate our experiences. On other occasions, we need time for introspection and reflection before we can begin writing.

Despite these challenges, we find fulfillment in serving as the hands, feet, eyes, and ears of Master Cheng Yen on the front lines. We report what we see, hear, and do, seeking her guidance for our work. Currently, in Lumbini, Tzu Chi has constructed a new building for a local free clinic center and initiated vocational training classes. Our School for All initiative has expanded to encompass 23 schools, and the number of locally trained

**The Lumbini Garden complex, spanning nearly eight square kilometers (three square miles), is intersected by a canal. Within this expansive area stand temples built by various countries. Prince Siddhartha, who would later become the Buddha, was born here over 2,500 years ago. Beyond the garden area, traditional village life unfolds in a different scene.**

TANG KIAT BENG

volunteers has surpassed a hundred.

As we pass by the Lumbini Garden every day, we see a flourishing mango tree. It sprouted from a single seed, and over the years has grown into a substantial tree. The profusion of flowers on the tree will gradually transform into small mangoes, and with more time, the fruits will develop seeds, which can be used to grow more trees. Such a cycle of growth can continue endlessly.

Our efforts in Lumbini are akin to planting seeds of goodness and love. From one seed springs an infinite potential for growth. Conversely, countless seeds can emerge from just one act of kindness. As long as we persevere with unwavering determination and resolute hearts, the love we are spreading has the potential to one day make a big difference in Nepal. This reminds me of something shared by Master Cheng Yen: life is much like the journey of learning Buddhism. Whether one progresses swiftly or slowly, the key is to stay on the right path and keep moving forward. ●●●



# Tzu Chi Dumpling Club

## A Taste of Home for Ukrainian Refugees

By Wang Wei-ling

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi volunteers in Poland

*The Dumpling Club at Tzu Chi's Warsaw office provides a warm and enjoyable experience for older Ukrainian refugees.*

In a kitchen in Warsaw, Poland, a pot of sour cherries and sugar simmered gently on the stove, gradually transforming into a beautiful crimson-purple jam. The sunlight streaming in through the window was just perfect, the bright beams of light illuminating airborne flour particles and making them glimmer like grains of golden sand. Laughter echoed through the air, which also carried a tangy, sweet, and comforting aroma.

The kitchen was located in the Tzu Chi Warsaw office, where more than a dozen elderly Ukrainians, refugees from their war-torn homeland, had gathered around a long wooden table. Their hands, bearing the marks of time, expertly divided fermented dough into small balls and rolled them into thin, round wrappers. As they waited for the cherry jam to be ready for use as a dumpling filling, they shared their cherished family recipes for *varenyky*, traditional Ukrainian dumplings.

Hanna Mankus, a Ukrainian working for Tzu Chi in Warsaw, observed, "When these seniors come to the Dumpling Club, they become like kindergarteners, competing to see whose dumpling recipe is the best! Witnessing them cast aside their worries and radiate such cheerfulness has been a delightful surprise that I didn't foresee when I first proposed the Dumpling Club project."

Mankus understood the seniors' pride as they shared their family recipes. She also understood the solace they found in participating in the club. As they filled the dumpling wrappers with ingredients, skillfully folding and pinching them into plump half-moons, they were momentarily transported back to the kitchens of their beloved homes in Ukraine. There, they had lovingly prepared the most delicious dumplings, both savory and sweet,

in response to the charming requests of their grandchildren.

"After the war broke out, life became exceptionally tough for the elderly. They grappled with language barriers in a foreign land and were often burdened by health issues," Mankus explained, her empathy deep for the seniors who were uprooted in their old age and forced to seek refuge in a foreign land. She highlighted one of their challenges: "Back in Ukraine, getting medical care was much easier; a simple phone call could secure you an appointment for the next day. But here, it could take six months to a year to see a specialist. They also struggle to communicate with healthcare providers." Getting around was also problematic; even understanding bus stop signs posed a challenge. "Sometimes, even I myself feel like I'm from Mars," she added.

Staying in Poland for an extended period became their new reality, but everything felt so unfamiliar. They had to start anew. Even stepping beyond the doors of their rooms in their host families' homes became intimidating for these older individuals.

Nina Kravchenko, an elderly Ukrainian refugee, expressed her concerns: "I'm not sure if my Polish host family enjoys having me in their home or if I'm inconveniencing them. I worry that they might ask me to leave one day."

Fear, anxiety, and loneliness weighed heavily on the seniors, leaving them increasingly despondent. To offer support, Mankus proposed the idea of establishing a dumpling club in late September 2022. Older Ukrainians were invited to gather at the Tzu Chi Warsaw office every Friday to make dumplings together.





“Ukrainians have a natural talent for making dumplings,” Mankus declared, “but the question was whether the elderly would be willing to leave their homes to participate in our club. Some initially had doubts, but I didn’t let them stop me.” She rallied help, organized purchases, prepared ingredients, and sent out invitations. “In the beginning, we had just seven elderly participants, but as of June this year, we’ve conducted over 30 sessions, and now 16 seniors regularly attend. They are fondly called the ‘Dumplingists.’” These Dumplingists eagerly anticipate their Friday gatherings and have even started meeting in a park for walks and chats.

Eighty percent of the dumplings made at the club are available for purchase. “We offer dumplings with a cabbage filling, paired with fried cheese, fried onions and mushrooms, or mashed potatoes,” Mankus explained. “We also have fruit jam options, with sour cherries being our unique specialty! Most Poles haven’t tasted these delights before, and those who purchased them were pleasantly surprised, with many showing their support by regularly buying the dumplings.” The proceeds from these sales are distributed among the elderly participants. Although the amounts may not be substantial, the seniors receive a sense of accomplishment as they earn money through their own culinary skills.

The remaining 20 percent of dumplings are

**Senior Ukrainians gather at Tzu Chi’s Warsaw office every week for the Dumpling Club, where they prepare traditional Ukrainian dumplings. The proceeds from 80 percent of the dumplings made at the club go to the participants, while the remaining 20 percent is donated to their fellow refugees struggling to cope in Warsaw.**

donated to Tzu Chi’s long-term care recipients in Warsaw, who are financially strapped refugees unable to work due to various circumstances. “When we deliver the dumplings to these families,” said Mankus, “we always take pictures and show them to the Dumplingists upon our return. The seniors are deeply gratified, knowing that their presence still carries great meaning and that they can bring joy to others.”

#### **1.4 million displaced people**

Mankus vividly recalled the harrowing experience of fleeing her homeland after the Russian invasion: “I boarded a train with my children. Our compartment was packed with 18 people, standing or sitting. We passed through areas where Russian forces were bombing, and the sky turned red. We were terrified, thinking about running out, but where could we escape to? We could only huddle together, hands shielding our heads, and hope for the best.”



Mankus had been an English teacher in Ukraine. After evacuating from Zaporizhzhia in southeastern Ukraine and arriving in Warsaw, she discovered that Tzu Chi was recruiting Ukrainian refugees who could speak English to assist with translating for the foundation's relief efforts for displaced Ukrainians. That's how she joined Tzu Chi, becoming a participant of their work relief program.

Over the past year, she has been assisting Tzu Chi in organizing English language courses and training more Ukrainians to speak English for the foundation's medium- and long-term refugee services. "Initially, we thought this war would only last a few weeks," she said, "and then we would be able to return home, but that did not happen. I'm very grateful to Tzu Chi for providing employment opportunities through their work relief program, which has empowered me to establish a life here in Poland."

Nevertheless, not every refugee has been able to secure employment. According to Polish government statistics from March of this year, approximately 1.4 million Ukrainian refugees have opted

to stay in Poland. A survey conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council revealed that up to 70 percent of Ukrainian refugees in foreign lands, primarily women with children, are on the brink of poverty, struggling to meet even their most basic living expenses.

Susan Chen (陳樹微), a Tzu Chi volunteer from Germany, has visited Poland several times since the outbreak of the war to support Tzu Chi in its relief efforts for Ukrainian refugees. She pointed out that many non-profit organizations have pulled out of Poland, exacerbating the challenges faced by refugees. Moreover, the cost of essential goods and utilities has risen significantly this year. The Polish government alone cannot adequately care for all the refugees. "War is incredibly cruel, especially for innocent people," Chen remarked. "Our presence here is not only to provide aid but also to ensure that victims of the war do not har-

**Ukrainian dumplings are traditionally served with fried onions and sour cream. At the Dumpling Club, all the food is vegetarian.**





bor hatred. We want them to realize that amidst the brutality of conflict, there are people who genuinely care about their well-being.”

### Away from home for over 400 days

On the first anniversary of the war, Mankus returned to her hometown of Zaporizhzhia for a visit. Located not far from the heavily bombed cities of Mariupol and Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia had become a refuge for many who fled those areas. As Mankus set foot on the streets of her hometown, she didn’t experience the excitement she had anticipated; instead, she felt disoriented. Everything had become so unfamiliar. All the windows in the buildings were vacant, and the air was filled with the scent of war. Even though it was daytime, the streets were deserted, and children were nowhere to be seen. “My home had temporarily become a shelter for displaced people from other cities, and the furniture had been rearranged. Naturally, I was okay with it,” she said.

After a short stay of just a few days, Mankus returned to Poland, deciding to stay in Warsaw for the safety and education of her children. When asked what she missed most about Ukraine, she took a moment to reflect before responding in earnest, “What I miss the most is actually the simple routine of waking up every morning, walking over to the refrigerator, seeing what’s inside, and thinking about what kind of breakfast to prepare. I really miss making my own sunny-side-up eggs.”

Mankus and her children currently live in a Catholic monastery in partnership with Tzu Chi,

**Hanna Mankus (second from left) serves as an interpreter in a Tzu Chi event, working alongside Tzu Chi volunteers to help her fellow Ukrainians.**

COURTESY OF NADYA CHOU

where their three daily meals are provided by the monastery. She expresses her gratitude to all the organizations that have generously provided assistance but can’t help but yearn for the days of her former independence. Still, she says, “If I have a message for my fellow countrymen, it is this: I hope that this war will make us all better, not worse.”

Families and elderly individuals receiving Tzu Chi’s care in Warsaw all participate in charitable activities alongside volunteers. This includes the production of dried fruit to be sent to underserved Ukrainian war zones for the elderly, vulnerable individuals, women, and children who are unable to leave. “In a well-known Ukrainian cartoon, there’s a saying, ‘The way your ship sails depends on how you name it,’” said Mankus. “So, I don’t consider myself a refugee; I see myself as a volunteer.”

In the kitchen of the Tzu Chi Warsaw office, participants of the Dumpling Club scooped dumplings ready to eat out of pots of boiling water. They brushed them with butter or topped them with fried onions before preparing to enjoy them with sour cream—this is the authentic way to savor Ukrainian dumplings. Everyone cheerfully dove in, finding comfort and strength in this traditional dish from their homeland. ❀





Hanna Mankus returned to her hometown of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, in early February this year. The streets were empty and the windows of buildings were either empty or boarded up.

COURTESY OF HANNA MANKUS





PHOTO BY LIU ZI-ZHENG





# Restoring a 500-Year-Old Koran

**By Jessica Yang and Ning Rong**

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of the Program Department of Da Ai TV

*A book restorer works on a 500-year-old handwritten Koran that has suffered damage from bookworms, water submersion, and even fire, aiming to reveal the original appearance of this sacred Islamic scripture.*





“This is undoubtedly the oldest book I’ve ever encountered, exhibiting multiple types of damage typical of old texts, including from insects,” remarked Xu Mei-wen (徐美文). Xu holds a Ph.D. in Library, Information, and Archival Studies from National Chengchi University in Taipei, and serves as a book restorer at Taiwan Book Hospital, an affiliate of the National Taiwan Library, New Taipei City. She

carefully examined what was most likely a 500-year-old handwritten Koran. The cover of the leather-bound tome had become hardened and detached from the main body of the book, displaying the scars of fire, water submersion, burial in soil, and insect infestations. The pages bore traces of blood, mold, mud, flower petals, hair, plant seeds, and insect feces.

“Through deciphering the handwriting and





**An ancient hand-copied manuscript of the Koran, passed down for hundreds of years, displays different handwriting styles and varying shades of ink on its aged hemp paper.**

LIU ZI-ZHENG

studying other elements of the book,” Xu added, “we are inclined to believe that it was transcribed by ten individuals at different times around the 15th or 16th century. The restoration process poses a significant challenge due to the inconsistencies in the ages and colors of the paper used in the book.”

The Koran was found to harbor at least three types of bookworms upon initial examination, necessitating its placement in an anoxic disinfesta-

tion chamber for a week-long treatment to eradicate the insects. Afterwards, Xu carefully brushed each page clean with a soft brush. She then renumbered the 500-plus pages of the handwritten Koran before separating the cover from the body of pages. Next, she performed dry cleaning using an eraser and eraser powder. A lot of care was required, and each step of the delicate restoration was very time-consuming. Xu explained that





## A Tattered Treasure

This Koran's front and back covers each have a large hole (opposite page). Experts speculate that they may have once been adorned with precious stones. The pages themselves showed extensive wear and tear (top photo). The manuscript was infested with three different types of bookworms. There were even what appeared to be insect wings inside the book, later confirmed to be flower petals (left photo). In the eyes of restoration experts, it embodied all the pathological conditions that could afflict a book, resembling a critically ill patient. The Koran is a fundamental Islamic scripture, considered to be the divine revelation of Allah. It serves as the cornerstone of the Muslim faith, providing guidance for Muslims' way of life.

TOP PHOTO AND RIGHT PHOTO ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL TAIWAN LIBRARY



missing even a single step in the meticulous process could jeopardize the outcome.

### Restoring old as old

After the book was taken apart and cleaned, one of the biggest challenges followed—finding an appropriate paper for the restoration effort.

Scientific examination plays a crucial role in restoration. Using a microscope, Xu and her team identified three types of paper used in the Koran. They also observed that the fibers in the paper were remarkably long.

Xu has 15 years of experience in cultural relic restoration and has dedicated years to the study of paper. She possesses extensive knowledge of its history. “The paper-making technology in the Middle East was introduced from China during the Tang Dynasty [618 to 907 CE],” she said. The transmission occurred after a group of skilled Chinese papermakers was captured and brought to the Arab world. “During the Tang Dynasty, paper was made from hemp fibers or bark from the paper-mulberry tree. But paper made from tree bark fibers was uncommon in the Arab world, due to the poor growth of trees in the region. Therefore, we have deduced that this Koran was made from hemp paper.”

Paper is a fundamental element in book restoration, but finding a matching modern paper to use proved to be a formidable task. Xu and her team reached out to various paper mills in an attempt to replicate the desired paper but were left empty-handed—none could produce a similar paper. Just when she was feeling stumped, a fortunate recollection came to her aid: she remembered having once purchased some hemp paper, conveniently stored in the National Taiwan Library’s warehouse.

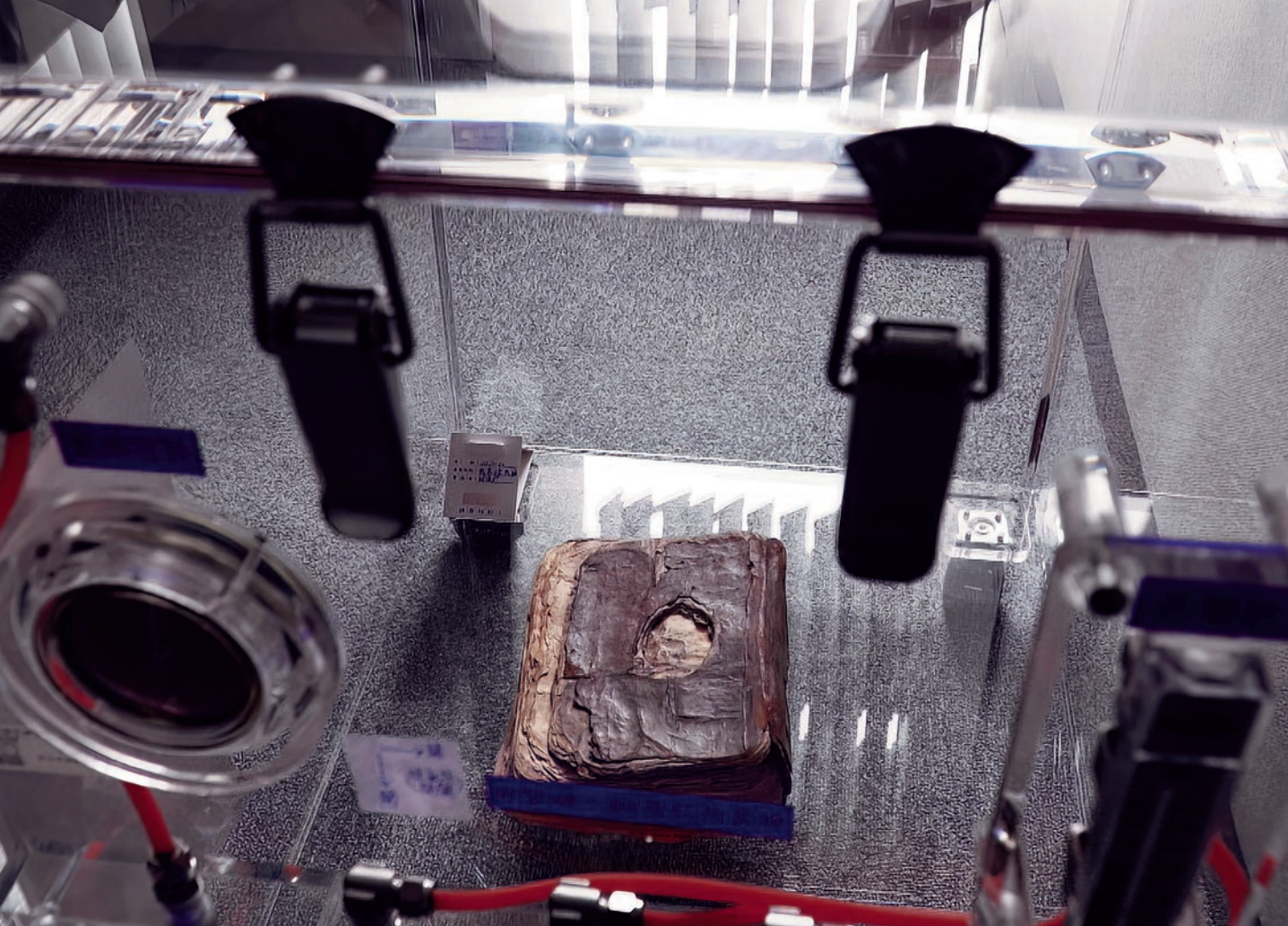
Just like that, in their own warehouse, they found some Japanese hemp paper that closely resembled the thickness and texture of the paper used in the 500-year-old Koran. Moreover, the Japanese hemp paper was produced around the same time period as the Koran’s paper. However, the paper needed to be further processed before it could be used. “The color of the hemp paper was very white,” Xu remarked, “while the color of the Koran’s pages varied in depth. Thus, we needed to find a way to dye our paper to achieve an aged look.” Staying true to Taiwan Book Hospital’s commitment to restoring old books to their aged appearance, Xu took on the task of personally preparing the dye and coloring the hemp paper.

### Painstaking efforts

The National Taiwan Library is nestled beside Number Four Park, in Zhonghe, New Taipei City. The Taiwan Book Hospital is located on the fifth floor of the library. The day we visited, three restoration technicians were meticulously preparing dyes in the Book Hospital. One was fetching water, while another heated dyes in a water bath. Xu, with a dropper and a measuring cup in hand, calculated the precise amount of dye needed. She explained that when they first started to restore the Koran, they estimated the handwritten book to be from the 15th or 16th century. Since the pigments of that time were definitely not modern artificial ones, she made a deliberate choice to experiment with plant dyes and mineral pigments. She recalled, “Initially, I tried using plant dyes and experimented with various plants, such as mixing peppercorns with ink. However, achieving the desired colors remained elusive.” After repeated attempts with plant-based dyes, all unsuccessful,







Xu thought of the unique characteristics of the Middle Eastern region, with its plentiful deserts and scarce oases. Consequently, she transitioned to experimenting with mineral pigments. Through various adjustments, she finally confirmed the correct proportions for the formula.

"In the past, masters in the field relied on their experience to dye paper," she said. "But when it came to restoring the Koran, we didn't have the guidance of such masters. As a result, we had to start everything from scratch."

Searching for the right paper, matching its color, and dying it consumed eight months for Xu. Then began the meticulous work of preserving the text on the Koran. For this, she used a Japanese-made, ultra-thin paper called *Tengucho* and adhered it to the pages of the Koran. Concerned that the moisture from the adhesive might cause the ink to bleed, she slowly pushed, rolled, and pressed the paper onto the pages using wrung-out cotton cloths. This method was a first for Taiwan Book Hospital and the first of its kind in Taiwan.

Xu believes that there is no fixed approach to restoring ancient books. Constant experimenta-

tion with new possibilities is necessary to restore old as old. Restoring ancient books is a significant endeavor in preserving cultural heritage. Currently, Taiwan lacks a comprehensive curriculum for training both Chinese and Western book restoration specialists. Restoration workers have to proactively seek guidance from professionals in various fields, much like Xu, who has sought advice from experts in library knowledge, archival aging, archival restoration, and mounting of paintings and calligraphy.

During the restoration of the centuries-old Koran, Xu added an artistic touch to the endeavor using techniques for mounting paintings. Having learned the art of mounting Chinese paintings or calligraphy on paper, Xu applied this approach to repair the Koran's damaged pages. "I might be the first to treat a book like a painting during the restoration, making each page of the Koran resemble a piece of artwork," she said. Her gentle and meticulous dedication enhanced the artistic value of this ancient Koran.

Xu encountered numerous challenges in the process of restoring the Koran, from cleaning the



Restoring the Koran involved a methodical step-by-step process. First, the ancient scripture was placed inside an anoxic disinfestation chamber (opposite page) and infused with 99.9 percent nitrogen for a week to thoroughly eliminate pests. Then, soft-bristle brushes were used to meticulously remove foreign substances (top right). After that, the pages were renumbered, and the book cover was separated from the body. It was followed by a thorough dry-cleaning process using an eraser, moving in a clockwise circular motion (bottom right).



book, to mending the pages, to creating a cover. She persevered through all the obstacles. But the hard work was not limited to restoring the book. In reality, her inner struggle was quite profound.

### Encountering the Koran

The restoration of the over 500-page Koran proved to be more challenging than Xu had anticipated. “The process was truly agonizing!” she exclaimed. “It took more than two years.” She almost burst into tears when she was nearing completion of the project. “It was a really tough project. I often wondered why I took it on.” At one point, while attempting to restore the cover, she even considered giving up. Nevertheless, she pressed on. “Every time we met with Master Cheng Yen,” she said, “she always showed such respect for us.”

On July 5, 2020, Muslim Tzu Chi volunteer Faisal Hu (胡光中) presented the hand-copied Koran, a cherished piece with over 500 years of history, to Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. The book had been discovered by Hu in an antique books and cultural relics market in Istanbul, Türkiye. While perusing the Koran, the Master noticed that the paper had turned yellow and brittle, and insects were emerging from it. Thus, she conceived the idea of restoration. The Master said after receiving the book, “Although I cannot understand the words in this Koran, its antiquity brings me great joy. Even though our religions are different, our core principles likely share similarities, offering educational and humanitarian value. Therefore, I am enthusiastic about its preservation.” With the assistance of Faisal Hu and another Tzu Chi volunteer, Wu Ying-mei (吳英美), the Koran was delivered to Taiwan Book Hospital for restoration.

Master Cheng Yen’s respect for other religions and selfless Great Love deeply touched Xu.



Although not a Buddhist or Muslim, Xu approached the restoration with great reverence for the scripture. She refrained from eating pork and often engaged in inner dialogues with the Koran, feeling as if an unseen force was guiding her forward.

The most challenging task in the restoration of the Koran was restoring the cover. “At first, I wondered whether we should restore the cover at all,” Xu shared. “It was in such bad shape—the leather had hardened and badly cracked. I knew that Master Cheng Yen is a vegetarian and avoids using animal leather. However, if we were to have opted for PU [polyurethane] leather for the cover restoration, we wouldn’t have achieved the same authenticity.” Speaking of this, she expressed gratitude to Master Cheng Yen for her trust in their team and her respect for their expertise. “It really gave us strength to press ahead with the restoration.”

Shortly after the restoration team reported to Master Cheng Yen about the restoration progress





## Painstaking Restoration Process

One of the uses of the translucent and delicate *Tengucho* paper (top photo) is for archival conservation. Xu went to great lengths to import it from Japan and adhered it to the pages of the Koran to protect the text. To achieve the aged appearance of the book, she personally crafted dyes and colored the hemp paper chosen for the restoration (left and bottom photos). She used mineral dyes after repeated experi-







ments and considering the characteristics of the medieval era and the Middle East. The dyed paper was then air-dried naturally (top photo). Various tools like brushes, tweezers, and cotton cloths were carefully used (right, bottom right, and bottom left photos) during the meticulous restoration process.

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE AND BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL TAIWAN LIBRARY







**Master Cheng Yen examines the restored Koran, a labor of dedication by Xu Mei-wen (in profile) and her team.**

COURTESY OF THE TZU CHI FOUNDATION





of the Koran on November 18, 2022, Xu tried a different method of producing a non-leather cover, leading to a breakthrough. Employing the latest technology from the United States, Xu made a new cover using paper instead of leather. The color matching for the new cover was swift, taking “only” two weeks. Then Xu glued the cardboard cover to the original old cowhide cover, bringing the Koran back to its original appearance.

### Cultural heritage

“Why did we dedicate so much time to restoring this ancient book?” Xu asked. “It’s because of its historical significance and the value of the paper. What we undertook was the preservation of cultural heritage. If we failed to properly restore this classic, future generations would have been deprived of the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of these pages, paper, and text.”

Through the restoration of the handwritten Koran, a precious piece of cultural heritage from the 15th or 16th century was brought back to life. The restored Koran is expected to endure for hundreds of more years, possibly a thousand. There’s a heartwarming touch of beauty behind Xu and her team’s dedicated efforts. It now bears witness to the spirit of mutual respect and love among different religions. The act of Master Cheng Yen, a Buddhist, restoring the Islamic scripture reflects a broad and inclusive spirit, leaving a legacy to be remembered and cherished. ❀



**The restoration of the Koran allowed a precious piece of cultural heritage from the 15th or 16th century to be preserved. It will now be appreciated anew by present and future generations. ZHENG YING-HANG**



# A Life of Gratitude and Giving

By Zhang Li-zhu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

*Yang Su is immensely grateful when she wakes up every day. She cherishes each new day as another chance to give of herself and sow seeds of blessings.*

**Y**ang Su (楊素), 82, always wears her gray hair in a ponytail. Despite a petite stature that conveys an impression of delicacy and frailty, her kindness knows no bounds. The acts of goodwill she performs rival those of individuals much younger than she is. Sometimes, she ventures out with friends as early as just after three in the morning to pick sweet potato leaves, which she then delivers to an orphanage to supplement the meals for the children there. She has a warm-hearted nature, so whenever she learns of a family facing hardship, she promptly reports their situation to Tzu Chi for assessment and assistance. She is frequently seen cycling around her community, visiting her neighbors. In fact, she is such a well-known presence in her neighborhood that she has earned the honorary title of an unofficial community leader.

Everyone in Tzu Chi who knows her affectionately refers to her as “Ah Po” (Grandma). Despite her advanced age and illiteracy, whenever her team leader informs her about any tasks to do, she readily agrees to lend a hand. This may include activities such as cleaning Tzu Chi facilities, participating in recycling work, cooking for Tzu Chi events, or chanting the Buddha’s name for the deceased.

Every Saturday morning, at around five o’clock, she arrives at the Tzu Chi Daya Recycling Station in Taichung, central Taiwan, to sort recycling. On the day I interviewed her for this article, she proudly showcased the clothes she was wearing, explaining that they were all obtained from

the recycling station. Pointing to her sneakers, she exclaimed, “I found these shoes at the recycling station too, and they fit perfectly! I really like them.” Taking out another pair of shoes, she added, “These ones are almost brand-new, and I treasure them too much to wear them. They are another precious find from the recycling station!”

The clothes worn by her twin grandchildren and the winter comforters they use are all recycled as well. “I mend discarded and worn-out comforters with needle and thread, then slip them into clean covers,” she explained. “This way, my grandchildren have warm comforters to keep them cozy in the cold winter. They really appreciate the comforters I prepare for them.”

Due to her age and the responsibility of raising her twin grandchildren, Yang Su often struggles to make ends meet. However, she politely declined when her fellow volunteers suggested applying for financial assistance from Tzu Chi on her behalf—she felt that there were other families in greater need. She wakes up early every day, with a heart filled with gratitude. “When I open my eyes and realize I am still breathing, I express my thanks to the bodhisattvas for granting me another day. I’m grateful for another day to give of myself and sow blessings.”

## **Cherishing and sharing food**

Yang serves as a cleaning volunteer two days a week at the Tzu Chi Daya office. On the days she does, she often treats everyone to sweet potato buns, a traditional delicacy she makes herself. She







wisely avoids food waste by collecting unwanted sweet potatoes from the fields to make her buns. Her fellow volunteers contribute ingredients such as mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and tofu skin for the fillings. The delightful taste of her sweet potato buns captured the attention of her team members, who recommended her for an appearance on a cooking show that aired on Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV. Despite the recognition, Yang remained humble. "I'm more than happy to create delicious food. It brings joy to everyone and allows me to form good affinities with them," she said.

The octogenarian cherishes and values food, always doing her best to prevent any from going to waste. Once, a farmer planted daikon radishes during a fallow period of his paddy fields and generously donated the vegetables to Tzu Chi. Yang and a group of volunteers diligently harvested the radishes under the scorching sun, then meticulously prepared and sun-dried them, transforming them into dried radishes. She emphasized, "We must race against the sun to ensure that the 3,000 kilograms [6,615 pounds] of radishes do not spoil. It would be a shame to let them go to waste."

She has such a deep appreciation for food, she couldn't bear the thought when she learned that the remaining food from lunches at an elementary school was being discarded as kitchen waste. Approaching a director at the school, she made a plea, "Please save the leftovers for me!" With the school's approval, she began collecting leftovers at the school. She packages the leftovers into bags, and promptly delivers them to Tzu Chi care recipients in the community. "I'm not afraid of facing ridicule for asking for leftovers," she said. "My only wish is to prevent food from being wasted and to help more families avoid hunger."

Her fellow volunteers, aware of the difficult life she leads, always send leftover snacks from the Daya Recycling Station to her home. But instead of keeping the food solely for herself and her family, she divides it and delivers the majority of it to Tzu Chi care recipients in the neighborhood. When asked why she didn't keep more for her grandchildren, she replied, "Because I have endured hardship and poverty. Whenever I have the chance, I must practice giving and generosity."

### **Her earlier years**

"Walking to where the waters end, I sit and watch the rising clouds." This verse by Chinese poet Wang Wei (王維, 692-761) aptly describes

how Yang approaches her life, with its ups and downs. In the face of challenging circumstances, when it appears that there is no way forward, she never loses hope but instead embraces whatever comes her way with a philosophical attitude.

Yang was born in 1941 into a farming family in Ruisui Township, Hualien, eastern Taiwan. She was one of ten children. From an early age, she worked alongside her family, tending to crops such as sweet potatoes, sugarcane, pineapples, and peanuts. Their livelihood as farmers was at the mercy of the unpredictable weather, making it challenging for them to have three meals a day. Basic necessities were always scarce. The family's strained finances meant that Yang never had the chance to pursue an education, nor did she ever dare to ask for such an opportunity. At the age of 20, she followed in her aunt's footsteps and became a mortuary beautician, facing the deceased every day. This particular experience granted her an understanding early on of the impermanent nature of life.

When she was 24, she made a career change and began learning dressmaking in a sewing shop. After she had worked there for some time, the shop owner, having taken a liking to her, arranged for her to marry her younger brother. (Such arranged marriages were common in Taiwan at that time.) Yang recalled, "Fifty years ago, brides were usually carried in palanquins to the families they were married into, but I rode an ox-drawn cart to my future husband's home!" She had never even met the man whom she married. He lived in a neighboring village and was six years her senior. Entering her new home, she discovered how simple and spare it was. Only then did she realize that she had married into a very poor family.

She grew vegetables, raised chickens, worked as a domestic helper, and chopped firewood in the mountains, all while caring for their three daughters and one son. Making a living in the remote region of Hualien was difficult, so five years after their marriage the couple took on jobs as longshoremen at Keelung Port in northern Taiwan. They took their son with them and entrusted their three daughters to the care of their grandmother. Working at the port, they managed to save some money over the course of several years. With their savings, they purchased land but eventually sold it to enter into a partnership with a relative to manufacture and export chopsticks. Later, they struck out on their own, but their business encountered limited success.



**Yang Su cherishes food. She collects unwanted sweet potatoes from the fields, prepares sweet potato buns with them, and generously shares the buns with her fellow volunteers.**

CHEN LI-XUE





The couple's eldest daughter, Chen You-fang (陳優芳), born in 1965, reminisced about that time: "Our family was involved in manufacturing chopsticks for export when I was in elementary school, but we didn't make much profit from it. My father later switched to subcontracting the production of badminton racket components. The economy was good at the time, and Dad's business flourished, generating a significant income." She explained that her father even established a factory in Malaysia and had plans to relocate the entire family to that country. Unfortunately, he fell seriously ill before the plan could materialize.

When Yang's husband became sick, her illiteracy left her incapable of managing his business, which was eventually passed on to their 32-year-old son. Her son worked hard to keep the business afloat, but the unscrupulous closure of one of his suppliers' factories left him saddled with a massive debt. Following a divorce from his Malaysian wife, the weight of the debt became unbearable, prompting him to flee to escape the burden. His twin sons were just three years old at the time. The responsibility for raising them thus fell to Yang. Fortunately, her daughters considerably eased her burden by sharing the living expenses.

### The impermanence of life

Lin Shu-zhen (林淑真) has known Yang for 33 years. She once worked at the couple's factory in Taiwan. She spoke warmly about Yang and her husband, saying, "The tremendous generosity and kindness they showed me are difficult to put into words. My family was facing financial struggles during my time at their factory, and I would often bring my three-year-old daughter to work with me. Aware of my situation, they not only paid me more than what was owed for my work, but also provided advance payments on my salary to help cover our daily expenses."

In 1991, Yang's husband suffered a stroke in Malaysia. The family arranged for a private plane to bring him back to Taiwan. He remained bedridden for ten years before eventually passing away. The day after his funeral, Lin Shu-zhen, who had begun volunteering for Tzu Chi by that time, approached Yang and extended an invitation, "Come! I'll take you to chant the Buddha's name at a funeral." (Tzu Chi volunteers offer this chanting service to bring peace to the souls of the departed and provide solace to the grieving families.) While Lin's intention was to help Yang through the grieving process, Yang felt taken

aback and angry, seeing her invitation as insensitive to her emotional state.

When Yang attended the funeral, she experienced a surprising and profound realization during the chanting session, that everything in the world is impermanent and subject to change. She recognized that her husband's passing was a part of the natural order. Instead of immersing herself in sorrow, she resolved to transform her grief into blessings for her late husband and let go of her attachment to him. She reminded herself not to dwell on the past or shed excessive tears but to embrace life fully and make meaningful contributions.

After the funeral, she began wholeheartedly participating in Tzu Chi activities. She joined other volunteers in making and selling rice dumplings and cakes to support the foundation's disaster relief efforts. Additionally, she enthusiastically helped sell steamed buns to raise money for the construction of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital in central Taiwan. Her dedication touched many people, inspiring them to make purchases. Almost every day, she had to deliver ordered buns to homes on her scooter.

Upon hearing Master Cheng Yen's call to donate blood and save lives, she was inspired to do so regularly. She continued this practice until the age of 65 when a nurse from the blood donation bus informed her, "You're too old to donate blood anymore." This news left her deeply disappointed.

In addition to being an active volunteer, Yang shared about Tzu Chi whenever she met someone. In 2007, volunteer Yan Su-pen (顏素盆) encouraged her to undergo training to become a certified volunteer. Yang took her suggestion and obtained her certification the following year.

Yang is known for being proactive in seeking out volunteer opportunities, finding joy in her service. If a few days pass without her receiving any volunteer service notifications, she phones her team leader, Liao Hui-qi (廖惠圻), and says, "Please don't disregard this old lady simply because of her age. Being a Tzu Chi volunteer brings me immense joy. Please don't leave me without work to do."

In fact, Yang is far from idle. Besides her volunteering, she supports her grandchildren by working as a cleaning lady in the morning and a dishwasher at a restaurant in the evening. She often finishes her shifts late at night and returns home exhausted, sometimes even dozing off with her head on the table. Her grandchildren deeply



appreciate her dedication and express their gratitude, saying, "Grandma, we will definitely take good care of you in the future."

Yang said, "I'm not afraid of hard work. I'm willing to take on any job as long as it is legal and brings in income." She has found a spiritual home in Tzu Chi, and her grandsons are a source of strength for her. For her, every opportunity that arises, whether it be work or volunteer service, is a blessing that allows her to contribute and enrich

her life journey. As she embraces the spirit of gratitude and giving, her remarkable journey of service and selflessness continues to inspire those around her. ❁

**Everything Yang Su (seated on the left) wears in this photo is recycled, including her rain boots. When it comes to cherishing things, she is a role model for the volunteers at the Tzu Chi Daya Recycling Station in Taichung, central Taiwan.**





# Tzu Chi Events Around the World



## Mozambique

In March 2019, Cyclone Idai wrought havoc in Mozambique, with Sofala Province being one of the hardest-hit areas. In the education sector alone, over 500 schools in the province suffered damage. The following year, Tzu Chi launched initiatives to construct new homes for survivors and provide assistance in rebuilding 23 schools. This past June marked the successful completion of reconstruction efforts in three primary schools.

Tzu Chi's school construction project commenced in July 2020, and soon encountered challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and additional cyclones. Nonetheless, new buildings in three schools have now been completed. The new classrooms built by Tzu Chi are well-ventilated, enjoy ample natural light, and are designed to withstand cyclones. Students no longer have to be sent home because of rain or strong winds.

One of the three schools, Escola Primária Completa de Kura, was almost entirely destroyed by Idai. Afterward, classes were held under trees or within improvised structures constructed from tree branches and canvas. Tzu Chi built nine steel-rein-

**In 2019, Cyclone Idai devastated Escola Primária Completa de Kura, a primary school in Sofala Province, Mozambique. Thanks to Tzu Chi's new classrooms, students now have a sturdy place for their classes.**

CAI RUI-HE

forced concrete classrooms, in addition to other facilities, for the school. Now, teachers and students can conduct and attend classes in the sturdy classrooms. The school's student population has seen a substantial increase, from just over 500 four years ago to now exceeding 900. Students cheerfully said that with the new classrooms, even during rainfall, their books remain dry, allowing them to study in peace until the end of the school day.

Local residents celebrated with songs and dances during the inauguration ceremony for the three schools. Lourenço Ferreira Bulha, the governor of Sofala Province, expressed gratitude to Tzu Chi, saying, "These schools are now not just places for education but can also serve as shelters in times of disaster. On behalf of the people of Sofala Province, I extend our heartfelt thanks!"



## The Philippines

Tzu Chi Philippines conducted a free clinic in Davao City, Mindanao, from July 20 to 22, totaling 2,750 patient visits. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the first medical service event Tzu Chi Philippines had held outside of Manila in the past three years.

The volunteer team arrived at Davao Chong Hua High School equipped with comprehensive medical equipment, offering services in dentistry, general medicine, and pediatrics. As part of this mission, goiter and hernia surgeries were conducted at Lanang Premiere Doctors Hospital. General surgeries in the Philippines typically cost between 80,000 and 120,000 pesos (US\$1,415-2,120), making them a luxury for economically disadvantaged residents.

Residents from nearby towns demonstrated their pressing need for medical care by queuing outside Davao Chong Hua High School as early as four in the morning. The dental department was particularly busy. Children expressed their gratitude with enthusiastic thumbs-ups after receiving treatment for their dental issues.

Rizza Ramos Arboleda, a 40-year-old housewife and mother of three, was among those who benefited from the free clinic. Her husband

worked as a driver. She shared that when her doctor diagnosed her with goiter, she was disheartened because she couldn't afford the required surgery. When she saw a poster promoting the Tzu Chi free clinic in her village, she promptly applied for the service. "I'm so happy you provide free surgery for patients like me," she said, wiping away her tears. "I'm truly happy."

Nathaniel Glenn Gupana, a 22-year-old university student majoring in multimedia arts, was another recipient of the free surgery. The young man had been dealing with a hernia since elementary school, and his main concern now was how it was affecting his passion for filmmaking. Handling heavy camera equipment had become a challenge. "I truly needed to undergo surgery to rectify my hernia problem," he said. "I never expected to be one of the beneficiaries of the free clinic. Even my parents were thrilled for me." With his condition resolved through the free clinic, he is now free to pursue his dream with renewed enthusiasm.

**A volunteer offers care to a surgery patient during a free clinic event held by Tzu Chi Philippines from July 20 to 22, 2023.**

COURTESY OF TZU CHI PHILIPPINES





## Guatemala

In July, heavy rainfall triggered landslides and rising lake waters in La Barca, Amatitlán, forcing residents to evacuate. Tzu Chi volunteers conducted a disaster assessment on July 13 to determine how to help survivors.

A team of volunteers traversed muddy terrain and climbed over large rocks to assess the situation. During their visit, they coincidentally encountered Mainor Orellana, the mayor of Amatitlán. The mayor suggested that Tzu Chi provide canned food so that people wouldn't have to cook, as they didn't have stoves.

Recognizing the urgent need for cooking equipment, volunteers held a distribution on July 18, just five days later, at a cultural center in Amatitlán. They provided gas cylinders, stoves, blankets, multi-purpose folding beds, and instant noodles. Each household also received 500 Guatemalan quetzales (US\$65). This distribution reached 44 households.

During the distribution, volunteer Luo Su-zhen (羅素珍) shared the heartwarming story behind the creation of the multi-purpose folding bed, which was developed because Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, couldn't bear to see disaster survivors sleeping on damp ground in tents on rainy days. Luo explained that the beds were made from recycled plastics, emphasizing their durability and eco-friendliness.

Mayor Orellana personally visited the distribution site, tried one of the multi-purpose folding

beds, and assisted with the distribution. Even traffic police officers pitched in, using small trucks to help aid recipients transport their supplies.

Survivors vividly recalled the terrifying moments of the disaster when mud inundated their homes late at night. They were compelled to escape in small boats and took temporary shelter in the city. The help from Tzu Chi will help ease their burden during this difficult time while they contemplate how to repair or rebuild their homes. ❁

**On July 18, 44 households in La Barca, Amatitlán, received cash, gas cylinders, stoves, multi-purpose folding beds, and other items.**

WU CI TIAN



**Tzu Chi volunteers assess damage in La Barca, Amatitlán, after heavy rains caused landslides in the area.**

WU CI TIAN





# Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

## TAIWAN

**Hualien: Headquarters**  
Tel: 886-3-8266779  
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**Taipei: Tzu Chi  
Humanitarian Center**  
Tel: 886-2-28989000  
Fax: 886-2-28989994

## ARGENTINA

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Fax: 54-11-43140252

## AUSTRALIA

**Brisbane**  
Tel: 61-7-32727938  
Fax: 61-7-32727283

**Gold Coast**  
Tel: 61-7-55717706  
Fax: 61-7-55717703

**Melbourne**  
Tel: 61-3-98971668  
Fax: 61-3-98974288

**Perth**  
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

**Sydney**  
Tel: 61-2-98747666  
Fax: 61-2-98747611

## BRAZIL

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Fax: 55-11-55391683

## BRUNEI

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## CANADA

**Edmonton**  
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**Montreal**  
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Fax: 1-514-2889152

**Toronto**  
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1-905-9471182  
Fax: 1-416-9002048

**Vancouver**  
Tel: 1-604-2667699  
Fax: 1-604-2667659

## DOMINICAN REP.

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## GUATEMALA

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## HONG KONG

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Fax: 852-28937478

## INDONESIA

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## JAPAN

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Fax: 81-3-32035674

## JORDAN

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## LESOTHO

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## MALAYSIA

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**Kedah**  
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Fax: 60-3-62563801

**Melaka**  
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Fax: 60-6-2812796

**Penang**  
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Fax: 60-4-2261013

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## MOZAMBIQUE

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## MYANMAR

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## NETHERLANDS

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## NEW ZEALAND

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## PARAGUAY

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**Durban**  
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**Gauteng**  
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**Ladysmith**  
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**Boston**  
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Fax: 1-617-4314484

**Cerritos**  
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Fax: 1-562-9261603

**Chicago**  
Tel: 1-630-9636601  
Fax: 1-630-9609360

**Cleveland**  
Tel/Fax: 1-440-6469292

**Columbus**  
Tel: 1-614-4579215  
Fax: 1-614-4579217

**Dallas**  
Tel: 1-972-6808869

**Detroit**  
Tel/Fax: 1-586-7953491

**Fresno**  
Tel/Fax: 1-559-2984894

**Hawaii**  
Tel: 1-808-7378885  
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## Houston

Tel: 1-713-2709988  
Fax: 1-713-9819008

**Indianapolis**  
Tel: 1-317-5800979

**Kansas**  
Tel: 1-913-3976517

**Las Vegas**  
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**Long Island**  
Tel: 1-516-8736888  
Fax: 1-516-7460626

**Los Angeles Northwest**  
Tel: 1-818-7277689  
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**Los Angeles West**  
Tel: 1-310-4735188  
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**Madison**  
Tel: 1-608-2687692

**Miami**  
Tel: 1-954-5381172  
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## VIETNAM

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# Explore the All-New Website of *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*



The redesigned official *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* website offers an enhanced user experience and improved visual presentation. It provides comfortable reading across mobile phones, tablets, and computers, ensuring that you can stay informed of Tzu Chi's latest updates no matter where you are.