

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Loving Stores

Gathering Places for Goodness





Impermanence is a fundamental truth of our world. Master Cheng Yen teaches us to hold this truth in our hearts, cherish those around us, and commit to doing good, offering a pathway to transcend life's uncertainties.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

Create Blessings, Mitigate Disasters

Translated by Teresa Chang

“**T**he world is impermanent and the land is fragile.” The truth of this statement by the Buddha was borne out on the morning of April 3, when Taiwan was jolted by a sudden tremor—a massive earthquake measuring 7.2 in magnitude—leaving everyone deeply unsettled. As the tectonic plates shifted, the ground surged, mountains split, and rocks cascaded down. Nature demonstrated its formidable might, rendering the earth as fragile as tofu. In this world, no place is truly secure. Compared to the power of nature, humans are truly insignificant. Instead of thinking, “I’m strong and tough. I’m not afraid,” let us hold nature in reverence, stay vigilant, and pray devoutly for a safer world.

According to news reports, furniture in many homes was displaced or fell over as a result of the tremor. Tzu Chi volunteers likely experienced the same impacts as others in their own homes, but they put the welfare of others before themselves, swiftly mobilizing to provide relief and organize distributions. I’ve always been deeply grateful to this group of real-life bodhisattvas. I cherish and hold them in high regard. I hope everyone in Tzu Chi does the same, valuing and supporting one another, particularly as some Tzu Chi volunteers are older and might be living alone or have only their elderly spouses to depend on. Those living nearby should visit their homes to assess post-earthquake conditions and offer assistance if needed. At the same time, don’t forget the disadvantaged families in your community. Visit them more frequently in the aftermath of the quake to provide support and help ensure their peace of mind.

This earthquake is a lesson from heaven and earth, educating us about suffering, emptiness, and impermanence. If we came through it safely, we should feel grateful—not just for our own safety, but also for the opportunity to continue making a difference in the world. At the same time, take to heart the reality of life’s impermanence. Birth, aging, illness, and death are all inevitable parts of life. No matter how close we are to our family or friends, the time will come when we have to part ways. So, let’s cherish every moment we have together and every instance of feeling loved and cared for. Let’s allow gratitude to fill our hearts.

Continuous aftershocks have been felt since the

strong earthquake struck. Experts attribute this to the ongoing adjustment of the earth, indicating instability. While we keep a close watch on these aftershocks, it’s crucial to maintain inner calm. Now that this major event has occurred, the priority is to solicit aid and inspire love to help those impacted. It’s not merely about raising funds; it’s about seizing the opportunity to cultivate and ignite compassion. When we all come together in love, we can provide timely assistance to those in need during times of suffering.

We all live together in this world, our thoughts and actions accumulating to shape our collective karma. When negative deeds or thoughts outweigh the positive, goodness weakens. The opposite is also true. Through increased engagement in benevolent acts, the power of goodness will strengthen, creating harmony in the world. Fostering kindness and actively contributing to the world’s well-being is essential. By sowing blessings in this way, we can help turn misfortune around and ensure that peace prevails at all times.

I’ve often talked lately about “learning” and “awakening” (to life’s truths). I encourage everyone to cultivate a heart of purity and learn through the act of giving, thereby deepening their understanding of life’s true principles as taught by the Buddha and helping themselves grow. Have faith in the Buddha’s teachings. The Enlightened One taught us to never do evil and to always do good. When you practice virtue and give with sincerity, you’ll have the power to inspire and change lives.

Tzu Chi will soon enter its sixth decade. From the early days of 30 housewives each saving 50 NT cents (about 1 U.S. cent) daily to help those in need to the present, every step of our journey has been solid and unwavering. This has brought me immense comfort. When I look at the world map, I see Tzu Chi volunteers spread across various countries, always ready to lend a helping hand where it’s needed. Working alongside so many real-life bodhisattvas in serving the needy is the most precious aspect of my life. Natural disasters, conflicts, poverty, and illness—there are countless souls suffering worldwide in need of assistance. One person alone cannot alleviate all suffering, and a few individuals lack the strength. It requires everyone coming together and joining forces. Let’s endeavor to give our best. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

May 2024



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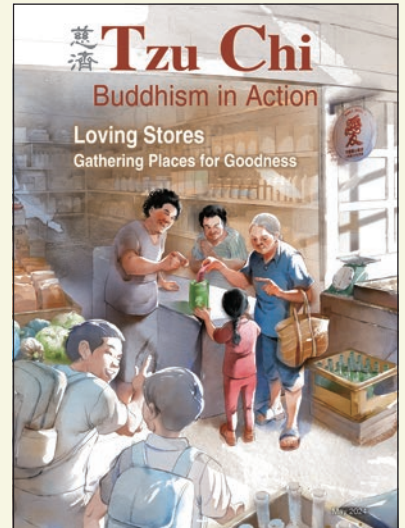
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right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

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Tzu Chi Chronicles

Notable Highlights From Feb. 15 to Apr. 15, 2024



Charity



Medicine

Japan

- **2/16 to 3/14** - Volunteers continued providing hot meals and implementing a work relief program in the quake-stricken zone on the Noto Peninsula, while negotiating cash distribution relief.

India

- **2/25** - Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia have been stationed in Bodh Gaya for a year, carrying out charity work. In late February, they commenced the construction of 36 homes in Silaunja for needy households.

Kenya

- **2/26 to 3/1** - Tzu Chi representatives attended the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly amidst global environmental challenges, advocating for sustainable solutions and sharing Tzu Chi's efforts to protect the planet.



The United States



- **3/8** - Tzu Chi USA initiated distributions of cash cards to victims of a wildfire in Texas on March 8. The conflagration was the state's largest-ever wildfire and the second-largest in US history.



Hong Kong



- **3/16** - Tzu Chi Hong Kong inaugurated a traditional Chinese medicine clinic in Yau Ma Tei on December 18, 2023. Following a three-month trial operation, an official opening ceremony took place on March 16. Besides outpatient services, the clinic collaborates with community organizations and charities to offer free medical services to the underprivileged.



Taiwan



- **4/3** - A strong earthquake hit on April 3. Tzu Chi volunteers quickly mobilized to provide aid. The first large-scale emergency cash distribution took place the day after the temblor, followed by four more distributions, benefiting 1,479 families. Housing repairs began soon afterwards.
- ★ For more information, please refer to pages 6 to 17.



The Philippines



- **4/4 to 4/6** - One hundred and seventy-three medical workers and support volunteers traveled to the province of Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao to offer free medical services. Operating rooms provided by a government hospital and a gymnasium capable of accommodating 10,000 people were utilized for this mission. Each day, 250 security personnel maintained order. Services included dentistry, pediatrics, ophthalmology, internal medicine, and surgery, benefiting a total of 4,125 individuals.



Mozambique



- **4/13** - Cyclone Filipo struck in mid-March, affecting 54,000 people and damaging over 10,000 homes. Tzu Chi volunteers from the capital city of Maputo visited 8,974 households to compile aid recipient rosters. Distributions began on April 13, providing essentials such as food, soap, mosquito nets, water purification agents, and more. Additional seed packages were distributed in farming areas. By April 28, 7,828 families had received aid.

Taiwan's April 3 Hualien Earthquake

Tzu Chi's Response

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

As Taiwan grappled with the aftermath of the April 3 earthquake, Tzu Chi brought solace and aid to those reeling from the disaster's impact.



The Uranus Building in Hualien City, Hualien County, partially collapsed during an earthquake that hit Taiwan on April 3, prompting the deployment of search and rescue workers.

LUO MING-DAO

ISARA
INTERNATIONAL
SEARCH & RESCUE
ALLIANCE



Architectural details of the top section of the red brick building, featuring a white, horizontally-slatted tower structure.

Windows of the upper curved section of the red brick building.

The large, curved glass facade of the red brick building, which is heavily damaged and filled with debris, reflecting the surrounding environment.



黒金通
全ての始まり

中山路

中山路



On the morning of April 3, Taiwan was rocked by a formidable magnitude 7.2 earthquake. Eastern Hualien County, located near the epicenter, bore the brunt of the impact. Some buildings partially collapsed or were rendered uninhabitable. Taroko National Park, a popular tourist destination, suffered devastation from landslides and rockfalls. In response, the authorities acted swiftly, mobilizing search and rescue teams to aid affected areas.

In the immediate aftermath, the Tzu Chi Foundation set up operations at the Hualien County Government Disaster Response Center, the only civilian organization to do so. Deploying manpower and resources, Tzu Chi worked with the authorities and other NGOs, providing comprehensive support to affected residents and assisting in frontline rescue efforts.

Aiding in airlift operations

Household items in numerous buildings across northern Hualien were toppled or strewn about during the intense shaking of the earthquake. Residents also fell as they sought refuge. Over 1,100 injuries were recorded across Taiwan. Among the injured was Mayor Wei Jia-yan (魏嘉彦) of Hualien City, the county seat. “A wardrobe

fell and hit my foot,” recounted the mayor, “luckily no bones were broken.” Using a crutch due to his injured left foot, he vividly showed the quake’s impact as he oversaw relief operations in the aftermath.

“Some quake victims required surgery or hospitalization,” said Tzu Chi volunteer Li Si-bei (李思蓓), who works at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. “I enlisted fellow volunteers to provide support for them, bringing the love of Master Cheng Yen and volunteers from around the world.” Li herself was affected by the temblor, but after instructing her two daughters to tidy up the fallen items at home, she quickly made her way to the hospital to assist injured patients.

Li vividly remembered the arrival of the first eight patients at the hospital, among them a woman named Chen. Ms. Chen had been preparing to deliver vegetables she had grown herself to a friend when the earthquake struck. She suffered a fractured hip bone when she was caught under a fallen cabinet at her front door. “Unable to wait for an ambulance,” Li said, “Ms. Chen hailed a taxi to the hospital. She was in such pain when she arrived that she couldn’t even put weight on her feet; an emergency room physician had to carry her in.”

The 2024 Hualien Earthquake

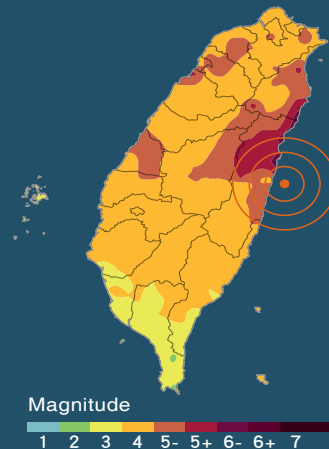
Overview of the Disaster:

At 7:58 a.m. on April 3, 2024, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck off the eastern coast of Taiwan, marking the most significant seismic event in Taiwan in 25 years. The disaster claimed 16 lives, left 1,155 injured, and resulted in three people missing. The earthquake also caused surface displacement in Taiwan, with a maximum uplift of approximately 45.1 centimeters and horizontal displacement of about 8.1 centimeters. Over 1,100 aftershocks occurred in the 20 days following the quake. Taroko National Park, one of the hard-hit areas, announced an indefinite closure.

Aid Provided by Tzu Chi:

- Emergency cash: 1,479 households
- Consolation cash: 46 individuals
- Gift packs: 1,725
- Hot meals: 6,256 servings
- Drinking water: 105 boxes
- Folding beds provided: 530 occasions
- Privacy cubicles provided: 105 occasions
- Blankets: 424
- Slated housing repairs: 215
- Volunteer shifts: 4,157
- Scope of fundraising efforts: 46 countries and regions

Last updated: April 22, 2024





Landslides in Taroko National Park blocked roads and left hundreds of people stranded in mountainous regions. With vehicles unable to navigate through the terrain, helicopters were used for transporting people and supplies. The Hualien County Police Department reached out to the Ministry of the Interior's National Airborne Service Corps for assistance and also sought support from Tzu Chi to provide relief supplies.

"We have never been involved in helicopter airlifts before," remarked Tzu Chi volunteer Xu Zhi-xian (許志賢), a retired police officer. "This is the first time we've encountered such a situation." As a cadre member of the Hualien chapter of the Tzu Chi Association of Police, Firefighters, and Their Families, Xu maintains regular communication with local law enforcement and firefighters. He helped organize the response after Tzu Chi was requested to provide relief supplies. At 6 a.m. on April 5, equipped with essential supplies, a team of Tzu Chi representatives, led by Dharma Master De Mai (德勸) from the Jing Si Abode and accompanied by the police, set off in three police cars and one truck, heading towards the Taroko helicopter landing pad.

"The first helicopter mission transported nine stranded individuals from Tianxiang [in Taroko National Park]," said Xu, who was part of the Tzu Chi team. "Among them were tourists from Singapore and Hong Kong. They were deeply touched to see Master De Mai and our volunteers

On the afternoon of April 3, Dharma Master Cheng Yen arrived at the site of the collapsed Uranus Building, where she expressed care for the on-site volunteers and rescue workers.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

offering care on-site. Some were moved to tears." Xu noted that over 600 people were trapped in the Taroko area after the earthquake, including tourists, hotel staff, and personnel from the Tianxiang Police Station and the Seventh Special Police Corps, all in need of food, water, and other supplies. The collaboration between Tzu Chi, the Hualien County Police Department, and the Airborne Service Corps facilitated two rounds of airlifts, providing crucial aid until roads were cleared.

Partnerships in action

According to data from the Hualien County Government, the earthquake caused 77 buildings in the county to collapse or become hazardous, affecting over 1,700 households. In response, the county government and township offices established temporary shelters at eight locations, including Huaren Junior High School and Zhonghua Elementary School. Tzu Chi also contributed to the relief efforts.

Lu Hsueh-cheng (呂學正), director of the Comprehensive Planning Office at Tzu Chi's Department of Charity Mission Development,

remarked, “Compared to the February 6 earthquake six years ago, the government’s response this time was so swift it was beyond my imagination. When I arrived at Huaren Junior High School around ten o’clock that morning, personnel from the Ji’an Township Office had already prepared the shelter equipment. The staff was also in place.” He noted that Tzu Chi had strengthened its collaboration with the public sector in this regard over the past two years. For example, they partnered with the Ji’an Township Office last year for disaster response and shelter exercises. Various signage prepared during those exercises proved useful during this crisis too.

Huaren Junior High School played a crucial role in Ji’an Township’s response to the earthquake. Red Cross-provided tents were erected across the playground, while the multifunctional gymnasium, constructed by Tzu Chi for the school seven years ago, offered shelter space equipped with privacy cubicles, folding beds, and blankets—all provided by Tzu Chi—ensuring the

comfort and privacy of displaced residents.

To alleviate post-disaster inconveniences, government agencies and civil organizations dispatched personnel to aid displaced quake victims. At the shelter set up in Zhonghua Elementary School, for example, staff from the National Health Insurance Administration facilitated the reissuance of national health insurance cards for those who fled without them. A telecommunications company installed phones for evacuees to make free local calls, real estate agents coordinated rental matching services, and the military erected field shower tents in a corner of the playground. “Twelve people at most are allowed to shower at one time, with two daily time slots available—one for men and the other for women,” said the responsible officer.

With the generous support of people from all walks of life, the shelters established after the earthquake were well-stocked with essentials. However, despite this touching assistance and regardless of how well-equipped a shelter may



A helicopter (right) collected relief supplies from Tzu Chi early on the morning of April 5; a volunteer (above left) offered care to a foreign tourist who had been stranded in Tianxiang, Taroko National Park, in the aftermath of the quake.

HUANG GUANG-HUA



be, nothing could replace the comfort of one's own home. "There was an elderly man who said he had lost everything and felt utterly despondent," Mayor Wei Jia-yan said. "Our social workers and other colleagues made continuous efforts to uplift his spirits." Speaking of this, the mayor extended special thanks to Professor Gu from Dong Hwa University in Hualien for organizing transportation to take affected residents, including the elderly man, to the university campus in the hope that the beautiful surroundings would provide some comfort.

Empathizing with the plight of quake victims, Tzu Chi enlisted seasoned senior volunteers to work alongside professional social workers and contracted psychologists from health agencies to provide care in shelters. "Our senior volunteers have amassed a wealth of life experience. Drawing from their rich life experiences and guided by Master Cheng Yen's teachings, they are able to provide meaningful emotional support to survivors of the earthquake," remarked Huang Yu-qi

(黃玉琪) from the Disaster Reduction and Prevention Section, Comprehensive Planning Office, the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development. Huang further explained that the volunteers who offered care in shelters had all undergone relevant training, and so they knew how to provide support without causing further harm. The professional psychologists were thus happy to work with them.

Emergency cash distribution

After the earthquake, Tzu Chi provided emergency cash to over 1,400 families in Hualien and northern Taiwan who were forced to evacuate due to damaged homes. Each household received 20,000 to 50,000 New Taiwan dollars (US\$670 to 1,670), depending on family size and the severity of the damage to their homes.

The distribution of emergency cash was carefully planned. Volunteer Wang Xuan-fang (王宣方) from Taipei described the process: quake victims first received assistance with paperwork and





received cash and gifts at a designated area staffed by volunteers and social workers. Then, they were directed to another area where additional volunteers and nuns from the Jing Si Abode provided comfort and listened to anyone willing to express their emotions.

Lai, one of the cash aid recipients, expressed her concerns. Her home suffered severe damage in the quake, and the shop where she worked closed due to slow business, leaving her temporarily unemployed yet obligated to continue making mortgage payments. She also worried about the difficulty of finding suitable rental housing, given the high demand from other quake victims seeking rentals. "For everyone, finding a place to settle down is the top priority; housing is the most urgent matter," she said.

In contrast, another recipient, Hu, who secured housing early, appeared much calmer. Her apartment, located on the fifth floor of a building, sustained minimal damage, but the building itself was deemed unsafe for habitation. To ensure that her mother, who was battling cancer, and her school-going children could maintain a sense of normalcy, she and her husband promptly began searching for a new home. Fortunately, they found a compassionate landlord willing to provide a short-term lease for three months.

"I believed someone would come to help us," Hu remarked, "and that we just needed to wait and take good care of ourselves first." She works at a tutoring center, while her husband is a baker at a supermarket. Both continued working after the quake, with her husband even baking cookies to share with fellow victims. Hu expressed gratitude for the care provided by Tzu Chi and remained hopeful about their situation. "We'll be back on our feet," she affirmed. "We just need some time."

Young people contributing

Students and faculty from Tzu Chi University and the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, both in Hualien, along with members of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association in eastern

The morning after the earthquake, volunteers conducted Tzu Chi's first emergency cash distribution at Dongjing Temple, near the Uranus Building (top, photo by Liu Qiu-ling); Tzu Chi held five large-scale distributions of emergency cash after the temblor, with nuns from the Jing Si Abode and volunteers on-site listening to survivors' accounts of their distress (bottom, photo by Qiu Jun-cheng).

Taiwan, came forward to help survivors in the aftermath of the earthquake too. For example, over 30 students from Tzu Chi University, guided by their teachers, volunteered at Zhonghua Elementary School, Huaren Junior High School, and Hualien Baseball Stadium.

"There was a lot of work to do," noted Yang Jing-yong (楊景湧), a graduate student in the Physical Therapy Department at Tzu Chi University, "from erecting tents, to setting up beds, to preparing items for survivors. We came together and combined our strength to ensure everything ran smoothly." Hailing from Indonesia, Yang felt significant fear during the earthquake, as such events are rare in his hometown. However, he enthusiastically volunteered in the aftermath, dedicating the four-day week-end following the quake (due to Tomb-Sweeping Festival and Children's Day) to relief efforts.

On a rainy day, Yang escorted a quake victim to a parking lot, holding an umbrella. "The home we worked so hard to buy was gone in an instant," lamented the victim, evoking deep empathy in Yang. "Without your help, we'd be lost. We're so grateful to you all." Yang was profoundly touched. "In that moment, I truly felt my value as a human being," he said with emotion.

Lin Shi-feng (林世峰), a Traditional Chinese Medicine student at Tzu Chi University, also volunteered after the quake. Reflecting on his experience, he said: "When the quake struck in the morning, I was shocked and disoriented, but by afternoon, I was volunteering, offering comfort to others while finding solace in the process." He appreciated the valuable experience of transitioning from a victim to a volunteer, overcoming shock by contributing to others' well-being.

Disaster reduction

To minimize the impact of disasters, it's crucial to conduct regular drills and training during normal times. For a place like Taiwan, prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons, preparedness is paramount. After the 2018 Hualien earthquake, the Tzu Chi Foundation and the Hualien County Government signed a memorandum of cooperation to strengthen disaster reduction and relief capabilities. Similar agreements were made with Hualien City and the townships of Xincheng, Xiulin, and Ji'an. As a result, many civil servants in Hualien County responsible for related tasks have attended evacuation and shelter training courses organized by Tzu Chi. Some have even participated in a training program co-orga-



台灣佛教慈濟基金會

TAIWAN BUDDHIST TZU CHI FOUNDATION





Nuns from the Jing Si Abode are pictured in the left photo visiting evacuees at a shelter on the evening of the earthquake (photo by Chen Rong-qin). Tzu Chi volunteers work with personnel from a non-governmental organization to clear folding beds from a shelter about to close (above, photo by Huang Yu-qi).

nized by the county fire department and Tzu Chi and earned disaster management certificates recognized by the Ministry of the Interior.

Xiao Zi-wei (蕭子蔚), head of the Social and Labor Division of Hualien City Government, said: “We’ve even conducted training for members of community development associations. Having gained hands-on experience, everyone was better prepared this time.”

Another noteworthy observation from the recent earthquake is the commendable performance of the six schools in northern Hualien that were part of Tzu Chi’s Project Disaster Reduction. This project was launched to construct new buildings to replace aged or damaged structures in schools in Taiwan. The robustness of the buildings constructed by Tzu Chi at the six schools underscores the foundation’s commitment to disaster reduction efforts.

Lin Min-chao (林敏朝), a consultant for Tzu Chi’s Construction Department, cited the multi-functional gymnasium built by Tzu Chi for Huaren Junior High School as an example. “In general, the safety factor for such buildings is 1.2

times that of other school buildings, but those constructed by Tzu Chi are even higher, reaching 1.7 times.” To enhance natural lighting, the gymnasium’s glass window area was increased. Nevertheless, due to the use of a steel frame structure and lightweight roofing and walls, the seismic resistance remains strong.

“Our goal with the school buildings we construct isn’t just to withstand strong earthquakes but also to serve as evacuation shelters for residents,” Lin asserted.



Distributing emergency cash to affected households, visiting hospitals to comfort the injured, chanting the Buddha’s name for the deceased at funeral homes, and providing relief supplies... After completing the initial phase of emergency relief efforts following the earthquake, which included the tasks mentioned above, Tzu Chi began another phase to aid in rebuilding. In mid-April, discussions were held with the Hualien County Government and the TSMC Charity Foundation to plan reconstruction efforts. Tzu Chi took on the responsibility of repairing homes in the townships of Xincheng, Xiulin, and Ji’an, prioritizing repairs for the homes of vulnerable residents. Expert volunteers from across Taiwan started surveys and repair work on April 18. Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide are also assisting by raising funds to help quake victims rebuild their lives. ❁

Enhancing the Comfort of Their Temporary Homes

Items Developed by Tzu Chi

Photos by Xu Zheng-xiong, Zheng Qi-cong, and Cai Su-mei



Privacy Cubicles

Developed in 2019

Weight: 7.56 kilograms

Material: Fabric made from 280 recycled PET bottles

Features:

- Compact storage, can be unfolded within two minutes
- Can partition space and enhance privacy
- Flame-retardant
- Spring steel frame, no additional support needed after unfolding

Multifunctional Folding Beds

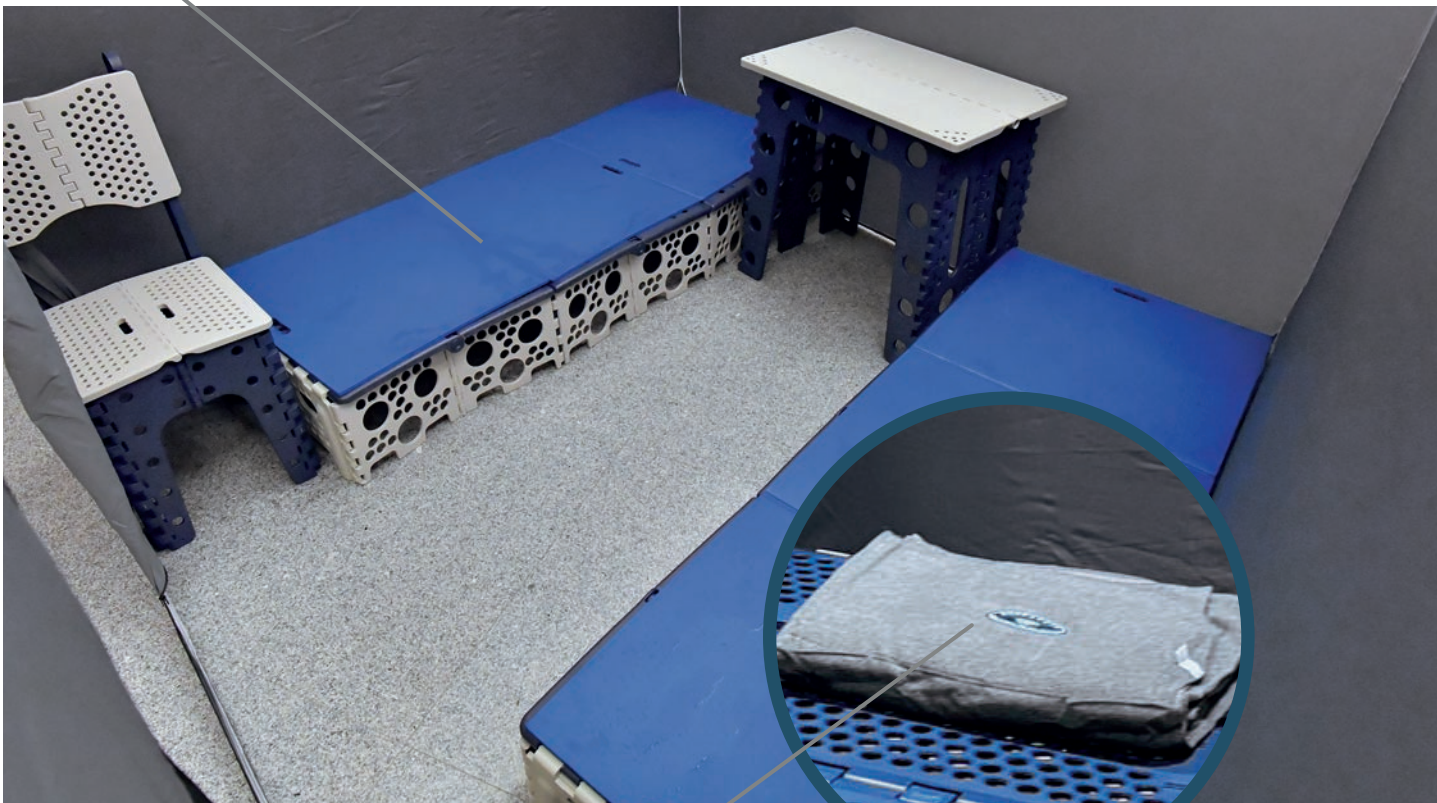
Developed in 2013

Weight: 15 kilograms

Material: Food-grade polypropylene

Features:

- Supports weights of up to 150 kilograms
- Can be unfolded by hand, no assembly tools required
- Hollow design promotes breathability and comfort
- Elevated 30 centimeters above ground level, suitable for damp, humid, or even water-logged environments
- Also available with a folding table and chair



Blankets

Developed in 2006, also available in a thicker version

Weight: 1,809 grams

Material: Fabric made from 67 recycled PET bottles

Features:

- Warm, soft, easy to wash, colorfast, and quick-drying
- Uses a waterless dyeing technology to avoid water pollution caused by traditional fabric dyeing processes; saves water and significantly reduces the secondary environmental impact of chemicals
- One hundred percent made from recycled PET bottles, certified as Cradle-to-Cradle Silver

The Power of Apology and Forgiveness

By Yi Yi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Yan Lin-zhao

*Embracing the courage to apologize or forgive is not easy, but it is rewarding,
leading to peace within yourself and others.*



I was bullied at work many years ago. Back then, the term “bully” didn’t receive much notice in Taiwan, and I didn’t know how to protect myself. I tried to rationalize my mistreatment, comforting myself by thinking that perhaps I owed the colleague something from a past life. I believed that everything would be fine if I could quickly repay my karmic debt by enduring her actions with fortitude. My body, however, was not so willing to submit to that plan.

The prospect of going to work every morning was agonizing for me. I felt a suffocating weight on my chest whenever I reached the entrance to my company. One day, I happened to touch my scalp and felt a bald spot the size of a ten-dollar coin. I was shocked. I was diagnosed with alopecia areata, also known as spot baldness. This was the first time I had heard of this condition, and it was likely triggered by psychological stress.

Coincidentally, I discovered that I was pregnant. I used this as an opportunity to resign, citing the need to take better care of myself during my pregnancy. I thought that leaving that detrimental work environment would solve everything, but I didn’t realize that the emotional wounds I was carrying would be remembered subconsciously.

In the first five years after resigning, I often dreamed that I was arguing with that colleague, venting in my dreams the words I had suppressed in real life. I’d wake up with tears soaking my pillow. I told myself that she was the most terrifying nightmare in my life and that I never wanted to see her again.

For some reason, her attitude toward me changed significantly after I resigned. She would send me birthday wishes every year and greetings on holidays. Perhaps she began to empathize with me because she had to take over my work and finally understood what I had to face on my job. Through a former colleague, I heard that she had taken courses in personal growth and had changed a lot.

Regardless of whether she had changed or not, I still wasn’t ready to face her. Though former colleagues invited me to gatherings many times, I would politely decline if she was going to be there. One day a colleague said to me, “We’re all mothers now; our hearts have softened. We need to find a way to move past the past.” After that comment, I mustered the courage to agree to attend a gathering.

Though five years had elapsed, I was very nervous and uneasy when I met her at the gathering. My smile was polite but trembling slightly.

However, the awkwardness between us gradually dissipated as we laughed and shared our experiences as mothers.

At the end of the occasion, she hugged me goodbye. At that moment, it felt like an electric current ran through my body. Not only had I seen someone I swore I would never see again, but I had even embraced her!

Shortly after returning home, I received a text message from her: “I was so happy to see you today! I’m sorry for being insensible when I was young and hurting the pure and kind you.”

I began to cry when I read her message, unable to hold back. My tears were for the feeling of finally being understood. She had dug a big hole in my heart five years back, and now she was using sincerity, spoonful by spoonful, to fill it. That hug, that text message, helped fill the hole and heal the wounds. The tears were also for deep gratitude.

How many people hurt others without realizing it? How many people lick their wounds alone? I am so fortunate that the person who hurt me was self-aware and had the courage to face what she had done in the past and to sincerely apologize.

The knot in my heart that had always been there disappeared in an instant, replaced by relaxation and joy. In that moment, I knew that we had resolved our past animosity and turned it into good karma!

Recently, I heard Dharma Master Cheng Yen share these words with overseas volunteers: “If there was discord between you and others in the past, reach out to them to restore good affinities. You can call those you had friction with, explain any misunderstandings, and offer apologies. By resolving past grievances, your heart will be at ease, and you will also release yourself. When what needs to be repaid is repaid, all interpersonal entanglements will unravel.”

In life, we sometimes hurt others and sometimes are hurt by others. What we must avoid most of all is bad relationships with others. Think about the day when you are saying farewell to the world. Do you want others to remember you with warmth or with lingering hatred? This reminds me of these wise words: “You must first form good affinities with others before you can attain buddhahood.”

Both apologizing and forgiving require great courage. May we have the resolve to let go of our hatred or animosity, and allow our hearts to be filled only with love. ❀

A Traveler in Tokyo

Text and photo by Yi Yi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

As I watched the homeless people dropping their donations into the collection box, I felt that each one of them was a real-life bodhisattva.

Earlier this year, while on a family trip in Japan, I put on my Tzu Chi uniform and met up with several familiar fellow volunteers in Tokyo. It happened to be one of the days when volunteers from the Tzu Chi Japan chapter distributed hot meals to the homeless at Yoyogi Park. They've been doing this twice a month for 14 years.

Though the distribution hadn't even started, nearly 60 homeless people had already formed a long queue at the park, patiently awaiting their meals. They looked like any other passersby, with somewhat tidy hair and clothes, but seemed a bit weary and lacking in confidence. I recalled seeing homeless individuals wrapped in blankets, sleeping by the roadside near Shibuya Station last night; I wondered if any of them were in this queue.

As we entered the park, I noticed several large trees that had shed all their leaves, leaving bare branches stretching out, adding a hint of coldness to the winter scenery. Volunteers swiftly set up the site, arranging tables, electric cookers, bowls, and utensils. They also hung Tzu Chi flags on trees and tables. There aren't many Tzu Chi volunteers in Tokyo, and some had gone to the quake-stricken zone on the Noto Peninsula in western Japan for relief efforts. But despite the limited manpower, those who remained dutifully ensured the homeless received a warm meal.

Other volunteers and I stood in an orderly manner across from the homeless people before commencing the distribution. Huang Yun-xuan (黃韻璇) took the microphone and greeted everyone in fluent Japanese: "We thank all of you for joining us at the Tzu Chi hot meal distribution site and waiting patiently. Today's menu is rice with assorted ingredients, and we've also prepared ginger soup to keep you warm. We hope everyone takes good care of themselves in this winter

season and avoids catching a cold!"

She continued, saying that a powerful earthquake had struck right on the first day of this year, and Tzu Chi volunteers in Japan had been providing hot meals in the disaster area since January 13, at an evacuation center and hospital in the town of Anamizu, Ishikawa Prefecture. "Seeing the recipients of these meals smiling and expressing their gratitude, all the volunteers serving in the disaster area feel blessed for the opportunity to assist them." She encouraged everyone to help the survivors, emphasizing, "Regardless of the size of your donation, your contributions accumulate and become our strong support; I believe your blessings will reach the quake victims."

After Huang's brief speech, all of us Tzu Chi volunteers took a deep bow. Then some music started playing, and together, the homeless attendees sang the Japanese version of the Tzu Chi song "Prayer." I closed my eyes, immersing myself in the moment with my ears: the sounds of wind, traffic, and birdcalls seemed to fade away, leaving only the heartfelt singing echoing in the expansive Yoyogi Park. I felt the cool air I breathed in, now with a hint of warmth and moisture. The emotional moment made my nose tingle and burn.

When the singing—which served as a form of prayer—concluded, several homeless individuals dropped coins into a donation box held out by a volunteer. One of them carefully retrieved a plastic bag from his backpack, extracted an envelope from it, then withdrew coins from the envelope to deposit into the box. It was evident from how he safeguarded the coins that he treasured them, but now he generously donated them to help the needy. Through their acts of giving, these homeless people transcended their anonymity on the fringe of society, emerging as individuals with loving hearts shining like precious jewels!



The steaming white rice and fragrant assorted vegetable stew prepared by our volunteers were mouth-watering. I was tasked with carrying trays and serving the hot food to the homeless. I only knew a few simple Japanese phrases, but I had remembered one of the key points of our distributions: a 90-degree bow, expressing gratitude to the recipients for allowing us to serve them.

Each time I bowed, I saw the shoes of the homeless attendees—each pair worn and stained with mud. Yet, despite the situation they were in, each of them was like a future buddha to me, teaching me via this distribution the meaning of the Three Spheres of Emptiness. In giving, you don't see yourself as the giver, others as the receivers, or what is given as the gift. We avoid

Homeless people generously donate to aid earthquake victims in the Noto Peninsula during a Tzu Chi hot meal distribution held in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo.

pride in being the helper and instead view helping others as a natural obligation. With the utmost respect, I bowed to them.

Suffering is ever-present in this vast world. Fortunately, there are Tzu Chi volunteers around the world. Like tiny dots of light, they combine their strengths to weave a vast net of compassion, gently catching those in need. When the love within the heart of an aid recipient is ignited, they too can become givers, spreading the spirit of compassion and kindness to others. ❁





Loving Stores

Gathering Places
for Goodness

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Xu Shu-zhen

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

It could be a grocery store, clothing shop, pharmacy, or even a hospital, but they all have one thing in common—they've joined the ranks of Loving Stores, in which Tzu Chi coin banks encourage kindness and donations of small change to help the needy.

In Taiwan, a rich array of physical stores and stalls lining the streets contributes to the convenience of people's lives. Shop owners and their staff, often working long hours, constitute one of the most industrious groups on the island. While busy making a living, over 20,000 vendors and shop proprietors across Taiwan have joined Tzu Chi's Loving Store campaign. They've agreed to place a coin bank on their counters, providing customers with an opportunity to donate their spare change for charitable purposes.

For this campaign, volunteers visit business establishments to enlist participants and return to collect donations. On this day, a small group of volunteers arrived at one of the participating businesses, a restaurant in Luzhou, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. The manager, Ms. Jiang, welcomed the familiar faces and engaged in friendly conversation with them. The topic soon turned to the difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Large banquets were prohibited during the pandemic," Jiang said. "Only five or six people were allowed at each big table, and even then we needed partitions. We truly experienced three tough years." The manager had seen many larger businesses close due to the pandemic, but fortunately, her restaurant persevered until the situation improved and customers returned. But now they faced another challenge: maintaining service quality amidst labor shortages. Running a restaurant is surely no easy task.

"It was really something to survive those three years," remarked volunteer Su Min-hui (蘇敏惠). "Your restaurant became one of the oldest in Luzhou after sailing through the pandemic's challenges." Su thanked Ms. Jiang for her commitment to social good by participating in the Loving Store campaign, despite the difficulties faced in operating a restaurant. She also recommended the restaurant's delicious vegetarian meals to her fel-

low volunteers.

Moving on, the group made its way to a maternal and child clinic. They arrived to find the waiting area buzzing with mothers and babies, and the director, medical staff, and administrative personnel busily attending to their duties. Ms. Zheng, a nurse representing the clinic, joined the Tzu Chi volunteers to count the donations from the coin bank placed in the clinic.

"This coin bank was made from recycled plastic bottles," volunteer Su said. Nurse Zheng expressed surprise as she learned that the latest version of the Tzu Chi coin bank, semi-transparent and green, was made from 12 PET bottles. Working together, they tallied the amount accumulated in the coin bank over the month, totaling more than 800 New Taiwan dollars (US\$25). In a heartwarming gesture, the nurse contributed a 1,000 NT dollar bill from her own pocket, boosting the total amount to a four-digit figure, pleasantly surprising everyone around. The total donated amount was then recorded, and both parties signed off as witnesses.

Next, the volunteers visited an animal hospital. Dr. Yang, who oversees the hospital, warmly greeted the visitors. After the donations from the coin bank hosted by the hospital were tallied, volunteer Huang Fang-ling (黃芳菱) took out a copy of *Tzu Chi Monthly*, sharing updates on Tzu Chi with the veterinarian. When she reached the page with Tzu Chi's global contact directory, she said to Dr. Yang, "If you ever require assistance abroad, you can find help here, provided there are Tzu Chi volunteers in that region."

A food stall at a night market in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, hosts a Tzu Chi coin bank on its counter, encouraging people to donate for philanthropic purposes.

The Tzu Chi Loving Store Campaign

The campaign was launched in 2019 in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. Businesses participate by placing a Tzu Chi coin bank in their store to collect donations. When it's time to be emptied, volunteers and store representatives open it together. They count and record the amount collected, then sign off as witnesses. Volunteers next mark the date on a new seal tag and reseal the bank. Thus begins the next round of fundraising. Donations collected are placed into a designated collection bag and returned to the local Tzu Chi office. The financial team deposits them into a specified account and issues receipts. Volunteers deliver these receipts to the participating businesses on their next visit. As of March 13, 2024, 20,020 businesses had joined the campaign.





Dr. Yang is from Kinmen, one of Taiwan's outlying islands, where his grandmother also takes part in Tzu Chi activities. He readily agreed to join the Loving Store campaign when invited due in part to this connection. Not only did he agree, but he also promptly donated thousands of NT dollars, kick-starting his establishment's contributions to the campaign.

How it started

"In my view, the Loving Stores serve as a bridge, benefiting shops, customers, and Tzu Chi alike, creating a win-win-win scenario where every purchase offers an opportunity to contribute with love," commented Huang Xiu-zhen (黃秀珍), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Hualien.

Huang was the first person to promote the campaign when it was launched in Hualien in the spring of 2019. She began by inviting shop proprietors with Tzu Chi connections to participate, including a café owner whose parents are Tzu Chi

volunteers, a pharmacy manager who is the spouse of a Tzu Chi hospital physician, and a food stall operator who is the mother of a foundation employee. Gradually, she expanded to include business establishments outside her network, asking store owners she encountered: "Could you allow us to place a coin bank in your premises?"

Despite her dedication to the initiative, there were moments when her courage wavered. For instance, she visited a soy milk shop 21 times as a customer before finally mustering the courage to ask the seemingly standoffish proprietor to join. To her surprise, the proprietor turned out to be quite warm-hearted. He not only agreed to join the campaign but also became a regular visitor to Huang's social media platform, where he reads Tzu Chi-related messages and often likes them.

Wang Yun-jing (王運敬), director of the CEO Office of the Tzu Chi charity mission, explained the original intent behind the Loving Store initiative: "We need more tangible methods to foster a



culture of compassion in our society. In the past, our coin banks were primarily adopted by individuals. We pondered if we could expand its scale.” Thus came the Loving Store idea.

The spirit behind the campaign began 58 years ago, when Dharma Master Cheng Yen led 30 lay disciples to aid the needy by encouraging them to each save 50 NT cents (about 1 U.S. cent) in a coin bank every day. With that same loving spirit in mind, volunteers nurture an atmosphere of collective kindness by inviting businesses to join. Even more importantly, such an initiative enhances interactions and connections among people.

Wang Yun-jing elaborated on that last point: “By maintaining regular interactions with participating businesses, we foster a sense of community and mutual care. This network of connections becomes invaluable in times of disaster.” The bonds cultivated through the Loving Store initiative serve as a source of hope and assistance when people in the community face adversity. For

example, when instances of need are identified, they can be quickly reported to Tzu Chi for help.

Expansion

The Loving Store campaign, once started, soon expanded to various towns and villages in Hualien, with approximately 600 businesses joining within a year. However, progress slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It wasn’t until mid-

The shops that have joined the ranks of Tzu Chi Loving Stores come in all varieties. Despite the diversity, what matters most is a compassionate heart to participate. Since the campaign was launched five years ago, the donation collection coin bank has undergone several improvements. The latest version, made from 12 recycled PET bottles and featuring a translucent jade green hue, is gradually replacing the earlier metal version (see top left image on the opposite page).





At a maternity and child clinic in Luzhou, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, a nurse and volunteers counted the money taken from a coin bank before both parties signed to confirm the total amount collected (left photo); volunteers also gave a receipt for last month's donations (photo below).



2022, when conditions improved, that the initiative started to reach other areas in Taiwan, such as Taipei, Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Changhua, and Kaohsiung, where local Tzu Chi volunteers joined efforts to promote it.

Lin Shu-zhen (林淑真), residing in Shilin, Taipei City, recalled her first attempt, in July 2022, to garner support for the campaign. Initially intending to visit a shop belonging to a Tzu Chi donating member (people who contribute monthly donations to the foundation), she inadvertently veered onto a different path after leaving home. She found herself standing in front of a vegetarian restaurant when she finally realized her mistake. Embracing the serendipitous moment, she entered and explained the purpose of her visit to the owner. The owner resonated with the campaign and allowed her to place a coin bank in the restaurant. It wasn't until later that Lin met with the original shop owner she had intended to visit and discovered that she was actually out of town that day.

"I believe there were bodhisattvas guiding me that day, don't you think?" said Lin. "Despite taking the wrong path, I successfully enlisted my first store." This fortuitous encounter led that popular vegetarian restaurant to become the first Loving Store in the greater Taipei area.

It was easier to enlist business owners who were already Tzu Chi donating members or supported Tzu Chi's causes, but volunteers sometimes encountered those who were less familiar with the foundation. When that happened, they had to put in extra effort to explain and convince them to join. There were also testing situations.

Volunteer Gao Xiu-min (高秀敏) once entered a shoe store to invite them to join, only to receive a cold response from the owner: "You can place a coin bank here, but it is none of my concern if no one donates." Gao noticed other organizations' collection boxes already on a desk. They were covered in dust, with hardly any coins collected.

In response, Gao explained to the store owner that the purpose of a Tzu Chi coin bank was not just to solicit concrete donations but also to inspire kindness. "You can start every workday with a kind thought and deposit it in the coin bank—it's like wishing yourself the best," she said with a smile.

When Gao visited the store again on her return journey, the owner cheerfully greeted her, saying, "Sister, we got our very first donation!" It turned out a customer had negotiated the price, and the owner suggested: "My prices are fair. How about this? How about you perform a good deed by put-

ting the money I didn't earn into that coin bank for charitable purposes?" The customer agreed, much to his delight.

While a monetary donation is cause for celebration for volunteers involved in the campaign, inspiring kind thoughts in both shop owners and customers is even more important.

A caring community network

Store or stall owners face numerous challenges in managing their businesses, including attracting and retaining customers, maintaining competitive pricing, adapting to market trends, and finding reliable staff. Additionally, they may find themselves tethered to their establishments without much freedom. Volunteer Su Min-hui, who once managed a stall, understands the hard work involved. When she was younger, she and her husband rented a stall in a mall near Taipei Station selling toys. They worked long hours, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day. "Store owners are often tied up with their work," she noted. "Having a coin bank in their stores allows them to contribute to charitable causes and sow blessings without needing to leave their premises."

Ouyang Gui-ying (歐陽貴英), who serves as the liaison for the Loving Store endeavor in Luzhou, expressed gratitude to participating store owners: "They provide space for our coin banks without us having to pay rent, creating opportunities for everyone to do good. Where else can you find such a wonderful thing? We must embrace these opportunities to do good together."

There is a great variety of businesses that have joined and volunteers have encountered shop owners from all kinds of backgrounds in promoting the campaign. In the process, they have found a common desire among people to do good.

For instance, Mr. Zou, who operates an eyeglasses store, informed volunteer Su Min-hui of their trade union's plan to donate reading glasses to needy individuals and asked if Tzu Chi could assist. "Yes, certainly," Su responded.

More than 20,000 stores, stalls, and other businesses have joined the campaign since its inception, reflecting the kindness of the Taiwanese people. The primary focus of this campaign isn't about the amount of money raised but about nurturing goodwill and connecting stores into a caring community network. Tzu Chi welcomes all store owners to join and participate in this meaningful endeavor, through which every contribution, no matter how small, plays a role in fostering a culture of kindness and generosity. ❀

A Caring Community Network

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Store owners who host a Tzu Chi coin bank can also assist needy individuals by referring them to Tzu Chi for help or sharing information about the foundation's services. They can handle their store operations while keeping an eye out for those in distress.

“When we visit stores to promote our Loving Store campaign, we start by introducing our assistive device program and Neighbor Helping Neighbor hotline. Only after that do we talk about Loving Stores,” explained Tzu Chi volunteer Li Guan-hui (李冠慧), residing in Taichung City, central Taiwan. She is the liaison for the Loving Store endeavor in the city’s Xitun District. She believes that a Loving Store volunteer team can do more than just visiting stores for the campaign; it’s also important to spread information about Tzu Chi’s services to help more people.

“I thought the Loving Store concept was a wonderful way to serve the public when Tzu Chi volunteers pitched the idea to us, so we decided to join,” shared Chen Xiu (陳秀), who operates a budget eatery in Xitun District with her husband. They became part of the Loving Store initiative a few months ago. Despite not making much profit from their business, the couple is generous in supporting public welfare.

Chen mentioned that the director general of the management committee for a nearby building visited and dined in her eatery a short while ago. During their conversation, the director spoke of an elderly woman who lived alone in the building and lacked support. To help her, the director began delivering food to her and even accompanied her to medical appointments. Hearing the story, Chen recalled that the volunteers involved in the Loving Store campaign had mentioned that if there was ever a need for assistance, they could report it to Tzu Chi. After learning more about the elderly woman’s situation, Chen contacted volunteer Dai Yu-qiu (戴玉秋) for help.

Dai forwarded the basic information of the elderly woman to a Tzu Chi social worker and joined fellow volunteers to visit the woman and assess her needs. The foundation applied for government long-term care services for the woman, including meal delivery. Since she had difficulty walking on her own, arrangements were also made for a quad cane and other equipment from Tzu Chi’s assistive device program to be delivered to her.

“Tzu Chi was very helpful; they provided assistance as promised,” said Chen. “If anyone needs help in the future, I will refer them to Tzu Chi again.” She said that she had learned that the elderly woman was now better off because of the care she was receiving, and felt genuinely happy for her.

This case of need discovered by the store owner convinced volunteer Li Guan-hui that she was right about this: “By collaborating with store owners, we can help establish a community safety net.”

Volunteering on weekends

Lin Cang-yi (林蒼義) and Cai Gui-feng (蔡貴鳳) run a successful vegetarian self-service restaurant in Xitun District. Their restaurant has adopted a Tzu Chi coin bank, along with donation collection boxes from other organizations. The couple wholeheartedly supports public welfare. “If customers lack coins for the donation containers, I can provide change for their bills,” Cai said.

The couple’s workload is heavy; apart from managing their restaurant, they also handle group meal orders. Lin, the chef, often starts work at 5 a.m. and doesn’t finish until 8 p.m. However,

they've made it a point to take two days off per week since the start of their business journey.

During a recent visit, Tzu Chi volunteer Li Guan-hui delivered the previous month's donation receipt to the restaurant. Seeing Li, Cai expressed admiration for her dedication to Tzu Chi work, saying, "Guan-hui is so busy, but she still finds time to volunteer. Since I have free time on weekends, I decided to join in!" For over a year, the couple has volunteered for Tzu Chi's assistive device program.

Volunteering for the program often involves physically demanding tasks, like cleaning equipment or delivering devices. However, Cai handles these duties well, accustomed to lifting heavy items like boxed lunches or ingredients weighing around 20 to 30 kilograms (44-66 pounds). Lifting a hospital bed with male volunteers poses no problem for her.

Since joining the assistive device program, the couple often delivers such equipment to those in need alongside other volunteers. This experience deepens their understanding of the difficulties faced by needy individuals and increases their gratitude for their own circumstances. On one occasion, when delivering an oxygen concentrator, they were pleasantly surprised to encounter a regular customer, who was just as happy to see their familiar faces. Knowing how much the assistive device program can benefit those requiring such equipment, Cai has put up a poster promoting the program in their restaurant to raise awareness and enable such resources to reach more people in need. ❊

A Loving Store sticker is displayed at participating businesses for easy identification.





Sandeep Is Doing Well

Updates From India

By Zhu Xiu-lian and Lin Jing-jun

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Hualien headquarters

Sumanti Devi lives in Rajgir, in the Indian state of Bihar. In late March of this year, she received a pleasant surprise when Tzu Chi volunteers visited her home. But it wasn't their first visit. She cheerfully shared updates on her son Sandeep Kumar, who had received medical care with Tzu Chi's help: "Sandeep is now in good health. He participated in a running competition a few days ago and came in first place. His academic performance, however, still needs improvement." The mother expressed her appreciation for the ongoing support from Tzu Chi, noting that whenever volunteers passed by Rajgir, they made sure to drop in, treating them like family. "We're truly grateful for everyone's care and support for Sandeep. Please convey our thanks to Master Cheng Yen," she added.

Sandeep, now attending a government school, held the hand of a volunteer and guided the visitors to his room. There, in the volunteers' presence, he wrote numbers and flipped through picture books. The boy aspired to become a teacher. The volunteers encouraged him to study diligently to achieve his dream.

Sandeep's connection with Tzu Chi goes back to 2022. That year, a Tzu Chi team in Taiwan producing a musical sutra adaptation arranged to capture video footage of significant locations in the Buddha's life to show on stage. These locations included Rajgir, one of the Enlightened One's most important preaching sites. When the team later reported the production's progress to Dharma Master Cheng Yen and presented their video footage, one of the segments taken in Rajgir uninten-





tionally showed a thin little boy with a disproportionately large abdomen. Recognizing that he must have been suffering from some kind of medical condition, the Master empathized deeply with him and expressed her worry and concern. Thus began an extraordinary effort to locate the boy and find out if he needed help from Tzu Chi.

Abhishek Kumar, a Tzu Chi volunteer living in Rajgir, was entrusted with the task of finding the boy. With little information about the boy, he searched from village to village on his motor scooter, eventually tracking him down at the foot of the hill where Saptaparni Cave is situated. (The cave is believed to be the site where the first Buddhist Council took place after the Buddha's passing.) The boy was identified as Sandeep, then nine years old.

Sandeep's mother was happily surprised when she learned about Tzu Chi's intent to help her son. In June 2022, Abhishek and another volunteer, Vivek Kumar from Bodh Gaya, accompanied Sandeep to a hospital in Gaya for an examination (see top photo). The test results were then forwarded to Dr. Chao You-chen (趙有誠), superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital in northern Taiwan, who helped confirm that Sandeep's extended abdomen was caused by a urological

condition. Dr. Chao also suggested a direction for the boy's treatment.

In July, the volunteers accompanied Sandeep and his parents to New Delhi, approximately 1,100 kilometers (684 miles) from Rajgir, where Sandeep received care from Dr. Sujit Chowdhary at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital (see bottom right photo). Due to the urgency of his condition, the doctor promptly performed surgery to drain the urine from Sandeep's abdomen. Over seven liters of urine were drained, causing the boy's abdomen to temporarily cave in (bottom left photo). This occurred because his abdominal organs had become misshapen after being compressed for so long. The misshapen organs gradually returned to their original shape with time, but unfortunately, his left kidney had lost function due to delayed treatment. Sandeep underwent another surgery in August of the same year to have that kidney removed.

The success of these two surgeries brought immense relief to Sandeep's parents and to Sandeep himself. With the weight of his burdensome abdomen lifted, he has regained his smile. He is no longer subjected to stares and can now run and jump like other children. Best of all, he can finally experience peace of mind as he grows up. ❁❁



PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA

Clean Water Is Hard to Come By

By Wu Xiu-ling and Biggie Samson

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tino Chu

Children scooping water directly from mud puddles and ponds to drink is a common sight in Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in southern Africa. However, the practice poses health risks. For instance, contaminated drinking water has been identified as the primary route of transmission behind a cholera outbreak that began in the country last year and has resulted in tens of thousands of reported cases. “In cholera hotspots, posters reminding people to wash their hands are everywhere,” said Tino Chu (朱金財), head of Tzu Chi Zimbabwe. “But how can people in communities suffering from severe water shortages wash their hands?” His comment reflects frustration with this harsh reality.

To help contain the outbreak, local Tzu Chi volunteers have worked on two fronts: distributing water purification tablets and organizing three teams to repair wells in cholera hotspots. Expert volunteers extract metal pipes from wells to determine whether they are damaged, replace faulty parts, and add water purification agents to ensure water safety. Between the onset of the outbreak last year and the end of February this year, the teams repaired over 620 wells, each capable of serving approximately 600 households. Over the past decade, Tzu Chi has also drilled a total of 236 new wells in the country to provide water for local communities facing water scarcity. ❁

ZIMBABWE





Free Medical Services for Underprivileged Families

By Chen Xiao-ying

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Jiang Guo-an

Tzu Chi volunteers in Northern California, in the United States, have dedicated over a decade to promoting the Happy Campus program, providing supplemental tutoring, bolstering student attendance, and more. They maintain a long-standing partnership with Rosemary Elementary School in Campbell, Santa Clara County. Through this collaboration, volunteers have come to recognize the issues faced by many members of the local Hispanic community, such as undocumented immigration status, precarious or insufficient incomes, and an inability to cover insurance or medical costs. Beyond economic con-

straints, language barriers pose additional obstacles to accessing healthcare.

To help address these medical needs, Tzu Chi held its first community free clinic event at the school in October 2023, followed by another in March 2024. These clinics offered services such as traditional Chinese medicine, dental care, spinal health care, and dental hygiene education. Separate areas were set up for consultations, using privacy cubicles designed and produced by Tzu Chi. Spanish-speaking volunteers were on hand to provide translation services. The clinic plans to continue on a biannual schedule, held every six months. ❁❁



UNITED STATES

 台灣佛教慈濟基金會
TAIWAN BUDDHIST TZU CHI FOUNDATION



Incubating Young Inventors

The Compassionate
Technology Innovation
Competition



By Yeh Tzu-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition has been running for seven years. Forty-seven outstanding ideas have been recognized and awarded prizes, with some projects already in the commercialization stage. Fueled by creativity and visions that prioritize societal welfare, young inventors are breaking new ground and driving change in the world.



PHOTOS BY YOU JUN-HONG AND LIU WEI-XING

Xue Kai-jie (薛凱潔), a student from the National Taipei University of Education, stood before her creation, the Turtle Protection Cover, presenting her invention concept to the judges. She explained that global warming has raised sand temperatures on the beaches where sea turtles nest, and because the temperature of the sand determines the sex of the hatchlings, more female turtles are being born than male. This imbalance is so extreme that in some cases 90 percent of newborn turtles are female. "Without intervention, these creatures face the risk of extinction," she said.

The Turtle Protection Cover, resembling an inverted wok, is made from sugarcane pulp combined with other natural materials, such as seaweed gel. It provides shade and ventilation, keeping the sand on the beach cooler. A signboard on top indicates the presence of turtle eggs underneath, while several openings at the bottom allow hatchling turtles to crawl towards the ocean.

A question and answer (Q&A) session followed Xue's presentation. Dr. Chao You-chen (趙有誠), superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital and one of the judges, was the first to ask a question. He said, "There are few talents like you in the world, but there are many people who care about sea turtles. My question is, how original is this project?" Following him, Mr. Cai Zhen-hui (蔡禎輝) from the Industrial Technology Research Institute and Mr. Wu Zhi-xiang (伍志翔) from the design industry also asked questions. They wanted to know about the carbon footprint of sugarcane pulp and whether using waste materials like this could increase carbon footprints elsewhere. They also asked if there were similar solutions addressing this issue and where Xue thought her creation excelled. The string of questions tested the contestant's ability to respond spontaneously and her familiarity with relevant issues.

The next contestant was a team from the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology. Already standing ready off to one side, they presented their creation, a massage mattress for bedridden patients. They called it the Compassionate Mattress. Despite only having a conceptual model made of a human model, cardboard, and sheets on the display table, the judges took their design seriously and listened attentively.

"Some people enjoy staying in bed a little longer in the morning, but for others, being bedridden is not a choice," explained team representative Zhang Ming-yuan (張銘元). "These patients

may require specialized care and can develop pressure sores. We aim to alleviate their suffering." He highlighted the differences between their pressure-relieving mattress and commercially available air mattresses. While the latter use parallel sections of air cushions that are alternately inflated and deflated to relieve pressure, their new version uses a motor-driven cam structure to move dozens of cylinders up and down. Their design not only avoids prolonged pressure points but also provides a massage effect.

"I would like the judges to experience how the massage feels firsthand," Zhang said. Under his guidance, the three judges pressed their palms on the sheet covering the model, feeling the dynamic up-and-down motion. Judge Wu Zhi-xiang cautioned, "If the cylinders are too soft, the cam mechanism may not achieve the massage effect; if they are too hard, there may be discomfort."

Another contestant, the "Water Providers" team from the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, spent a year and a half developing a non-electric water purification device. This device can provide clean water in areas with unreliable electricity. Team member Jiang Yi-hui (蔣怡慧), with a nursing background, explained that their motivation for the design came from media reports highlighting the lack of clean drinking water in underdeveloped regions like Africa. Although they experienced several failures during the development of their manually operated water purifier, they remained determined, considering their goal worthy of the effort.

The team used simple materials such as water pipes, plastic bottles, and old clothes to create a filter. The old clothes can be cleaned and reused after filtration, achieving a high level of recycling. The device is economical, lightweight, and environmentally friendly, with changeable and easily obtainable parts.

Everyone is a winner

Over a hundred entries had competed for a chance to be selected for the finals of the seventh annual Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition. Sixteen works were selected from the college group and eight from the high school group. The three inventions featured above were among those selected for the final competition, which was held on November 18, 2023, at Taipei's Plantarium.

After a series of intense presentations and Q&A sessions that day, the top three works from each group were announced, as well as the People's



◀ College students Xiao Cai-xuan (left) and Lai Ting-kai (right) collaborated to create a device capable of converting and storing energy. This device can quickly provide electricity during natural disasters or mountain accidents.

YAN FU-JIANG

▼ The “Water Providers” team presents their invention in the final competition of the seventh annual Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition. The team developed a non-electric water purification device that can provide clean drinking water in emergencies.

LIU WEI-XING



Choice Award, the Special Enterprise Award, and other special category prizes. Xiao Cai-xuan (蕭采宣) and Lai Ting-kai (賴廷愷), currently studying at National Taiwan Ocean University and Fu Jen Catholic University respectively, won first place in the college group. They invented a device that can convert and store energy, ideal for quickly supplying power to mobile phones or wearable devices during natural disasters or mountain emergencies. A team from Yuli High School, consisting of students Ye Zhen (葉蓁), Wu Bo-yi (吳柏逸), and Zhang Zhi-yan (張芷妍) and their mentor Xu Qi-rong (徐啟榮), developed an earthquake-resistant modular furniture set in response to the high frequency of earthquakes in Taiwan. They garnered first prize in the high school group.

Some of the award-winning works were already physical products, while others were still in the conceptual stage but showed considerable potential for further development. Regardless of their final ranking, every participant who went through the challenging phase of intense mental effort and learned through practical experience was a winner from a learning and growth perspective.

Inspiring creativity for positive change

The Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition, jointly organized by the Tzu Chi Foundation and the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, has been running since 2017. It aims to inspire students to use their creativity for positive change. Starting with just over 40 teams in the first year, the competition grew to over 120 teams by the seventh year in 2023. The growth shows that despite facing challenges in our ever-changing world, many young people are determined to pursue their dreams of making a difference.

Participants showcase their creativity in two main areas: charity and healthcare. Teams interested in charity focus on disaster prevention, preparedness, relief efforts, or projects that can improve the livelihoods of disadvantaged people or promote community and environmental sus-

Judges get hands-on experience with the massage mattress for bedridden patients invented by the team from the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology.

LIU WEI-XING



tainability. Those interested in healthcare work toward supporting the elderly and the weak, improving long-term care, or developing products that can enhance the safety and well-being of patients.

Entries must adhere to at least two of the 5 R's of sustainability: refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle. Lo Wen-jui (羅文瑞), president of the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, explained: "Many products consume a lot of resources and cause significant pollution during their development and mass production. That's why we require that our contestants make environmental protection a key consideration in their creative inventions."

Last year's competition began with registration on May 1, 2023. It attracted over 120 teams, with 24 teams ultimately selected to enter the finals. Each finalist made thorough preparations to present their creation and answer the judges' questions during the final competition on November 18, aiming to achieve a good ranking and win prize money.

Judges assess entries based on aspects such as practicality, ease of use, reasonable pricing, and market acceptance. They also provide feedback and advice to each team. Superintendent Chao You-chen of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital emphasized during the final competition on November 18 that there will always be winners and losers in any competition. He said, "If we compete on who weighs the heaviest, I win, but if it's about who is the youngest, you win. If the announced results differ from your expectations, keep in mind that your win or loss is just a matter of perspective. While some competitions focus on commercial value, we emphasize compassion and care for the disadvantaged or the Earth." He affirmed that everyone's creative ideas already had a good start. "Perhaps one of you here today will become another Bill Gates," he added. "When that day comes and your pockets are full, remember that your initial intention was to help others."

Compassion at the core

Professor Pan Zhi-long (潘志龍), who led the team from the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, highlighted the current emphasis in education on bridging the gap between learning and practical application. He noted that recognition or awards in national or international contests like the Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition can significantly benefit students' future academic and career paths.



The Yuli High School team developed an earthquake-resistant modular furniture set in response to the high frequency of earthquakes in Taiwan. They clinched first place in the high school group. Deputy CEO Scott Liu (third from right) of the Tzu Chi charity mission posed with the team during the award ceremony.

YAN FU-JIANG

President Lo Wen-jui added that when it comes to invention and product development, student teams cannot compete with well-funded companies in terms of financial resources, equipment, and technology. But though the ideas and prototypes the students present may be unpolished, he still encourages everyone to engage in innovative research and development. Scott Liu (劉效成), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, on the other hand, remarked that innovation does not necessarily mean inventing new things. "It can be about integrating existing technologies with compassionate thoughts and the needs of mankind, enabling the technologies to have a greater positive impact."

Compassion is at the core of compassionate technology development as encouraged by the competition. Its focus is on whether technology can help people find relief from suffering and attain happiness while being friendly to all beings on the Earth and beneficial to the environment. Innovation and development driven by an altruistic heart have unlimited potential. Tzu Chi invites warm-hearted and creative young individuals to participate in this competition for kindness, contributing their love and wisdom to benefit the world. ❁

Innovative Solutions to Real-World Challenges

By Ye Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

One team invented earthquake-resistant furniture, while another created a solar-powered drying system to extend the shelf life of agricultural products. They both identified unsolved problems and devised innovative solutions in their work.

“**E**arthquakes are common in our hometown of Yuli, so we designed this product to increase the chances of rescue,” explained Ye Zhen, an 11th-grader at Yuli High School in Hualien, eastern Taiwan.

Ye Zhen and her fellow schoolmates, 12th-grader Zhang Zhi-yan and 11th-grader Wu Bo-yi, along with their mentor Xu Qi-rong, formed a team to devise an earthquake-resistant modular furniture set. Their furniture is engineered to withstand the impact of falling objects and building collapse during tremors. The desk and wheeled drawer unit in the set are sturdy, providing space for survival when other indoor furniture would fail. They are also equipped with a built-in LED light, buzzer, and rechargeable battery, which would facilitate rescue operations. Furthermore, the desk and two accompanying chairs offer extra storage space for essential survival supplies.

The team won first place for their design in the high school category at the seventh annual Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition in 2023. One year earlier, the People’s Choice Award went to a solar-powered automatic drying system designed to preserve agricultural products in Indonesia. The Best Application Award that year was won by a team from Keelung Commercial and Industrial Vocational High School in rainy Keelung for their shoe drying machine. These products were created to meet local needs, concretely demonstrating empathy.

Thinking ahead to save lives

Seismic activity is common in Taiwan’s eastern Hualien and Taitung areas, so residents there are familiar with earthquakes. However, many locals, including the Yuli High School team that invented

the earthquake-resistant furniture, still harbor lingering fears from the tremor on Sunday, September 18, 2022. When Ye Zhen returned to her school dormitory after the quake, she found herself and her roommates among the victims, with furniture fallen and items scattered everywhere. Zhang Zhi-yan, who was on the second floor of her home during the tremor, quickly rushed downstairs to check on her grandfather’s safety.

The earthquake left such a profound impact that it motivated Ye, Zhang, and their schoolmate Wu Bo-yi to start a project focusing on earthquake response, aimed particularly at aiding the elderly and those with limited mobility. They undertook the project as part of a school course on innovation in practice. Xu Qi-rong, who works in the computer design department of an international corporation in Taipei, became their mentor for the project. The team decided to center their project around earthquake-resistant furniture. They discussed ideas through videoconferences and attended a relevant workshop at the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology in Hualien on Saturdays and Sundays. Under Xu Qi-rong’s guidance, the three high school students began by sketching and creating paper models, gradually refining their concept step by step. Eventually, they had a professional model maker create a detailed and realistic display model.

Their modular furniture set includes a desk, two chairs, and a wheeled drawer unit. “Our desktop is crafted from an aluminum honeycomb panel made of recycled aluminum, with a weight-bearing capacity four to six times that of a regular desktop,” explained Ye Zhen. Aluminum honeycomb panels are known for their strength and lightness, commonly used in aircraft construction.



Earthquake-Resistant Modular Furniture Set

● Invention Team:

Students from Yuli High School

● Design:

The desk and drawer unit in the set are sturdy, capable of providing a survival space during a strong earthquake. They are also outfitted with an LED light, buzzer, and rechargeable battery to increase the chances of rescue in the event of building collapse. The set also includes two chairs with extra storage space for essential survival supplies.

PHOTOS BY LIU WEI-XING



Ye highlighted other design features of their furniture set: the desktop is not only lightweight and robust but also includes a handle and an LED light on the side facing the floor. One can use the handle for stability when taking shelter under the desk and the LED light automatically illuminates during an earthquake. In ordinary times, the light can serve as a night light.

To bolster resistance, the team used two oval cabinets to support the desk instead of regular desk legs. A built-in electronic timer, set to emit alerts every three or six months, reminds users to check and update the disaster relief supplies stored within the furniture set.

The wheeled drawer unit consists of three tiers. The top two tiers are designed for storing food, medicine, and other emergency supplies. There are small doors on the sides, allowing access to items when necessary without the need to pull out the drawers. The bottom tier is equipped with a buzzer and charging device. In the event of being trapped during a quake, the buzzer provides an alternative to shouting or knocking, helping to conserve energy.

Xu Qi-rong said that they had planned for the worst-case scenario during their design process. In the case of a collapsing roof, their furniture set had to have a certain degree of rigidity to resist being crushed easily and be able to provide a survival space. "Our drawer unit was not originally designed to bear weight," he explained, "but we deliberately designed it to be close in height to the desktop and capable of bearing weight. If the desktop is deformed under pressure, the drawer unit can be used as support." The mentor also asserted, "And with supplies around you, the chances of survival will be higher."

Chen Yan-xing (陳彥杏), Yuli High School's director of academic affairs, said, "The Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology was wonderful. They provided our students with transportation expenses and equipment to help with their project." He added that due to their school workload, the three students could often only work on the project during weekends. "Still, they over-

came whatever difficulties they encountered and achieved what they set out to do. Both their mentor and I are very impressed!” Chen was happier than the students themselves to see them win first place and two special awards at the Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition.

Xu Qi-rong expressed his pride for the students. He noted that the resources available to them, living in a rural area, were not as abundant as those for students living in cities, and yet the three managed to achieve their “mission impossible” through their own passion for meaningful innovation and their teachers’ enthusiasm for education.

Addressing the issue of surplus produce

While the earthquake-resistant furniture was designed by Taiwanese students, another award-winning invention—the solar-powered automatic drying system—was the brainchild of a group of Indonesian students. These students were from a special class at the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology. They received scholarships from Indonesia’s Sinar Mas Group to study agricultural production and marketing in Taiwan, aiming to

find innovative solutions to challenges facing Indonesia’s agriculture sector.

Bagas Pramana Putra Fadhila, a graduate from this special class, is fluent in Chinese. He explained the reason behind their invention with the help of images on his cell phone. He said that while the quality of the dragon fruit harvested in Indonesia is good, the excessive yield saturates the market, leading to the disposal of the surplus as waste. Chili peppers, essential in Indonesian cuisine, face a similar issue. Bagas hails from the ancient city of Yogyakarta, where his parents run a grocery store. He is most keenly aware of the fluctuating prices of chili peppers in his hometown. “Yogyakarta has many chili pepper farmers,” he said. “Usually, a kilogram of this produce sells for 100,000 rupiah [US\$6.37], but during low price periods, it’s only one-tenth of that price.”

Why haven’t Indonesian farmers learned from Taiwan’s farmers’ associations and set up drying centers to address the surplus production issue? It seems simple, but the situation in Indonesia makes such a solution more challenging.

Although Indonesia’s electricity prices are 40



percent less than those in Taiwan, and diesel prices are just half, the income of an average citizen in Indonesia is less than one-sixth that in Taiwan. From this perspective, energy costs in Indonesia are relatively high, making it unviable to dry surplus produce. This explains why, despite being a major chili pepper producer, Indonesia must import large quantities of dried chili peppers from China.

The Indonesian students came up with the idea of using free solar energy to dry excess vegetables and fruits in Indonesia. They created the Solar Thermal Energy Automatic Drying System as their graduation project before returning to their home country for their senior year internship. Student Zhang Mei-hua (張美花) noted: "Using solar thermal energy to dry agricultural products can help farmers increase their income."

The students sought advice from solar energy expert Dr. Zhang Wen-qu (張文曲) for their project. They first designed a patented solar energy collector using vacuum tubes compatible with solar water heaters. A solar power generator and a recycled dishwasher completed the main struc-

ture of the dryer. (The dishwasher served as a drying box.)

The operational principle of this system is simple. A blower propels cold air from the outside into the vacuum tubes, where it absorbs thermal energy from the sun and warms. The resulting hot air rises naturally into the collection tank above before flowing into the drying box through a pipe to dry the vegetables and fruits. The blower and control system are powered entirely by solar energy.

Compared with sun-drying for long-term preservation, drying in sealed equipment ensures better hygiene and is more efficient. The students carefully moved all the components of their system to the top floor of a school building, assembled them there, and then conducted experiments in the drying box with sliced pineapples, bananas, apples, and other fruit.

"The control system was not optimal at first," said Bagas, "and sometimes the temperature would be too high or too low. But it was a good learning process for us." He was responsible for writing the drying system's AIoT, the remote control program combining artificial intelligence (AI)



Solar Thermal Energy Automatic Drying System

- **Invention Team:**

Indonesian students from the Department of Business Management at the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology

- **Design:**

The system consists of three main components: a solar power generator, vacuum tubes, and a drying box. It uses solar thermal energy to heat the air for drying, addressing challenges of produce perishability, limited storage space, and high transportation costs faced by farmers. The dryer's data is linked to a mobile app for real-time monitoring. This system enhances the value of agricultural products.

PHOTOS BY CAI YUAN-YUAN

with the Internet of Things (IoT). He found that when the hot air temperature was too high, the sliced vegetables and fruits would dehydrate quickly and become too hard; if the temperature was too low, they would not dry sufficiently and easily become moldy. Gathering solar energy data presented its own set of challenges: "We recorded every hour of the day, but when it suddenly rained, the data could not be used."

The team disposed of unsuccessfully-dried vegetables and fruits in the kitchen waste recycling bin. Then they used fresh produce to try again, making necessary corrections and adjustments. After numerous rounds of this process, they finally succeeded. Zhang Mei-hua happily shared, "I recently made dried dragon fruit with our invention. I think it's quite delicious. What's best, the nutrition is still there!"

Capturing attention

The solar thermal drying system was officially unveiled before summer vacation in 2022, sparking great excitement within the team. The students were based in Hualien when they developed the system, an area with relatively weak sunlight compared to other areas in Taiwan. If the dryer could be effective in Hualien, it would perform even better in Indonesia, with its lower latitudes and stronger sunlight.

According to the data collected by the team, up to 1.9 million tons of chili peppers are discarded annually in Indonesia due to overproduction, which is equivalent to half of its annual production. Processing even one-tenth of the discarded chili peppers into dried peppers could generate a value of 99 million U.S. dollars, comparable to the annual income of 23,000 Indonesian households. Compared to conventional drying processes, this system could save 99 million kilowatt-hours of electricity consumption and reduce carbon emissions by 59,000 tons.

The student team's innovative creation secured a national patent in Taiwan and won the gold medal in the college green energy innovation category at the 2022 Taiwan Sustainable Energy Creative Implementation Competition. It also garnered the People's Choice Award and the Special Enterprise Award at the sixth annual Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition held the same year. In October 2023, it won the Silver Award in the Invention Competition at the Taiwan Innotech Expo. The dryer attracted considerable attention from industry professionals during the four-day exposition

at the Taipei World Trade Center.

Professor Su Mei-hui (蘇美惠), from the Department of Business Management at the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, supervised the drying system project. She said that they had run simulations and found that if they were to dry one ton of produce at a time with their system, they would need to expand it to the size of a shipping container with the vacuum tubes placed on top. Preliminary estimates put the cost of equipment at such a scale at about 750,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$23,600). "According to calculations based on Indonesia's sunlight conditions, excluding the rainy season, it would take only about 1.7 years to recover the cost," remarked the professor. She mentioned that during the Taiwan Innotech Expo, a ranch owner from China's Gansu Province who raised horses suggested that if their equipment could be scaled up to dry a large amount of grass at once, it would more efficiently help people like him store the hay needed for their horses to survive the winter.

Dr. Zhang Wen-qu, the solar energy expert, said that he had learned from people in the petrochemical industry that the toxic sludge produced during oil production is typically dried using electric heating. If solar thermal energy could be used for drying instead, it could save hundreds of millions of dollars in energy costs. "There are many industrial processes that require heat energy. The students' design could be adapted for more applications by manufacturers," Zhang said optimistically.

Professor Su further analyzed: "In the past, manufacturers used the most easily accessible and low-cost fuel, coal. However, there is now pressure to reduce carbon emissions, and carbon will be priced in the future. Therefore, they must find clean energy sources to replace it." In this context, the Solar Thermal Energy Automatic Drying System has a promising future.

The research and development process of the drying system was a valuable experience for the student team. Bagas, for example, demonstrated his strength by designing the AIoT remote control program for the system, which played a significant role in his admission to the prestigious Tsing Hua University in Taiwan for graduate school.

Having gone through the arduous journey of research and development, the young students featured in this article have not only increased their aptitude for problem-solving but also demonstrated creativity in protecting the Earth and practicing environmental sustainability. ♣♣

Transforming the Lives of Young Tibetans With Scoliosis

Compiled by Li Wei-huang

Information provided by Bian Jing

Translated by Siri Su

Tzu Chi collaborates with Yushuzhou Hope Charity to help young Tibetan patients afflicted with scoliosis obtain medical treatment.

Leaving his hometown in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, China, Nima embarked on an 800-kilometer (497-mile) journey to Chengdu, the provincial capital. After getting off the train, he headed straight to 416 Hospital. Although he was 20 years old, he stood only 145 centimeters (4'9") tall due to severe scoliosis.

Scoliosis is a condition in which a person's spine has an abnormal curve, sometimes resembling an S shape. It occurs in about three percent of the population, but the cause of scoliosis has been elusive. Surgery is required in extreme cases. After corrective surgery, a metal ring is surgically fastened around both the patient's head and waist, connected by four supporting rods. Traction applied through the head ring gradually reduces the spinal curvature, allowing patients to stand taller.

Nima underwent three corrective operations, gradually gaining the ability to stand straight within nine months of hospitalization, increasing his height to 165 centimeters (5'5"). Afterward, he was only required to wear orthoses for rehabilitation, which are devices designed to support or modify an injured or malformed part of the body. His greatest relief came in the form of improved breathing: "Breathing is no longer a struggle," he said.

Nima's father, Tapo, recalled his child being born with a noticeable spinal curve, which wors-

ened with age. He feared his son might pass away at any moment. But if Tapo was so concerned, why did he wait until Nima was 20 years old to seek treatment?

Challenges hampering medical care

Yushuzhou Hope Charity (YHC), based in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, has long been helping young Tibetan patients with scoliosis receive medical care. According to Geding Pengcuo, head of YHC, such patients face challenges in accessing treatment due to their parents' limited health awareness, inadequate access to related information, and physical distance from advanced medical resources.

Without proper treatment, a patient suffering from scoliosis may develop thoracic deformities, which can compress their nerves or impact the functions of their heart and lungs, potentially leading to respiratory failure. The average life expectancy for untreated patients is 45 years. Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial. Surgery offers the best outcomes, minimizes rehabilitation challenges, and significantly reduces medical expenses.

In Beijing and Chengdu, there are three hospitals that specialize in treating severe scoliosis patients. YHC combines medical and charitable resources, regularly inviting specialized doctors to travel to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau for scoliosis screenings and arranging medical treatment for patients. Dr. Zhou Lijin (周立金), an orthopedic

surgeon at Beijing Chaoyang Hospital, asserted, “Many Tibetans don’t know what scoliosis is or where to find medical treatment. To help them, we must reach out to the remote regions they live in, regardless of the distances.” Amidst their efforts, there have been instances where patients’ families had such limited understanding of the condition that doctors had to make multiple visits before convincing them to seek medical care.

In 2019, through YHC, Tzu Chi volunteers in Chengdu first came into contact with Tibetans afflicted by the condition in neighboring Qinghai Province. The volunteers witnessed firsthand the struggles of these young individuals, who lived at altitudes of 3,000 to 4,000 meters (9,840-13,125 feet). They observed the challenges they faced in accessing medical care due to limited resources, misconceptions, or economic difficulties, and clearly saw how this could profoundly impact their futures. A Tzu Chi care team was thus formed and joined YHC’s Caring for Tibetan Children project to support this group of children and adolescents through their demanding and costly medical journey.

The journey from Chengdu, about 500 meters above sea level, to Yushu Prefecture in Qinghai, with an average elevation of 4,200 meters, presents significant challenges for Tzu Chi volunteers. Every step or ascent requires caution to prevent altitude sickness. Sometimes, even the doctors themselves have to wear oxygen masks during screenings.

After screening, YHC arranges for scoliosis patients in need of surgery to go down the mountains for treatment. Generally, more severe cases of scoliosis require several corrective surgeries, with treatment spanning from six months to one year. The substantial medical expenses, exceeding 31,000 U.S. dollars, are partially covered by the government with additional support from Tzu Chi. Volunteers also assist with the patients’ daily needs during their hospitalization.

Care during hospitalization

On August 26, 2019, the first three patients receiving aid from Tzu Chi arrived in Chengdu for treatment, accompanied by their families; among them was Nima. The largest group in the following five years arrived on October 23, 2023: 39 people—consisting of 13 scoliosis patients, their family members, and YHC volunteers—endured a grueling 36-hour train journey from Tibet before reaching Chengdu.

Tzu Chi volunteers’ companionship typically



Health workers assess the condition of a young Tibetan suffering from scoliosis.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

begins with a warm welcome at the train station. Whether they are from western Sichuan, Qinghai, or Tibet, most patients and their families are visiting Chengdu for the first time. Volunteers hope to help them settle in as quickly as possible. They thoughtfully prepare Tibetan tea to accompany meals, assist with hospital admission procedures, and provide toiletries, buckets, and other daily necessities. They also supply suitable clothing according to the season. Due to differences in dietary habits between Tibetans and Han Chinese, the families of most patients choose to co-rent small kitchens to prepare their food. Volunteers ease their burdens by bringing them cooking and dining ware from their own homes.

Volunteer Ji Yahong (紀亞紅) mentioned that while a few school-going children can speak some Mandarin, their parents face language barriers. Such differences in language, culture, and living habits have proven to be significant obstacles in the process of seeking treatment. Since the families require assistance even in communicating with the medical staff, they need all the help they can get.



A volunteer washes a scoliosis patient's hair at 416 Hospital in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China.

BIAN JING

Tzu Chi volunteers visit patients every Tuesday throughout their extended hospital stays, helping them and their families cope with various challenges. Such visits continued uninterrupted even during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the children are emotionally affected due to pain from treatment, volunteers guide them to cultivate gratitude and actively cooperate with the treatment. Since they may encounter difficulties washing their hair after the head ring is installed, volunteers prepare toothbrushes, sponges, and face cloths and carefully clean their scalps. When parents worry about family members back home and feel down, volunteers listen to and comfort them, or prepare hot soup or dumplings for them to lift their spirits. Most of the young patients are unable to attend school due to their illnesses, so volunteers help them learn Mandarin.

A noticeable number of individuals among the patients are monastics. Geding Pengcuo explained to Tzu Chi volunteers that due to their religious beliefs, many Tibetans believe that serious illnesses are a result of karma from past lives. As a result, children born with congenital diseases or physical

disabilities are often sent by their parents to monasteries for ordination, with the belief that doing so can resolve their karmic debts and alleviate their pain and suffering.

Bazang was one such monastic. He didn't receive medical care until he was 30 years old. As a result, his medical journey was more challenging. Unlike others who left the hospital on foot after treatment, he required a year of rehabilitation after leaving the hospital before regaining mobility. Volunteer Wang Lin (王琳) confessed that it wasn't until she helped Bazang change into surgical attire that she truly grasped the impact of scoliosis. "I was truly

shocked to witness his deformed and twisted spine," She remarked. "Treatment is absolutely essential for these patients." Whenever volunteers see children discharged from the hospital after successful treatment, their joy matches that of parents.

Tzu Chi volunteers, in partnership with YHC, have provided support for more than 200 young Tibetans with scoliosis and their families over the past five years. In March of this year, 60 children were simultaneously undergoing treatment at two hospitals, marking the highest number to date. Tzu Chi and YHC also conduct screenings for Tibetan children and adolescents with congenital heart disease and congenital hip dislocation and help those severely in need of treatments receive care at hospitals in Chengdu, Xining, Beijing, and other locations. Wherever these individuals receive treatment, local Tzu Chi volunteers are there to provide support.

So, what's Nima's current situation? After recovering, he decided to stay and work in Chengdu. Now, when new patients arrive for treatment, he helps as an interpreter and assists volunteers with hospital admission procedures. Having gone through a similar journey, Nima's presence offers encouragement to these young patients as they eagerly await their chance to recover. ❀

Conrado's Colorful World Comes Alive

A Story From the Tzu Chi Eye Center, the Philippines

Text and photo by Jamaica Mae Digo

Conrado Peñamora found joy and purpose in painting, so when cataracts developed in both of his eyes, he became listless. The Tzu Chi Eye Center helped him undergo surgery, bringing colors back into his life.

On January 23, the Tzu Chi Eye Center in Manila, the Philippines, received an extraordinary gift from one of its patients: stunningly lifelike oil paintings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, and volunteer surgeon Dr. Peter Lee (李悦民)!

The artist, Conrado Peñamora, 79, created the portraits shortly after undergoing successful surgeries at the Tzu Chi Eye Center in 2023. He finished the paintings, his first creations upon recovering his eyesight, in two months.

"I am grateful to everyone who helped me, but most importantly, to Tzu Chi. If not for their help, my eyesight would not have recovered its clarity," Conrado said. "After the surgery, I received many requests to paint, but I insisted on working on Master Cheng Yen and Dr. Peter's portraits first. I would say that these paintings are my masterpieces. They are the most beautiful works of art I have ever created!"

Tzu Chi volunteers were very moved by Conrado's effort. "This is very unexpected," volunteer Alfredo Li (李偉嵩) told Conrado, patting him on the back. "Master Cheng Yen said: 'When we do something good, goodness will return to us unexpectedly.' This is exactly what happened today."

"This is a priceless gift," Dr. Peter agreed. He added that he would display Conrado's portrait of him in his clinic. "Thank you!" Dr. Peter told him.

Conrado had suffered for nearly three years

from poor vision caused by cataracts. In his younger years, he worked as a graphic and layout artist for a printing company. However, when technology disrupted his livelihood, he got laid off. "Computers are now the ones doing most of the work," he lamented. "It's very discouraging."

To keep himself busy, Conrado went back to doing his first love: drawing and painting. He was a Fine Arts undergraduate from the University of Santo Tomas, after all. However, this hobby became very challenging when his vision started to decline. "I had to strain my eyes and wear thick lenses to see my subject," Conrado said.

Cataracts also made colors appear dull and faded, affecting the quality of his work. For example, he once painted a picture of one of his children's family while struggling with the condition. It was only after he recovered his eyesight that he realized it had come out yellowish.

And it wasn't just Conrado's art that suffered because of his eye ailment—his family also noticed a difference in his behavior. "He became sullen," described Jeffrey, Conrado's son-in-law.

Conrado had known for years about the charitable work of Tzu Chi. He used to reside in Santa Mesa, Manila, a few blocks from the Tzu Chi mission complex in Bacood. After the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted his children's business, Conrado's family was compelled to move to more affordable rental housing in Dasmariñas, Cavite. Despite the distance from their new home to the



Tzu Chi Eye Center, Conrado made the long journey to have his eyes checked.

In July 2023, Dr. Peter Lee performed cataract removal surgery on Conrado's left eye. A month later, Conrado underwent another operation on the right eye. From a visual acuity of 20/200 in both eyes on his first checkup, Conrado's vision improved to 20/20 on the right and 20/30 on the left. "I feel like a child again!" Conrado giggled.

Today, Conrado continues to paint and proudly declares that he had discarded the pair of eye-glasses he used to wear. "I have no use for them now," he said, "because I can see so much better.

With his cataracts successfully removed, Conrado Peñamora is now occupied with working on commissioned paintings.

The paintings I create now are even better than the ones I used to create."

Occupied with requests piling up from clients for portraits, Conrado has never felt more alive. "Painting means a lot to me. It's one of the things that keeps me strong and young. It also keeps the loneliness at bay because I am constantly busy," he asserted. ●●●

The Tzu Chi Eye Center

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The Tzu Chi Eye Center in Manila opened in 2016 and is staffed free of charge by medical professionals from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA). The center serves an average of 700 patients per week, providing free exams and surgeries to prevent blindness, which can significantly impact families' livelihoods. In 2023 alone, it handled over 20,000 outpatient visits, dispensed medication to 14,000 patients (each visit counted as an individual), and performed nearly 3,000 surgeries. TIMA doctors completed 1,023 shifts, while support volunteers contributed over 1,500 shifts.

This year, the center collaborated with the Ramon Magsaysay Awards Foundation's Transformative Leadership Institute for a large-scale free clinic event. During the two-day event, held on February 20 and 21, 12 TIMA doctors and Dr. Tadashi Hattori, a Ramon Magsaysay Award recipient in 2022, performed cataract surgeries, restoring vision for over 200 disadvantaged patients.

A Second Life for Hospital Beds

By Zhang Ju-fen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Li Ya-ping

The Tzu Chi assistive device team in Chiayi, southern Taiwan, repairs and refurbishes retired beds from Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, transforming some into fully operational beds.



Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in Chiayi, southern Taiwan, opened its doors 23 years ago, thanks to generous donations from around the world. However, the high-quality hospital beds purchased at that time have started showing signs of wear and tear, including rust and malfunctions. While other medical institutions might swap out such beds without a second thought, at Tzu Chi, they're repurposed, continuing the cycle of love.

In 2023, volunteer Yang Li-fen (楊麗芬) found a collection of hospital beds stored together in the hospital and inquired if they were going to be retired and replaced. Lin Wen-feng (林文峰), head of the Safekeeping Section of the General Affairs Department at the hospital, explained that these electric beds, imported from the United States and each costing over 50,000 New Taiwan dollars (approximately US\$1,650), were experiencing issues after years of use, including with their lifting mechanisms. The Engineering Department at the hospital had evaluated the beds and concluded that they no longer met modern medical standards. The beds were slated to be replaced with newer models.

Shen Kun-fu (沈坤福), head of the Engineering Department's Maintenance Section, clarified that some beds had defective circuit boards or motors. He also noted that the original manufacturers had stopped producing the parts. Some were showing rust stains, affecting their appearance, but refurbishing them would be nearly as expensive as purchasing new ones. He added that if these beds were handed over to a recycling company, they would likely be treated as scrap metal, a fate he couldn't help but find regrettable.

Yang Li-fen proposed that the beds be given to the Tzu Chi assistive device team in Chiayi for repair and reuse. This proposal received strong support from the General Affairs Department. The large-scale recycling project with the team was initiated on June 7, 2023.

Each bed weighed 150 kilograms, and many of the volunteers involved in the project were getting on in years, but they worked tirelessly, bending down to tie ropes securely and carefully transporting each bed to their repair site. Over the eight months since the project started, volunteers have dismantled beds too far gone to be function-

Volunteers from the Chiayi assistive device team visit Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital to collect retired hospital beds for repair and reuse.



Tzu Chi's assistive device program collects used assistive devices across Taiwan, then repairs and refurbishes them before distributing them to applicants. Here are some wheelchairs collected by program volunteers in Chiayi.

al, transferred usable parts onto beds in better condition, and meticulously cleaned every part of each bed. They rewired broken circuits or switches and removed rust before repainting. Some volunteers even bought parts with their own money to repair some of the faulty beds.

As of February 2024, over 60 of the 122 repaired beds had already been distributed. Despite the challenging transportation process, volunteers have delivered beds to nursing centers in Penghu, an archipelago off the southwestern coast of Taiwan, as well as to various locations in Chiayi County and City, including the mountainous Alishan Township and the coastal Budai Township. The first bed arrived at Leye Village in Alishan Township on August 24, 2023. A 72-year-old woman there, receiving home care, couldn't afford the tens of thousands of Taiwanese dollars for an electric medical bed. When the bed provided by Tzu Chi was delivered to her home, her daughter, the woman's principal caregiver, was deeply grateful to Tzu Chi for alleviating pressure on her family.

Volunteers for the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program in Taiwan clean, disinfect, and refurbish used assistive devices before sending them out to people needing such equipment. Anyone can apply for these devices, which are delivered to the applicant's home. Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital still has nearly 400 beds waiting to be recycled, so volunteers will continue their efforts to give new life to the equipment. ❀

A Volunteer's Visual Journey With Tzu Chi

Narrated by Chen Rong-feng

Interviewed and written by Lin Mei-hong

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Chen Rong-feng

I've loved taking photos since my teenage years. After joining Tzu Chi, I kept growing my photography and videography skills, eventually venturing into aerial imagery. My goal is simple—I want to use my skills to capture the beauty and goodness of the world.
—Chen Rong-feng

I have been curious about “new” things since childhood, especially when it comes to electronic products and devices. In elementary school, I even dismantled a radio my dad bought to study its inner workings. During high school, I developed a fascination with cameras. I recall waking up one morning at two to capture the school gate, using a B shutter speed for 20 seconds. In the interplay of moonlight and car lights, the majestic school gate showcased the beauty of a dignified academic institution. I submitted the work to an intramural competition and won first place.

Time flew quickly after high school. My eldest son was born in 1991, when I was 28. While on a business trip to Japan, I purchased a mini digital video camera, marking the beginning of my journey into videography. In 2006, I attended a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony for the first time. At the volunteer recruitment area, I enthusiastically noted my expertise in photography and videography on a form. Soon thereafter, I received an invitation to join Tzu Chi as a documenting volunteer. I began training in 2008 to become a certified volunteer.


I always followed my own approach through my years of taking photos, doing things as I liked. When I first joined the foundation, I was uncertain about which aspects of a Tzu Chi event to capture. I vividly recall my dissatisfaction with my work at my first Tzu Chi camp. However, when I submitted the photos I had taken to Jian

Hong-zheng (簡宏正), the coordinator for the Image Team, I was pleasantly surprised. Looking at my photos, Brother Jian exclaimed, “Everything I needed is right here!” This affirmation greatly cheered me and set me on my determined journey as a documenting volunteer, motivating me to continuously refine my skills.

In early 2010, I joined fellow Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan on a mission to Guizhou Province, China, to distribute aid to the needy. When we arrived at the distribution venue in Pingyan Township, Luodian County, we were greeted by the heartwarming sight of hundreds of villagers and children forming two rows, applauding and warmly welcoming us. The sight moved me deeply. I found myself wondering, “What have I done to deserve such warmth from people I have never met?” I followed the other volunteers without saying a word, afraid that if I spoke, tears of emotion would spill from my eyes.

During home visits, we were welcomed into their households as if we were part of their family. This heartfelt reception stemmed from the love nurtured by my fellow volunteers during their ten years of work in Guizhou. I felt deeply grateful that my role as a documenting volunteer brought me to Guizhou, allowing me to be showered in such warmth while I captured one poignant scene after another through my lens.

The rural homes we visited were typically basic, crude structures that provided minimal



shelter from wind and rain. I vividly remember a home visit to the Li family. Mr. Li had suffered a bone fracture, and lacking the financial means for medical treatment, his arm had become deformed. His wife, experiencing back pain, struggled to carry water for the family. The family had no source of income at all. We checked their pot and saw some poor-looking corn porridge inside. When we learned that such meager fare was their main food for three daily meals, I couldn't contain my emotions. I rushed outside and began crying uncontrollably.

I used to think that crying was embarrassing for a man, but I couldn't hold back my tears that day. They just couldn't stop flowing. It was the first time I had shed tears in 40 years, and I must have cried without stopping for a good half hour.

After this trip to Guizhou, I set aside my love for the pursuit of enjoyment and pleasure. Before, I used to travel abroad for sightseeing once or twice a year. Although such travels brought me happiness, the joy was short-lived. The charitable

PHOTO BY LIN MEI-HONG



mission to Guizhou, however, left an indelible mark on me. After that trip, almost every time I traveled abroad, it was for Tzu Chi.

Innovative solutions

I faced several challenges after taking on the role of coordinator for a community documentation team. At the time, our documenting volunteers lacked a dedicated database for their work, making it difficult for some of them to find photos to complement their articles. To address this issue, I collaborated with other volunteers to establish a dedicated File Transfer Protocol platform. This platform allowed our volunteers to easily upload and share data. Additionally, I worked with computer engineers to develop an online event schedule, which helped us post information about our community's Tzu Chi activities. This saved us a lot of time and money. It reduced the need for phone calls to disseminate event information and encouraged greater participation from those interested in the events.

The challenge of not having a storage system for articles and photos extended beyond our specific community. I recognized that our volunteers' hard work was not adequately preserved and that a considerable amount of time and manpower was spent gathering relevant data, so I began contemplating cross-district data integration. I started collaborating with Zhang Ting-xu (張廷旭), a volunteer from Tzu Chi's central Taiwan Information Technology Team. We developed a dedicated software system for data integration. After we were successful, Zhang remarked in friendly banter, "This software was created at your request; you're responsible for promoting it!"

In response, I reached out every day to the coordinators for documenting teams in different districts in central Taiwan, providing explanations and tutorials on archiving using our software system. After a year of efforts, relevant records from across the central Taiwan district began to be uploaded to the system, easily accessible through a simple search. Eventually, this system expanded to include other areas in Taiwan.

Later, I became the coordinator for Tzu Chi's central Taiwan Image Team. I pondered: "How can I attract new volunteers? More importantly, how can I rekindle the initial enthusiasm of our senior volunteers?" I decided to introduce courses in 2018 to tackle these questions. The course design was diverse, allowing instructors to use personal photos for storytelling or inviting profes-

sional photographers to engage with our volunteers. Photos can speak volumes; for instance, instructor Chen Jian-hua (陳建華) used pictures of his mother to reflect on accompanying her through the last leg of her life, while Li Ying-qing (李盈青) shared the challenges she had experienced in her life through photos documenting her growth and development. Everyone got to know the instructors better through their photos, but also gained insight into the art of storytelling through photography.

I also collaborated with bakeries and dessert shops, requesting their products for volunteers to photograph. The resulting photos became promotional materials for the businesses. I invited commercial photographer and Tzu Chi volunteer Ye Tang-ming (葉唐銘) to share insights on composition and the use of light and shadow in pastry photography. During class, everyone arranged and presented the pastries provided by our collaborating businesses. Ye reminded everyone that the direction of light sources would change at different times, resulting in various effects, and that photography is subjective, with no definitive right or wrong. Following the instructor's guidance, participants took their photos and then uploaded their work to a messaging app group chat for immediate sharing and discussion. Afterwards, the participants were able to eat the pastries, bringing sweetness to palates and hearts alike.

At the end of the course, I used the Kahoot! app as a fun, interactive way for participants to review what they had learned. I gave prizes to the top three scorers in the review game. It was a lot of fun to see participants navigate through a series of tense and joyful moments during the activity. Creating classes that were eagerly anticipated by our volunteers became what I considered my greatest achievement.

Aerial imagery

My foray into aerial imagery began in 2014. That year, Tzu Chi held a Buddha Day ceremony at the Taichung Intercontinental Baseball Stadium in Taichung, central Taiwan. While I was documenting the ceremony with a camera, a buzzing sound caught my attention. Following the sound, I looked up and saw a drone for the first time. Involuntarily, my gaze followed it as it soared into the sky, and I found myself drawn closer to the drone operator. I was completely mesmerized when I saw the spectacular aerial view captured by the drone.

I couldn't get the image of a drone out of my

Chen Rong-feng developed a passion for photography during high school and often went outdoors for photo-shoots.

COURTESY OF CHEN RONG-FENG

Tzu Chi volunteers went to Luodian, Guizhou, China, in 2010 to distribute aid to the needy. Here is a touching moment captured by Chen Rong-feng.



mind after that and purchased a drone the following year. I practiced flying it whenever time allowed and shared the videos I took online. Some people left negative comments upon seeing my footage, saying things like: "It's not just about flying high in aerial imagery." Instead of becoming disheartened by such comments, I recognized my inadequacies from their perspectives and encouraged myself to keep improving my skills.

I established an aerial imagery team in 2018, with the goal of sharing my drone flying skills and learning from more enthusiasts. The next year, I joined the Taichung City Fire Department's aerial imagery unit to contribute to disaster relief efforts. This involved surveying the origins of fires, assisting on-site commanders in making accurate decisions for firefighting, participating in search and rescue missions for missing mountain climbers, and deploying lifebuoys for drowning victims.

The aerial imagery team I established also collaborates with the

Coast Guard Administration to fly over the sea and document the ecology of white dolphins.

In 2020, the Taiwanese government began regulating drones. To help fellow Tzu Chi volunteers pass licensing exams, I began designing mock test questions and organizing flying technique practice sessions in open areas. Everyone endured the scorching sun without shade during the practice sessions, so I offered cool refreshments and snacks for relief. We mutually encouraged and learned from each other. A total of 68 volunteers have successfully obtained certifications.

Organizing a flying practice session, whether for exam purposes or not, entails careful planning. It includes finding an appropriate outdoor space, providing diverse flight training, and prioritizing safety. Once an outdoor space is chosen, I conduct repeated site inspections. In addition to training in mountain and sea flying techniques, I incorporate rescue scenarios. As an example, I strategically place five mannequins in grassy areas or along riverbanks, turning the exercise into a friendly competition to see who can locate the most mannequins in the shortest time.

I've been with Tzu Chi for over 15 years. The number of volunteers participating in our photography classes or learning sessions has grown from dozens to over 200. The aerial imagery team has also welcomed many new members, with participants now spread across Taiwan. Our numbers are steadily increasing. While one person may move swiftly, a group can go much farther. Preserving Tzu Chi's history is not a task achievable by one person alone; it requires the collective effort of many. That's why we must encourage participation and new blood in our documenting work.

I've seen a constant evolution in photography and video equipment during my time with Tzu Chi. My viewfinder has expanded from ground-level to aerial perspectives. I enjoy learning and growing along my life's journey. I'm not one with grand plans. My goal for life is simple—to use my skills and abilities for the common good. As I share on my Facebook page: "My love for photography dates back to my youth. Images and visuals drive me forward.

From photography and videography to editing and aerial imagery, I'm on a continuous learning journey. I am genuinely passionate about my work. I'm Chen Rong-feng [陳榮豐]." ❁



Driven by a passion for aerial imagery, Chen Rong-feng organized a Tzu Chi drone team to enhance the perspective of documentary photography and filming.

COURTESY OF CHEN RONG-FENG



Chen Rong-feng used a drone to aid in aerial reconnaissance and investigate the point of ignition at a fire scene in Taichung, central Taiwan.



In 2021, Chen Rong-feng captured aerial footage of the Tzu Chi Dongda Campus in central Taiwan after the main construction was completed and landscaping was beginning.

The JING SI A Illustrated APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

My fellow monks!

Do not accept my teachings just because you respect me.

You should be like fire which tries pure gold.

You must personally test and prove the Dharma I teach.

Recognize the Dharma from the fruit it produces.



Buddhist disciples should not worship the Buddha as a god. We should think of the Buddha as a saint—a great educator who exceeds earthly intelligence and reveals true wisdom. He serves as a role model for us to follow.

This approach establishes a solid foundation for life and encompasses the rich educational essence of Buddhism.



Master Cheng Yen, people always want to get, but you teach people to give. Doesn't this go against human nature?

Is it possible to always take without ever giving? It's like always wanting to withdraw money from a bank account without ever making any deposits. It's impossible.

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

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Happiness and optimism are excellent vaccines against spiritual viruses.

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA