

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Food for Thought

The Power of Vegetarianism





Many Tzu Chi recycling volunteers are older people. Dharma Master Cheng Yen encourages more younger people to join in to help protect the environment.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

Protect the Earth With Wisdom

Translated by Teresa Chang

There is a Buddhist story about a little sparrow that lived in the forest. One day, a fire started in the forest. Instead of fleeing in panic, the bird flew to the sea, dipped its wings into the water, flew back to the forest, and dropped the water into the blaze. The little sparrow flew back and forth, doing what he could to extinguish the fire. He knew he didn't have much power—his wings were small, and the fire was large. But he kept up his efforts because he knew many animals were still trapped in the forest.

This little bird can teach us an important lesson about compassion. We share this world with many other people and living things, and all our lives are intertwined. When a disaster hits, we should all do our best to help those affected, no matter how big or small our individual contributions may be.

In the news, we have seen huge crop losses caused by swarms of locusts, devastating wildfires, and severe flooding. China, for example, was hit hard by floods this year. Duchang in Jiangxi Province and Leshan in Sichuan Province were among the areas badly inundated. I'm very thankful to our volunteers in China. They quickly mobilized to assess the damage and distribute aid.

Volunteers carried out most of the distributions for flood victims in the summer. It was so hot some volunteers almost had heat strokes, but they kept on working, taking only brief breaks to recuperate. They knew that recipients were enduring high heat to receive their supplies, and they didn't want to make them wait. An elderly villager named Huang couldn't bear to see the volunteers suffering under the scorching sun while they distributed aid, so she walked home to fetch a big umbrella. She held it over some volunteers to protect them from the sun.

Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan had visited some of the flooded areas over 20 years ago and distributed winter jackets and blankets. During the relief mission this time, our volunteers in China saw that some villagers had kept those winter jackets and blankets that Tzu Chi gave them over 20 years ago in good condition. The villagers said that they wanted to pass the jackets and blankets down to their children as a reminder that vol-

unteers from Taiwan once traveled all the way from their island to help them after a massive disaster years before.

Love is showing care and consideration for others. The warmth people show when they are willing to work hard to help others is truly moving and uplifting. The same is true when those being helped show sincere gratitude for what they have been given. Our world will be a very beautiful place if such warmth abounds.

When a disaster hits, we must do our best to help those affected. At the same time, we must take to heart the lessons it brings. It's high time we stopped exploiting the Earth without restraint in pursuit of our own pleasures and comforts. We should instead use our wisdom to protect it. That's how we can ease climate change and reduce natural disasters.

Our world is in a critical state, and we all need to safeguard it with love. Our recycling volunteers have set a good example in this respect. Many of them are getting on in years, but instead of seeking a life of comfort, they took up recycling to do the Earth a good turn. They don't mind the filth and smell that sometimes come with that work; instead they're happy they can still contribute at their age to the welfare of the world. It's hard to understand their joy unless you join them and personally experience what they've experienced.

We need more people to take up recycling work like these volunteers. Most of them are older, so we especially need younger people to join and accept the baton of environmental responsibility. The future belongs to the younger generation. We need to raise their environmental awareness and inspire them to action.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi's recycling work. I'm truly thankful to all our volunteers for their contributions. Many of them not only take part in the work, but try to inspire others to join them by sharing the joy that comes from doing such work and the significance of the cause. They are like candles passing their flame to ever more candles. They are helping to light up society. If we can all do our best to benefit the world like they do, we will greet a future full of hope. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

November 2020



1 PROTECT THE EARTH WITH WISDOM

Master Cheng Yen shares the story of a little sparrow with a lot of heart, and encourages us to live a similar life of compassion, action, and commitment.

4 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Becoming a vegetarian creates ripples of positive impact throughout the world. This article spotlights several persons for whom vegetarianism is a way to support the environment, one's health, and animal rights.

12 TZU CHI INDONESIA'S ANTI-CORONAVIRUS ENDEAVORS

Read how volunteers and staffers with Tzu Chi Indonesia have worked tirelessly during the pandemic to bring love and care to the underserved in Indonesia.

22 HELPING JEEPNEY DRIVERS WEATHER COVID-19

Jeepney drivers in the Philippines have been hit especially hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's how Tzu Chi volunteers stepped in to help them through the difficult time.

26 PROPRIETORS STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC

In the shadow of the pandemic, these Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia have turned economic challenges into opportunities for growth and service.

30 SAFER HOMES, BETTER LIVES

This article highlights Tzu Chi's efforts to make homes safer for needy and elderly people. Read how the foundation is helping to reduce falls or accidents through simple but effective preventative measures.



39



44



48



59

39 FINDING PURPOSE IN GIVING

This Tzu Chi volunteer has walked two paths in his life, one focused on making money, the other giving to people in need. He knows which one leads to true happiness and riches.

44 A NEW LEG, A NEW LIFE

Read how Tzu Chi helped one man stand up again after an accident robbed him of his ability to stand on his own.

48 BREAKFAST AND BENEVOLENCE

This breakfast cart vendor recycles, educates, and inspires her custom-

ers and neighbors to protect the Earth. Her example is one we can all take to heart.

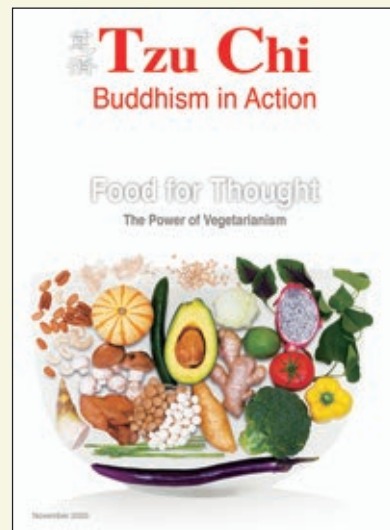
58 THE ILLUSTRATED JING SI APHORISMS

The Buddha taught us to be compassionate so that we can sincerely live in peace with each other.

59 TZU CHI EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

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

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

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Food for



Thought

The Power of Vegetarianism

By Chen Li-an

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Protect the Earth and show your love for animals by paying attention to what you eat. The choices you make in your diet can effect a positive change in the world.



“Hello, everyone, I’m Shu-min,” said Park Shu-min as she looked into the camera. “Today I’m going to demonstrate how to make spicy fried rice cake.” The 24-year-old South Korean, who went to school for many years in Taiwan and now lives and works on the island, was creating a video to post on a social media platform. She has posted more than 15 videos online since the start of this year. The common themes of her videos are environmental protection and vegetarianism. She’s been a vegetarian for nine years now.

“I create my videos mainly to inspire people to quit eating meat,” the young woman said. She added that she switched to a vegetarian diet after watching a documentary when she was a student. That documentary, titled *Cries of Life*, was about the miserable lives of factory-farmed animals, such as pigs and chickens. She was greatly shocked by what she saw in the film. It made her realize how much suffering such animals endured

on farms and during slaughter, just so people could have meat to eat. “I like animals and children very much,” Park said. “I found it very cruel that some animals were forcibly separated from their families, couldn’t grow and live normally, and were then mercilessly slaughtered to satisfy people’s appetites for meat.” The documentary forced her to reflect on her own diet. When she realized that she could live well without eating meat, she decided to go vegetarian.

Park admits there aren’t many vegetarian restaurants in Korea. That poses a challenge when she goes back to her home country and eats out with friends. People there also don’t know much about vegetarianism. A friend once said to her,

Park Shu-min talks to a camera about her dining experience in a vegetarian restaurant. She was creating a video to post online to encourage more people to give vegetarianism a try.



"You're a vegetarian? Let's go eat pork knuckles then." That friend thought that pork knuckles didn't count as meat.

"I've also had friends put meat on my plate and tell me to pretend that it was vegetarian meat," Park said. "I felt so disrespected!" The inconvenience, mockery from friends, and her love for tempura once made her waver on her decision of becoming a vegetarian, but her love for animals eventually won out and she has stuck with her choice.

Limited food choices and worries about being "ostracized" by non-vegetarian friends have caused many novice vegetarians to abandon their decision and go back to eating meat. Park admits that it is a challenge for vegetarians to balance their diet choices with social life. She knows that she can't force her friends to accommodate her diet choice, so she tries to be as flexible as possible—up to a point. "When left with no other choice, I share meat dishes with friends by eating only the vegetables in the dishes. My core principle is 'no meat.'"

Park started sharing vegetarian cooking and food on social media when she was a student and kept it up after she started working. She plans her videos with care. What matters to her most is not the number of likes she gets, but how well she can encourage more people to reflect on what they eat. One thing she hopes to get people to think about is the impact their diet choices have on the environment.

"I didn't realize until I became a vegetarian that livestock agriculture requires huge amounts of water and pollutes the earth and the air," Park said. Once she learned that eating vegetarian is not just a way for her to show her love for animals but also a great way to protect the environment, she decided to start doing more for the environment. For example, she started carrying reusable tableware when she goes out so that she can avoid using disposable items.

She finds it very heartening when people who have watched her videos tell her they've become interested in a vegetarian and eco-friendly lifestyle because of her and have even decided to give vegetarianism a try. "Feedback like that always comes as a great encouragement," Park said with gratitude. "I'll keep promoting vegetarianism in my way even if I have an audience of only one person."

The vegan fad

Vegetarianism used to be more associated with religion, but more and more younger people now



Some younger Tzu Chi staffers in Taiwan have started a live stream program to promote a vegetarian diet.

are opting to go vegan for the environment, for health, and for animal rights. Park cites herself as an example—her decision to become a vegetarian was prompted by her desire to protect animals. Even though her parents had long ago switched to a vegetarian diet due to their religious beliefs, they never demanded that Park follow suit. Instead, they respected her choices. "Young people don't like to be forced into doing things," she said. "If my parents had tried to coerce me to quit eating meat, it would very likely have had the exact opposite effect." Since it was her own decision to eat vegetarian, she's been more willing to stick to the path she has chosen.

Because vegetarianism is close to her heart, Park has tried to stay up-to-date on issues related to it. She shares that the term "vegan"—meaning no consumption or use of animal products—has become popular among the younger generation in recent years, mainly due to the influence of celebrities in politics, business, sports, and show business. "The dietary habits of young people are easily shaped by people around them or the celebrities they like," Park said. "The fad of veganism has undoubtedly led more people to want to learn more about a plant-based diet." She hopes that such a trend will help raise awareness of the deeper meaning of a vegetarian diet: respect for animal rights and love for the Earth.

In recent years, companies producing plant-based meat substitutes, such as Beyond Meat,



A child participates in a game in an event held by the Tzu Chi Foundation and Taipei city government in August 2020 to encourage vegetarianism.

OmniFoods, and Impossible Foods, have become rising stars in the food industry and stock market. The meat substitutes developed by these companies have garnered a lot of attention from both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. In fact, *The Economist* declared 2019 the “Year of the Vegan” because interest “in a way of life in which people eschew not just meat and leather, but all animal products including eggs, wool and silk, is soaring, especially among millennials.”

Taiwan, with a population of more than 23 million people, has more than three million vegetarians. Compared with people in many other countries, the island’s inhabitants are more informed about and receptive to vegetarianism. It is also not difficult to find restaurants serving vegetarian food in Taiwan. Taipei, in northern Taiwan, has been listed by CNN as one of the top ten cities in the world for vegans.

Even so, a considerable amount of meat is still consumed in Taiwan. According to 2018 statistics from Taiwan’s Council of Agriculture, people in Taiwan eat an annual average of 70 kilograms (154 pounds) of pork and poultry per person, far higher than that consumed in Japan, the Philippines, and other nearby countries. In view of worsening climate conditions and the coronavirus pandemic, which was suspected to have been caused by wild animals, the Tzu Chi Foundation, based in Taiwan, has stepped up its

efforts to promote vegetarianism. Some younger Tzu Chi staffers in Taiwan have, for example, started a live stream program to campaign for a vegetarian diet. Volunteers in other countries have been doing what they can to advocate for vegetarianism too. Tzu Chi USA has launched a campaign which has successfully encouraged participants to eat more than two million vegetarian meals.

Whether as a result of the vegan fad or due to people’s conscious efforts to protect the environment and animal rights, vegetarianism is a lifestyle choice many people are making for themselves around the world.

Save the earth with your diet

Business is booming at a restaurant on a street next to Da’an Forest Park in Taipei. People lining up to eat there before the shop even opens is a common sight on weekends and holidays. The bright, neat, comfortable environment in the restaurant and a menu offering a rich variety of vegetarian cuisine have drawn a wide clientele ranging from older people, mothers with children, and young office workers.

Liu Yan-xi (劉妍希) is the owner of the restaurant. Like Park, she's relatively young, only 28. Environmental protection is an issue that Liu follows closely, and it was her concern for the environment that led her to open the restaurant, which she did three years ago to motivate more people to eat less meat. "I've learned from what I've read online or in newspapers and magazines that no action is more effective than eating vegetarian if we want to reduce damage to the environment and curb climate change," Liu declared. Vegetarian cuisine in Taiwan used to be greasy and salty to increase its appeal, but she attracts her patrons by serving healthy, unprocessed, and delicious whole food. She is helping her customers eat healthy while they contribute their bit to a more sustainable Earth.

Liu is happy that many people who dine in her restaurant have returned again and again, many times with their friends and family in tow. She knows that it's not easy to stick to a vegetarian diet and that it takes a change in mindset to persist in it, but every meal she serves means one less meal with meat has been consumed.

Alberto Buzzola is an Italian who works as a photographer in Taiwan. He has visited over a hundred countries around the world during his 30-plus years as a photographer, including many countries in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. What he saw and experienced in those countries, coupled with some information he had read, made him reconsider his meat-eating habits. He is among the ranks of people who have opted for vegetarianism for the sake of the envi-

ronment and the general welfare of the world.

"There are over 800 million hungry people in our world who do not have enough to eat," said Buzzola. "If a piece of land is used to raise animals, the food produced can only feed a small number of affluent people. If we use the same piece of land to grow crops, we'll be able to feed far more people."

Concern for the environment is another reason he decided to become a vegetarian. He has been paying attention to environmental issues facing the Earth over the years. "I can survive without eating meat," he said, summing up his switch to a meatless diet in those simple words.

In addition to going vegetarian, Buzzola has also tried to lead a lifestyle that has as little impact on the environment as possible. For example, he uses a reusable water bottle to avoid buying bottled water, and he rides a bike to and from work to reduce his carbon emissions. He often has to carry heavy photographic equipment around, but the regular exercise and a balanced diet has helped keep up his strength. "Eating vegetarian hasn't affected my health or energy levels," he says.

A pig farmer turned vegetarian

Compared to other like-minded people, Luo Hong-xian's (駱鴻賢) path to becoming a vegetarian was more dramatic.

Luo used to be a third-generation pig farmer, raising several hundred pigs on a farm in Linkou, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. In his eyes, a pig was more a source of income than a living



Once a pig farmer, Luo Hong-xian no longer raises pigs to sell for slaughter. He has instead turned his farm into a safe haven for animals. He has become a vegetarian too.



According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, more than 77 billion livestock animals around the world were killed for meat production in 2018. That number translates into the slaughter of 210 million animals per day, 2,443 animals per second. Those statistics do not include marine life.

creature—that is, until an incident in 2008 brought a sudden reversal to his thinking and career path.

One day that year, Luo was sending some pigs to a slaughterhouse as usual, but one of the pigs to be sent away, instead of squealing loudly like the other pigs, remained silent. It looked at Luo quietly, as if asking him, “Why are you so cruel?” Luo was stunned as their eyes locked. In that moment, it was as if the compassion that had lain dormant in his heart was suddenly awakened. He couldn’t sleep that night, and at three a.m. he jumped out of bed and rushed to the slaughterhouse to save that pig. Sadly, he was too late: the pig had already been killed and

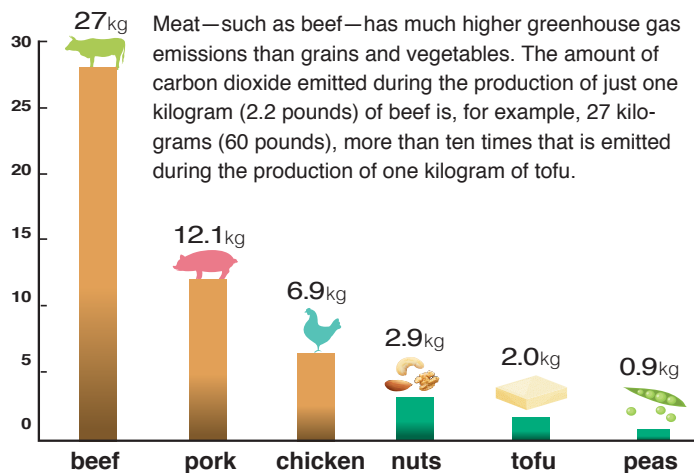
butchered by the time he arrived. This incident prompted him to vow to never eat meat again, and to never sell the rest of his pigs to be slaughtered for food.

His farm has since become a safe haven for animals, where pigs, chickens, ducks, and geese live and grow freely until they die naturally. Having lost his original source of income, Luo turned to other means to make a living. He sells fertilizer made from animal manure, does odd jobs wherever he can, and makes vegetarian boxed meals for sale. It’s harder for him than before to make a livelihood, but he knows he is doing the right thing and so has kept at it.

Since his dramatic conversion, he has been invited to give talks in Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Austria, Finland, and other countries to inspire love for animals and promote vegetarianism. In the process, he has met experts in different fields and come to a deeper understanding of the vast environmental footprint created by livestock farming.

“In order to produce meat, massive tracts of land have been overdeveloped, much to the detriment of the natural world,” he said. He cites the rainforests in Brazil as an example. Large areas of forests there have been deforested to raise cattle. Animal agriculture requires not only masses of land but water and grain as well. Statistics shows that it takes more than 2,400 gallons of water to

Carbon Emissions Per Kilogram of Food Products



Meat—such as beef—has much higher greenhouse gas emissions than grains and vegetables. The amount of carbon dioxide emitted during the production of just one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of beef is, for example, 27 kilograms (60 pounds), more than ten times that is emitted during the production of one kilogram of tofu.

Source : The climate change website of Taiwan’s Environmental Protection Administration



produce one pound of meat, but only 25 gallons to grow one pound of wheat. If all grain were fed to humans instead of animals, we could feed a lot more people. Luo mentioned the wastewater problem related to the livestock industry too. The pollution caused by livestock wastewater is another environmental concern that many consumers may not have considered.

Considering the numerous and diverse impacts that animal husbandry has on the environment, Luo said: “Judging from the way people are living now, it will be hard to get many to instantly change their diet habits and see the resulting effects. But just imagine if half of the world’s population would begin to eat vegetarian. What a tremendous positive impact that would have on our environment.”

Everyone can make a difference

A report on land use and climate change issued in 2019 by the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes a plant-based diet as a major opportunity for mitigating climate change. Livestock farming puts a lot of pressure on the environment by using up valuable natural resources and generating large

Victims of Cyclone Idai in Mozambique line up for food distributed by a charitable organization. The cyclone triggered a food crisis in that African country. Over 800 million people are estimated to suffer from hunger in 2020.

amounts of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Endeavors to lessen the impacts of global warming will fall significantly short if no major changes are made to global land use and human diets. “We don’t want to tell people what to eat,” says Dr. Hans-Otto Pörtner of the IPCC. “But it would indeed be beneficial, for both climate and human health, if people in many rich countries consumed less meat, and if politics would create appropriate incentives to that effect.”

It is not that difficult to contribute to the well-being of the environment and the world in which we live. As consumers, we have a great influence on how land is used and what food is offered on the market. Opt for products that are eco-friendly and animal friendly. Make choices that will promote our planet’s sustainability. Each of us can make a difference, and each of us has an essential role to play in the future of our planet. ❀



Fishermen steer their boats toward an Indonesian warship carrying food prepared by Tzu Chi for a distribution. The distribution event, held on June 12 in Suramadu waters in the Madura Strait, benefited over 2,000 fishermen.

COURTESY OF SURABAYA CITY GOVERNMENT



Tzu Chi Indonesia's Anti-Coronavirus Endeavors

Compiled by Huang Xiao-qian

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago state and the fourth most populous country. The nation faced a severe challenge in tackling the coronavirus infection when the pandemic broke out around the world. With 27 years of experience in charitable work, Tzu Chi Indonesia quickly swung into action to help soften the impact.



The COVID-19 pandemic began its insidious spread around the world in the first quarter of 2020. Indonesia's President Joko Widodo announced the country's first two confirmed cases on March 2, 2020. The announcement was quickly followed by a burst of panic buying, as people began worrying that the government might enact a lockdown to curb the spread of the infection. Long lines formed at almost every supermarket and convenience store in the country.

It wasn't long before the pandemic severely strained the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) the world over. The need hit Indonesia hard as well. Face masks and hand sanitizer were in short supply, and the cost of what could be purchased soon tripled. Just as the need for it rose, the supply of readily available PPE dwindled. Medical workers fighting the disease on the front lines were especially in dire need.

Tzu Chi Indonesia quickly responded to the PPE shortage in the nation. By late January, Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia had purchased PPE and sent the supplies to China to help that nation fight the escalating outbreak there. At the same

time, they stockpiled some PPE in case of an outbreak in Indonesia. It was a wise strategy. When the need for PPE rose in Indonesia, Tzu Chi Indonesia was able to quickly donate face masks and protective gowns to frontline medical workers.

In March, to help the government deal with the infection, Tzu Chi Indonesia began working with the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to raise money to buy anti-coronavirus supplies for donation. The supplies included COVID-19 test kits, ventilators, protective gowns, safety goggles, and N95 masks. The purchases were made in Indonesia and China. Tzu Chi Indonesia arranged for three chartered plane trips to transport the items purchased in China back to Indonesia. When the shipments arrived, government officials helped hurry them through customs duty-free. On March 22, with the help of the military and police, the medical equipment and supplies began to be delivered to different places in the country for distribution.

Warm response from the business sector

Sugianto Kusuma (郭再源) and Franky Oesman Widjaja (黃榮年), deputy CEOs of Tzu Chi Indonesia, were two major figures behind the fundraising campaign. They realized early that if not properly tackled, the highly contagious COVID-19 might spiral out of control, putting people's lives at risk and causing social and economic upheaval. However, to tackle the disease and stem its spread, a lot of PPE and other medical supplies would be needed, the purchase of which would require staggering amounts of money. What should they do?

Kusuma has an optimistic personality, which won him the nickname "Mr. No Problem." He believes that all challenges can eventually be overcome if one is working for the benefit of others. He and Widjaja thus jumped right in and began soliciting donations from the business sector.

The two men are themselves big-time entrepreneurs, and joined Tzu Chi many years ago. They have since willingly and cheerfully shouldered many responsibilities to help the foundation carry out its philanthropic work. The examples they've set have inspired many businesspeople to follow in their footsteps by becoming long-term donors or volunteers themselves. During the fundraising campaign this time, the participation of these businesspeople was an important factor in enabling Tzu Chi and the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to raise the

A Timeline of COVID-19 in Indonesia

- March 2** The first diagnosed case is reported in Jakarta.
- April 10** Large-scale social restrictions are imposed. The total number of confirmed cases hits 3,512, with a death toll over 300.
- June 4** Lockdown measures are eased to allow the economy to reopen.
- June 17** With 41,431 recorded cases, Indonesia becomes the Southeast Asian nation with the highest number of infections.
- Aug. 6** Indonesia is overtaken by the Philippines as the country in Southeast Asia with the most coronavirus cases.
- Oct. 15** Indonesia becomes the hardest-hit nation in Southeast Asia again, surpassing the Philippines.



money required to purchase much needed anti-coronavirus supplies.

Widjaja said that Tzu Chi Indonesia has left deep charitable footprints locally over the last 27 years. This is indicated by how enthusiastically the business sector has pitched in to help this time. More than a hundred companies have chipped in so far. "In fact, many companies have been negatively impacted by the pandemic themselves, and yet they are still willing to help," said Widjaja. "I believe that we'll be able to pull through the pandemic with all of us working together in unison."

The foundation uses funds only for the purpose for which they were donated. There is a report dedicated to the expenditure of the donations raised to help with the anti-coronavirus campaign. "We need to let the donors know that every penny they've given has been used properly," Widjaja explained. "Our dedicated report has grown to more than a hundred pages now and is constantly being updated."

A stabilizing force

The appearance of the novel coronavirus infection has forced people to change their lifestyles

Tzu Chi volunteers and entrepreneurs from the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry donate medical supplies to Indonesia's Ministry of Health on April 6 at the Tzu Chi Jakarta Complex.

and induced an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in societies around the world. In the face of these new challenges, Liu Su-mei (劉素美), CEO of Tzu Chi Indonesia, thanked Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings for helping her and other volunteers stay calm. "Because of the Master's teachings, we realize that we need to remain calm and unflustered in all circumstances. Doing so will enable us to handle any situation with wisdom," Liu said.

Liu set up an Anti-Coronavirus Emergency Relief Executive Team to tackle the pandemic when COVID-19 made its way into Indonesia. The team decided that all Tzu Chi volunteers and employees in Indonesia would comply with the government's measures to combat the coronavirus and follow the decisions of Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan. All volunteers and employees were determined to stick to their posts in the battle against the infection.

When the Indonesian government instituted large-scale social restrictions known as Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB) in April, some Tzu Chi staffers began working from home. But Tzu Chi Indonesia office employees in Jakarta, in departments such as secretariat, general affairs, finance, and purchasing, continued to work on-site. Sometimes they even needed to work overtime late into the night. Their top priority at the time was to get the medical supplies donated by Tzu Chi into the hands of healthcare professionals as quickly as possible, to protect them from the virus.

The demand was staggering when Tzu Chi first started distributing PPE and other medical equipment and supplies in Indonesia. Staffers at the Secretariat Department began receiving more than a thousand e-mails each day asking for help from Tzu Chi. A dedicated hotline hadn't yet been set up, and so many medical facilities and individuals also phoned the office asking for help. "Sometimes we received phone calls as late as 11 p.m. applying for donations of medical supplies," said employee Marwan Yaumul Akbar. To handle the demand, he often had to spend the night in the dormitory at the office, but he didn't mind at all. "Working at a charity organization can sometimes take a lot out of you," he said, "but we feel richly rewarded to be able to help others."

Staffers at the General Affairs Department are responsible for receiving and shipping supplies. When they receive requests from the Secretariat Department, they need to prepare materials for shipping and place them in front of the warehouse. And they don't always know when a batch of supplies will arrive. During the early days of the pandemic, when the demand for supplies was high, there were frequently nights when the staffers arrived home from work only to be called back to the office in the wee hours to receive a new shipment of goods. Staffer Wu Tian-qi (吳天旗) said, "This anti-coronavirus mission is harder to carry out than other disaster relief operations. We have to stand at the ready all the time, while taking precautions ourselves to avoid getting infected with the virus. I often remind my fellow colleagues not to go anywhere after work, because if we contract the virus we won't be able to work."

Huang Li-chun (黃禮春), the director of the Secretariat Department, has worked for Tzu Chi for many years. He has been a key figure in the distribution of anti-coronavirus supplies during the pandemic. Spending nights at the office was typical for him too when the high demand for

supplies kept them busy. His colleagues often saw him sorting goods in the basement at night wearing his pajamas.

He admitted that keeping up the heavy workload left him tired, but it was countered by seeing the messages for Tzu Chi on social media, thanking them for their help and wishing them the best. These messages of gratitude and goodwill caused a profound joy to rise in him. "Blessed with all the best wishes from so many people, I believe we will all remain sound and healthy," Huang remarked.

Meeting the needs

Tzu Chi Indonesia started shipping the personal protective equipment it had in stock to medical facilities in the country on March 18, 2020. Four thousand masks and 50 protective gowns were delivered on March 21 to RSUD Bogor, a hospital in the city of Bogor, West Java. The hospital had been designated by the regional government on March 17 to treat COVID-19 patients. Because there was such a severe shortage of PPE on the market at the time, Ilham Chaidir, the superintendent of the hospital, was deeply moved when he received the medical supplies from Tzu Chi volunteers. "You make us feel that we are not working alone in the battle against the coronavirus," he said.

RS Sumber Waras in Jakarta was another hospital that benefited from Tzu Chi's donation of PPE. "Our hospital has only a small stockpile of face masks," said Dr. Faye Yowargana to the Tzu Chi volunteers who delivered 4,000 masks to the hospital. "We'll run out of our supply next week. That's why I contacted Tzu Chi for help. Thank you so much for delivering the 4,000 masks to us. You've prevented an emergency for our hospital." She couldn't stop thanking the volunteers for their assistance.

On March 22, a million COVID-19 test kits arrived in Jakarta. They had been purchased from China by Tzu Chi Indonesia. Terawan Agus Putranto, Indonesia's Minister of Health, arrived personally at the Tzu Chi office in Jakarta to receive 25,000 of the test kits, which were then distributed by the Ministry of Health to medical facilities in the nation.

The next day, volunteers donated four ventilators to two hospitals: RSPAD Gatot Soebroto and RSPI Sulianti Saroso. The deputy superintendent of the first hospital, Brigadier General Dr. Agus Budi Sulistya, commended Tzu Chi for taking action to aid in the country's fight against the pandemic. "Our frontline medical workers really



need anti-coronavirus medical equipment and supplies now," he said. "It's very heartwarming in the face of the pandemic that we're quick to show our care for each other."

Tzu Chi Indonesia purchased 385 ventilators from China, 355 of which had been donated by early October to various hospitals. The equipment has been a great help to the medical facilities. A ventilator is an important device for treating COVID-19 patients who are in critical condition. It's thanks to Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan and volunteers in China that Tzu Chi Indonesia was able to make the purchase.

By early October, Tzu Chi Indonesia had donated medical equipment and supplies to over 1,330 hospitals and other organizations in the country.

Nationwide large-scale distributions

In April, large-scale social restrictions were put in place in some areas in the nation. Leisure venues

Tzu Chi employees in Jakarta pack goods in mid-May for distribution to people whose livelihoods have been seriously impacted by the lockdown measures implemented by the government to contain the coronavirus.

ANAND YAHYA

were forced to close their doors, social assemblies of more than five people were prohibited, and school was suspended. Citizens other than government employees and essential workers had to work at home. App-based ride-hailing *ojek* (motorcycle taxis), a popular form of transport and delivery service in the Greater Jakarta area, were prohibited from transporting passengers and were only allowed to transport goods. Eid al-Fitr, a Muslim festival that fell in May this year, was postponed to the end of the year to prevent massive numbers of people from the Greater Jakarta area from returning home for the religious holiday. Such movement would only exacerbate the spread of COVID-19.



Indonesia has a population of 267 million, nearly 10 percent of which live below the poverty line. The economic situation of the country worsened after the large-scale social restrictions were imposed. Some companies had difficulty staying afloat, massive layoffs followed, and employees were forced to take unpaid leaves of absence. Those running roadside stalls and motorcycle taxi drivers also saw a big drop in their incomes.

In Karimun, located in the Riau Islands Province, buses were forbidden to take full loads of passengers so that social distancing guidelines could be maintained. Bus drivers lost as much as 70 percent of their incomes as a result. International airports and ports in Papua, the easternmost province of Indonesia, were temporarily closed. Porters' and taxi drivers' incomes there dropped to zero.

To help ease the economic hardship caused by the coronavirus, Tzu Chi Indonesia first moved

Military personnel in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra Province, prepare to deliver Tzu Chi aid supplies to people in their homes. This door-to-door distribution was undertaken to avoid the gathering of crowds at a distribution venue. CHEN JUN-BIN

up payments of financial aid to its long-term care recipients, and provided two months' worth of aid instead of one. Then volunteers started working with the military, police, and local governments to distribute food to the underprivileged. Every package delivered included five kilograms (11 pounds) of rice, one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of sugar, ten packets of instant noodles, and other items. There were also a consolation letter from Dharma Master Cheng Yen and a flyer containing health information about COVID-19. In addition to distributions to the general public, bulk sup-



plies were provided to organizations.

The distributions were conducted in accordance with local government regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Residents in some areas didn't have to go out to obtain their supplies. Instead, military and police personnel delivered the goods to them by motorcycle. Commercial motorcycle taxis were also employed to deliver supplies door-to-door.

As the death toll climbed, funeral service personnel were overwhelmed by their workloads. They had to bury dozens of COVID-19 victims every day. "We are about to enter the Ramadan period," said a funeral home driver in tears. "We want to be able to celebrate it with our families too. We implore everyone to stay home as much as possible to prevent more large-scale infections. We have family too, and we have our lives to live. The way things are now is not what we want."

Volunteers and police officers in Bekasi, West Java, cross a wooden bridge to deliver daily necessities to residents of Cikarang on May 13. A thousand boxes of supplies were distributed on this day.

On April 21, before the arrival of Ramadan on April 24, Tzu Chi worked with the presidential office and held a distribution of goods for funeral service workers as a way to extend care to them. The event was held at a cemetery. Six hundred packages of goods were delivered to the venue, some of which were further sent out to two more spots. The event, captured on video and made into a short film by the Presidential Secretariat, was deeply moving. Presidential Secretariat head Heru Budi Hartono said that he hoped that funeral service workers would feel the government's and Tzu Chi's care for them through the distribution.

On June 12, a team of Tzu Chi volunteers and Navy personnel sailed on board the warship KRI Makassar-590 to Madura Strait. They were on a mission to distribute daily necessities to fishermen from Bulak and Kenjeran, in Surabaya, and from Madura, off the northeastern coast of Java.

The volunteers had boarded the warship earlier that morning at six, bringing with them 2,600 boxes of necessities. When they arrived at their destination for the distribution, hundreds of fishing boats approached the warship. The fishermen began boarding the ship in an orderly fashion to obtain their share of the supplies. Aid recipients broke into happy smiles, offering profuse thanks for the goods. Mat, one of the fishermen, said, "I hope all those who have helped us will be amply rewarded for their good deeds."

Also present at the event were representatives from the East Java provincial government and police, including Governor Khofifah Indar Parawansa. Heru Kusmanto, the commander of the Indonesian Navy Fleet Command II, said during a speech that fishery is an economic mainstay of East Java Province and that they hoped to help local fishermen ride out the pandemic via the distribution.

As of early October, Tzu Chi Indonesia had distributed more than 419,700 packages of daily necessities in the hope of helping Indonesians through the economic challenges posed by COVID-19.

We're all Indonesians

Tzu Chi Indonesia's anti-coronavirus endeavors have been widely reported in the nation's media. On April 14, Kompas TV (a national private television network owned by Kompas Gramedia, Indonesia's largest media conglomerate) interviewed several Tzu Chi volunteers online during its eight o'clock prime-time slot. The volunteers included Hong Tjhin (陳豐靈), CEO of DAAI TV Indonesia, Tonny Christianto, the superintendent of Indonesia Tzu Chi Great Love Hospital, Freddy Ong (王輝勳), the director of Indonesia Tzu Chi Great Love School, and Gandhi Sulistyanto, from Sinar Mas Group.

Patricia Susanto, the host of the TV program, introduced Tzu Chi by saying that the foundation has been helping people in Indonesia for 27 years and that the purpose of the TV program was to help people better understand the four missions of Tzu Chi—charity, medicine, education, and culture. Hong Tjhin shared how Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi in Taiwan, and talked about the

foundation's ideal of providing relief to the needy and inspiring the rich to give. He said that many entrepreneurs in Indonesia have, for example, been inspired by the teachings of Master Cheng Yen to give to the underserved.

Susanto then asked why the owners and employees of some companies that already have their own charity foundations still felt the need to volunteer for Tzu Chi. Gandhi Sulistyanto answered that Tzu Chi holds an appeal for those people because, with decades of experience in charity work, the foundation has set up a mature mode of operation, especially in disaster relief work. He went on to say that many businesspeople join Tzu Chi because they can do more than just donating money or material supplies in the foundation—they can also experience and learn from the Great Love spirit of Tzu Chi by personally taking part in the foundation's work.

A.B. Susanto, a producer at Kompas TV, said on the program, "Dharma Master Cheng Yen reminds us that we can't predict how long we are going to live, but we can decide if we want to live meaningfully. Have you ever pondered whether you've made any contributions to our society? During the pandemic this time, Tzu Chi has worked with many entrepreneurs to give to our country. What they have done is truly admirable."

After the outbreak of COVID-19, Tzu Chi volunteers and employees in Indonesia quickly arranged for medical equipment and supplies to be sent to various hospitals. The donations from Tzu Chi have earned the appreciation of many medical professionals, their families, and the general public. Many have left thank-you messages on social media for Tzu Chi. Volunteer Jia Wen-yu (賈文玉) even received a message from a friend whom she hadn't seen in more than 20 years. The message read: "A friend of mine is a physician at a hospital in Jakarta. He had been wearing a raincoat in lieu of a protective gown until his hospital received some protective clothing from Tzu Chi. I'm so thankful to Tzu Chi. I admire the foundation."

Ade Armando, a professor of communications at the University of Indonesia, posted on a social media platform something to this effect: "I learned from the news in March that some ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation had raised 500 billion rupiah (US\$33,550,400) to help our country battle the pandemic. I'm very touched. Some people have been disseminating hatred, saying that people of



Chinese ethnicity who live in Indonesia do not love Indonesia and that they are not Indonesians. But look at how much ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs have done for our country during the pandemic. In fact, it's not just entrepreneurs—even ordinary Chinese people have been quietly giving of themselves to help. A Chinese, for example, donated a piece of land for the burial of people who have succumbed to COVID-19. I hope that one outcome of the pandemic is that we can all understand and recognize that the ethnic Chinese in our country are also Indonesians.”

Doni Monardo heads the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management. He is also the chief of the national COVID-19 task force. He had a video created to thank Tzu Chi, in which he pointed out that even before COVID-19 struck, Tzu Chi had built more than 2,000 housing units

Suryana, with his family around him, opens a box of food from Tzu Chi. He is a farmer living in Sukabumi, West Java. Precautionary measures enforced by the government to countervail the coronavirus made it harder to sell his vegetables. The gift from Tzu Chi would help him and his family weather the pandemic.

for victims of an earthquake and tsunami that devastated Palu, the capital of Central Sulawesi Province, in September 2018. He commended the foundation for continually caring for the people in the country. “I thank Dharma Master Cheng Yen and all Tzu Chi volunteers from the bottom of my heart. I expect us to work together in the future in the spirit of Great Love for the causes of humanitarian aid and environmental protection.” ❀

Helping Jeepney Drivers Weather COVID-19

Information provided by Tzu Chi Philippines

Compiled by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Daniel Lazar

The Philippines has been one of the countries in Asia hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of infections in the nation hit 100,000 on August 2, with more than 2,000 deaths. In response to a petition from frontline medical workers to tighten restrictions to rein in the virus, a new lockdown was enacted in Metro Manila, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, and Rizal from August 4 to 18. An earlier shutdown, from mid-March to May, was one of the world's longest. The months-long restrictions hobbled the economy, severely impacting the livelihoods of many people. Among those worst hit were jeepney drivers. Some drivers of this popular form of public transportation were impacted so badly they had to resort to begging to feed their families.

The plight of the jeepney drivers moved Tzu Chi volunteers in the country to action. They decided to provide daily necessities to jeepney and tricycle drivers for three consecutive months to help them ride out this difficult time. The project was launched in August, with distributions conducted in cities located from Luzon, northern Philippines, to Mindanao, southern Philippines, as well as in outlying islands. As of early October, more than 25,000 families had received help.

"The pandemic has caused us a lot of suffering," said jeepney driver Bernard Manalang at a distribution. "Many drivers are desperate and don't know how to provide for their families. We were lucky to meet Tzu Chi at a time like this. Thank you for your help. Every family who received help today was very happy."



Quezon City



THE PHILIPPINES



Volunteers overcame many challenges to obtain and confirm recipient rosters before the distributions could take place. They obtained lists of possible recipients from jeepney drivers associations and the government, but those lists didn't match. As a result, volunteers had to expend a lot of effort double-checking the information. Despite the work, they felt everything was worth it as long as Tzu Chi's aid could reach the needy and help ease their burden.

Volunteers confirmed recipients' identities with QR codes at distribution venues before handing out supplies. Volunteers and recipients alike took precautionary measures to reduce the chance of virus transmission. Each distribution served hundreds of or even more attendees. Each attendee represented a family struggling to get by. Volunteers' hearts ached as they thought of the large number of people suffering during this difficult time.

Some farmers were having a hard time as a result of the pandemic too. They had difficulty selling their produce because restaurants were closed. To help these farmers out, volunteers bought out of pocket 5,000 kilograms (11,023 pounds) of vegetables from them and distributed the food to more than a thousand jeepney drivers at the distribution at the Ynares Sports Complex in Antipolo City on October 3. Every driver who came to this event received eggplant, bottle gourd, corn, papaya, and pumpkin in addition to 20 kilograms of rice, cooking oil, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, salt, noodles, and soap. It was a joyous day for both the drivers and farmers.

The end of the pandemic is not yet in sight. Volunteers in the Philippines will continue to help the most vulnerable in society tackle the economic challenges thrown in their way by the coronavirus. ❁



THE PHILIPPINES



Proprietors Struggling to Survive the Pandemic

By Yap Chai Hoon
Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Ho Wei Mee

Some Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia are among those whose livelihoods have been affected by the precautionary measures enforced by the Malaysian government to arrest the spread of COVID-19. How have they been getting along?

The raging COVID-19 pandemic has caused a recession in Malaysia more severe than that in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis or the Great Recession of 2007–2009. To rein in the spread of the virus, the Malaysian government implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18, 2020. The order shut down businesses across the board unless they were providing essential services, such as medical

care, logistics, food, and banking. Many companies put their employees on unpaid leave, cutting off their incomes and throwing their lives into disarray. As a result of this lockdown

Stores that couldn't stay afloat after the Malaysian government implemented preventive measures to curb the coronavirus are freed up for rent. SAM PIN FOOK





measure, unemployment shot up quickly, from 610,000 people in March to 820,000 in May. The service industry bore most of the brunt. It was anticipated that the employment picture would improve in the second half of the year, with the implementation of the Recovery Movement Control Order in early June. This allowed businesses to gradually reopen and call people back to work. Before the economy really bounced back, however, many people still needed to figure out how to get through the dark days before the end of the tunnel.

Ong Kar Ling (王嘉苓) had run her travel agency for ten years when her business started feeling the pinch of the pandemic in January 2020. That was when her customers began canceling their orders or postponing their travels in droves. At her wits' end, she had no choice but to send her only employee, a part-timer, home. Even so, she wasn't too concerned when the MCO was initiated in March. She stayed home binge-watching TV dramas, enjoying some relaxing downtime. But then the MCO was extended, again and again. With each extension, her panic grew more acute. She knew that her office rent came due with an unbending regularity, MCO or not, and that the repayments on her loans were scheduled to start in

The pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to the tourism industry, in which Ong Kar Ling used to work. She had no choice but to find another way to earn a living.

just six months. Nobody knew with any certainty when the pandemic would come to an end, but she knew beyond a doubt that her revenues were drying up. Where was she going to find the money to make those payments?

Rise early for new work

It was only 4:30 in the morning, but Ong was already bustling around in her kitchen. She hadn't had breakfast yet, but that would have to wait. She needed to get 50 orders of Mee Jawa (Java noodles) ready for lunch delivery to customers at two locations. She had to make the best use of her time. Steam billowed up from pots and pans as sweat broke out on her forehead. Luckily, her mother and best helper, Tan Saw Keok (陳淑季), soon joined her to help out.

"Are the ingredients ready?" Tan asked as she tied a kerchief around her head and got ready to fry some vegetable crepes. Soon after, Ong's sister also came into the kitchen to help. The mother and

daughters sliced potatoes, shredded lettuce, halved eggs, and cut dried tofu. As they worked, the sun gradually crept into the kitchen. At 8:30, they began packing what they had prepared into serving containers. They put lettuce and bean sprouts on one side, added boiled noodles next to the vegetables, then piled potatoes, dried tofu, vegetable crepes, eggs, and calamansi on top of the noodles. A little chili sauce and crushed peanuts were sprinkled on the food as a finishing touch. By the time it was done, the combination of ingredients made a colorful and eye-catching picture.

"We make the soup last," explained Ong. "Otherwise, the food will get cold by the time we hand it to the customer."

Everything was ready to go at eleven o'clock. Because it was a weekend, Ong's husband was at home. He drove her to deliver the orders to the customers. They finished their last delivery at one o'clock, then headed back home.

It had been two months since Ong switched from tourism to running a food delivery business. She and her family had worked out the kinks and figured out ways to get the job done more effi-

ciently. Her kids loved that because they were consequently not needed to help in the kitchen as much as before. Mee Jawa is a traditional Indonesian food which Malaysians love to eat, too. For Ong, every ingredient and every step of the preparation is serious business. On the days when she makes Mee Jawa, she has to get up earlier than usual. "I never needed to rise so early in my earlier job," she said, smiling.

A way to promote vegetarianism

Though forced to leave the tourism industry, Ong considered herself fortunate because the pandemic did not impact her husband's job. They could still make ends meet and continue sending their two children to a Chinese independent high school.

Still, Ong knew deep down that idleness would deplete even a great mountain of fortune, so she combed through the classified ads to try to find a new job. She discovered to her dismay that despite her 20-plus years of experience in the tourism industry, it was quite a challenge for her to find work in another field.

In fact, Ong wasn't too confident in her abilities. Some friends in tourism invited her to rent a space in a food court to sell food together, but she declined. She held back because she thought too much. "Looking back now," Ong said, "I wonder what I was afraid of. Was it because I had never done it before and wouldn't have known how to go about it in the first place? But, come to think of it, if I don't do anything, nothing will ever come of it."

The Ong family once ran a coffee shop. Falling back on that experience, Ong talked to her mother and sister about starting a homemade food delivery business. They publicized their service on social media and got a good response. They started taking in some money by selling homemade food. An added benefit was that such a service would allow them to promote vegetarianism.

Their business offers free delivery in the Klang District, where they live, if a customer orders at least two vegetarian meals. Customers living in other areas need to order at least four meals to have the delivery fees waived. "I know other people charge more for their food, but this work is



Ong Kar Ling and her family started a homemade food delivery business after the pandemic forced her to switch to another line of work. The family's food business brings in income while allowing them to advocate vegetarianism.

about more than money,” Ong said. “As long as customers want vegetarian food, I’m glad to make it for them. I want to help Master Cheng Yen promote vegetarianism.”

Though the business requires the joint effort of several family members to operate, Ong’s home-based business earns an income that is only a third as much as what she used to make alone. Even so, the family decided to donate part of their earnings to Tzu Chi to help the needy. They were upholding the spirit of “If you take from society, give back to society.” Out of every meal they sell—priced at six ringgit (US\$1.45)—they donate 50 cens (12 U.S. cents) to Tzu Chi.

Ong’s mother, Tan, began volunteering for Tzu Chi ten years ago. She is most supportive of her daughter. “We have a little income, so we have no problem helping others,” she said. “I believe that the ripples of goodness will come back full circle to us.”

If the mountain will not come to me

The coronavirus was under much better control in Malaysia by July. Schools and more businesses reopened as a result, but the borders remained closed. Tourism remained depressed, so Ong stopped leasing the office space for her travel agency. She would wait and see what might come along next.

Like tourism, the entertainment industry has been hard hit by the pandemic. Volunteer Ho Wing Hong (何永康) had been in the karaoke business for many years when the pandemic hit, but even his once stable business went south. He was forced to close three stores. For the first time in his life, Ho, in his fifties, felt uncertain about what the future might hold for him. He kept reminding himself not to lose hope.

In July, he and his wife started an online flower shop. They had to learn as they went, but they didn’t mind. “Perhaps this is a test for us from heaven,” he said. “Problems and challenges are opportunities for growth. If we can adjust our mindsets and change our approaches, there will be no dead end.”

Ho has even found a silver lining in the cloud of the pandemic. With more time on his hands now, he can volunteer more frequently for Tzu Chi. He serves as a documenting volunteer by videotaping Tzu Chi events. He said that if he constantly dwelt on his livelihood, he wouldn’t be able to sleep soundly, so he might just as well use the time he has to volunteer for Tzu Chi. After the pandemic erupted, he helped videotape Tzu Chi



With his taxi business impacted by COVID-19, Tee Chee Guan makes good use of his time by volunteering more frequently for Tzu Chi. COURTESY OF TEE CHEE GUAN

distributions for refugees and foreign laborers. “Having witnessed their plight, I feel I’m a much more fortunate person.”

Many refugees and foreign laborers are paid by the day. The lockdown measures really put them in a tight spot. With no incomes, they faced the imminent danger of hunger and homelessness. Ho has seen some of them, their eyes welling with tears, ask Tzu Chi volunteers for help. Their landlords were threatening to evict them if they didn’t pay their rents.

Chay Sie Wai (謝小慧) helped with aid distributions for refugees by conducting telephone interviews with them. She had lost her job in April, but was lucky enough to land a new one later. “Though I get paid less than before, it’s better than sitting around idly at home doing nothing,” she said. Charity work has helped her feel content with her own lot. Though she needs to draw on her savings, she feels she is getting along well enough. “I’m very grateful,” she said of her current situation in life.

Tee Chee Guan (鄭智源) has volunteered actively in Tzu Chi distributions since the pandemic broke out. He drove a taxi before the pandemic, mainly taking people to and from the airport. His livelihood has been severely impacted by the coronavirus, but government subsidies have been adequate to sustain his family. “I’ve used this opportunity to take part in more charity work,” he said. “I hope to use my actions to teach my children that whenever you can help others, you should do your best.”

Safer Homes, Better Lives

By Ke Pei-yin

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

For more than half a century, Tzu Chi has worked to make homes safer for needy and elderly people. As the population in Taiwan ages rapidly, so too do many homes. It has become ever more important to make people's homes safer to prevent falls or other accidents.





The only bathroom at the home of this Tzu Chi care recipient is located outdoors. The bathroom was rendered partially unserviceable and unsafe to use because wind had snapped the electrical wire running to it. Tzu Chi volunteers in Taichung removed the pitaya plant that had wound its way up the nearby utility pole and rewired the bathroom, making it safe to use again.

There is a small park in a quiet alley in the Da'an District of Taipei, frequented by many elderly people in the neighborhood. They come to sit and rest, to chat, to enjoy the warmth of the sun. In contrast to this seemingly cozy picture, however, there is a row of shabby, two-story, corrugated metal houses close to the park. These shanty-looking dwellings don't seem to belong in this neighborhood of modern high-rise buildings.

Mr. Bao lives in one of the metal houses. He is severely mentally disabled, and has lived alone ever since his mother passed away. He receives a monthly government subsidy for low income households. Tzu Chi volunteers first visited his home in 2006 at the request of the village head, to repair his window screens. They returned the following year, after Typhoon Krosa had blown off his roof, entrance door, and window screens. Volunteers repaired the damage and rewired his house while they were at it.

The households in the row of dwellings where he lives are separated by thin concrete walls. Bao occupies the third unit from the end. Things are piled up neatly around his entrance door and the front hallway is kept quite clean, but the neatness outside belies the sorry state inside. A big hole in the wooden floor in his attic bedroom brings into question the safety of his home. After evaluation, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to help fix up Bao's home again.

Preventing risk of a collapse

A group of volunteers visited Bao one day to conduct a thorough inspection of his home and determine what repairs were necessary. A moldy odor greeted them before they even stepped into the house. Once they were inside, the sight and the stench quickly made them realize that Bao eats, drinks, and goes to the bathroom here. The kitchen and the bathroom were just beyond the



living room, separated by a shower curtain. There was nothing at all to separate the kitchen from the bathroom. Obviously, a bathroom door was needed for hygiene and privacy; it was one of the first things the volunteers decided to install.

Volunteer Chen Hong-lin (陳宏麟), a 40-year veteran in interior decorating, noticed that the tiles on the sink in the kitchen had fallen off. He suggested replacing the tile sink with stainless steel. Such a sink would be durable and easy for Bao to maintain.

Chen then examined the broken attic floor and the damp, decaying, moldy stairs leading to it. "The wooden stairs to the attic can be replaced with steps of galvanized steel," he said, "and we can replace the plywood attic floor with a C-beam base covered with plastic flooring. There will no longer be any danger of a collapse by the time we get done with it."

Tzu Chi volunteers had repaired Bao's roof

before, but the metal sheets they had installed then did not have enough overhang to stop rain from splashing into the house during typhoons or rainstorms. Chen measured everything and decided to extend the metal sheets to ensure that the roof would keep out even the "cats and dogs" kinds of rain.

Generally speaking, a house becomes an "old house" after 30 years; a 50-year house would be considered a "super-old house." Statistics from Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior in the first quarter of 2020 pegged the average age of houses in Taipei at 34 years, with 77,000 super-old houses in the city. Although advancing age is traditionally one of the main reasons for house repairs, the large number of old houses in Taipei has not led to a surge in requests from the needy for Tzu Chi assistance in home repairs.

Why is there such a discrepancy between the number of older houses and the number of repair



↑ Bao's living room also serves as a bedroom. A shower curtain separates it from the bathroom and kitchen. There is little privacy to speak of in the housing arrangement, but Bao has long become accustomed to it.

← Volunteers hold a housewarming party for Bao (in pink shirt) after the remodeling of his home was completed.

requests? “Most of the recipients of our long-term care are renters, not property owners,” senior volunteer Zeng Mei-hui (曾美惠) said. She added that any remodeling proposals must be negotiated with property owners, a back-and-forth process that can be quite time-consuming. It makes more sense to make other arrangements for care recipients if their rentals require major overhauls, such as convincing them to move to another place, than to go through the process of renovating a rental unit.

Zeng went on to explain that though some care recipients are not renters, they live in houses built on land they don’t own themselves. When that happens, volunteers must consult with the lawful owners of the land and buildings before they proceed with any renovations. This prevents legal issues down the road. And once the remodeling has started, volunteers must pay attention to an array of details to keep things moving forward positively. For example, they must strive to not disrupt or trouble people living nearby. All this goes to show that a remodeling effort involves much more than just making the physical renovations to a house.

Volunteers arrived at Bao’s house one day in early July to prepare for a one-month renovation. They cleaned up the house, packed up Bao’s belongings, and together with Bao, his sister, and her husband, moved larger furniture out of the place before covering it in waterproof canvas. The remodeling team arrived the next day and began working. They first took apart the wooden floor of the attic. They removed nails and other supporting mechanisms until the whole floor dropped to the ground, causing a big dust cloud that made everyone around sneeze nonstop.

After cleaning up the mess, the team measured, cut, and installed C-beams in the attic. A sturdy floor began to take shape. When they were done with the floor, they set to work replacing the rotten wooden stairs that led up to the attic with galvanized steel steps. They measured, welded, drilled holes, and screwed carefully. Chen Honglin inspected the workmanship every step of the way to ensure quality.

Respecting what residents want while ensuring safety

Tzu Chi has been making home improvements for the disadvantaged in Taiwan for more than half a century. In response to the rapid aging of Taiwanese society, the foundation is looking to further extend this service to benefit more people.

In recent years, Tzu Chi has advanced home safety improvement projects from a prevention point of view. With help from village or neighborhood heads, volunteers have been trying to reach more elderly and disabled people to help them improve the safety of their homes.

Some older people in Taiwan would rather remain in their old homes in the countryside than move in with their children out of town or check into retirement homes. They often end up living alone as a result. To save money, they may continue to use old-fashioned squat toilets even though they have difficulty standing up from a squatting position. To save electricity, they may be reluctant to turn on lights. Moving around in their poorly illuminated homes makes them vulnerable to falls and other hazards. They stick to their routines and are often loath to ask others for help. Seeing their needs, Tzu Chi volunteers have taken the initiative to reach out to them and senior-proof their homes.

Close to 30 percent of residents are elderly in Pingxi District, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. With the assistance of the city’s Departments of Social Welfare and Civil Affairs, Tzu Chi volunteers went to work in this highly aged district. They made their first home visits in Pingxi to identify people who needed home improvement services in mid-May 2020. They were accompanied by Pan Long-yu (潘隆裕), chief of the Shulang neighborhood, and Gao Shu-lian (高淑蓮), of the Social and Humanitarian Section of the district office.

Mr. and Mrs. Zhan have six children, all of whom have their own families and live elsewhere. The elderly couple lives alone in a one-story house surrounded by woods in Shulang. They were sitting and chatting outside their home when the group of visitors arrived. During their visit, Tzu Chi volunteers tried to convince the couple to allow the installation of grab bars in their bathroom to reduce the risk of falls. The couple looked shy and embarrassed during the conversation; they were reluctant to go along because they didn’t want to trouble others. Only after the volunteers repeatedly reassured them that it would be no trouble at all did the couple agree to have grab bars installed in their bathroom.

Li is another older resident of Shulang. She lives alone. Like the Zhans, her children live out of town. Volunteers assessed her home and planned to install safety handrails in places where the risk of falls was the greatest. They also planned to



← Improved indoor lighting and added grab bars make Li's home, in New Taipei City, safer to live in.

↓ Volunteer Lin Shi-jie (left), a professional mason, examines the wall with a wall scanner to avoid electrical wires and water pipes before installing grab bars in the bathroom. Zhan, the house owner, looks in curiously from the door.





build some steps to bridge the elevational gap between the floor and the threshold, a gap that the volunteers worried might cause her to trip and fall. But Chen Zhi-ming (陳志明), a Tzu Chi social worker, pointed out that such a change could itself be more dangerous than no change at all. Unused to the added steps, Li might be more likely to trip and injure herself. The volunteers thus decided to discuss this adaptation with Li more thoroughly before they went ahead with anything.

One day in mid-July, before the sun got too hot, Tzu Chi volunteers made another visit to Shulang to install grab bars in six households. At the Zhans' home, volunteer Lin Shi-jie (林世傑), a professional mason, used a wall scanner to locate hidden electrical wires and water pipes behind the walls in the bathroom. This enabled them to

avoid drilling into them during the installation. Lin and other volunteers mounted a grab bar by the toilet and another one by the washbasin. Two hours later, they moved on to Li's house.

Li was standing at her door to greet the volunteers before they had even parked their car. The team first installed a grab bar in Li's bathroom, which was separate from the main building. Then they replaced the old, worn lighting fixture in the bathroom, and relocated the switch so that Li would no longer need a stool to reach it. Reaching high places is a safety hazard. "You're very considerate," said Li to the volunteers. After she had tried the grab bar, she was so happy she couldn't stop smiling.

Similar home safety improvements for the elderly have been carried out in Dongshan, Beitun



As much as 90 percent of Dongshan, Beitun District, Taichung, is hilly. Xu's lavatory was built on a steep slope more than 30 meters (100 feet) from her house. The way leading to the lavatory had neither lights nor guardrails. Volunteers visited her at her home in late May to assess how to make improvements to her living environment (left). During another visit in June, volunteers Ye Wen-an (left in the right photo) and Cai Ming-mo (蔡明模, second from right) and neighborhood chief Qiu Cai-yuan (third from right) discuss the possibility of adding a bathroom next to Xu's bedroom.

PHOTOS BY LIU JIN-LONG

District, Taichung City, central Taiwan. Dongshan is also home to many older people. Near the end of May, more than a hundred people, including Tzu Chi volunteers, gathered in front of a community activity center in the neighborhood. They divided themselves into seven groups before fanning out to visit 19 households, which were located mainly in the mountains or in small alleys. Neighborhood chief Qiu Cai-yuan (邱財源) and his associate Liu Cun-rong (劉村榮) led the way.

A car carrying some of the visitors bounced along a winding, uneven mountain road, headed toward the home of villager Xu. After the group of people got out of the vehicle, they carefully negotiated a wet, mossy, steep slope before arriving at Xu's home. A constant smile played on the elderly woman's lips—perhaps because she had

not seen so many visitors in her home all at once in a long time.

Xu's children did not live with her. She lived alone in a one-story house that was about 60 years old. The house was set in the middle of a sea of trees. Sunlight could not easily reach it, making it damp and dark even on a sunny, bright day. On a cloudy day, the house became even darker. The roof, long in disrepair, leaked badly in the rain. The lavatory was situated on a steep slope more than 30 meters (100 feet) from the house. Xu had to cross a small bridge just to reach it, and the path had neither lights nor guardrails. At night, Xu had to feel her way in the darkness to answer nature's call. She had even been bitten by snakes on her way to the lavatory before. To improve safety, volunteer Ye Wen-an (葉文安) suggested to Xu that

she let them install a toilet in her shower room, which was not far from the house. But Xu declined the offer for help, saying that she was accustomed to the current arrangement.

Small repairs prevent big falls

During similar home visits in Taipei and Taichung, volunteers have noticed that many elderly folks tend to decline Tzu Chi's offer to senior-proof or remodel their homes for improved safety. Qiu Cai-yuan, Dongshan neighborhood chief, cheered the volunteers on nevertheless. He reasoned that more frequent visits might change the minds of the elderly.

That proved true in Xu's case. Volunteers visited her again in mid-June. Her daughter was there this time. The volunteers explained to both how they hoped to remodel the house to make it safer. Their enthusiasm and perseverance finally won Xu over. She agreed to the remodeling, which would include repairs to her roof and the addition of a new bathroom next to her bedroom. Soon, the shower and toilet would be in one place and much closer for her to use.

In contrast to the lukewarm reception in other cities, requests for remodeling services in Tainan, southern Taiwan, have risen threefold. Why the difference? Staffers who process all of Taiwan's residential safety improvement projects at Tzu Chi's Department of Charity Mission Development in Hualien explained the reason for the increase in requests. They said that the efforts of neighborhood heads and volunteers in promoting and implementing remodeling plans have changed the minds of some elderly folks. Though such folks didn't want to burden their children, they shunned the remodeling help as a handout for the poor. But once neighborhood heads and volunteers convinced the folks that their projects would improve their safety at home, they willingly began signing up in droves. The elderly folks realized that taking good care of themselves was the best way to put their children at ease and keep them from worrying.

Some social welfare organizations in Taiwan also provide home improvement assistance like that offered by Tzu Chi. The Heng-Shan Social Welfare Foundation is one such group. In the process of helping mentally challenged people gain the ability to take care of themselves, personnel there learned their homes are often a big mess. This is because their illness prevents them from sufficiently caring for themselves or their homes. In May 2014, the foundation established the Heng-

Shan Good Deeds Group, whose mission is to improve the living environment and safety of disadvantaged households with disabled members.

The Eden Social Welfare Foundation started offering home improvement assistance to disadvantaged families in 2009. In 2017, this foundation founded the Live Well Home Repair Group in response to the growing ranks of elderly people living alone, elderly couples living alone, and elderly folks staying home alone while their children worked during the day. They knew that home improvements could lower the risk of accidents at home and consequently help prevent loss of function in older people, which is a good thing for society.

The success of the Tzu Chi Foundation senior-proofing and remodeling service undoubtedly relies heavily on volunteers who work with the needy. But there are only so many of them, and there is just so much that they can do. It is the foundation's hope that more like-minded people and home renovation professionals will join to strengthen this service to the needy.

Su Jia-hui (蘇家慧) works in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan. After a friend told her about Tzu Chi's home improvement service, she accompanied some volunteers on a visit to Xu's home. Xu speaks Taiwanese, a dialect Su doesn't understand well. Though she could not understand much of the conversations during the visit, she quietly observed the interactions between the volunteers and Xu. She was shocked by Xu's living conditions during the visit, and she felt very sorry for her. The trip helped her realize that her own circumstances were much better than those of many other people. It made her even more grateful for what she had.

In early August, a group of volunteers in Taipei held a housewarming party for Bao, mentioned at the beginning of this article. They cooked *tangyuan* (small glutinous rice balls) and a nice lunch for the happy occasion. The unceasing rain outside did nothing to dampen the joy, fun, and laughter inside the house. Volunteers also went with Bao to give tangyuan and apples to his neighbors, to thank them for looking out for him over the years.

Bao was all smiles as he inspected his remodeled bedroom. With the new floor, he could now finally sleep soundly at night.

"In the past, when he took a step on the wonky stairs, my heart would skip a beat," said a volunteer. Now looking at Bao stepping on the sturdy stairs, volunteers can finally put their minds to rest. ❀

Finding Purpose in Giving

By Ke Pei-yin

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Making money used to be his one and only goal in life, until a promise to the Buddha turned him in a new direction. Now giving of himself to the needy has become his lifelong commitment.

As soon as Xu, an elderly Tzu Chi care recipient, emerged from her house, Cai Ming-mo (蔡明模) greeted her in a spirited voice and stepped forward to give her a supporting hand. Cai and a few other volunteers had just arrived at Xu's home to pay her a regular visit. They chatted a bit, then Cai asked her about a medical condition she had told them about on their last visit. It had been bothering her for some time. Cai explained they had asked a physician to come along this time to check on her.

Cai, 50, was the tallest among the volunteers. He also had the most sonorous voice of them all. But it's not just his physical characteristics that set him apart—his personality also stands out in a crowd. Wherever he is, the atmosphere livens up, conversation flows easily, and laughter is constant. His gregarious nature can even chase away a dour expression on a care recipient's face.

Cai might have inherited his friendly, outgoing personality from his father. Born in Changhua, central Taiwan, Cai is the youngest of five children. His family owned a factory that specialized in zinc alloy die casting. All was well until Cai's oldest sister died in a car crash when he was in first grade. His mother was devastated, to the extent that she could no longer help her husband manage the factory. As a result, Cai's father, kind and trusting by nature, generously made loans to his financially strapped relatives and friends. Before long, the family business began to experi-

ence cash-flow problems.

Cai's father eventually had no choice but to close his factory and move the entire family to Taichung, also in central Taiwan. That was when Cai was a fifth grader. Though his family was in poor shape financially, Cai continued to lead a carefree life under the protective wings of his parents. Even so, he noticed something at the time that left a deep impression on him—the change in people's attitudes towards his father when he fell on hard times. It was as if only wealth and status could win a person respect.

There was a big market for metal accessories for leather goods at the time, and Cai's father soon made a comeback riding on that wave. But instead of learning from his experiences, he continued to make risky loans to others. By the time Cai was in ninth grade, his family was deep in debt again. To help with his family's finances, Cai began working part-time at his father's factory while going to school.

Cai completed his compulsory military service in the mid-1990s and emerged ready to start a career. At the time, many traditional manufacturing businesses in Taiwan were moving to China. Wanting to capitalize on the booming market for metal accessories abroad, Cai went to China too and set up a factory there. Taking to heart what had happened to his father, he buried himself in work, making money his one and only goal in life. When he was 30, he met the love of his life and tied the knot with her.

Finding happiness in volunteering

Cai was introduced to Tzu Chi through a friend. He began making monthly donations to Tzu Chi when he was 24, even though he didn't know the charity foundation well. When he was 29, a massive earthquake hit central Taiwan, on September 21, 1999. As Cai delivered relief supplies on his own initiative to the disaster areas, he saw Tzu Chi volunteers there distributing hot meals to survivors. Only then did he realize that

this was the organization to which he had been donating.

Every time Cai returned to Taiwan on breaks from running his business in China, he'd help his relatives who had become Tzu Chi volunteers do recycling work. He'd drive a truck to collect recyclables and help sort them out. He felt a rare peace while engaged in the unpaid volunteer work; his mind, usually churning with thoughts, would calm down. He especially enjoyed the times when,



having finished their work for the day, he and his relatives would sit down for some tea and conversation. He had been living alone for years abroad, toiling away for his business. These moments of connection and conversation were very precious to him.

Some time later, his father had a run of bad luck. He was injured on one occasion and fell seriously ill on another. Cai hurried back to Taiwan both times. The second time, despite having no religious faith, he went to the Tzu Chi office on Minquan Road in Taichung and prayed to a statue of the Buddha there for blessings for his father. He'd rarely done that before, and he felt quite awkward prostrating himself before the statue.

Fortunately, his father regained consciousness three days later, and he was moved out of the intensive care unit a week after that. But the experience, and the promise Cai had made to the Buddha to take up charity work if his father recovered, prompted him to make a change. He decided to wrap up his business in China and return to Taiwan for good to better take care of his father and other family members.

Cai returned to Taiwan and started working at a factory owned by his brother-in-law. He began Tzu Chi volunteer training around the same time, splitting his time between volunteering and working at the factory. Thinking back on that time, he said that that year was his unhappiest. He felt lost having ended the business he had started in China. He felt he had nothing. But at the same time, he appreciated having embarked on the path of charity. It seemed that another door had opened in his life. After a relief trip to the Philippines in 2013, he

even decided to quit his job and dedicate himself completely to volunteer work. He was just in his mid-40s at the time.

Impermanence

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan hit the central Philippines, killing thousands of people and causing cataclysmic destruction. Leyte Province was one of the hardest hit areas. Tzu Chi decided to provide temporary classrooms for affected schools and temporary housing for families who had lost their homes. Cai and 12 other volunteers formed a construction team and traveled to disaster areas in Leyte to assist with the construction work and to pass on construction techniques to locals so they could help put up the structures.

"When I looked down at the Philippines from the airplane," Cai recalled of his trip that time, "the more than 7,600 islands that made up the nation looked like pearls scattered on the sea. However, when I got nearer the airport apron, I discovered that not a single building was left intact." He remembers walking on streets swamped with garbage and debris, and seeing corpses being pulled from under mud and rubble. An overwhelming sense of impermanence hit him. He reflected, "No matter how powerful or influential you are, there is no evading impermanence."

Cai and his team members visited Tunga Central School, an elementary school in Tunga, northern Leyte, about half an hour from the airport. It was far enough from the sea to escape being devastated by the floods, but it had suffered damage just the same. Roofs had been blown off the school buildings, and students could only attend class when the weather was good.

"A little girl kept smiling at me from amidst a group of schoolchildren," Cai remembers. Hand in hand with Cai, the girl guided him on a tour around the school. They couldn't talk to each other due to the language barrier, but they both wore constant smiles. "This is my daughter," Cai said to the interpreter, who later told him that the girl had been the only one in her family of nine to have survived the floods triggered by the typhoon.

A few days later, the team of volunteers went to Alangalang National High School, in Alangalang, northern Leyte, for more construction work. The roofs of the classrooms there had also been blown off, and their cement walls were dilapidated. At noon, Cai and the other volunteers had lunch with



The walking stick that Xu (middle) used had rotted away at the bottom, but she couldn't bear to throw it away because it had belonged to her late husband. Cai Ming-mo (left) decided to repair it for her after learning of its emotional value. Here, Xu uses a plastic tube that Cai had prepared to decide on the suitable length of the repaired stick.



Cai (right) and other volunteers mix sand and cement to build some steps for a care recipient.

students at the school. They were surprised to see that the students' lunch boxes contained nothing but plain rice—there was nothing at all to go with it. "And the rice was hard so that it would feel more filling," remembered Cai.

The volunteers ending up sharing their lunches with the students and eating only rice themselves. Despite that, "it was the most delicious meal I'd ever had in my life," Cai recalled.

Cai's heart ached for the girl who had lost her entire family to the typhoon and for the students who had only rice to eat for their lunch. As his heart went out to them, he reflected on his attachments to money and status when he was younger. His vanity at the time was as plain as day. However, "People are very forgetful," he said. He explained that it's easy to count your blessings when you visit the needy and witness the hardships they are going through. But once you say goodbye to the needy and go back to your old life, that sense of contentment and gratitude can easily diminish. "Only when you're constantly exposed to the world of the underprivileged and open your heart to feel their need will you truly experience a lasting difference in your heart," he remarked.

Reining in his temper

After his relief trip to the Philippines, Cai talked to his wife, Zhou Hui-ping (周惠萍), about quitting his job and devoting himself entirely to volunteering for Tzu Chi. She was supportive. "Without my wife, I wouldn't have been able to walk the Tzu Chi Path with such unwavering steps." He thanks her for supporting every decision he has made. He is also grateful to have very thoughtful children. He often shares with them what he has experienced in his volunteer work, and they've grown closer to him because of it.

Cai recalled one day that he and his son, who was still in grade school at the time, decided to go swimming. But before they left, he received a message that a fellow Tzu Chi volunteer had taken ill. He asked his son if it would be okay if he visited that volunteer to extend his care before they went swimming. Instead of throwing a tantrum, his son readily agreed. Cai was touched by his young



son's consideration, and he reminded himself to do everything he could to be the best father he could be for his children. Even though his volunteer work keeps him busy, he makes a point of making breakfast for his children and taking them to and from school whenever he doesn't have to attend to volunteer duties. He has decided to do so all throughout their junior and senior high school years.

Cai became a boss at 26 when he set up his own factory in China. Having experienced success at such a young age, he became prideful and often failed to consider other people's feelings when he dealt with them. He remembers that shortly after he received his volunteer certification, he had a meeting with other volunteers to discuss a purchasing matter. During the meeting, his temper got the better of him and he lashed out impatiently at a senior volunteer: "We already went over this before and our decision was not to make that purchase. Why are you bringing it up again?!"

He was rueful when he recalled that incident, saying that his temper was short back then. It seemed that a fire of anger could be set ablaze in his heart at the slightest provocation. He realized

Cai interacts with a group of children at Tunga Central School, where he helped put up some temporary classrooms after Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the central Philippines. Doing construction work under the hot sun was hard work, but seeing how happy the children were with their new classrooms made Cai forget all the hard work he had put in.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

afterwards that he had done wrong and let his temper get the best of him. He told himself to be sure to put a curb on his temper to avoid hurting others' feelings.

He realizes that the Tzu Chi Path is not just a path of giving but also of spiritual cultivation, of constantly reflecting on and improving oneself. He will continue to polish his shortcomings away as he marches forward on the path he has chosen. He said that he has better understood life's meaning in Tzu Chi and has found his purpose in life by serving others. He has realized that a simple life of giving is what he really wants. He is determined to continue working with other volunteers to relieve suffering, bring happiness to others, and make a difference in the world. ❀

A New Leg, A New Life

Text and photos by Anand Yahya

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Life threw him a curveball when his leg was amputated, but love and care from others helped him get back on his feet.

Anton, 36, wears a friendly smile as he tends to the customers patronizing his vegetable stall. He looks no different from any other man his age. It's only when he moves around that you might notice that his gait is different.

He lives in the village of Karang Rahayu, Cikarang, West Java, Indonesia. His working days are long. He goes to the Cibitung wholesale market every night from 11 p.m. to one the next morn-

ing to stock up on vegetables for his stall. He opens his stall in a traditional market between six and eight a.m. Offering water spinach, spinach, chilies, shallots, bottle gourds, and other vegetables, his stand is a display of rich colors.

Anton appreciates the life he is leading now, though he once felt so depressed that he wanted to take his own life.

An accident before Eid al-Fitr

August 18, 2012—the eve of the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr that year—is a day Anton will never forget. He was going grocery shopping for

Anton cherishes being able to go back to his old ordinary life.





Anton is grateful to Tzu Chi for helping him get a prosthetic leg, thus enabling him to walk again.

his mother for the holiday when disaster struck. As he was crossing a street, a speeding minibus seemingly appeared from nowhere and knocked him flying. He landed in the street, only to have his left leg run over by a motorcycle.

Luckily Anton survived, but his left leg was in bad shape. Because it was during the Eid al-Fitr holiday, many medical workers had returned to their hometowns to celebrate with their families. Anton was unable to receive good treatment at the hospital, so his family decided to take him home and seek alternative therapies for him. "Who was to know that when my cast was removed at home, we'd discover that my leg had already rotted," Anton recalled.

His family did their best to try to nurse him back to health, but after eight months' treatment with alternative medicine, his leg still wasn't better. Too poor to afford medical attention at a hospital, he resorted to getting by on antibiotics. Finally, in 2014, he learned from someone he knew about Tzu Chi, and so he applied to the foundation for help.

The volunteers who visited him for assessment decided to provide him with financial aid. They also accompanied him to a hospital in Jakarta for medical attention. Thankfully, the infection in his leg hadn't yet spread to other parts of his body. He received four operations over the next nine months. Even though he walked with a limp after he healed from the surgery, he was finally able to stand and return to work. He continued selling vegetables at the market. It was at the market during this time that he met his future wife, Napiah.

A wife who stands by him

Sadly, Anton's life didn't remain peaceful for long. Just a year later, in 2015, he noticed a small sore on his left leg. The wound gradually grew bigger. He dressed the lesion himself and it healed a few months later. Much to his dismay, however, he found a second, larger lesion on the back of his left leg a few weeks later. What's worse, it rapidly deteriorated. The badly infected sore led to recurrent fevers. Anton had no choice but to seek medical help.

Indonesia had launched a national health insurance program in 2014, but not all medical costs were covered. Thinking that he wouldn't be able to afford treatment and the transportation fees to go to a larger hospital, Anton visited a free health center for treatment. A doctor at the health center told him that his leg had to be amputated to save his life, and that he would need to be fitted

with a prosthetic leg afterwards. The artificial limb alone would cost 30 million rupiah (US\$2,000).

Anton's heart despaired when he received the doctor's news. Though the amputation would be covered by the national health insurance program, where was he to get the money to pay for the prosthetic? The thought of losing his leg and his mobility distressed him so much that he even thought of ending his life.

He told his wife to take their child and go back to her maiden home. He said that he wouldn't be able to support them and give them a good life. But Napiah wouldn't hear any of that. She said to Anton, "When I married you, I'd made up my mind to be there for you through thick and thin. How could I leave you now, when you're most in need of my support?"

At the end of his wits, he contacted Tzu Chi for help again. Volunteer Veriyanto The, from Cikarang, helped care for him this time. He remembers that Anton called him repeatedly before they were due to meet for the first time. "I could tell he was suffering in agony and was in dire need of help," said Veriyanto, "so I cancelled several meetings that day and rushed to his home to check on him." When he arrived, Veriyanto saw Anton's leg wrapped in a cloth, his sore stinking and oozing pus.

Just like the first time around, Tzu Chi stepped in to help after learning of Anton's situation. Veriyanto and other volunteers accompanied him through his surgery and recovery. The foundation also paid to have Anton fitted with a prosthetic leg after his amputation.

Napiah, as she said she would, stood by him throughout it all. She often took him on a motor scooter during this time to receive treatment. They would draw curious looks, but she didn't mind at all. "There is nothing to be ashamed of. My husband can't get around on his own. It's a matter of course that I should give him a supporting hand," said Napiah.

With her love and Tzu Chi volunteers' encouragement and financial assistance, Anton pulled through this hard time in his life. He began to believe that he'd be able to go back to his old life and continue to fulfill his responsibility for his family.

Back on his feet

Though Anton can't move as easily as before with the prosthetic, his artificial limb has allowed him to return to a normal life. He said cheerfully



that he can now ride a scooter to the Cibitung market to purchase vegetables for sale, set up his stall on his own, and clean up afterwards. He relishes being independent and not having to rely on others. The expressions of sorrow and pain on his face are gone, replaced now by a bright smile, with which he greets and tends to his customers every morning.

"I'm determined to give my wife, children, and mother a good life and make them happy," said Anton. "They are my strongest motivation to keep going."

He thanks Tzu Chi for helping him get a prosthetic leg and regain his mobility, and he says with gratitude that volunteer Veriyanto has given him a lot of encouragement and support along the way.

Anton's business is doing well. He has been able to improve his family's finances and renovate his house little by little. He even donates

A bright smile has replaced sorrow and pain on Anton's face. Providing his family with a good life is now his strongest motivation to keep going.

part of his income to Tzu Chi so that he can help others in need.

Anton encourages people with disabilities not to dwell on the negative. He suggests that they participate in activities that can lift their spirits or even try to run a small business. For one thing, staying occupied is a good way to prevent one's thoughts from getting caught up in the negative; for another, it is emotionally rewarding to be able to live on one's own strength. As Anton knows full well, there is truth in the saying: "You have to fight through some bad days to earn the best days of your life." ❀

Breakfast and Benevolence

How One Vendor Is Helping the Earth

By He Yanjun and Hong Yujia

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Dexin

This breakfast stall owner has an additional role: she also serves as a recycling volunteer and promotes environmental protection among her customers and neighbors. Her role as a guardian of the Earth helps the environment and lights up her life with a vital sense of fulfillment.



Li Yaping (李雅平) says she likes sunflowers because of the positive spirit they embody. “The flowers always face the sun and as such bring warmth to people’s hearts,” she said. “The many seeds in the center of their flowers also convey hope and energy.”

A new day has just begun. Li decorates her mobile breakfast stall with a bunch of sunflowers. The golden flowers smile toward the sun, brightening her stall and the hearts of passersby.

Li is from Ningde, Fujian Province, China. She moved by herself 20 years ago to the city of Xiamen, in the southeastern part of Fujian Province, to work. Five years later, she started running a breakfast stall in the city. Every day, rain or shine, she serves residents of the Hetongli

community by warming their stomachs with food. Two years ago, her stall started to look different. She began collecting and tying up bundles of waste paper and used bottles and cans that customers dropped off at her stall each day. Though most people would look at such items as garbage, she viewed them as “gifts” from her customers.

Li Yaping sorts the food items delivered to her breakfast stall in the early hours of the morning. She wants to sort everything as quickly and efficiently as possible so she can listen to Master Cheng Yen’s Dharma talk at 5:20 a.m.





Earlier than the bird

It was just 4:30 in the morning. Even the dim streetlights looked sleepy. The sounds of a pushcart traveling across the surface of a road broke the peace of the morning in Hetongli. Li, dressed in a uniform and wearing a red baseball cap, adroitly pushed her breakfast cart to a street corner and parked it in position.

She had some time to spare before 5:00 a.m., when the vehicle delivering the food items to be sold at her stall would arrive. Breaking into a half trot, she headed toward a garbage station in the community. When she arrived, she began her “treasure hunt.” “Some residents here don’t sort their garbage thoroughly,” she said. “If I don’t pick out the recyclables from amidst the garbage, they’ll be taken away and disposed of as regular trash.”

Li reached into a yellow trash can about 1.2 meters (3.9 feet) tall, and began going through the

Li rifles through the garbage in a trash can to salvage recyclables. “The work isn’t dirty if you do it with a pure heart,” she said.

contents. First her head, then her shoulder, then her entire upper body were in the trash can. Before long, the bag in her hand was filled with beverage bottles, plastic cups, and other recyclables.

As soon as she was done with that station, she jogged to another one in a neighboring community and continued her treasure hunt.

Half an hour quickly slipped by. It was about five o’clock, so Li took off her gloves, washed her hands with soap under a faucet, and ran to meet the delivery vehicle. After receiving the goods, she sorted and put them in order at her stall. She went about her task quickly and efficiently. She



had to get done by 5:20 so that she could listen to Dharma Master Cheng Yen's daily Dharma talk via videoconferencing.

When all was set up at her stall, Li took out her cell phone, gave it a few taps, and adjusted its volume before placing it at a suitable angle on her cart. Then she took out her pen and notebook and sat straight before her phone, waiting for the talk to begin.

The sky gradually brightened. The soft sunlight splashed onto the quiet streets in the community. Passersby did a double take when they passed Li's stall and saw her diligently taking notes while watching her cell phone. Elderly people out for morning exercises and younger workers returning home from their graveyard shifts stopped at her stall and purchased breakfast, their eyes taking in the copious notes she had taken. A few regulars knew that Li was "recharging her

Tzu Chi volunteers who live near Li's breakfast stall cart away recyclables brought by community residents.

battery" again. They asked her, "What did the Master talk about today?" Li enthusiastically shared with them the teachings that had impressed her the most: "The Master said if you just listen to her talks on the Buddha's teachings without ever putting them into practice, it's just as good as having never heard them. Putting the Dharma into action and doing our best to give to others is the best way to honor the Buddha."

The talk came to an end at around 6:30. Li made a 90-degree bow to her teacher on the phone's screen. This has become a unique yet regular scene in Hetongli.

Promoting recycling at her stall

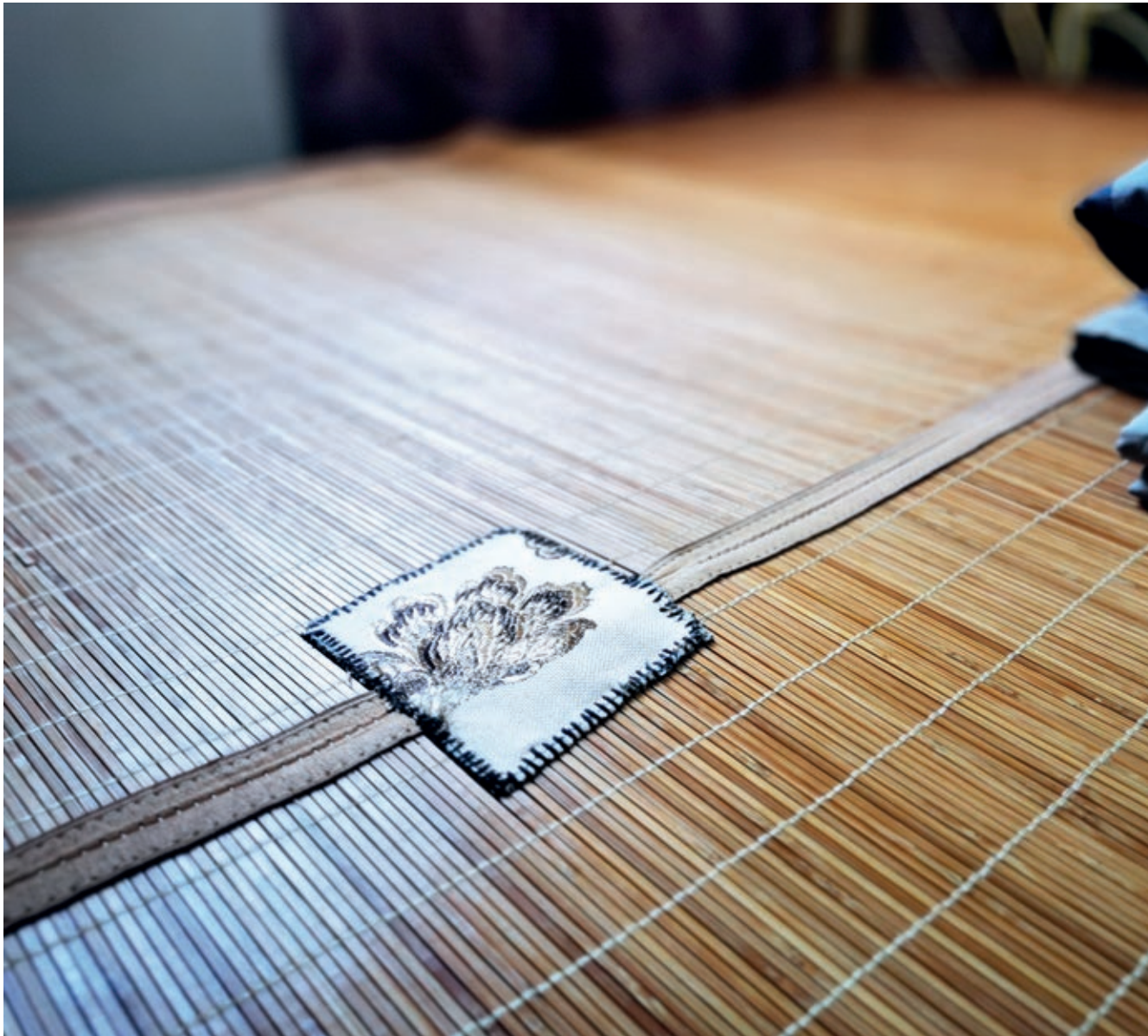
Listening to the Dharma talk seemed to fill Li with energy. As the day progressed, more people came to patronize her stall. She warmly tended to each one. She gave each customer only a single plastic bag to carry their purchases, no matter how much they bought. She explained to them that the fewer plastic bags are used, the better it is for the environment. She also explained the importance of recycling.

“One time I saw a Tzu Chi volunteer in Taiwan promoting recycling at her stall,” Li said. “That gave me the idea: why don’t I do the same?” Just

like that, she started talking about environmental protection and doing recycling at work.

When a customer asked for a second plastic bag from her, Li patiently explained to him why she was limiting each customer to one bag: “Global warming is increasing the number and severity of natural disasters on the Earth. A plastic bag isn’t biodegradable. If we cut down how many we use and encourage others to do the same, we’ll help ease the pressure on the environment. It’d be great if you’d consider using fewer bags.”

Later, a secondary school student told Li he didn’t need a bag. Li’s eyes sparkled with joy when



she heard that. She said to the teenager, “Attaboy! Be sure to spread the significance of environmental preservation to your schoolmates too.”

Among the community residents who came to buy food from Li’s stall, several brought her “gifts,” which they placed near her stall. They knew that this special breakfast vendor would put their love for the environment to good use. Li’s smile grew more radiant with each gift. She put her palms together and thanked each donor profusely.

An 80-year-old woman named Lin put a few used cardboard boxes near Li’s cart, quietly said to Li, “I have only these few for you today,” then turned to leave. But before she could walk away, Li grabbed her arm and responded in a chipper voice, “Ma’am, thank you so much! What matters is not the amount of recycling you bring, but your love for the

Earth. You’ll have countless merits.” The old woman broke into a smile upon hearing such heart-warming words from Li.

Hu, another woman, stopped at Li’s stall when she saw what had just happened and asked curiously about the recyclables. Li is the happiest when something like this happens. She said to Hu: “If you bring your recycling here, we’ll sell it and use the money to help the needy. You can show your love for the Earth while helping needy people at the same time. The love in the world will grow more and more abundant if we all give of ourselves.” Hu said she really resonated with Li’s message, and promised to bring her recyclables to her stall in the future. They added each other on WeChat to facilitate further communication.

Li said appreciatively of the neighbors who had been bringing her their recycling: “They always tell me the recycling they bring me isn’t much. I tell them it’s okay—that many a little makes a mickle. Even just a bottle helps. The recycling from five or six families when put together is



- ↑ People’s criticism about her recycling work hasn’t discouraged Li. She has stayed the course.
- ← Li has learned to cherish the things she owns more since she took up recycling. This photo shows how Li patched a hole in a bamboo mat with a piece of embroidery.

enough to make a small Mount Meru.” (In Buddhist cosmology, Mount Meru is the center of the universe and the abode of gods.)

Taking a moment when there were no customers to serve, Li donned a pair of gloves and organized the recyclables at her stall. She said she needed to get them ready to be taken away later. At around eight o’clock, a few neighbors arrived at Li’s cart. They’d come to take the recyclables to the nearest recycling point on their way to shop for groceries. On days when the amount of recycling is larger, Li posts a message to her group chat for recycling and nearby Tzu Chi volunteers come to haul the items away.

Li began cleaning up her breakfast cart at nine. Li, an elderly man in the community, had bought from her all the food items that hadn’t yet been sold. He does this every day. Li once asked the old man why he did this, and his answer really moved her. He said that he wanted her to be able to call it a day sooner so that she could have more time to do good—meaning her volunteer work for Tzu Chi.

Li’s 15-year-old son came to help her push the cart home. The mother and son closed the beach umbrella, then set out on their way home. They had to ascend an uphill stretch of road about 200 meters (0.1 mile) long to get home. It was a lot easier to negotiate the slope with her son’s help. “My husband gives me a hand on his days off too,” she said as a contented smile lit up her face. Li feels blessed to have her family behind her.

Once a shopaholic, now an environmentalist

If Tzu Chi volunteers hadn’t started promoting recycling in her community four years ago, Li would most likely still be chasing after money. She became passionate about making money when she was growing up due to her family’s strained financial situation. When she was 15, her younger brother was diagnosed with leukemia. Though her family spent all their savings paying for his treatment, they lost him in the end. After he passed away, Li left home and worked hard to make money to help support her family. She worked part time in several jobs at the same time, including in electronic and shoe factories.

She started running a breakfast stall when she got married and had her own child. The stall allowed her to be more flexible with her time. But after closing up her stall every day, she went to a supermarket and continued working as a salesperson. Her husband, Qian Baojun (錢保軍),

worked several jobs too. Working hard like this eventually allowed them to buy a housing unit of their own in Xiamen.

Li kept her home spic and span. She had a special hobby: cleaning the floor. Before she joined Tzu Chi, she’d wash her home’s floor with bucket after bucket of water. She used so much water that even her husband, who is meticulous about cleanliness, nagged her. “You’re dumping one bucket after another nonstop. Do you think water is free?”

Li liked to shop online too. Even though the items she bought were not expensive, she bought so much that her closets were crammed full of her purchases.

But all that changed in 2016. Typhoon Meranti hit Xiamen in September that year, bringing such strong gales that trees were uprooted in Li’s community. Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized to help clear the trees and other debris away so that they wouldn’t block roads and affect traffic. The volunteers later even began promoting environmental preservation and recycling in the community. Inspired by their love for the environment, Li put on a volunteer vest and joined Tzu Chi’s recycling efforts. “Doing recycling work makes me sweat and is physically tiring, but I feel great and happy doing it,” said Li.

Despite being a neat freak, she followed the example of Tzu Chi volunteers and collected and sorted reusable garbage. “I felt awkward at first,” she admitted. “No matter how much I washed my hands when I returned home, I couldn’t seem to get them clean.” But she persisted, motivated by the dedication of other volunteers.

Her participation in Tzu Chi’s recycling work helped her realize the importance of conserving resources. For example, she stopped dumping bucket after bucket of water on the floor when she cleaned her home. She reflected on her consumption habits too. She felt remorseful about how she used to buy things she didn’t really need only to throw them away when she ran out of space. She felt especially bad when she realized that many people in the world suffer from starvation and that all the money she had squandered away could have been put to better use helping the needy. She stopped shopping at will, and even began wearing recycled clothes. Her husband teased her when he saw her wearing hand-me-downs from neighbors, but she didn’t mind. She also started helping sort second-hand clothes and giving them away to people in need.

Li is a very different person now. In addition to buying less, she tries to make every item she

owns last as long as possible. When a hole was worn in a bamboo mat at her home, she patched it up with a piece of embroidery she made herself. "If I was acting the way I did before I became more aware," she said, "I'd have tossed that mat out a long time ago." Though the mat is patched, she thinks it's still beautiful. "Like Master Cheng Yen says, 'If we look at a chipped cup from another angle, it is still round.'"

Accumulating wealth is no longer a priority to her, but recycling is. In fact, it has become one of her favorite things to do. "A used bottle to others is just a used bottle, but in my eyes it is ten cents," she said with a laugh. What is garbage to others is treasure to her—she says joy fills her heart when she sees a piece of trash she can pick up to recycle. She doesn't mind getting all sweaty from doing recycling work. When she sweats, she feels she is getting rid of her inner impurities too.

Her temper has also improved since she joined Tzu Chi. Whenever she feels irritated because of something her husband does, she thinks of Master Cheng Yen's teachings. The Master's words of wisdom light up the dark corners of her heart like sunlight streaming into a dark room, and her anger dissipates.

Li's family has felt her change too and supports her volunteering. Her husband used to give her sour looks when she picked up discarded drink bottles on the bus, but no more. He has even begun helping fix recycled broken electric appliances so that they can be given away to people who need such items.

Li's husband, Qian Baojun, fixes recycled broken appliances to give away to anyone who needs them.



A recycling room

When Li first took up recycling, she would often bring the garbage she had collected home. As the amount increased, her husband suggested that they talk to the company that managed their apartment building about letting them use an empty room on the first floor to store the recy-

clables. Li thought that was a good idea, but she had an even better one. She contacted the company and proposed setting up that empty room as a recycling point for their building. She felt that such a room could help increase awareness of environmental protection. "I was hoping I could get more neighbors to recycle their garbage and inspire their love for the Earth," Li explained.

Li's breakfast stall does more than provide breakfast—it is a place where she promotes recycling too.

The property management company was impressed with Li's idea and they saw that she would be using the room for a good cause. They



agreed to let her use the room after she gave her word to keep the place clean.

Li kept her word. To keep the place clean and avoid clutter, she put a recycling bin at the door of the room. She wrote her cell phone number on the bin and specified the kinds of recyclable garbage that would be accepted. At first, many residents used the bin as a garbage can and put all kinds of trash in it—cigarette butts, kitchen waste, and so on. Some residents even denounced Li for collecting the recyclables to sell for her own profit. They said she was so hooked on money that she wasn't

beneath making money from garbage.

Li remained undaunted despite the gossip and hurtful remarks. She knew she could enlist the help of senior Tzu Chi volunteers to improve the situation, so she invited them to accompany her to visit her neighbors and share with them the environmental ideals that had pushed her to set up the room for recycling purposes. Li told new residents about the room when they moved in too. Her tireless efforts paid off. Now, out of the 54 households in the building, 51 bring their recycling to the room.

Volunteer Zhou Chunlan (周春蘭) lives in the same community as Li, and she often helps her clean up the room and put things in order. Zhou knows that "it was easy to set up the room, but hard to maintain it and keep it clean at all times." To ensure its tidiness, Li checks the room four or five times a day, in the morning, at noon, in the evening, and before she goes to bed. Zhou tries to help ease her burden by giving her a hand.

Li's hard work has won the hearts of many of her neighbors. One neighbor, Fan, said, "Li is doing a good thing. With her help, more garbage is being recycled, and the money from selling our recycling is used to aid the needy. Though there are differing opinions about the work she is doing, she has kept going and never become discouraged. Many of us [building residents] are touched when we see her working in the recycling room."

Happy sweating for the Earth

In addition to managing the recycling room where she lives, Li pushes a hand truck around her neighborhood every day to collect recyclables at shops and homes. She does that after she closes up her stall for the day and puts things in order at the recycling room.

On this day, she grabbed a few burlap sacks and set out as usual with her hand truck for a collection trip around her community. Within an hour, she was back at her building, her truck laden with recyclables. Li was happy. "I'm making more money from recyclables than from selling breakfast!" she said cheerfully. "Look at all these items! The proceeds will allow us to help even more needy people."

One shopkeeper told Li that he had some empty beer bottles for her, and he asked if she'd take them. Li readily agreed. Though glass bottles fetch little money, they are precious resources in her eyes. She is glad to help recycle anything that can be reused to ease the burden on the planet.

A community resident complimented Chen: "All her cells are alive with an environmental spirit. She's getting better and better at promoting recycling. Even my young son knows to prepare the waste cardboard we have at home for her." Li was delighted to have planted an environmental seed in a child and in another family.

Huang lives in the community next to Li's. She took up recycling three years ago due to Li's example. She has even set up a small recycling place similar to Li's at her home. Li often visits her to help her sort recyclables. "If we don't do a good job at recycling now," said Huang, "our environment will deteriorate more and more. I used to sweat and toil to make a living; now I sweat and toil for the Earth. Working for the environment makes me very happy." Hearing that, Li said with a smile, "Seeing how hard she is working, I dare not slack off at all."

The bright smiles on their faces were like the sunflowers Li had placed at her stall—they gave people a lively sense of hope and optimism. ♣



The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

My fellow monks! You have left your families, so there is no one to look after you. If you do not support each other, who else is going to care for you in the future? My fellow monks! Those who are willing to serve me should also take care of the sick ones among you.



The Buddha taught us to be compassionate, which means that we should love and be kind to people, so that everyone can sincerely live in peace with each other.

Those who help other people are called bodhisattvas. If you give of yourself and help others for one day, then you are a bodhisattva for one day.



At the end of your lectures, why do you often tell us to “be mindful”?

Dharma Master Cheng Yen replied: As human beings, we cannot afford not to be mindful. People are out of touch with themselves, and so in their daily lives they often say or do the wrong things. Therefore, whenever I finish a talk, I almost always remind everyone to “be mindful.” I hope each of you can take good care of this mind of yours, so that you can be pure in thought, word, and action.

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

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



The United States

Tzu Chi volunteers from Northern California provided emergency financial assistance to victims of the North Complex Fire from September 22 to October 9 at a local assistance center (LAC) set up at the Oroville Gymnastics Academy in Oroville, Butte County, California. The North Complex Fire is a massive wildfire that was started by lightning in Northern California on August 17, 2020. By October 27, the fire had burned an estimated 129,070 hectares (318,930 acres) and had been 96 percent contained. Aid distributed by Tzu Chi at the LAC included cash cards, blankets made from recycled plastic bottles, cloth masks, and instant rice and noodles.

Pat Cornelius was one of the victims helped by Tzu Chi. This was the second time he had received aid from the foundation. He was a survivor of the 2018 Camp Fire. He told Tzu Chi volunteer Baba Kauna Mujamal at the LAC that he had moved to the town of Paradise, Butte County, in 1974, and lived there for nearly 45 years before the Camp Fire destroyed his home. He received financial aid

Woods and homes were burned down by wildfires that raged across Northern California earlier this year.

LIU HAN-QING

and a blanket from Tzu Chi in the aftermath of that fire. He remembered that before he left the distribution venue after obtaining his aid, a volunteer asked him if there was anything else they could do for him. He answered, "I need a hug." Hearing that, four volunteers stepped forward at the same time and gave him a big hug. "You guys really do care," Cornelius said to Mujamal, adding that he could tell that providing aid for evacuees like him was not just some sort of routine work for the volunteers. "You extend warmth out of your heart to people."

Looking at the blankets Tzu Chi was distributing this time, he said, "This brings back many memories."

Michael Putnam and his wife, Jennifer, came to the LAC on September 24. The couple was moved to tears when a volunteer read them a consolation



A Tzu Chi volunteer interacts with a victim of the North Complex Fire at a local assistance center set up at the Oroville Gymnastics Academy in Oroville, Butte County, California.

LU WAN-JIE

letter from Dharma Master Cheng Yen for people affected by the wildfires. “Jesus and the Buddha must have been brothers,” Michael said. The couple were survivors of the Camp Fire, too. “We never expected we’d be experiencing the same thing again,” said Jennifer. Despite what they had suffered through, the couple said they were warmed by the foundation’s aid. They said they’d find a temporary place to stay after receiving the aid—any place that could shelter them from the elements would do. They declared that though they loved nature, they would not move back into the woods again. A forest might be a good place to vacation, they said, but it would no longer be fit for living there full time. They were not going to be driven from their home a third time.

Tears filled Sabrina Hopkins’s eyes as she listened to a volunteer read the Master’s consolation letter. She said she was deeply moved by the support, love, and care conveyed by the letter. “Thank you so much for your help,” she said. “I don’t know what we’d do without people like you to help us.” She took a Tzu Chi coin bank before she left and said she’d put her spare change in it to help the foundation aid the needy. She promised that when she was back on her feet, she’d do her best to pay back the love she had received from the foundation.

The forest fires might have laid people’s homes to waste, but love burned bright in the embers of the fires.

Cambodia

Since the coronavirus pandemic broke out months ago, Tzu Chi Cambodia has been working

to help soften the impact on local needy people. The branch office has now moved into its second phase of aid. In October, volunteers held three distributions for impoverished households, underprivileged university students, and people with disabilities to help them cope with this challenging time.

The first distribution was conducted on October 3 for 140 needy families in Chamkarmon, Phnom Penh, the national capital. Participating households received much needed supplies, including bread, rice, and solar panels. Some of the families didn’t have electricity at home, and others had difficulty affording it. The solar panels would help provide the families with illumination and improve their lives.

Theng Sothol, Chamkarmon district governor, complimented Tzu Chi for always working to serve people’s needs. “This was the second time after the pandemic that Tzu Chi distributed rice and other aid to needy families in Chamkarmon,” said the governor. “The solar panels will help reduce the families’ electric bills, which will be a great help to them.”

Sok Ang, one of the aid recipients, said: “My home is dark, and we really need lights to see. The solar panel will help us cut our energy costs. I’m really happy to receive it.”

A volunteer helps guide a group of people with visual impairments at a distribution held by Tzu Chi Cambodia in Phnom Penh on October 11. The distribution was organized for people with disabilities to help them through the pandemic.

HUANG SHU-ZHEN



Another distribution was conducted on October 10 for 387 university students from destitute families. The students received rice, noodles, and bread from the foundation. Vo Leak, one of the students, had come from out of town to study in Phnom Penh. "My family makes a living from farming," she said. "It's hard for us to get by. Thanks for Tzu Chi's aid." Ben Saream, another student, said, "It's costly to eat out. We'll be able to save a lot of money if we cook our own meals. I'm really grateful for Tzu Chi's help."

The following day, volunteers distributed more rice and other food to 485 people with disabilities. The foundation reached out to this group of people after the Musical Association of the Handicapped (MAH) sought Tzu Chi's help via the welfare department of the Phnom Penh city government. It had been hard before the pandemic for this group of people to earn a livelihood, and the coronavirus just added insult to injury. After learning about their predicament, Tzu Chi Cambodia decided to provide them with three months' aid. This distribution was the second one the foundation had held for these underserved people since the pandemic began.

Among the guests present at the event was Princess Jenna Norodom of Cambodia. She had learned about the distribution via Facebook and contacted Tzu Chi about attending in person.

After volunteers introduced Tzu Chi's origin to the crowd and shared how even small sums of money, when pooled together, could make a big difference, people began generously depositing money into coin banks held out by volunteers. The young princess and guests from the government also donated to help the needy. Even aid recipients contributed what they could. Nav Chantharith, a visually impaired employee at MAH, said: "Tzu Chi reaches out to those in need around the world, including disabled people like us. They help make our lives better. I hope to pay their love forward by donating what I can to aid other needy people."

China

On October 14, Tzu Chi volunteers from Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces conducted a winter distribution in the town of Zhenqin, Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. Each family received nine items, including roasted barley flour, flour, cooking oil, blankets, jackets, and cotton underwear. In all, 886 needy families (3,083 people) received goods that day.



A Tzu Chi distribution was held on October 14 in Zhenqin, Yushu Prefecture, China, for 886 needy families. The supplies would help recipients through the cold winter months ahead.

YE PING

Volunteers began setting things up at the distribution venue when they arrived on the morning of October 14. They were helped by local people who had volunteered to serve during the event. Aid recipients who had arrived early also joined in to help. The locals' assistance was important for the volunteers. The area sat at an elevation of 4,500 meters (14,763 feet), and it was beyond the volunteers, who lived at much lower elevations, to move the heavy supplies from a warehouse to the distribution site.

Volunteer Tang Guoliang (唐國梁), from Qinghai, said, "The winter arrives early in Qinghai. We started making purchases for this distribution in mid-September so we could put the supplies into the hands of local villagers before it began snowing in earnest."

The event was kicked off right on time at 10:30. A local official thanked the Tzu Chi volunteers for coming a long way to the town to help the villagers. The harsh conditions of the area, such as a shortage of pastures for livestock to graze, have



made it difficult for the locals to make a living. The official said the aid from the foundation would be a big help to the aid recipients.

Volunteer Wang Ping (王萍), from Sichuan Province, bustled around the venue helping in every way she could. “The high altitude has made me a little winded and my voice husky,” she said, “but I’m very joyful and full of energy.” She serves as a prime example of this saying: happiness is found in helping others.

A villager pointed to the Tzu Chi logo printed on a distribution notification letter and said that he and other villagers had received aid from the same organization 24 years ago.

“Thank you”—in Tibetan—was heard frequently at the venue as recipients expressed gratitude for the goods they had received. Though getting home with the heavy supplies was a little arduous, the thought of a well-supplied winter ahead made them smile.

Taiwan

An inauguration ceremony was held on October 20 for the new buildings that Tzu Chi constructed for Gung Guan Junior High School in Miaoli County. Gung Guan Junior High was one of the schools included in the foundation’s Project

A scene at Gung Guan Junior High School in Miaoli County, northern Taiwan. Tzu Chi built four new buildings for the junior high that replaced old, unsafe buildings on campus.

YAN LIN-ZHAO

Disaster Reduction. This project was launched in 2014 to replace aged or damaged school buildings in Taiwan with new ones so that students could learn in safer, better environments.

Gung Guan Junior High was founded in 1946. After decades of use and wear and tear, the buildings at the school were no longer safe to use. Miaoli County Magistrate Hsu Yao-chang (徐耀昌) requested help from Tzu Chi to rebuild it. In response, the foundation sent a team to assess the condition of the school buildings. Based on their findings, Tzu Chi decided to finance the reconstruction of the school.

The reconstruction project included four new buildings with a total floor space of 9,541 square meters (102,698 sq feet). In addition to regular classrooms, the buildings house a library, office space for the teaching and administrative staffs, practice and ensemble rooms for the school’s music program students, as well as other facilities.

The new buildings are functional and strong, which is necessary given that Taiwan is prone to earthquakes. To ensure that the new buildings could withstand tremors of up to magnitude 7, architect Huang Jian-xing (黃建興) designed the buildings with reinforced exterior corridors and balconies with strong pillars. But such strength does not come at the expense of aesthetics. Another notable feature of Huang's design was the incorporation of motifs reflecting the culture of the local community. For example, building walls were decorated with appealing images of tung blossoms, persimmons, and red dates—emblems representative of the local Hakka community.

During the inauguration ceremony, school principal Fang Li-ping (方麗萍) thanked architect Huang for designing the strong, beautiful buildings for the school, the Miaoli county government for providing support, and the contractors for pulling out all the stops to finish the project as soon as possible. She thanked Tzu Chi construction commissioners for visiting the school every month to inspect the buildings under construction to ensure the quality of the workmanship. Finally, she thanked Tzu Chi volunteers and the Parents Association for extending support and care to the school's students and staff.

The entire project took two and a half years to complete and cost over 230 million Taiwanese dollars (US\$8,207,100). In Miaoli County alone, Tzu Chi has helped construct new buildings for four

An inauguration ceremony for the new buildings at Gung Guan Junior High School took place on October 20.

YAN REN-PENG



schools under its Project Disaster Reduction. Of those four schools, only one remains to be completed.

The United Kingdom

Wearing a face covering in shops and supermarkets in England became compulsory on July 24. When schools reopened in September, students over 11 years old were also required to wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas. These restrictions were intended to protect people from the coronavirus, but they further strained the supply of masks in England. Tzu Chi volunteers have been doing what they can to help.

Britain began suffering from a mask shortage as early as March. To help relieve the shortage, Tzu Chi volunteers in the country began making cloth masks at home and giving them away to help protect community residents from the virus. Volunteer Wang Su-zhen (王素真) of Malvern, Worcestershire, not only made masks to give away, but she also created an instructional video and provided materials for mask-making. Her thoughtful actions allowed more people to join in to help make masks and relieve the shortage.

Ms. Su of Manchester has been volunteering for Tzu Chi for over a decade. Because of her poor health, she avoided going out during the pandemic and thus felt bad for not being able to do anything to help others during this time. When she learned that she could make masks to give away, she realized this was a good chance for her to give. In a few months' time, she made over a thousand cloth masks for adults, children, and even toddlers less than three years old.

Many other volunteers and community residents joined in Tzu Chi's mask-making effort, but they couldn't keep up with the demand. Fortunately, the Qing Culture and Art Foundation in Taiwan donated more than 20,000 cloth masks to Tzu Chi Britain from May to July. Volunteers visited post offices, train stations, and shops, and after obtaining permission from people in charge of these premises, placed supplies of masks on site for anyone who would need them. Volunteers also provided masks to street people, refugees, and hospital workers.

When schools in England reopened in September, students over 11 years old were required to wear masks in corridors and communal areas. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered masks to various schools so that school staff and students could be better protected. St Anne's RC Primary School and St Vincent's Schoolhouse in



Tzu Chi volunteers delivered 2,000 cloth masks to Glenthorne High School on September 8 to help protect the school's students and staffers from COVID-19.

ANDREW BOGUE

Manchester, Nascot Wood Junior School in Watford, Hertfordshire, and Glenthorne High School in Sutton, London, were among the schools that received masks from Tzu Chi.

On September 8, volunteers delivered 2,000 cloth masks to Glenthorne High School. The masks were received by Debby Austin, the school's attendance officer. Austin told the volunteers that her school had 1,700 students and 400 teachers and administrative staffers, but the government had only provided two small boxes of masks and other personal protective equipment. Volunteers were happy to help the school better equip themselves for the coronavirus.

Sri Lanka

Tzu Chi Sri Lanka held its second annual large-scale distributions for low-income families in September. Gift vouchers were handed out to nearly 5,000 families from September 18 to 28.

The distributions this year were originally slated to take place in April, but were postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. As soon as the pandemic began to abate in the nation in August, volunteers applied to government authorities for permission to launch the distributions and obtained approval to do so.

The events this year were held at two Tzu Chi offices, one in Colombo and one in Hambantota. As a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, volunteers spread the distributions in Colombo over six days and those in Hambantota over four days. Volunteers also scheduled morning and afternoon time slots for aid recipients to further stagger their arrivals and minimize the crowd. Each aid recipient, based on where they lived, was assigned a date and time slot during which they could come to the offices to obtain their vouchers. Attendees had to wear masks, submit to temperature checks, and have their hands sanitized before entering the distribution venues.

An aid recipient who came to a distribution at the Colombo office said that her family was too poor to afford even daily necessities, and the pandemic had just made things worse. It was a great solace to her to receive the gift vouchers from Tzu Chi.

Samanthi, a 38-year-old single parent of three children, volunteered at the distributions at the Hambantota office. Her husband had died in an accident in June 2016 on his way home from work. After the tragedy, her relatives provided her with financial assistance so that she could feed her children. The relatives' aid, however, was insufficient to help her in the long run. She was referred to Tzu Chi for assistance, and became a long-term care recipient in 2018. Encouraged by Tzu Chi volunteers, she later began volunteering for the foundation to serve other needy people. She said she was greatly cheered by the smiles on attendees' faces whenever she took part in a Tzu Chi event. She was content and grateful to be able to give to others.

Tzu Chi volunteers continued to serve recipients even beyond the distributions. Some of them accompanied elderly recipients to supermarkets to help them use their gift vouchers to purchase necessities. A man who had walked barefoot for two kilometers (1.2 miles) with the help of a walking stick to the distribution venue in Colombo told the volunteer who helped him out at a supermarket that he needed to plan his purchase with care so that the love from donors wouldn't go to waste.

Every aid recipient left a distribution with a cheerful expression. Their happy smiles conveyed their gratitude to Tzu Chi. ❀

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

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*To attain wisdom, let go of attachments.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

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