

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

The Epidemic



March 2020

Respect Life by Going Vegetarian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

We've said goodbye to another Chinese New Year holiday, but my mind is full of concern as we move forward. The wildfires that broke out last year in Australia are still burning. Tens of millions of animals have perished in the conflagrations, with firefighters spread thin trying to contain the fires. The outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) has been most heartrending too. The disease that erupted in Wuhan, China, has spread to dozens of countries around the world. The death toll and number of confirmed cases are climbing at an alarming rate. A sense of crisis has hit the international community.

What is the origin of the virus that is causing such sickness and fear? Wild animals are the suspected source. Animals that live in the wild have habitats of their own and are supposed to roam freely. And yet, in order to satisfy their palates, humans hunt these animals for food. Doing so ultimately increases the chance that viruses will spread from animals to humans, and might have even contributed to the eruption of this current epidemic.

This problem, however, is not limited to hunting wild animals for food. Humans also raise huge numbers of livestock for food. These animals are killed for human consumption when they have grown large enough to slaughter. Thinking only of themselves, human beings disregard other living creatures' right to live. They give their desires free rein and cruelly sacrifice the lives of other living things for their own interests. When diseases like bird flu or foot-and-mouth disease break out, livestock are killed on a large scale to curb the spread of the diseases. This is truly a sad fate for such defenseless animals.

No vaccine or cure has yet been discovered for the coronavirus. The only thing we can do now is stay vigilant and take protective measures, which include washing our hands often, wearing masks, and avoiding crowded places. But doing just these things is not enough. A more essential thing to do is to adopt a vegetarian diet. Aside from being a show of our sincere piety, this can help prevent disease from entering our bodies in the first place.

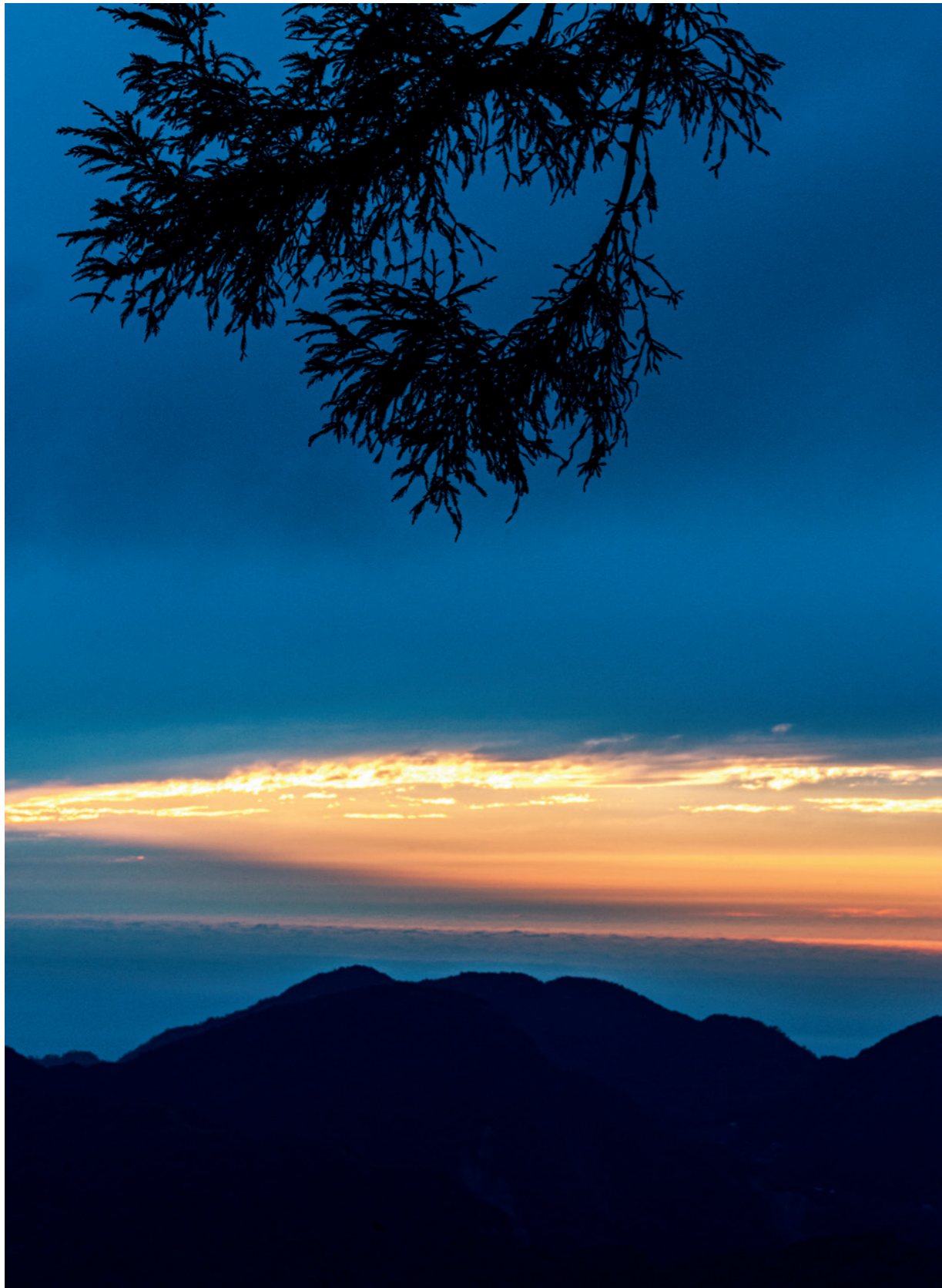
Grains and vegetables are the best food choices to nourish our bodies. They are wholesome and natural and have enough nutrients to keep us going. Keeping our diets simple and pure will help promote a life that is also simple and pure. This is conducive to living a most blessed life.

The coronavirus epidemic is a warning to mankind. It is a call for us to reflect on our behavior and repent of what we are doing wrong. It's high time everyone woke up and took action. There are many benefits to eating vegetarian. When is a better time than now to give it a try? The duration of gastronomic satisfaction is very short. All you need to do is shift your mindset. Show respect for the world of other animals. Don't raise them for food or allow their lives to be sacrificed. Animals, like humans, are living creatures. Put yourself in their place; develop compassion and love for them. Respect their right to live.

Faced with a raging epidemic, we should be vigilant but we should not panic. We should take good care of our hearts and minds, do the right things, and not cause further disturbance to society. If someone unwittingly passes on unfounded information to you, don't pass it on. That will only induce more fear and anxiety. Act wisely, and let the rumors stop with you.

Medical workers have worked hard and bravely to battle the outbreak of the disease. They are among the real heroes in this fight against the spread of the epidemic. While they work hard to save lives, we can help make their jobs easier by taking good care of ourselves. If you've visited an epidemic zone, be sure to follow quarantine regulations. This will protect yourself and others. If we all do what we should do, we can help the epidemic come to an end as soon as possible.

Faced with recurrent disasters and epidemics in the world, we must stay vigilant, harbor a heart of pious sincerity, and pray devoutly for blessings to come to the world. Adopt a vegetarian diet as a show of sincere piety and to demonstrate your respect and love for other living creatures. Think wholesome thoughts and make good vows. When everyone walks the right path, we will be able to help dispel and ward off disasters and epidemics. ❀



HUANG XIAOZHE

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

March 2020



12



14



20



40

1 RESPECT LIFE BY GOING VEGETARIAN

What can we do in the face of the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak? Master Cheng Yen offers some perspective to help heal our world.

4 LOVE IN THE TIME OF THE EPIDEMIC

In the face of the coronavirus epidemic, we especially need love to help us see it through.

6 THE LOCKDOWN

Read a first-person account from a resident of Wuhan, China, right before and after the city was locked down due to the coronavirus epidemic.

12 TZU CHI'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

Read about how Tzu Chi is dedicating resources and a spirit of love in response to the epidemic.

14 MOZAMBIQUE

Local Tzu Chi volunteers in Mozambique continue to touch lives nine months after the country was hit hard by Cyclone Idai.

20 A TRIP TO SIERRA LEONE

A Tzu Chi photographer provides an intimate and sobering look at Sierra Leone. The country and its people continue to move forward the best they can under the burdens they carry.

38 DISPELLING DARKNESS WITH LOVE

Many people shut themselves in at home after becoming blind. They need help to break out of their isolation.

40 REBUILDING LIFE AFTER EVERYTHING FELL APART

Read how people have struggled to overcome pain and fear after losing their sight to lead lives of courage and productivity.

46 THE WAY OUT OF DARKNESS

This is the story of Que Wen-li's journey from despair and isolation to financial independence after she lost her sight.



46



56



50



61

50 SERVING THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Having spent her career serving the non-sighted, Zhang Zi has helped many people rediscover hope.

54 DELAYING FRAILITY IN OLD AGE

This article explores what can be done to prevent or delay the onset of frailty.

56 MOM'S SMILE IS BACK

A widowed mother carried a heavy load to raise a son all by herself. Her son's exemplary filial piety has helped her find her smile again.

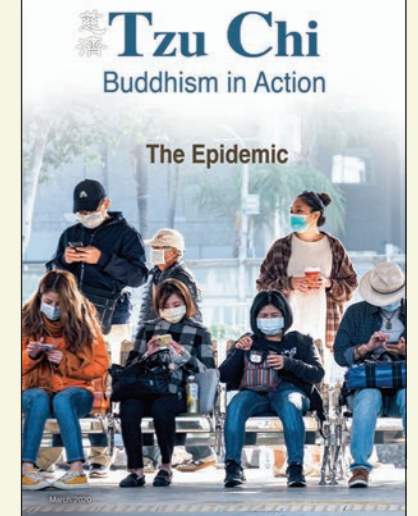
60 THE ILLUSTRATED JING SI APHORISMS

If we do or say things with the wrong attitude, suffering is bound to follow.

61 TZU CHI EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

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

To read our magazine online, please visit our website: web.tzuchiculture.org.tw or scan this QR code:



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.
Address: No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Telephone: 886-2-2898-9000 ext 2001
Fax: 886-2-2898-9994
E-mail: chris_wu@tzuchi.org.tw

Tzu Chi Bimonthly

Publisher
Shih Cheng Yen
Managing Editor
Wu Hsiao-ting
Senior Editor
Douglas Shaw
Volunteer Editor
Steven Turner
Volunteer Translator
Teresa Chang
Designer
Chen Yu-ling

The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
Copyright © 2020 Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation.
All rights reserved. Printed in Taiwan.
For a free copy of the *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*, please contact your nearest Tzu Chi branch office (see inside back cover).
中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

Love in the Time of the Epidemic

The world is a global village, and all our lives are closely intertwined. The spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus is yet another proof of this. Quarantines or lockdowns of cities are measures to contain the spread of the disease, not to build walls between people. What can we do for each other in this crisis faced by all humanity?

Faced with the looming threat of the novel coronavirus, everyone wears a mask to protect themselves at bus stop in Tainan, southern Taiwan, in early February 2020.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

The Lockdown

Text and photos by Zhou Liyan

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The author of this article, a resident of Wuhan, China, describes her experiences and feelings right before and after the city was locked down due to the coronavirus epidemic.

My hometown is in the city of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, China. It's more than 800 kilometers (497 miles) from Wuhan, Hubei Province. I moved to Wuhan in 2012. This is the ninth year I've lived in the city.

I visit my parents and grandmother at my childhood home in Jiaxing every year during the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday. I had planned to do the same this year. My husband and I made arrangements to take a high-speed train bound for Jiaxing on January 26, the second day of the Chinese New Year [which is traditionally the day on which married women visit their parents during this most important Chinese holiday]. Our intention was to set out on our trip after wishing Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, Taiwan, a happy Chinese New Year via video-conferencing along with other Tzu Chi volunteers in Wuhan. If all went as planned, I'd be home in the bosom of my family on January 26 after a six-hour trip.

On December 29, 2019, Tzu Chi volunteers in Wuhan held a year-end blessing and thanksgiving event. More than seven hundred people attended. Immediately afterwards, we began the preparatory work for an annual year-end banquet for Tzu Chi long-term care recipients in Wuhan. That meal was scheduled for January 5, 2020.

On December 30, the Wuhan Municipal Health Committee issued "An Urgent Notice on the Treatment of Pneumonia of Unknown Cause" on its Weibo social media account. This notice was widely circulated on the Internet. However, many Wuhan citizens didn't pay much attention to it, thinking it was fake or a rumor. Besides, flu is common in winter, so people didn't think any more of it. Everyone continued to immerse themselves in the festive atmosphere in anticipation of the upcoming holiday. Similarly, Tzu Chi care

recipients in the city continued to look forward to our year-end banquet. Every year we drive them to and from the event. We also deliver our winter aid supplies to their homes at the same time.

On January 1, 2020, as the new year was ushered in, the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan city was closed. This market was the suspected origin of the pneumonia of unknown cause. [In addition to seafood, the market sold live poultry and wildlife to the public.] Tzu Chi volunteer Fan Lihua (樊麗華), a medical worker in a hospital, realized it would be better to postpone our year-end banquet in light of the current situation. She observed that many of our care recipients had disabilities or were elderly, and as such they generally had lower resistance to infectious diseases. Besides, the place the meal was to be held was in a closed space, which might further compound the situation. We agreed with her assessment, and postponed the event accordingly.

Happiness coming to a halt

On January 5, I attended a monthly meeting of Tzu Chi commissioners. A fellow volunteer felt unwell during the meeting—she felt something was wrong with her heart—so I accompanied her to a hospital. The ER at the hospital was, as usual, packed with patients. I often went to medical facilities to visit our hospitalized care recipients, so I was used to the crowds in a hospital. I wasn't wearing a mask at the time, and no hospital personnel reminded us to do so. In fact, the only people I saw wearing masks in the entire outpatient lobby was a couple, a man and woman, who appeared to be together.

As the coronavirus epidemic continued to worsen, we cancelled our upcoming visits to nursing homes for the elderly, but a small group of us still delivered our monthly subsidies for living



Before the Lockdown of Wuhan

Volunteers in Wuhan welcome attendees to a Tzu Chi year-end blessing and thanksgiving event on December 29, 2019 (right). Children, holding lights, pray during the event.



expenses to a few families who were having difficulty getting by. This was to make sure that they could have a better Chinese New Year. That day was January 11, a Saturday. Traffic was light on the way. Many workers and university students in Wuhan come from out of town, and so the city becomes a lot emptier as many of them return home when Chinese New Year rolls around.

The next day, I visited volunteer Qi Yan (齊岩) at his company to help organize files on trainee volunteers. Brother Qi's company was a stone's throw from the Huanan Seafood Market. I usually drove when I visited him, but that day I chose to ride the subway for convenience and because it was more environmentally friendly. When Brother Qi learned that, he said to me in a joking tone, "You should've driven a car. It's too dangerous to ride the subway right now." I remember that there

weren't many people on the subway that day, and no one, including me, wore a mask.

Life went on as usual during the following week. I began doing my New Year's shopping, and I prepared a lot of presents to take to my childhood home. My husband left on a week-long business trip to Shenzhen, Guangdong Province. While there, he called home and told me that he had heard in Shenzhen that Wuhan was experiencing a mask shortage and that it was already impossible to get masks in our city. I told him not to help spread rumors and intensify panic. I assured him I'd be able to get some in the pharmacy near our home.

However, when I went to buy face masks on January 18, they had sold out. I asked the clerk at the pharmacy when they would restock, and he said he had no idea. Luckily, we still had a

pack of one-use face masks at home for when we had colds. With that, and with the three packs of masks my husband had purchased in Shenzhen, I thought we should have enough for the time being.

The next day, several volunteers and I went to the home of volunteer Fan Lihua to make wontons. Since Fan worked at a hospital and was busy at work, we were making the wontons so that she could freeze them to eat later. That would help cut down on the time she needed to spend on preparing meals. The sun shone brightly that day. The weather was perfect. Chatting while making wontons, we had a great time.

However, our happiness seemed to come to a halt on that day. After that day, we became easily agitated and often felt powerless. One moment we'd be moved to tears while the next we were consumed by anger. We had to give ourselves pep talks so that we could remain positive and upbeat.

Human-to-human transmission

On January 20, Zhong Nanshan (鍾南山), China's leading epidemiologist, said on the news that the novel coronavirus pneumonia could be transmitted from human to human. Zhong had risen to fame after combating the SARS epidemic in 2003. His words were like a wake-up call to people in Wuhan, who had known so little about the disease. Zhong and the government began urging people not to visit Wuhan. The city's residents were also urged not to leave the city.

That same afternoon, my mother-in-law traveled from the city of Xiaogan in Hubei Province to spend the beginning part of the New Year holiday with us. She spent a lot of time volunteering at a temple and rarely visited us in Wuhan. My husband had told her to be sure to wear a mask on the train, which she did.

The experts and government were all urging us to stay in Wuhan, so on January 21, I began to seriously consider canceling the trip back to my childhood home for the New Year. I did more shopping in the supermarket and filled our refrigerator and cupboards with food in case we stayed home. But in my heart, I really wanted to visit my family.

My husband returned from his trip to Shenzhen on the evening of January 21. He said that temperature checks had been initiated at the airport. His company was originally planning to break for the holiday on January 23, but now the date had been moved forward to the 22nd. I felt more at peace when I saw the three packs of masks he had bought in Shenzhen.

On January 22, we finally decided not to visit my folks this year. My dad was shopping for groceries in a market when I called him to inform him of our decision. Unlike me, my folks were not vegetarians. I urged him not to buy live poultry and fish and to eat more vegetarian food. Later my grandma called me, saying that in view of the recent virus, she finally realized I had done a good thing by switching to a vegetarian diet.

When my husband reminded me to return our train tickets, I opened the ticket-booking app on my phone and took a look at our tickets, but I couldn't bring myself to return them. I thought: "With medicine so advanced now, maybe the situation will take a sudden turn for the better." I prayed that this would happen.

However, my prayer wasn't answered. The Wuhan city government announced at two in the morning of January 23 that from ten a.m. that same day onward, all public transportation in the city was suspended. All outbound flights and trains were likewise cancelled. The lockdown of Wuhan had started.

The importance of reporting the truth

I was a high school student when the SARS epidemic broke out. At the time, we were ordered to stay in school and not to go home. Information on the Internet back then wasn't as extensive as it is today, and there were a lot fewer self-media sites. Even though the epidemic situation seemed bad, we just did what we were told without thinking too much.

Nowadays, however, there is no shortage of information on the Internet. With a smartphone in hand, you can access as much news as you want. The problem is, it's often hard to tell whether the message you are reading is true or fake. In this age of Internet and mobile communication, the media's role in reporting the truth and exposing false rumors appears even more important in the fight to control the outbreak of the coronavirus. Soon, I began watching only a news program hosted by Bai Yansong (白岩松) on China Central Television. Bai said that we should only pay attention to news from reliable sources to help stem the spread of fake rumors. I couldn't have agreed with him more.

Every year, hundreds of millions of people in China leave their cities before Lunar New Year to visit their families in more rural parts of the country. In 2019, for example, a total of 415 million domestic trips were made during the New Year

holiday. I was one who participated in this largest annual human migration in the world. I'm not native to Wuhan, so I left to visit my family. This practice is common and widespread in China.

Wuhan has a registered population of nine million, and a migrant population of five million. The city boasts the largest number of higher education institutes and college students nationwide. There are around a million college students in Wuhan. Many left for home in early January or a little later for the winter break. Likewise, many Tzu Chi volunteers in Wuhan are from out of town too. They left the city to visit their families before the city was put on lockdown.

This is why I was so sad and angry when I heard news circulating on the Internet that said that five million people fled Wuhan just before the lockdown took effect. The five million people said to have fled Wuhan didn't *flee*. They left the city as they had planned, either to return to their hometowns or go on sightseeing trips. When I read online articles that declared otherwise, I couldn't stop myself from clicking on the "File a Complaint" button. Two user accounts were shut down as a result for violating user regulations.

When I read or saw news reports of people who had left Wuhan being driven away or being despised by people in other places, I was so angry I cried. When I read about them being welcomed into open arms elsewhere, I was so moved I cried. It was said on the Internet that my city was sick. Even so, I still loved her. I loved her even though I'm not from Wuhan.

Feeling lucky but powerless

I didn't return my high-speed train tickets until the afternoon of January 23. You are usually required to pay a processing fee when you return a ticket, but this time the fee was waived. My husband and I were told that the event in which Tzu Chi volunteers in Wuhan were to gather together to wish Master Cheng Yen a happy Chinese New Year via videoconferencing had also been cancelled. My husband had been assigned the task of operating the sound system in that event, and he had taken time off work twice to test the equipment and rehearse. Considering the amount of preparation he had put in, I asked if he felt disappointed that the event had been cancelled. He said, "Of course not. Life is precious. In times like this, we can't take too much precaution." What he said was indeed true. However, I couldn't help but feel surprised at the same time at how fast things seemed to have spiraled out of control. My

husband and I were both vegetarian; we weren't even aware that the Huanan Seafood Market also sold wildlife. The whole affair drove home even more deeply what Master Cheng Yen says about the intertwined karma of all living creatures.

The following day was New Year's Eve. My husband, mother-in-law, and I had vegetarian hotpot for dinner. We took pictures of our bountiful meal, then posted them on a family WeChat group chat for my parents and grandmother in Jiaying to see. I wanted them to know that despite the situation in Wuhan, we were celebrating Chinese New Year like everyone else and were eating well.

That night, I told my husband I would stay up past midnight to send away the old year and welcome the new, but secretly I wanted to stay up so that I could find out about the updated number of confirmed coronavirus cases and the death toll. I couldn't for the life of me fall asleep anyway. I waited until two a.m., but still no updates came in.

New Year's Eve was followed by several days of rainy weather, during which we watched movies, read, cooked, and drank tea at home. We considered ourselves lucky, especially compared with those out-of-town Wuhan residents who were spurned, quarantined, or driven away by locals; or compared to those front-line medical workers who risked their lives and fought feelings of fatigue to look after patients; or compared even to those sick people who were turned away by overcrowded hospitals even after they had stood in line for a whole day hoping to be admitted. Watching the news of these situations, we, well-fed and cozy at home, really hoped we could do something to help. However, we knew that there was really nothing we could do except to stay home as much as possible to help prevent the spread of the disease. We felt lucky, but emotionally repressed at the same time. We had very contradictory feelings.

On the afternoon of January 25, the Wuhan city government announced that all motor vehicles would be forbidden in the city center starting January 26. This meant that we wouldn't be able to take our cars out any more until told otherwise. I quickly went grocery shopping and came home with two large bags of food. Many relatives and friends had messaged me asking if we had had enough to eat. I always told them not to worry, that the supermarkets were well stocked, that commodity prices had stayed stable, and not to believe all that misinformation they read on-line.

Some Tzu Chi volunteers in Wuhan and I decided to start an on-line study group on the 26th. We felt that rather than spending time browsing panic-inducing news articles on our cell phones, we would put our time to better use by reading good books. Our daily study group session lasted two hours. The book we had chosen was the first volume of *An Exploration on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Thought System*. It was 1,016 pages long and the thickest book on my bookshelf. I thought that the quarantine would surely be lifted by the time we finished it.

According to a notice published by the Hubei provincial government, our Lunar New Year holiday was extended to February 13. The first workday would be on February 14. Yet, the number of confirmed cases and fatalities was still on the rise with no signs of slowing down. Everyone wondered if they could really return to work on the 14th. Even so, we still encouraged and cheered each other on.

The precious gift of face masks

One day during this time, a friend messaged me asking for help. He knew I volunteered for Tzu Chi, and he wondered if I might be able to help him get admitted to a hospital. He was suffering from a mild coronavirus infection, he said. I told him apologetically that I wouldn't be able to help, that it was beyond me, or probably anyone else, to get him into a hospital at a time like this. The Internet was chock-full of people asking if anyone could help them get a berth in a hospital. Even those running a fever had to stand in line for a whole day hoping to get treatment. But only confirmed cases were allowed to check into medical facilities.

I did my best to comfort my friend. I told him to be sure to take his temperature every day and report his readings to authorities in his community. I also told him to stay on his medication and eat properly to keep up his strength. I said that Huoshenshan Hospital [an emergency field hospital especially constructed in response to the coronavirus outbreak] was about to be finished. Once it was finished, he would be able to check into it.

I was overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness when I said those words. I thought to myself, "In this day and age, must we still need to panic and suffer for a deficiency of medical resources?" I continued to receive more bad news. A former colleague's grandfather had been infected and hospitalized. A Tzu Chi donating member's husband was receiving treatment for the disease too.

A volunteer's family member had been infected and put under quarantine.

My husband started to work at home. I read every day, or tended to our plants. Our residential complex was extremely quiet. There were no car horns, or noise from children playing. The occasional sounds of coughing or singing from our neighbors became so loud and clear amidst the silence.

One day, a message began circulating on WeChat, calling for every Wuhan resident to open their windows at eight that night, sing along with their fellow citizens, and then call out: "Go, go, Wuhan!" for the finale. When eight o'clock rolled around that night, I indeed heard fits of singing and shouting coming through our balcony doors. Someone called out at the top of his lungs: "Neighbors across from me, open your window and sing. Let's cheer together for Wuhan!" The singing and shouting from all around were not expressions of loneliness or pessimism, but of hope, of this sincere wish of ours: "Get well soon, Wuhan."

I didn't know the young man living opposite us, but I had often heard him singing over the past several days. He seemed to be all alone. With an intention to show my care for him, I stuffed a bag full of fruit and snacks, put on my mask, and knocked on his door. He seemed to be talking to his out-of-town family when I knocked, for I heard him telling them that a neighbor had come to knock on his door. When he answered the door, I handed over the food I had prepared for him and wished him a Happy New Year. I asked if he had enough to eat at home, and he answered in the affirmative. He said his parents were away in their hometown, and he didn't need much to eat. He was like us, originally from out of town.

A few minutes after I returned to my home, he knocked on our door. He gave us two packs of face masks, explaining that he had bought more than he could use, so he could share some with us. Wow, face masks—something truly precious in a time like this. I felt that his gesture instantly sealed our friendship.

We need to be kinder in a time like this

Someone in our residential complex was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus. Another person living in a building next to the confirmed case's seemed to have been infected too. The gate to our complex was locked down as a result; no one was allowed to come in or out.



After the Lockdown of Wuhan

Zhou Liyan (周李艳), the author of this article, participates in an on-line study group. Everyone takes turns reading from a book for ten minutes (above). The vegetarian hotpot meal Zhou and her family prepared for their dinner on Chinese New Year's Eve.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZHOU LIYAN



No one complained or made discriminatory remarks about those infected on our residents' group chat. Everyone was blessing each other and reminding one another not to go out. When someone sent information that was not true, someone else immediately stepped forward to counter it. A rare atmosphere of harmony and unity dominated our community.

In peacetime, people in our community could easily erupt into a fight over a parking space. They'd argue in loud voices like sworn enemies, their faces and ears going beet-red. But in a rough time like this, they showed themselves to be intrinsically kind and warm-hearted.

Are there selfish people around? Definitely yes. There are selfish people everywhere. My dad told me that someone in our hometown

took a sightseeing trip to Wuhan before the city was locked down, and when he returned home, he not only hid the fact of his trip but went around everywhere. His family got the virus from him, and the entire neighborhood was now locked down.

There are too many rumors circulating on the Internet. Some might be true, some false. But there is something I know for certain: Wuhan people left the city to go back to their hometowns or for sightseeing—they didn't set their foot outside of Wuhan to spread the virus. If I returned to my hometown, I'd report truthfully to the authorities that I'm from Wuhan and do whatever else people in my circumstances should do—because I'm a Tzu Chi volunteer, and also a resident of Wuhan. I'm just doing what I should do.

Tzu Chi's Response to the

Coronavirus Epidemic



Medical personnel at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital pray for the epidemic to end.
FAN YU-HONG



A volunteer sanitizes the Tzu Chi Bade Recycling Station to make it a safer place in which to work.
LIAO MU-NAN



Tzu Chi volunteers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, pack donated medical supplies for delivery to areas impacted by the coronavirus.
COURTESY OF TZU CHI KUALA LUMPUR AND SELANGOR



Volunteers in the city of Quanzhou, Xiamen Province, China, donated nutritious foodstuff to medical workers at Quanzhou First Hospital and Jinjiang Municipal Hospital.
HUANG GUO-MING

▶ About COVID-19

- In December 2019, several cases of pneumonia of unknown cause were detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The disease was determined in early January 2020 to be caused by a new strain of coronavirus, temporarily dubbed “2019-nCoV.” On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially named the illness caused by the virus “COVID-19.” The “CO” stands for “corona,” “VI” for “virus,” and “D” for “disease.” The novel coronavirus itself was officially named “SARS-CoV-2.”
- As of March 9, there had been 111,650 confirmed cases and 3,887 fatalities in over 100 countries and territories. Chinese authorities had reported 80,735 confirmed cases and 3,120 deaths in mainland China. Most of the cases in China had been concentrated in Hubei, Guangdong, Henan, and Zhejiang provinces.

▶ Help to Those Quarantined

- In accordance with coronavirus quarantine regulations from Taiwan’s Centers for Disease Control, Tzu Chi University in Hualien, Taiwan, provided care for its students from Hong Kong and Macau who had returned to Taiwan for a new semester after winter break. Quarantine quarters were set up for the students on February 7, and three meals a day were prepared and delivered by school personnel. Nurses called the students every day to check on the status of their health. Tzu Chi moms and dads [volunteers who provide care and support for students at Tzu Chi schools] helped care for the students’ emotional needs by phone.
- The Malaysian government flew over a hundred individuals home from Wuhan in early February. Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia, at the invitation of the National Disaster Management Agency, provided daily necessities, dry food, and emotional support for those in quarantine at a surveillance center. They were required to spend a period of 14 days in quarantine to ensure they were virus-free.
- Tzu Chi USA was invited by the U.S. government’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention to help address the needs of American citizens being placed under quarantine in military facilities upon their evacuation from Wuhan. Tzu Chi provided blankets, scarves, and dental floss to those in quarantine. Tzu Chi volunteers also helped translate for those in quarantine who couldn’t speak English. Starting on February 16, volunteers participated in a counseling project to help reduce the fear and frustration of quarantined evacuees from the Diamond Princess cruise ship.

▶ Responsive Measures in Taiwan

- The seven Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan have taken preventative measures against the coronavirus epidemic. Tzu Chi facilities around the world have activated precautionary measures too, including hand sanitizers and temperature checks at their entrances. Recycling stations have also been sterilized.
- As per the Taiwanese government’s request, surgical mask manufacturers on the island sped up their production to relieve a shortage of masks. Taiwan’s armed forces were mobilized to help at factory production lines to increase the supply. At the invitation of the Tainan city government, Tzu Chi volunteers pitched in to help as well. They joined the production lines at a mask factory in Tainan on February 10, working a daily shift from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon.
- The official website of the Tzu Chi Foundation started publishing a daily reminder from Dharma Master Cheng Yen on February 1 to help reduce anxiety and fear that has accompanied the spread of the coronavirus. A daily prayer event was launched on February 3 at Tzu Chi facilities around the world, with volunteers and employees praying at the same time every day for blessings for the world. Tzu Chi also called upon people to adopt a vegetarian diet as a way to nurture compassion and help dispel disasters and epidemics.
- A daily chanting of the “Universal Gate” chapter from the *Lotus Sutra* was initiated at the Tzu Chi headquarters in eastern Taiwan on February 7 to pray for peace in people’s minds and a world without disasters and epidemics.

▶ Aid to Medical Workers

- Tzu Chi volunteers in countries including Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, the USA, China, and Russia prepared hospital supplies and had them delivered to hospitals in areas hit hard by the epidemic. The supplies included isolation gowns, safety goggles, surgical caps, medical gloves, and bed sheets for hospital beds.
- Volunteers in China gave gifts of medical supplies and nutritious foodstuffs, including multigrain powder and oatmeal, to front-line medical workers.



Mozambique

On the Mend After Cyclone Idai

By Karmen Long, Tzu Chi International Medical Association

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Cai Kai-fan



Nine months after Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique in mid-March 2019, I visited the country again. I found a Mozambique that was at once familiar and strange to me.

It was strange to me because the scenes of devastation left behind by the cyclone were gone. In Beira, the capital and largest city of Sofala Province, in central Mozambique, the utility poles and streetlights toppled by the storm had been put back in place; the fallen trees on the roadside had been cleared away; and the depressions and holes on the main thoroughfares had been filled in. National Road No. 6, which led to Nhamatanda, another disaster area, was no longer packed with bumper-to-bumper traffic. I had already noticed on my flight over that the airplane wasn't packed with international disaster relief workers as it was last time, but even the airport was quiet, no longer full of people and the bustle of activity.

Though everything seemed to have settled back to normal in Beira, evidence of the cyclone remained if you looked close enough. Many houses along the larger roads were still covered with plastic tarps, serving as temporary roofs. The surfaces of many side roads were still damaged and potholed in many places. As our vehicle took us farther and farther away from the airport, we noticed the road on which we were traveling turning into bumpy dirt road. Traveling deeper into local villages, we saw many people still living in tents. Grown men were loitering aimlessly around. No work for them meant no income.

A volunteer carries a folding bed home for an elderly villager. Tzu Chi held distributions of folding beds in Nedja and Metichura in the village of Tica, Sofala Province, in December 2019.

This was the Mozambique that was familiar to me.

Even more familiar to me were the local Tzu Chi volunteers. After Cyclone Idai, Tzu Chi had enlisted the help of local young people to implement its emergency relief work. Those young volunteers were still there in the disaster areas. Seeing them singing and dancing, I realized that I had really returned to Mozambique.

The gift of beds

Tzu Chi initiated its relief operations in the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Idai. Our foundation distributed food, seeds, farming utensils, building materials, and tools. We later provided free medical clinics. The initial phase of emergency aid work has since been followed by mid- and long-term reconstruction projects, including houses and schools. Because our volunteers have continued to work in the disaster areas, Tzu Chi has been able to offer to the survivors help and services that have truly met their needs.

Along with some local volunteers, I visited some survivors in their tents. The first thing we noticed as we stepped inside was how hot the tents were. The residents told us that they usually didn't spend time indoors during the ten hours between sunrise and sunset. During the day, they sought shady areas outside to try to stay cool.

Some in our group took off their shoes to feel the temperature of the ground. They found that it was so hot it was impossible to lie on it. That's when we decided to distribute Tzu Chi folding beds to residents. Since the beds could fold up and double as chairs, residents would find them handy. They could use the multi-function beds inside or outside of a tent.

Distributions were held soon afterwards in Nedja and Metichura, in the village of Tica. These areas were also the proposed sites for houses the foundation was building for survivors. After receiving their beds, recipients hoisted the gifts from Tzu Chi onto their heads and headed home. Some, upon returning home, immediately unfolded their beds in the shade of trees and lay down on them to rest. A woman called out to us as we passed her home, "We can finally get a good sleep tonight!" Hearing the gratitude in the woman's voice, I knew that the work of our volunteers in Mozambique had made a real difference to the people here.

Many of our volunteers in Mozambique have difficulty themselves making a living, but that didn't stop them from volunteering. They even

invited their fellow villagers to join them in their work. Francisco was an example. When we visited him at his home, he proudly told us that he had enlisted 50 volunteers in the past several months.

We asked him why he had recruited so many volunteers. He replied, "I'll take them to visit the needy in our community, to care for our fellow villagers." When he said this, I thought, "Isn't this the ideal of community volunteerism Master Cheng Yen has been promoting—that people in the same neighborhood should help each other and together foster harmony in their community?"

Even though the native volunteers in Mozambique don't understand Mandarin, are thousands of miles away from Taiwan, and have never met Master Cheng Yen, I've repeatedly seen them exemplify the Master's teachings. It is as if they have appeared, like one bodhisattva after another, to help the Master care for the needy in a land that has seen much suffering.

An older woman and her grandchildren in their home in Tica. When Tzu Chi volunteers visited the family, the woman said that they were using the shovel they had received from Tzu Chi for farming.



Cheia and Canna

Francisco's daughter was born just as Cyclone Idai was slamming the country. Francisco's pregnant wife, Lucia, had climbed a tree to escape the floods brought by the cyclone, and right up there in the tree, she gave birth to her baby girl. To commemorate this incident, Francisco named his daughter "Cheia," meaning "flood" in Portuguese, the national language of Mozambique. Cheia was nine months old when we visited the family. She could already sit steadily on her own and had even begun crawling. We couldn't help but praise life's resilience when we saw her.

We met another baby girl, Canna Fernando, in Metichura. Canna was born on the evening of July 13, 2019. Earlier that day, her mother, Dominga Manuel, had gone to a Tzu Chi distribution and received some instant rice. After she had returned home and eaten a meal, she gave birth to a baby girl. Her gratitude to Tzu Chi for the food they had given her had led her to name her baby girl "Canna," which sounds like "gratitude" in Mandarin.

When Tzu Chi was distributing folding beds to cyclone victims in Metichura, Dominga, looking at a picture of Master Cheng Yen at the venue, expressed again her appreciation for the Master's help. She thanked the Master for giving her family

food so that she and her six children wouldn't have to starve. By this time, Canna was six months old, and she looked lovely and healthy.

As Cheia grew, the emergency period following the cyclone came to an end. By the time Canna was born, survivors were well on their way to recovery. The local people had never had much, and though the cyclone made their lives harder, they didn't blame heaven or complain about their bad luck. On the contrary, they faced their lot in life philosophically. Though they started their lives over after the cycle with fortitude, behind that were lives of hardship beyond the imagination of outsiders.

Unemployed dentists

In many countries around the world, dentists, physicians, and nurses are considered professions that guarantee security. If you apply yourself in school and obtain a related degree, you will be assured of a steady income and stable life. But this isn't the case in Mozambique.

In May 2019, Tzu Chi held three free clinics in Sofala Province for cyclone survivors. I learned from Kenneth Liao (廖進興), a dentist from the United States who had participated in the free clinics, that several local medical professionals who volunteered at the events had been provid-

ing free medical services for years. It turned out that they hadn't been able to land formal jobs after they had graduated from medical school, and thus were working without pay in hospitals while waiting for opportunities of paid employment. Two dentists among them had even worked pro bono for four years.

Mozambique has a population of nearly thirty million, but the doctor to patient ratio there is only three to 100,000. It isn't that the country doesn't need more medical professionals; it's that there isn't enough money to hire more doctors. Every year, the number of graduates from university medical and dentistry programs comes to about 300 each, but there are only 30 job openings offered in each category. That leaves over 500 graduates to their own devices as they face an uncertain future.

When we were distributing folding beds to cyclone survivors this time, we invited four local medical workers to help. They had volunteered in May 2019 during our free clinics. One of them, Vicente, told me he had graduated and earned his dentist's license more than four years before, but

At a distribution, volunteers demonstrate how to set up a Tzu Chi folding bed.



was still waiting for the government to give him a job. He was currently serving without pay at a government hospital so that his medical skills wouldn't grow rusty.

Because Vicente told me his story so nonchalantly, I thought he must have come from a well-to-do family and so wasn't too worried about having to work without pay for a few years. But my impression was quite mistaken. A visit to his home allowed me to realize that the exact opposite was true.

Vicente lived in a slum a short distance from some upmarket houses in the city center of Beira. The sanitary conditions were awful, and to get to his home, we had to pass several fetid pools of standing water. It was, however, his home's conditions that came to weigh on my mind most heavily.

Vicente was the youngest of seven children in an impoverished family. His father was already 80, and a stroke had rendered him unable to work. His mother, a seamstress, supported the family with whatever simple sewing work she could get. All of Vicente's siblings lived out of town. His eldest sister had passed away three years before, leaving behind three children for their elderly parents to care for. This plunged the family even deeper into poverty.

When Cyclone Idai hit, their brick house was completely destroyed. The family had no choice but to move into a half-finished house belonging to Vicente's eldest sister. The house had only half a roof, and when it rained, water fell into the house and accumulated indoors. Although he was

a qualified dentist, Vicente didn't even have the income to help repair their home.

It wasn't that Vicente hadn't worked hard in the hope of improving his family's financial situation, but reality got the upper hand. In 2010, he tested into university by scoring very high on the entrance exam. With the help of a government scholarship, he began studying dentistry. "I thought that as long as I studied hard and obtained the qualifications to become a dentist," said Vicente, "I'd be able to give my family a better life." After he graduated, however, he not only failed to provide his family with a better life—he even became a burden to them.

Vicente said he considered himself lucky to be able to work in a hospital in Beira, even though it was without pay. A good friend and schoolmate of his, Eugenio, had not even been able to land an unpaid position in Beira. He had to go to Chimoio, a city three hours away, to work as a pro bono dentist. Unlike Vicente, Eugenio had to live separately from his family while awaiting paid employment.

Persevere in hardships

Like Vicente, Eugenio graduated from Zambezi University's dentistry program. When he was young, he was badly injured in a traffic accident and was hospitalized for about a month. Though it was free to receive such treatment in a public hospital, the equipment was in bad shape and the care was inefficient. Eugenio's parents had to run about raising money to discreetly pay off medical workers at the hospital where their son was receiving treatment in order for him to get better services. That experience made Eugenio pledge to become a physician who treated his patients as if they were his family. Though he hadn't landed a job since his graduation and had worked without pay as a dentist for over four years, he hadn't forgotten his aspirations.

Many qualified physicians in Mozambique have difficulty finding employment, especially den-

tists. Sofala Province has a population of 2,000,000, but there are only five job openings for dentists every year. The current focus of the nation's medical system is on infectious diseases, and so funding allocated for oral hygiene has decreased. Because of this, Vicente once regretted his decision to become a dentist. That changed when he took part in the May 2019 Tzu Chi free clinics in Sofala.

During that free clinic mission, members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) from countries including Taiwan, the United States, and Australia provided free medical services in Sofala. Within three days, Vicente and a Tzu Chi dentist team together served more than 600 patients. "I realized during the free clinics that what the government said about oral health being unimportant wasn't correct. Many villagers I saw had serious dental issues. I felt that since I had the expertise in dentistry, I shouldn't give up easily."

That's why, unlike many of his counterparts who had given up on medicine and switched to a different career, Vicente had stuck with his choice and kept going on his medical path.

Leonardio was also an unsalaried physician, but he had fared better than Vicente and Eugenio. He was an internist, and since internists who held paid positions in hospitals had to work night shifts, they could pay unsalaried physicians to work their night shifts for them. Though Leonardio received just 500 Mozambican metical (US\$7.8) per night for standing in for a paid physician, the money was important to him because he had to support his family of four.

After listening to these young men tell their stories and after visiting their homes, I was overwhelmed with a range of emotions. I was about their age and used to practice internal medicine in Scotland. Like them, I became a medical doctor because I wanted to help others. But even though they had worked just as hard as I had in school, due to our different circumstances in life, things had gone so differently for us.

If they hadn't insisted on holding on to their ideals and had switched to a different career path, they might already be doing a lot better



Vicente, a dentist (right), and Karmen Long (龍嘉文), a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and the author of this article, tend to a villager's lesions in Metichura.

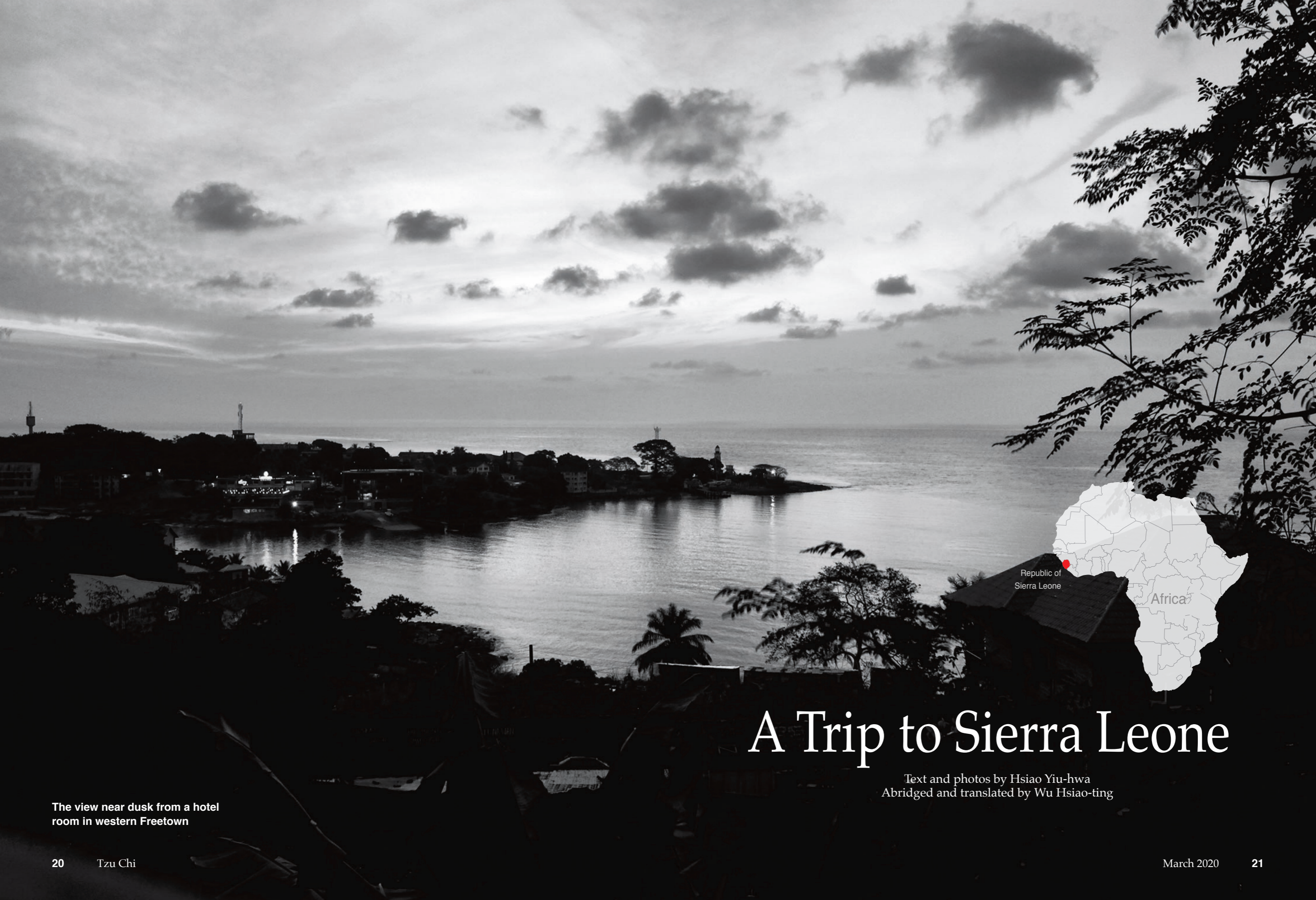
financially. Their commitment must have been very firm for them to persist this far. I believed that even though things might not be going very well for them now, their perseverance would eventually pay off. The rippling effect set forth by their kindness and good intentions would eventually come back to benefit them. TIMA's Mozambican chapter had been set up, and these doctors had decided to join. I applauded them for their decision to serve the needy despite their difficult financial situations, and I wished them the very best.

I once heard something to this effect: "Sometimes, it's scary to take that first step. No one would blame you if you didn't. But once you do, you will have to live with the consequences of your actions." This reminded me of Master Cheng Yen. She founded Tzu Chi 53 years ago. She was at that time a young Buddhist nun barely able to keep herself fed. If she had just focused on her spiritual practice, no one would have blamed her. However, she took that first step and established the charity—then even decided to build a hospital to help more needy people.

I have seen in our volunteers in Mozambique that same compassion and purity of heart demonstrated by the Master half a century ago. I believe that with the help of these volunteers, the Master's wish to transform Africa will be a dream come true.



Dominga Manuel and her baby daughter, Canna Fernando, interact with Tzu Chi volunteers who were visiting their village to distribute folding beds.



Republic of
Sierra Leone

Africa

A Trip to Sierra Leone

Text and photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa
Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The view near dusk from a hotel
room in western Freetown

I pushed open my hotel window and looked out. It was near dusk, and the tranquil seaside scenery was refreshingly beautiful. My view could easily have rivaled those offered at a typical coastal tourist destination. I was at a hotel on a small hill in western Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The view I was enjoying “came at a cost”—160 U.S. dollars a day to be exact. How much money would this be to the average Sierra Leonean? I’d have to venture out of the hotel and look around the city to find out.

But first, why is Freetown named as it is? A little history lesson might be in order here.

After Sierra Leone was “discovered” by the Europeans during the great seafaring days in the mid-15th century, several countries set up trade there. Portuguese traders came first, followed by the Dutch, French, and English. The Europeans initially set their sights on the region’s rich natural resources, such as minerals and timber, but their interest shifted towards slaves as the demand for slaves in the Americas grew. Sierra Leone became an important center in the slave trade.

After the American War of Independence (1775-1783), some liberated slaves were returned to Sierra Leone. They settled in an area that was named “Free Town” to signify their newfound freedom. Since then, the town has developed from a resettlement area for freed slaves to a bustling city of more than a million people. This was how Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, got its name.

Hawkers with their wares on their heads

As I ambled through the downtown area of Freetown, I found every street and alley teeming with people and activity. Ambulatory vendors, with their wares on their heads, roamed the streets hawking their goods. They were selling a great number of things. It might be a few bananas, several bottles of soda, a handful of toothbrushes and toothpaste tubes, a few pairs of old shoes, some pots and pans, or sundry other items. Everything you could think of, wanted, or needed could be found on top of their heads.

To a foreigner, these super-micro, on-the-top-of-the-head businesses are very eye-catching and have a strong exotic appeal. They make great subject matter for a photographer like me. But I started to wonder: What’s their impact on the economy of Sierra Leone? I know that many local people depend upon these super-micro businesses as their source of income, but how much do they make? How much do they contribute to the economy in Sierra Leone?

I asked a soda hawker how much he earned a day. He said about two U.S. dollars. That money was used to support his family, not for his own personal use. So how large are the families in Sierra Leone? Statistics show that women in Sierra Leone give birth to an average of five children; the mothers’ average age when they have their first child is 19. Using these numbers, you can get a rough idea of how big families are here. Needless to say, the money earned by these vendors doesn’t go far.

Knowing next to nothing about market economy, I can’t definitively answer the question of just what an impact these vendors might have. But intuitively, I can’t help feeling that it is not a very productive use of the country’s labor force. A large sector of the population has been forced to take up this means of livelihood, and with so many out and about, they must not make much money.

What’s more, with so many people making a living like this, the government is missing out on much needed tax income. This in turn affects the government’s ability to pay for things people need—including medical care, education, housing, and the maintenance and construction of new infrastructure.

Everything in short supply

A look around Freetown easily reveals the inadequacies and problems Sierra Leone is facing. Walk into Connaught Hospital, built in 1912 when the nation was still a British colony, and you are immediately struck by the severe lack of medical resources. Though Connaught Hospital is the largest medical facility in Sierra Leone, medical equipment and tools are old and in extremely short supply. Four dialysis machines, donated a few years earlier by Israel, are here at Connaught. These four machines are the only such machines in the entire country—and three are out of order. That leaves only one functioning dialysis machine in the whole of Sierra Leone. When a hospital of this scale does so poorly, what must it be like for other medical facilities around the nation?

Everything is in short supply. There is an inadequate number of physicians, an inadequate number of beds, an inadequate number of everything. The only thing not in short supply are patients—there never seems to be an end to them. The acute lack of healthcare professionals and medical infrastructure triggered a nationwide strike of doctors in Sierra Leone in December 2018. The protestors

asked for medical equipment purchases, additional resources, higher pay, as well as other improvements. The strike lasted 13 days and paralyzed hospitals nationwide.

The country’s medical conditions are in shambles, but the educational sector is doing hardly any better. The law requires nine years of free and compulsory schooling, but a shortage of schools, teachers, and funding has made implementation unfeasible.

Sierra Leone emerged from 11 years of devastating civil conflict in January 2002. The war led to the destruction of nearly 1,300 primary schools. Near the end of the war, in 2001, 67 percent of school-age children were not attending school. Though the situation has greatly improved since then, there is still a long way to go to reach the nation’s basic requirements.

What about public hygiene? Public infrastructure? Social welfare? How much longer do the citizens of Sierra Leone have to wait until they can enjoy the basic entitlements and privileges that people elsewhere take for granted? I’m afraid even concerned government officials have no answer to that question.

Lending a helping hand

Covering an area of 71,740 square kilometers (27,700 square miles), Sierra Leone is twice the size of Taiwan. The nation is rich in natural resources, including diamonds, gold, and titanium ore. Even so, a high percentage of its seven million people still live below the poverty line.

Inadequate medical care, insufficient educational resources, poor public infrastructure—when you look at all the problems the country is facing, you can’t help but wonder what on earth went wrong. Is it the nation’s system of government? Poor efficiency? Human factors or other issues? Whatever the reasons, they were not something a foreigner like me who was only there for a short time could fully comprehend.

When I returned to my hotel, I pushed open my window and looked out at the peaceful sea again. As I took in that picturesque, 160-dollar-a-day view, the agitation I was feeling from my trip around town gradually began to subside. As I stood there, looking out, my thoughts turned to the locals I saw on the streets struggling to make a living. I felt guilty at how expensive my accommodation was in comparison. However, guilty or not, I didn’t have much choice in the matter. Without exception, hotel rooms in Sierra Leone cost upwards of a hundred U.S. dollars a night.



A woman sells fish balanced on top of her head on a street in Freetown.

How can they charge such prices and get away with it? It’s because they cater to foreigners, not the locals.

Why do foreigners visit Sierra Leone? For most, it’s not the sightseeing. A large proportion of foreigners consist of businesspeople in the country seeking business opportunities. Another large group is NGO personnel who are in the nation to implement humanitarian aid work. I was in this latter category. I had come to the country with a group of Tzu Chi volunteers, who had paid their own way to carry out the foundation’s philanthropic work for people in need. They were also learning more about what the foundation could do for a nation rated as one of the poorest in the world.

Tzu Chi has aided the underserved in Sierra Leone since 2015, in the hope of bringing some relief to a people who have suffered through a brutal decade-long civil war, a deadly Ebola virus epidemic from 2014 to 2016, and recent devastating natural disasters. Without a doubt, this is a country in which Tzu Chi will continue to expend its resources and efforts. When will their efforts bear fruit? I’m not sure. But I’m positive they will keep at their work, without complaint, because they know that they are just doing what humans should do.

Time Frozen in Bustling Street Scenes

An outdoor market in Freetown's downtown area is crowded with people buying and selling. The city center is full of hustle and bustle all day long.

Great Britain ended its colonial rule of Sierra Leone in 1961. A postbox from the colonial days still stands on the side of a street in Freetown. It indicates that the city has not made much progress in terms of urban planning and development since then.

Freetown is not large geographically, but one seventh of Sierra Leone's population strives to make a living there. The pressure to stay afloat is understandably intense.





Super-Mini Stores on Their Heads

In Freetown, as throughout the entire country, ambulatory vendors hawking goods balanced on their heads are everywhere. They walk around the streets at any time and place, on the lookout for potential customers. This is how they make a living. A large percentage of people in Sierra Leone strive to keep themselves and their families fed by running this kind of super-micro business.



Medically Underserved, Health Unguarded

- 1 Aided by a pair of crutches, a polio victim forges ahead on the rough path facing him in life.
- 2 An old man with an injured leg sits outside Connaught Hospital in Freetown.
- 3 A dilapidated bed still in use in the government-run Connaught Hospital
- 4 A billboard like this one, promoting the prevention of HIV, is a common sight in Sierra Leone.

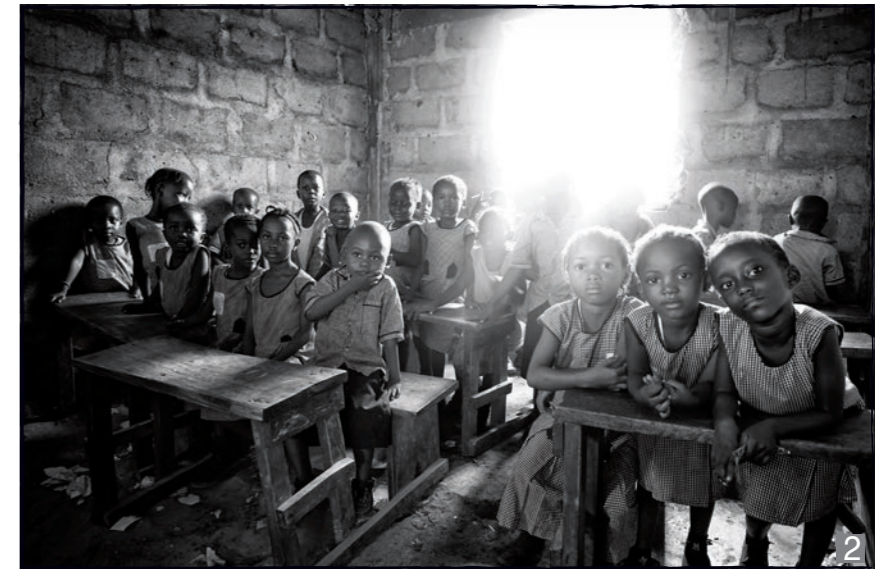
These scenes, common in Freetown, provide a glimpse into a country in which there is still a lot of room for improvement in the areas of medical care and public health.



Survival Challenges From an Early Age

- 1** Children wait in the rain for the distribution of hot food by Tzu Chi. One of them shields herself from the rain with a container she brought to hold the food.
- 2** This 38-year-old woman says she has five children, one cradled in her arm, one lying across her thigh, two flanking her, and one standing to her left with her arms crossed over her chest. The woman exemplifies the typical mother in Sierra Leone. Statistically, women in Sierra Leone give birth to an average of five children. According to the World Health Organization, Sierra Leone had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world in 2015. The country also has one of the highest infant and under-five mortality rates.





A Shortage of Educational Resources

- 1** Students in class in a primary school in Tombo. This private school was converted from a deserted warehouse. The indoor space is divided by wooden poles and recycled sacks into seven classrooms for a hundred to 150 students. There is no lighting or air conditioning. With so many children crowded together for lessons, the teaching quality and learning efficiency are quite debatable.
- 2** A scene from a primary school classroom located next to Grafton Amputee Camp in Western Area. Nearly 1,300 primary schools were destroyed during the Sierra Leone civil war, between 1991 and 2002. The nation's educational sector has not yet recovered from the devastation.

No Way Out for Slum Residents

- 1** Kroo Bay is a slum in central Freetown. This community is a microcosm of the general living conditions in Sierra Leone—no running water or electricity, poor sanitary conditions, and overcrowdedness.
- 2** Young people in a slum idle away their time. Sierra Leone has a high unemployment rate. Faced with a shortage of job opportunities, young people are powerless and see no future for themselves. The cycle of poverty and their aimlessness have negative effects at the individual and societal levels.

1



2



1



2

Tzu Chi Volunteers Reaching Out

- 1** Two visually impaired girls at Paul School for the Blind, located in Bo, play with each other. This school enrolls pupils from extremely destitute families. Through the recommendation of the Lanyi Foundation, one of Tzu Chi's three partners in Sierra Leone, Tzu Chi has decided to help the school repair its dormitory floor and replace broken bed frames.
- 2** Tzu Chi volunteers lead a group activity during a visit to an approved school (for juvenile offenders) in Freetown. Bringing aid to the institution, the volunteers gave the youngsters their best wishes and encouraged them to learn job skills to facilitate their return to society. ❊



Dispelling Darkness With Love

There are over 56,000 visually impaired people in Taiwan. Most of them, more than four in five, were born with sight and became blind later in life. People whose world is suddenly plunged into darkness can suffer enormous psychological impact and trauma. Many such people shut themselves in at home, sometimes for years, and refuse to connect with the outside world. If people like them can receive help to get back on their feet soon after losing their vision, the fear and pain they experience can be greatly reduced.

IBT students, accompanied by their teachers and Tzu Chi volunteers, on a tour in the National Palace Museum

Rebuilding Life After Everything Fell Apart

By **Chen Li-an and Li Wei-huang**
Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

The Institute for the Blind of Taiwan helps people relearn job skills and rebuild their lives after their worlds have been turned upside down with blindness.



“I almost killed myself that year,” said Hong Rong-xuan (洪榮選). Now 68 years old, he was once a taxi driver. Nine years ago, when he was taking a short break at work, his eyes suddenly felt like a piece of fabric had fallen over them—his originally bright world became all blurry.

An ophthalmologist later diagnosed Hong with an optic nerve stroke. The doctor said that it could have been caused by issues related to blood sugar, blood pressure, or sleep. Hong received treatment, but his condition didn’t improve. In fact, it grew worse. His left eye lost all vision and his right eye could only see indistinct contours. His almost complete blindness threw his world into disarray and caused him a great deal of suffering.

“I didn’t want to face anyone,” he recalled of that time. Feeling that he had become useless without his sight, he shut himself up; for three long years, he never once stepped out of his home. The only person who kept him company was his elderly mother. As one day blurred into the next, his thoughts and emotions sank deeper, following his sight down into the darkness.

From resistance to acceptance

For those people who become blind after living with sight, everything they used to take for granted in everyday life can become another trigger for frustration. Every step they take, literally and metaphorically, is accompanied by uncertainty and unease. Trained by the constant shadow of fear, it’s easy for them to lose enthusiasm for life.

Many institutions in Taiwan offer assistance to the visually impaired to help them get back on their feet, but many blind people, like Hong Rong-xuan, are so depressed by their disability that they are unwilling to step out of

A student from the IBT learns how to use a white cane to navigate his way under the guidance of an instructor on a small road outside the institute where traffic is forbidden. Learning how to travel independently is an important step for the visually impaired as they work to return to society.

their homes. Other factors, such as overprotective families or lack of information about available help, may also lead to a prolonged confinement at home. As a result, many of these folks end up not returning to society until several years later.

An important step for people with affected vision to live independently again is to relearn marketable skills. This helps them rediscover their dignity in life and decreases the financial and emotional burden on their family.

Wang Guo-hao (王國豪) graduated in 2018 from the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan (IBT) in Xinzhuang, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. Like Hong Rong-xuan, he’s a victim of acquired blindness. At 27, he was diagnosed with Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy, a disease caused by mutations in his mitochondrial DNA. His vision deteriorated so fast after the onset of the condition that he became blind in less than six months. He was the only one in his extended family diagnosed with the disease; before him, no one in his family had been discovered to have the genetic disorder.

After the diagnosis, Wang was told to prepare for the worst every time he visited the doctor. Even with the warnings ahead of time, he couldn’t bring himself to come to terms with his blindness when it became reality. His friends’ careers were all starting to take off, and it seemed that only his life had come to an abrupt halt. He couldn’t stop asking himself: “Why me?”

Despite being depressed and miserable, he didn’t want to become a burden to his family. A little more than a year after he fell victim to the disease, he enrolled in a massage course at the IBT with the help of his sister.

Wang admitted that he felt extremely uneasy when he first arrived at the institute. The massage course lasted nine months, during which time participants were required to live on campus. The unfamiliar environment as well as the course itself gave him immense pressure.

Wang remembers that he cried from the first class period to the last on the first day of the course at the institute. He kept thinking that he should have a better career choice in life, but he had no idea where else to go except for the institute. He did know one thing for certain: “If I give up now, I’ll be stuck where I am.”

People like Hong Rong-xuan and Wang Guo-hao, who lose their vision later in life, face challenges hard for sighted people to imagine. Mood swings are typical as they struggle to adjust to a life without sight. However, often-

times it takes just a shift of mindset for them to turn their lives around.

After his mother passed away, Hong finally mustered enough courage to face himself. He reasoned with himself: "I can't just shut myself away at home for the rest of my life." He began looking for things he could accomplish alone. With the introduction of a friend who was a Tzu Chi volunteer, he began volunteering at the Tzu Chi Shuanghe Recycling Station in New Taipei City.

After some trial and error at the station, Hong discovered something he could do alone: tearing off page after page of paper for further sorting. That was five years ago. From that day on, he felt that he had found something to which he could anchor himself. He began reporting at the station every day it was open, rain or shine. His newfound sense of purpose, coupled with the care and support he received at the station, gradually helped him emerge from his gloom.

It takes nearly two hours for Hong to travel from his home to the recycling station. Traveling on his own to the station was especially difficult in the beginning, when everything was new and unfamiliar to him. Aside from the difficulties that came from the need to change buses, he had to depend on the help of strangers to find his way to the station. This was because he had never received orientation and mobility (O&M) training, which helps people with visual impairments to maintain travel independence. However, with the help of an umbrella or walking cane, which prevented him from bumping into things, and with the guidance of kind-hearted strangers, he gradually became comfortable and skilled at traveling on his own to the station.

From shutting himself up at home to venturing out on his own, Hong feels that the biggest change he's experienced over the years is that he has almost forgotten that he can't see. "I must've received help from over 4,000 strangers along

Hong Rong-xuan dexterously tears off page after page of paper at a Tzu Chi recycling station. After losing his vision, he rediscovered his purpose in life by becoming a recycling volunteer.



the way," he said. "Though I don't know them, I'm really grateful to them."

Wang Guo-hao's life has also become better with the help he received at the IBT. His training, provided by the professional, hard-working IBT personnel, helped him regain his ability to take care of his daily needs and live independently. The support of his classmates, facing the same challenges in life, helped him find the courage to overcome the difficulties thrown in his way. He could also talk to social workers when he was down. Gradually, he became adjusted to his new life.

Wang graduated from the institute over a year ago. After passing a licensing exam, he now works as a masseur. Now that he can support himself, he's able to face his future with more confidence. With a job to distract him, he is also less likely to dwell on negative thoughts. He is gaining surer footing.

Another way to see the world

When you arrive at the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan, you first see an old, one-story building. But if you walk through that first building, you'll come to a new building where classes are held. The hallways are quiet. Through the windows, you can see students listening intently to instructors as they teach massage skills and the meridian system in traditional Chinese medicine.

In addition to its massage program, the IBT helps people with varying degrees of visual impairment relearn how to take care of themselves. Courses are tailored to meet everyone's needs, and training is conducted in real-life situations until one can tend to one's own daily needs without having to rely on others' help. Lin Xia-fei



(林夏妃), a staffer at the institute, explained that it can take from half a year to three years for one to learn to live independently.

Orientation and mobility training, along with daily living skills training, are especially important in helping a blind person to achieve independence. As times change, the need to adapt is inevitable, and so the institute has also incorporated instruction on how to use technology, such as cell phones and computers.

Teaching braille was a major focus of the IBT in the early years of its history. It took students an average of two years to finish the course on braille. These days, however, most non-sighted people have shifted to relying on technology to connect with the world. Mobile apps designed for the visually impaired have also been developed to make their lives more convenient, apps that allow them to identify colors, read with their ears, write with their voices, surf the Internet, and stay in touch with friends and relatives.

Even though fewer and fewer non-sighted people are using braille, instruction on this form of written language for the blind hasn't disappeared. The IBT still teaches its students basic braille and helps them to develop their tactile sensitivity so they can at least recognize their names

Every week, Hong and a fellow Tzu Chi volunteer promote reduced use of plastic bags and encourage people to join Tzu Chi as donating members by holding boards printed with the messages at a market and mass rapid transit station in Yonghe, New Taipei City. Though visually impaired, Hong's desire to do good and help protect the environment is stronger than that of the average person.

in braille or know how to read the numbers when taking elevators.

Among all the types of training for the visually impaired, orientation and mobility training presents the biggest challenge. This training allows the unsighted to learn the techniques of using the white cane and how to move safely in different environments. Nevertheless, some people, unable to come to terms with their disability or not wanting to attract curious looks in public, refuse to use a white cane when they are out and about.

Zhang Zi (張自), head of the IBT, shared an example. She said that a former student, even after receiving O&M training at the institute, refused to use a white cane when he left his home. He often bumped into things or tripped and fell as a result. After experiencing several scares and

frustrating incidents, he eventually broke down in a park and cried for more than an hour. Only after that did he make up his mind to use a white cane. "It wasn't until that moment that he finally accepted himself," Zhang said. "He realized that blind or not, he had to keep going."

Care and support

A light rain was falling, but the bright afternoon sun was out, and it was still stiflingly hot. The heat, however, couldn't dampen the high spirits of students at the IBT. They were having a field trip and were really looking forward to it. A typical school day at the institute usually consists of intensive instructional and training sessions from morning to evening, so students appreciated down time like this when they could take a breather.

Tzu Chi volunteers are a constant presence during these field trips, which take place four times a year. Students might, for example, visit a bowling alley, old streets in Xinzhuang, or the National Palace Museum. Or perhaps, they are just out practicing their massage techniques on subjects in an out-of-school environment. But no matter where they go, Tzu Chi volunteers who have learned how to guide a blind person are there to help out along with teachers from the institute.

This afternoon, the students were visiting an elementary school in Xinzhuang to provide massage services. This was a practice session to prepare for a licensing exam that was coming up. Volunteers gave the students verbal cues as they carefully guided them to the school: "We've come to some steps;" "Downward slope ahead;" or "We're crossing the road." Xiao-hui, who was completely blind, was very thankful for the volunteers' help. She said that she still felt nervous when she was out and about, and assistance like that from the volunteers put her at ease.

When the students were giving massages to teachers at the elementary school, Qiu Shu-yuan (邱淑媛), an instructor at the IBT, dropped

Wang Guo-hao works at a massage parlor established by the IBT. The parlor provides stable job opportunities for new graduates. After passing his licensing exam, Wang returned to the workforce by working at the parlor.



tips and suggestions for improvement in a low voice to the students. Qiu explained that students learn massage techniques and related knowledge at the institute, and when they go out of the school for internship or practice sessions, they learn how to apply their skills to people of different occupations. This is necessary because people from different walks of life have different muscle conditions.

Qiu has served at the IBT for eight years. Her biggest wish is to see every student successfully return to society and live independently. She spoke of the challenges working at the institute: "The hardest part is getting rejected by the students. It's not easy to win their trust. It requires a lot of time and effort. Thankfully, I have the support of a very good team."

Students in the massage program at the IBT have to live on campus, which gives them time at night to study and prepare for their licensing exams. One Wednesday a month, Tzu Chi volunteers visit the students during their study time to provide care and support and to listen to them share their feelings and thoughts.

The institute doesn't charge students any course fees. Even room and board are free. Though the government provides some funding, the IBT has to raise over half of its own operating costs. The financial burden on the school is therefore heavy—it's in the red every year.

"It has been especially hard raising money in recent years," said staffer Lin Xia-fei. "Some people even think we are a fraud gang." She explained that due to changes in the larger environment, the number of regular donors has greatly decreased.



IBT students, guided by docents, feel by touch a made-to-scale replica of an antiquity on a visit to the National Palace Museum.

Staffers have to work very hard to raise money. "If in the past we had to go out six times to solicit donations, we now have to go out 12," she declared.

Tzu Chi stepped in after learning of their financial difficulties. In 2016, the foundation signed a cooperation agreement with the IBT to help finance the institute's massage program. Over the past four years, partly because of Tzu Chi's help, 63 course participants have passed their licensing exams and joined the workforce.

Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川) is the director of Tzu Chi's Department of Charity Mission Development. He feels Tzu Chi has done a very meaningful thing in aiding the institute, especially when he sees graduates start working to support themselves and their families. Many visually impaired people, after receiving training at the IBT and regaining the ability to live independently, also donate money to the institute. This is one way they can repay the love and care they have received from society.

Zhang Zi, head of the IBT, said that "I might just as well disappear from the world" is a nega-

tive thought shared by many people who have just lost their sight. The loss of vision comes with severe psychological trauma and impact. If help is not offered promptly, the visually impaired can end up shutting themselves up at home for an average of five to seven years. On the other hand, if newly non-sighted persons can receive reconstructive resources quickly, the fear and pain they experience as they struggle in the darkness can be effectively reduced.

Students at the IBT are in different stages of acceptance. Some are still working hard to accept the reality of their lost vision. Others are doing what they can to get back on their feet. No matter what stage they are in, as long as they can rediscover their goals and purpose in life, their lives won't continue to be submerged in darkness. They will eventually find their way out of the darkness by following the light in their hearts.

The Way Out of Darkness

The Story of a Visually Impaired Masseur

By Zhan Yun-ying
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

I love to work. I'm so happy I've become a professional masseuse and can make a living now. When a customer says to me, "That felt really good," I feel great too!
—Que Wen-li

Working slowly and methodically, Que Wen-li (關文莉), 55, mindfully exerts pressure with her expert hands and works to relax her customer's tense muscles. Feeling each one with her fingertips, she locates corresponding acupoints and presses and rubs them.

At first glance, there is nothing unusual about this masseuse. However, if you were to look closer, you'd notice a cloudiness in her left eye. That eye is completely blind. Her right eye is better, but not by much. She can only see blurry shapes in that one.

Que can still clearly remember the day she lost her vision. It happened so suddenly. Just the day before, she had gone to a local temple to watch a performance celebrating the Lantern Festival. Her eyes had been just fine. Who was to know that the next day she'd wake to find her vision terribly hazy? A visit to the hospital revealed the culprit: diabetes-induced retinal detachment. Overnight, her world changed forever.

Massage as a profession

Before her sudden loss of vision, Que had helped care for her mother-in-law, a stroke patient. After she went blind, it became impossible for her to continue her role as a caregiver. She couldn't do chores around the house or go out to buy food. Her family, instead of being understanding of her condition, accused her of being lazy. They called her "a useless person."

It's easy to see why they argued a lot during this period. "I thought constantly about ending my life during that time," Que recalled. "I didn't want to be a useless person." She lost all her confidence, and isolated herself at home for the next ten years.

In 2016, she applied for a disability certification from the government, which led to a visit from social workers from the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan (IBT). The social workers encouraged her to step out of her home and to break free from her isolation. They told her that with training she would be able to do things independently again, such as taking a bus on her own. Que thought they were pulling her leg: "How is it possible for a blind person to take a bus on their own? That's impossible!"

But the social workers were nothing if not persistent. They arranged for Que to begin receiving daily living skills training at the IBT southern center. As she relearned how to take care of herself, her faith in life was gradually reignited.

Though she was originally firmly against studying massage, Que desperately wanted to become economically independent again. "I wanted my dignity back," she said. "I didn't want to depend on my family for money anymore." She knew the only way she was going to make any money was to learn a trade, so she resolutely decided to leave her hometown in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, for the IBT campus in northern



Taiwan to learn massage skills. Under the guidance and help of IBT teachers, psychological counselors, and other visually impaired people, her attitude towards the massage profession gradually began to warm.

Due to limited funding, there is a yearly limit on the number of people admitted to the massage program at the IBT. People who wish to enter the program must pass a written exam and interview. "I went all out during the interview," Que declared. "I was determined to garner a spot on the program." Her efforts paid off, and she was admitted to the program.

However, learning massage wasn't as easy as she had expected. The entire course lasted nine months, and every participant had to undergo 1,600 hours of intensive training. There was a lot to learn: basic anatomy, pathology, the study of the meridian system, not to mention the massage techniques themselves. The biggest challenge came from having to master the knowledge of muscle structures, acupuncture points, and the meridian system. Que, already in her 50s, often had difficulty remembering things. She felt so frustrated she even second-guessed her decision to join the program. "What was I thinking, to

Que Wen-li massages a customer to help her relax her tense muscles.

leave a life I was familiar with to come here to suffer?" she'd ask herself.

Fortunately, the teachers at the IBT understood what their students were going through, and they shared their own experiences to help the students through those difficult times. With the instructors' help and encouragement, Que forged on. "Everyone goes through the same thing I'm going through," she said to herself. "It's not just me." She graduated from the IBT in 2018, and with a recommendation from the institute, she began working at a massage parlor in Keelung, northern Taiwan.

"When I first started working, my hands were often so sore I'd cry at night," Que recalled. But she tried to see this time as a transitional period. She comforted herself that she felt sore because she had worked hard. Her customers were sometimes a source of frustration too. "One time a customer told me I had done a poor job of massaging." That comment greatly disheartened her. Her colleagues consoled her and encouraged her to turn her feeling of frustration into a motivat-

ing force for improvement, to make up for her lack of experience with a willingness to learn and get better.

Que took their advice to heart. She also began to realize the necessity to improve. She and her classmates had received a solid grounding in massage skills at the IBT, but what they had learned was not enough for them to serve the rich array of customers they would encounter in their businesses. Some of their customers might, for example, suffer from deformed spines due to poor postures, giving rise to the need to handle them differently. Therefore, Que resolved never to stop learning and improving her skills, and she was quick to consult with her fellow massage therapists if she needed help.

Paying back society

At one time, Taiwan's massage industry was the exclusive province of the visually impaired—only non-sighted people could legally practice massage in Taiwan. But in 2008, Taiwan's Council of Grand Justices issued a constitutional interpretation declaring that law unconstitutional. The law was removed from the books three years later. As a result, the massage industry was opened up to the sighted population on October 31, 2011.

Wu Hong-ming (吳弘銘) is a graduate of the IBT who has worked as a masseur for a decade. He commented about lifting the legal barrier for the sighted to enter the massage industry: "Massage parlors run by the visually impaired are usually not as luxurious or fancy as those run by the sighted. The impact on us [from the competition] was inevitable." Que, having worked as a masseuse for just over a year, learned from her boss that business was indeed a lot worse than it used to be before sighted massage therapists were allowed. Que isn't too worried though. She said, "What you need to do is improve your skills. You needn't worry [about the competition from sighted massage therapists] as long as you have superior massage skills."

She believes that when God closes one door, he opens another. She mentioned that her sense of touch has become sharper since her sight was taken from her. And having a good sense of touch is critical in massage work, because it relies mostly on the sense of touch. Since everyone has dif-

People who are born with sight but lose their vision later in life need help and support as they find a way through their darkness.



ferent body shape, it isn't necessarily more accurate to locate an acupoint by sight. "While sighted people can easily locate the meridian system by sight, we visually impaired have to grope and feel for what we're looking for," Que remarked. "It might take us more time, but once we locate what we're looking for, we can render more spot-on services." It is also easier for the sightless to concentrate and focus on what they are doing.

When Que was a student at the IBT, Tzu Chi volunteers invited many physically disabled people to the institute to share with the students how they had overcome their challenges in life. Volunteers also encouraged IBT students to donate what money they could on a regular basis to pay back society. Doing so helped them build their confidence too. "I found it amazing," said Que, "that we visually impaired could help others too."

Before she lost her sight, Que ran a vegetarian restaurant. A Tzu Chi volunteer happened to live next door to the restaurant, and at her invitation, Que began making a monthly donation of a hundred NT dollars (US\$3.31) to the foundation. But after she lost her sight, she lost the ability to work and had to stop donating to the charity. As soon as she rejoined the job market in January 2019, she started donating again. She expressed her happiness at being able to make money and help others again.

Wang Guo-hao graduated from the IBT the same year as Que. He also shared the joy of giving. He remembered that when he was still a student at the IBT, the institute arranged for students to give massage services to people in a vegetative state. Since people in that state are unresponsive and Wang and his fellow classmates couldn't see, they were afraid of hurting those they were massaging. Even so, they found the experience emotionally stirring. "Many of us cried," Wang said. "We were all deeply moved. We had no idea we could help others like that."

Wang now works at a massage parlor established by the IBT. The parlor donates part of its



After training, and with the help of barrier-free facilities, visually impaired people can move around safely in familiar environments just as easily as sighted people.

revenue back to the institute. It's one way for graduates to pay back. Everyone hopes that through this cycle of goodness, more unsighted people can be helped.

Que once held the misconception that massage was just a front for the sex industry, but she knows better now. She respects her own profession as a massage therapist. She talks about the sense of accomplishment she receives at work: "When a customer I've just served tells me, 'That felt really good,' I feel great too."

Now that she has become economically independent again, her family has changed their attitude toward her. She feels very lucky to have encountered the IBT. The institute allowed her to rediscover her dignity, and she is very grateful.

Que once heard a Tzu Chi volunteer with a disability say, "You're on the way to success the moment you step out of your home." Those words made a deep impression on her. Thinking back on those words now, she realizes that she and other visually impaired people like her are examples of such a success story. Through perseverance, courage, and with some help, people who have lost their sight can regain their ability to work, pay back society, and rediscover life's meaning. They can emerge triumphant from their valley of darkness.

Serving the Visually Impaired

Zhang Zi, Head of the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan

By Chen Li-an

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

I hope more people learn about the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan so that more visually impaired people can receive help sooner. It's important to pass on experience and expertise. I'll do my best to contribute as long as I still can.

—Zhang Zi, head of the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan

Once the principal of the Taipei School for the Visually Impaired, and now at the helm of the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan (IBT), Zhang Zi has served the non-sighted for 45 years. A major part of her life—her prime years actually—has been dedicated to the education of the visually impaired.

Zhang graduated from a teachers' university in 1975, the same year the Taipei School for the Visually Impaired was established. Because she had intern experience in the field of special education, Zhang was offered a teaching spot at the Taipei school. Back then, non-sighted people rarely ventured out of their homes, and Zhang had never even met a blind person before she joined the school. Although she was nervous about teaching there, she accepted the challenge, and thus began her career in special education.

Zhang explained that almost all the school's students had been born blind. With no visual experience to guide them, they built their worlds based on their imaginations. Though they couldn't see, Zhang believed in their right to receive a quality education. Whether the students were learning good habits, good character, or the methodology of going about a task, she believed the standards shouldn't be lowered because of their visual impairments. On the contrary, even more care should be applied to their education, starting with the teaching materials selected for them.

Special education is different from general education. Zhang emphasized the need to care for not just the students but their families as well. She remembered a student's mother who had tried to take her own life several times. The woman's husband had walked out on her and their child because the latter was blind. She felt hopeless as a result, which had led to her suicide attempts. Zhang was in the late stages of her own pregnancy when she learned about the family's situation, but, giving no thought to herself, she said to the mother, "You can't die! I'll help you!"

Zhang bent over backwards to help the family. She visited a masseur she knew well and implored him to take on the student as an apprentice to help lighten the family's financial burden. Happily, everything turned out well in the end, and a possible tragedy was averted.

Zhang expended a lot of effort on cases like this one, and she helped a lot of students' families. She learned from her experience that educators can do more than just impart knowledge to students—they can make more of an impact in their students' lives.

Community outreach

In 2004, after serving for nearly 30 years, Zhang retired from the Taipei School for the Visually Impaired. Four years later, she was offered the position to lead the Institute for the Blind of Taiwan. She accepted and thus began the



next phase of her career serving the visually impaired.

It's not easy to keep the institute in operation, but Zhang does her best to maintain the institute and its staff. She knows that if professional support for the visually impaired runs short, the quality of education and counseling for this group of people is bound to suffer. She also understands the importance of passing on experience and expertise. She lives by her words when she says, "I'll do my best to contribute as long as I still can."

Zhang declared that even though she has served the visually impaired for nearly half a century and has accumulated a lot of experience, she still has to relearn a lot of stuff every time she encounters a new case. Every individual is different and has different needs; adjustments need to be made in the process of tailoring help for them so that their needs can be effectively served. Despite the efforts it takes to serve the non-sighted, Zhang said, "When you see them smile, you feel you're doing a very meaningful thing."

It has been more than 60 years since the IBT came into existence. Over a major part of that history the institute "silently" helped the visually

Zhang Zi (first from right) has served the visually impaired for over four decades. She is a proponent of assessing the needs of each non-sighted person to offer assistance that best suits them.

impaired—until a few incidents happened that prompted the IBT to make changes. In a ceremony marking the completion of a massage course one year, Zhang heard a student say, "If I'd known that my life would become so much fun after I received vocational and life skills training at the IBT, I'd never have let those ten years before I joined the institute go to waste."

Zhang declared that those words were a huge blow to her. She thought to herself at that time, "Is it due to insufficient publicity about our institute that people like that student stay cooped up in their homes for that long?"

Another time, a resident of Xinzhuang, where the IBT is located, said that when he first came to the institute to volunteer, he had had no idea what the institute did—despite having lived in the district for more than 40 years!

These incidents prompted the administrators of the IBT to survey the surrounding areas to find

out how many visually impaired people lived locally. They were surprised to find that in Xinzhuang alone—about 20 square kilometers (7.7 square miles) in area with a population of about 420,000—there were over 400 visually impaired people. What's more, the IBT had not even encountered these people. Many of them couldn't take care of themselves, nor had they ever received orientation and mobility training. Because they couldn't see, they assumed they'd never be able to work again. As a result, their sphere of activity was limited to their homes.

To make the services of the IBT known to more

people and also to give back to the local community, the institute began organizing community activities and classes to entice the local non-sighted population to step out of their homes and live a more enriched life. Their intentions were good and the activities and classes were free for participants, but things didn't go well in the beginning. "Most people thought we were a gang of swindlers," Zhang said with a wry smile.

To make breakthroughs, she decided to enlist the help of neighborhood chiefs, who knew the situations of families in their neighborhoods better than most other people. At Zhang's request, local

neighborhood chiefs accompanied IBT personnel on their visits to families with non-sighted members to encourage participation in the institute's events and classes. Zhang's strategy was quite successful and participation grew. With increased participation, classes organized by the IBT also grew more diverse, including ballroom dancing, singing, cooking, balloon modeling, etc. Today, the number of course enrollments has reached nearly 4,000 every year—although some people participate in multiple class offerings each year.

The institute also holds workshops for the families of the visually impaired and for the gen-

eral public which allow participants to experience what it would be like if they couldn't see. This is to foster people's understanding of what it would be like to be blind, and to help them become more empathetic. In addition, workshops are offered for children to help them understand the importance of protecting their vision. These are provided to help lower the instances of acquired blindness.

The IBT does not charge any fees for its vocational and life skills training, nor for the community classes it offers. Zhang once asked Zeng Wenxiong (曾文雄), the founder of the IBT, why they didn't charge anything, especially as the institute found itself in the red every year. Zeng replied that when people lose their vision, it is a serious blow to their families' finances. If the institute charged people who were already struggling financially for taking part in IBT courses, it might further deter them from stepping out of their isolation. "We can make life easier for them if we work harder to raise money," said the founder. "Once they get back on their feet, they'll be able to turn their lives around."

Following in their founder's footsteps, the IBT staff has done their best to solicit donations or seek help from other charitable resources to keep the institute in operation. They want to ease the financial burdens of non-sighted people and their families. Zhang sincerely hopes that organizations like the IBT can always stay in operation. "No one can guarantee that vision loss will never happen to themselves or others. We must keep our services going and keep on improving them."

As the IBT continues to serve the visually impaired, Zhang hopes that more people will learn about the institute so that more visually impaired people can receive help sooner. In addition to serving the needs of the non-sighted, the institute can also play a role in nurturing the public's understanding of the visually impaired and help them realize what help they can offer them. Perhaps everyone can start by not shying away from this group of people. Next time you run into a blind person, don't hesitate to reach out and ask, "Do you need help?"

Accompanied by Tzu Chi volunteers and IBT staff, participants of a massage course at the institute set out for an out-of-school practice session. Many people have, with the institute's help, started their lives anew after losing their sight.



Delaying Frailty in Old Age

By Liao Wei-qing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Huang Xiao-zhe

Do the seniors in your family tire easily, move slowly, and feel disinclined to leave the house? Are they losing weight? Find out ways to prevent, delay, or reverse frailty in older people.

Li, an 82-year-old woman with a chronic illness, fell the other day and sustained a bone fracture. After surgery, her mobility was severely reduced, so much so that she became unable to take care of her daily needs and had to check into a nursing home. Even after her wounds had healed, she continued to tire easily and have a poor appetite. She nodded off a lot during the day, and did not feel like getting out of her bed.

In response, her family decided to take her to the geriatric outpatient clinic at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital for an examination. It was there that Dr. Lin Chun-yu (林純聿) diagnosed her with frailty combined with geriatric depression. The physician adjusted the medicine Li was taking, taught her family how to help her exercise, and pointed out other things for them to pay attention to. Three months later, Li was able to walk with the help of a walker. Three months after that, she had recovered her stamina and was able to get around with just a four-footed cane.

As the population ages, geriatric care is becoming more and more important and in demand. Dr. Lin pointed out that these days it is common that seniors are succumbing to physical or mental conditions and becoming less capable of taking care of themselves. This can happen when a senior has had a fall, has been struck with an illness, or has experienced the passing of a relative or friend.

According to Lin, the prevalence of pre-frailty among people in Taiwan aged 65 or older is about 40 percent. Frail people are at an increased risk of adverse health outcomes, including hospitalization, institutionalization, and premature mortality. It's a growing issue in society that demands attention.

Frailty test

Frailty is generally believed to be a natural consequence of aging, so people tend to ignore it when they notice older people in their family getting weaker. However, fighting the tendency to accept frailty as part and parcel of getting old is essential. The reason is that early identification and intervention for those at risk can prevent or delay the negative outcomes of frailty.

Dr. Lin suggested that people 70 and older, or those at least 65 with an unintentional loss of five percent or more of their weight, can take the following test to find out if they are at risk of frailty:

1. Slowness: defined as taking more than 7.5 seconds to walk six meters (20 feet).
2. Weakness: defined as a grip-strength measurement of less than 26 kilograms (57 pounds) for men and less than 18 kilograms (35 pounds) for women.
3. Weight loss: defined as an unintentional weight loss of more than 4.5 kilograms (10 pounds) compared with the year before.



4. Exhaustion: defined as feeling that everything you did was an effort or that you could not get going, in at least three out of the last seven days.

5. Low physical activity: defined as burning less than 383 calories per week for men, or 270 calories per week for women.

The presence of one or two of these factors indicates pre-frailty, and a change of lifestyle is recommended. Dr. Lin suggests to first adjust your diet. If you don't have kidney disease, increase your protein intake. The recommended amount to consume per day is 1 to 1.5 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. Also, make exercise a habit: Practice raising your legs and hips, walking, standing, etc., to increase your muscle strength and prevent muscle loss. It's also advisable to have regular physical checkups.

The presence of three or more of the five assessment factors indicates frailty, and medical intervention is recommended. At this stage, Dr. Lin recommends visiting a geriatric outpatient clinic for an overall appraisal. Is there improper use of medicine? Are there other risk factors involved? Such assessments can help medical workers formulate a care plan.

Take Li, the elderly woman mentioned at the beginning of this article, as an example. Dr. Lin learned that she was taking painkillers and two kinds of sleep-inducing pills in addition to medications for her chronic condition. To increase the patient's willingness to move around more during the day, the doctor reduced her doses of sleep-inducing medication. And because Li displayed symptoms of depression after she was injured, Dr. Lin prescribed anti-depression drugs for her. The physician also recommended an increased intake of protein and demonstrated to her family the kind of exercises she could do to increase her muscle strength.

"Walking at a slow pace doesn't help to delay frailty," said Dr. Lin. "People should take a more proactive approach to aging. Change your lifestyle, adopt a balanced diet, and develop a habit of exercise to prevent or delay the onset of frailty." She further reminded people not to think of frailty as a natural outcome of aging and to have regular checkups to assess their physical condition. With these simple precautions, a healthy, happy old age is within everyone's reach. ❁

Mom's Smile Is Back

By Zhang Li-zhu

Translated by Rose Ting

Photos by Chen Li-xue

A-zhi's mother has raised him alone since his father passed away. A-zhi knew that being a single mother wasn't easy, and he was determined to help his family climb out of poverty and give his mother a good life.

“Mom, why don't you remarry?” the boy asked. His mother pondered this mature question from her young son, and then she responded: “Having experienced the pain of losing the man I love, I can't bear to go through that pain again.”

This was a dialogue between A-zhi and his mom, Giang (not their real names). He had asked her about remarrying because she had rarely smiled since his dad passed away. A-zhi reasoned that if he had a father and she a husband, she might begin to smile again. He just wanted her to be happy.

A kitchen with a view

Giang and A-zhi live on the top floor of a four-story apartment building in Daya District, Taichung City, central Taiwan. Their home is very small, only 107 square feet, into which is crammed a bed, a desk, and other basic furniture and household items. There is no room for a private bathroom, so they share a communal bathroom with the families living downstairs.

The one-room apartment has a small balcony, which doubles as their kitchen. Because it's outside, the kitchen has no cover and is exposed to the elements. A recycled gas stove sits in a corner of the balcony, but it doesn't work very well—the flame is low and requires fanning to get it going full blast.

Despite the primitive setup, Giang is optimistic and tends to look at life's hardships with a positive attitude. “Cooking here [on the balcony] is nice,” Giang said. “You can see the stars in the

evening, and it's cooler out here. I can just pop my head out to check if my son is returning home from school. There are many benefits.”

“What if it rains?” several visiting Tzu Chi volunteers asked in unison.

A-zhi quickly responded by producing something that looked like a small electric hotplate. “We have an induction cooker,” he said. “When it rains, we can just go inside and use it to cook some noodles.”

Giang and A-zhi live a simple life and take care of each other. They seem to be content with a roof over their head and each other to rely on. The mother keeps their home spotless, and the son never complains about not having enough money. They are a living example of Master Cheng Yen's saying: “It's better to have a broad heart than a spacious house.”

Giang is originally from Vietnam, but she moved to Taiwan after getting married. When her husband died of cancer, the burden of supporting her family fell on her shoulders. She became so busy making a living she even stopped going to church. When people at her church learned about her situation, they referred her to the Tzu Chi Foundation for help. That was back in 2011, eight years ago. Since then, the foundation has provided her and her son with a monthly subsidy as well as emotional support and care. During this time, volunteers have witnessed A-zhi grow from a second-grader to a high schooler.

A considerate son

In *The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety*, written during China's Yuan dynasty (1271-1368),



there is a story about a young boy named Huang Xiang (黃香). In this folk tale, Huang lost his mother when he was nine, but he continued to take good care of his father. During the hot summer season, he made a point of fanning his father's bed at night to cool it for his father to sleep on. During the cold of winter, Huang warmed his father's bed with his own body heat so his father could have a warm bed on which to fall asleep comfortably.

Though this folk tale is very old, A-zhi has brought it to life. The apartment he and his mother share is so small that there is room for only one bed. Each night, one of them, mother or son, gets the bed and the other gets the floor, with a piece of fabric in between serving as a partition. A-zhi always volunteers to sleep on the floor in winter so that his mother can sleep on the bed and stay warmer, whereas in summer he chooses to sleep on the bed and leaves the cooler floor for his mom to sleep on. Like Huang Xiang in the story, A-zhi is a good son and demonstrates exemplary filial piety.

Giang said emotionally that she used to be so busy working she didn't have time to pay much attention to people around her—including her son. But that changed one day when she came down with the flu. She was running a fever of 40

A-zhi (left) repays his mother's love by applying himself in school and helping out with chores around the house. His mother is happy she has a great son.

degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), and A-zhi lovingly cared for her by applying a cold compress to her forehead and plying her with water. He kept tabs on her temperature by repeatedly feeling her forehead with his hand. A-zhi lavished care on her and showed the love of a devoted son. That's when she realized: “How nice it is to have a son!” It's no surprise that Giang is all smiles when she talks about her son.

She added that A-zhi was always more mature than other children his age growing up. When he was in kindergarten, his school organized a field trip and invited parents to participate. Because she had to work that day, she couldn't decide whether to join the trip or not. A-zhi told her, much like an adult: “Mom, you'll always have time to make money, but my childhood will only happen once. Once it's gone, it'll be gone forever.” After receiving such wise advice, she decided to attend the field trip. In fact, she never missed her son's activities after that when parental participation was encouraged.

A mother who doubles as a father

A-zhi has never had a tutor or attended a cram school, but he applied himself to his studies and in 2018 tested into the highest ranking high school in Taichung City. Schoolwork was demanding, and Tzu Chi volunteer Chen Jian-hua (陳建華) tried to give him as much support as he could. He encouraged A-zhi to do his best but not put too much pressure on himself.

Seeing how hard A-zhi was working, volunteer Tang Yu-huan (湯鈺環) asked him if he needed to attend a cram school to supplement his studies. A-zhi replied that he didn't want to increase his mother's financial burden, so he would hold off on the cram school until it was time to get into high gear to prepare for the General Scholastic Ability Test to enter college.

A-zhi works hard at more than schoolwork. For example, he works part-time at his school for an hour every day to earn some pocket money to buy textbooks and school supplies. It's usually seven in the evening by the time he returns home.

Though he works hard and his mother expects a lot from him, it hasn't always been smooth sailing between the two. When he was in junior high, he fell in love with on-line video games. For a

time, he spent so much time on them his mother became very worried that he would fall behind in his schoolwork. Their relationship became greatly strained over the issue.

Giang shared the situation with the Tzu Chi volunteers who regularly visited them, and even cried out of frustration. Volunteer Tang shared her own experiences as a mother with her, saying, "It is wrong to think that our children should do everything we tell them to just because we're their mothers. That will only result in tension between us, and no one will win in such a situation. As long as it doesn't affect his performance at school, allow A-zhi to relax every once in a while. It will help him to relieve stress."

Tang gave her own relationship with her daughter as an example and said that the two of them once nearly fell out until she decided to change her attitude and stop being so controlling toward her daughter. "Once I let go, things

A-zhi often studies late into the night. After learning that his desk lamp was broken, volunteer Tang Yu-huan (left) gave him a new desk lamp so that his eyesight wouldn't be affected by inadequate lighting.



became much easier for me," Tang said, "and my daughter and I began to get along a lot better."

Heeding Tang's advice, Giang changed her mindset, and the tension between her and her son eased as a result. "It's hard being a mother and father at the same time. I knew nothing about parenting. Thankfully, Sister Tang has taught me a lot about how to communicate and get along better with my son."

Due to the longstanding companionship of Tzu Chi volunteers, Giang has developed an emotional bond with them and has come to trust them. She can let her guard down when she is with them, and she feels free to pour out whatever unhappiness or frustration she is experiencing. "My husband is no longer around," she remarked, "but I'm lucky to have the Tzu Chi volunteers. They're like family to me now and have given me very strong shoulders to lean on."

Making his winter warmer

When October rolled around and the weather began to get cooler, volunteers delivered a Tzu Chi folding bed to A-zhi. Now he doesn't have to continue to sleep on the floor in the winter—plus the bed can fold up and double as an extra chair. Tang brought two blankets to go with the bed.

Tang knew that the desk lamp on A-zhi's desk was broken, so she gave him a new lamp too. A-zhi carefully opened the box and pulled out a white-and-purple lamp. He plugged it in and turned off the room's ceiling light to test the lamp. "Wow! I can finally get a good night's sleep," his mother exclaimed. The volunteers were surprised that Giang seemed happier than her son over the desk lamp.

It turned out that A-zhi had been relying on the ceiling light to study at night, and its brightness made it difficult for Giang to fall asleep. She always had to wait until after midnight, when A-zhi had finished his homework and turned off the light, before she could finally sleep. Always the good son, A-zhi had taken to spending every Saturday at his uncle's place so that his mother could have a good rest. Now with the new desk lamp, she could go to sleep earlier, and A-zhi could stay home on Saturday nights.

Around the world with his mom

A-zhi once accompanied his mother to the market for grocery shopping. While shopping, they saw a beggar, his hair a mess and his entire body covered in grime. Without a word, Giang took out all the change she had in her pocket and

Tzu Chi New Shoots Scholarship

Tzu Chi started the New Shoots Scholarship in 2007 to encourage students from needy families to apply themselves in school, nurture good values and character, and bravely pursue their dreams. The scholarships are given in five categories: academic progress, scholarly accomplishments, filial piety, special achievements, and perfect attendance. An average of 9,000 students receive the award each year. Award ceremonies are held every October in 22 counties and cities around Taiwan.

gave it to the beggar. She then turned to her son and said, "We must help those who are worse off than ourselves." Those words had a profound impact on A-zhi.

In 2019, A-zhi won a Tzu Chi New Shoots Scholarship. During the award ceremony, he thanked his mother for taking good care of him for the past 16 years and said he'd never felt less love with one parent than he had with two. He said that though they were not rich, he never felt he lacked anything in life. He was full of gratitude for his mother because he knew that everything he had was due to the long hours she worked.

He also thanked Tzu Chi volunteers for their care and support and said that they had become an important part of his life. He hoped that, by dint of his own strength, he could become a medical doctor in the future to help more people. He wants to help his family climb out of poverty, take his mother on a tour around the world, and give her a better life.

Giang, standing beside him on the stage, was by this time in tears. When they returned to their seats, she said, "I wanted to say on stage that I have a very loving son who never makes me worry. He performs very well at school and even does a good job of sweeping the floor and cooking at home. But I was so emotional and weepy I couldn't get a single word out!"

Giang and A-zhi have faced many obstacles and have overcome many difficulties together. Giang lost the love of her life to cancer, and had to raise her son by herself. It was never an easy road, but A-zhi's thoughtfulness and love for his mother brought the smile back to her face. ❀

The Illustrated JING SI A PHORISMS



The Buddha says:

Everything is created and controlled by the mind. If we do or say things with the wrong attitude, suffering will follow us just like a cart follows the ox.

Your mind is like a mirror—it reflects the world around you. However, if the mirror is covered by dust, you won't be able to see anything. If you want to be wise and perceptive, your mind must be free of the worries caused by conflicts with others.

There is an old saying: "Those who are involved are confused, while the bystanders see clearly."



During the New Year, everybody wishes each other a happy new year.

Master Cheng Yen said, "We should bless each other at all times, not just at New Year."

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



China

Tzu Chi volunteers in Yunnan Province conducted four winter aid distributions in Huize County on January 11 and 12. Rice, cooking oil, comforters, jackets, and undergarments were distributed to 1,959 needy families (6,073 people).

The weather was very cold on the days the events were held. Volunteers served participating villagers hot ginger tea and led them in group activities to help them warm up. Other volunteers applied lotion to villagers' weathered hands. Volunteers interacted warmly with aid recipients, hoping to convey to them the love from Tzu Chi.

Tian Zhaoneng (田朝能), an aid recipient, was born with a physical disability. He lived with his elder brother, the brother's wife, and their two daughters. Tian's brother had become disabled too after suffering a brain injury while working in the field, and his wife had mental illness. Tian had come alone on this day to pick up everything for his family. After he had received his goods, volunteers helped him put on a jacket he had just received, and then helped him carry all his goods to the place where he would take transportation

Four Tzu Chi winter distributions were held in Huize County, Yunnan Province, China, on January 11 and 12. In all, 1,959 families received assistance over those two days.

home. He told the volunteers that the distributed items would be very useful. He thanked Tzu Chi and the volunteers profusely.

Xu Zhenggao (余正高), a visually impaired elderly man, also came alone to pick up his goods. Three volunteers carried his goods for him and accompanied him back home, a walk of more than 20 minutes. One of the volunteers, Chang Guanhua (常冠花), said that she had participated in several Tzu Chi winter distributions, and that she could see that the aid delivered by Tzu Chi really met the needs of the villagers, especially impoverished seniors. The supplies undoubtedly helped them have a warmer winter.

This was the first time Tang Xiuying (唐秀英), 62, had volunteered in a Tzu Chi winter distribution. She said she was happy to give to the underserved while she still could. She had learned to

smile more often after joining Tzu Chi, which helped spread happiness to more people.

Residents came empty-handed and returned home happily laden with goods. Despite the cold weather, a current of warmth and love flowed through the recipients and volunteers alike.

The Philippines

Taal Volcano in the province of Batangas, Luzon Island, erupted on January 12, and thousands of families had to be evacuated. According to the Philippines National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 244 evacuation centers had been set up in 20 cities or towns by January 16. Tzu Chi volunteers set out for affected areas on January 17 to evaluate the situation. Divided into four groups, they visited evacuation centers in six towns. Based on their findings, and after meeting with government officials, they decided to focus their aid on the town of Tuy.

Mayor Armando Afaible told the volunteers that many organizations had donated supplies to evacuation centers, but because most organizations hadn't coordinated their efforts with the government, many of the items they provided didn't meet the needs of the evacuees. The mayor then provided a reference list of needed supplies to the volunteers.

Volunteers quickly began to prepare and purchase needed items. They visited Tuy again on January 28 and distributed the aid to 610 families. Among the supplies were eating utensils, hygiene kits, rice, and blankets.

Adela Magsino, an aid recipient, cried when Tzu Chi volunteers led a prayer. She was touched that Tzu Chi, a Buddhist organization, would help people of a different religion. Pelagia Pasingin, 76, told volunteers that her only source of income was providing massage services. She had been put temporarily out of work due to the volcanic eruption but she still needed to provide for her grandson, who suffered from

In response to the recent rampant wildfires in Australia, Tzu Chi volunteers from the Gold Coast and Brisbane donated a fire truck to the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services on January 10.

cataracts and a mild mental disease. She was therefore very grateful for Tzu Chi's help.

Marcelo Manuel, a volunteer, thanked the foundation for allowing him to participate in the relief operation. He said he wasn't able to donate goods for the needy, but he was still able to give his time and strength. He said he identified deeply with the spirit of Great Love espoused by Tzu Chi, and so he felt very good about being able to volunteer for Tzu Chi.

Australia

Tzu Chi volunteers in the Gold Coast raised AUD\$220,000 (US\$145,079) and donated a fire truck to the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) on January 10. This was to help combat the recent devastating wildfires in Australia.

Eleven Tzu Chi volunteers from the Gold Coast and Brisbane went to the QFES on January 10 to donate the fire truck. QFES Assistant Commissioner John Bolger and staff received the volunteers. Together with others, the assistant commissioner pasted a Tzu Chi logo on the truck to symbolize that Tzu Chi would always be with the firefighters.

The truck has a capacity of seven firefighters and can carry 1,600 liters of water. It can draw water from dams, creeks, pools, and most other water sources. It also has a fire-retardant foam system in which fire-suppressing foam can be mixed in various ratios with water to provide a greater smothering effect.

On January 20, another team of volunteers visited the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and donated AUD\$220,000 for the purchase of another fire truck.



PENG YUN-HUA



COURTESY OF TZU CHI CHILE

Volunteers in Chile held a distribution for fire victims in La Granja, Santiago, on January 2, 2020. Twenty-two families benefited.

Chile

A fire caused by faulty wiring broke out in La Granja, Santiago, in the early morning of December 31, 2019. Five people were killed, two injured, and 70 people affected. Tzu Chi volunteers visited the affected area the following day to assess damage and determine what assistance they could render.

Volunteers met a young man during their trip and learned that he had lost three family members to the fire. The man's elder sister, her husband, and one of their children had died. The man said that his sister had a daughter and a physically disabled son. The daughter, 17, was the first one to notice the fire and quickly alerted her family. She escaped unharmed, but her parents and brother unfortunately didn't make it out. Her parents were probably trying to get their son out when they perished.

Other residents said that the fire raged for about two hours before it was extinguished. The fire spread quickly because the surrounding houses were built of wood. Survivors began cleaning up after the accident with the help of neighbors, relatives, and friends.

After assessing survivors' needs, volunteers set about purchasing the items they needed most. The items included shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, detergent, deodorants, razors, and combs. A distribution was held on January 2, benefiting 62 people in 22 families.

A survivor said, "Material goods lost in the fire can be replaced, but lives lost are gone forever. We

are grateful we're still alive." With help from society, fire victims have bravely embarked on the path to reconstruction.

Thailand

There is no doubt that plastic bags have been causing serious pollution problems around the world, and many countries have taken measures to address this issue. Thailand, for example, began year 2020 with a ban on single-use plastic bags at major stores. Tzu Chi Thailand decided to support this policy by no longer giving away plastic bags at the pharmacy of the two free clinic events held every month at the Tzu Chi office in Bangkok. The decision was first implemented on January 19. Volunteers prepared many reusable shopping bags for people who came to the free clinic on that day and who needed a bag to take their medicines home.

Tzu Chi has always been a great supporter of environmental protection. In the five years since the free clinic services were launched for refugees from different countries, volunteers have encouraged patients to be environmentally conscious. This includes encouraging patients to recycle to help reduce the amount of garbage produced.

Tzu Chi volunteer Chen Li-jing (陳麗晶) said, "Our volunteers brought these reusable bags from

To support the Thai government's policy to cut down on the use of one-use plastic bags, Tzu Chi Thailand stopped giving away plastic bags at the pharmacy of the two free clinic events held every month at the Tzu Chi office in Bangkok. The two patients pictured here brought their own bags to the free clinic on January 19.



HUANG JUAN

home so that our patients can use them to carry home the prescriptions they've received. These are bags the volunteers can spare, made of materials like paper or fabric."

Some patients said to the volunteers that they would bring the bags they had received to the next free clinic. Others had brought their own bags. However, many patients still did not know the pharmacy had stopped giving out plastic bags. This pushed volunteers to step up their efforts to spread the news. They hoped that the next time patients came for services, they would bring their own bags and help the Earth become cleaner.

Serbia

Tzu Chi volunteers have visited refugee camps in Serbia every winter without fail since 2016 to distribute winter clothes. This year, a team of volunteers from eight countries visited five camps, from January 10 to 14. They brought clothes to 3,800 refugees in Obrenovac, Krnjača, Adaševci, Šid, and Principovac.

Many refugees hugged the volunteers the moment they saw them. Many were still wearing clothes distributed by Tzu Chi last winter. Reza, a refugee who arrived at the Krnjača camp from Iraq a year before, stepped forward to greet and

thank the volunteers as soon as he saw them. He had received clothes from Tzu Chi the year before, and he said that the garments were made of very good material and had stayed warm despite repeated washings. He had used the clothes with care to make them last.

Adult and children's clothes were arranged by size at the venues to make distribution easier. Some refugees immediately put on the new clothes they had received. Volunteer Susan Chen (陳樹微) noticed that some laundry hanging out to dry at the Obrenovac camp was frozen over. She was glad that Tzu Chi could provide refugees with clothes to help keep them warm.

Volunteers also held two blessing ceremonies during this trip, at the Krnjača and Adaševci camps, to convey their best wishes to refugees on behalf of Master Cheng Yen.

Over the years, Tzu Chi has provided regular meals, summer and winter clothes, school supplies, and other aid for refugees in Serbia. The foundation hopes the displaced people feel a sense of hope and love through this assistance. ❀

Volunteer Zhang Rong-fu (張榮富) interacts with children at the Krnjača camp in Serbia while on a visit there to distribute winter clothes.



KANG HUI-CHING

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

TAIWAN

Hualien: Headquarters
Tel: 886-3-8266779
Fax: 886-3-8267776

Taipei: Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center
Tel: 886-2-28989000
Fax: 886-2-28989994

ARGENTINA

Tel: 54-11-48625770
Fax: 54-11-43140252

AUSTRALIA

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

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

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

Perth
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

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

BRAZIL

Tel: 55-11-55394091
Fax: 55-11-55391683

BRUNEI

Tel/Fax: 673-3336779

CANADA

Edmonton
Tel: 1-780-4639788
Fax: 1-780-4621799

Montreal
Tel: 1-514-8442074
Fax: 1-514-2889152

Toronto
Tel: 1-416-8868886
1-905-9471182
Fax: 1-416-9002048

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

DOMINICAN REP.

Tel: 1-809-5300972

EL SALVADOR

Tel/Fax: 1-503-7293905

FRANCE

Tel: 33-1-45860312
Fax: 33-1-45862540

GERMANY

Tel: 49-40-388439
Cell: 0049-152-2951-9571

GREAT BRITAIN

Tel: 44-20-88699864
Fax: 44-20-89334262

GUATEMALA

Tel: 502-22327648
Fax: 502-23675872

HONG KONG

Tel: 852-28937166
Fax: 852-28937478

INDONESIA

Tel: 62-21-5055999
Fax: 62-21-5055699

JAPAN

Tel: 81-3-32035651
Fax: 81-3-32035674

JORDAN

Tel/Fax: 962-6-5817305

LESOTHO

Tel: 266-28312566
Fax: 266-22313897

MALAYSIA

Ipoh
Tel: 60-5-2551013
Fax: 60-5-2421013

Kedah
Tel: 60-4-7311013
Fax: 60-4-7321013

Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 60-3-62563800
Fax: 60-3-62563801

Melaka
Tel: 60-6-2810818
Fax: 60-6-2812796

Penang
Tel: 60-4-2281013
Fax: 60-4-2261013

MEXICO

Tel: 1-760-7688998
Fax: 1-760-7686631

MYANMAR

Tel: 95-1-541494/541496

NETHERLANDS

Tel: 31-629-577511

NEW ZEALAND

Tel: 64-9-2716976
Fax: 64-9-2724639

PARAGUAY

Tel: 595-21-333818
Fax: 595-21-310588

PHILIPPINES

Tel/Fax: 63-2-7320001

SINGAPORE

Tel: 65-65829958
Fax: 65-65829952

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town
Tel: 27-21-9130934
Fax: 27-21-9137057

Durban
Tel: 27-31-5615348
Fax: 27-31-5644438

Johannesburg
Tel: 27-11-4503365
Fax: 27-11-4502256

Ladysmith
Tel: 27-36-6341333
Fax: 27-36-6341261

SWEDEN

Tel/Fax: 46-31-227883

THAILAND

Tel: 66-2-3281161-3
Fax: 66-2-3281160

TURKEY

Tel: 90-212-4225802
Fax: 90-212-4225803

UNITED STATES

San Dimas
Tel: 1-909-4477799
Fax: 1-909-4477948

Atlanta
Tel: 1-770-4581000

Austin
Tel: 1-512-4910358
Fax: 1-512-9261373

Boston
Tel: 1-617-7620569
Fax: 1-617-4314484

Cerritos
Tel: 1-562-9266609
Fax: 1-562-9261603

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

Cleveland
Tel/Fax: 1-440-6469292

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

Dallas
Tel: 1-972-6808869
Fax: 1-972-6807732

Detroit
Tel/Fax: 1-586-7953491

Fresno
Tel/Fax: 1-559-2984894

Hawaii
Tel: 1-808-7378885
Fax: 1-808-7378889

Houston

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

Indianapolis
Tel: 1-317-5800979

Kansas
Tel: 1-913-3976517

Long Island
Tel: 1-516-8736888
Fax: 1-516-7460626

Madison
Tel: 1-608-2687692

Miami
Tel: 1-954-5381172
Fax: 1-954-539907

New Jersey
Tel: 1-973-8578666
Fax: 1-973-8579555

New York
Tel: 1-718-8880866
Fax: 1-718-4602068

Los Angeles Northwest
Tel: 1-818-7277689
Fax: 1-818-7279272

Los Angeles West
Tel: 1-310-4735188
Fax: 1-310-4779518

Oakland
Tel: 1-510-8790971

Orlando
Tel/Fax: 1-407-2921146

Phoenix
Tel: 1-480-8386556
Fax: 1-480-7777665

Pittsburgh
Tel: 1-412-5318343
Fax: 1-412-5318341

San Diego
Tel: 1-858-5460578
Fax: 1-858-5460573

San Francisco
Tel: 1-415-6820566
Fax: 1-415-6820567

San Jose
Tel: 1-408-4576969
Fax: 1-408-9438420

Seattle
Tel: 1-425-8227678
Fax: 1-425-8226169

St. Louis
Tel/Fax: 1-314-9941999

Washington DC
Tel: 1-703-7078606
Fax: 1-703-7078607

VIETNAM
Tel: 84-8-38535001
Fax: 84-8-38535055



The true joy derived from the Buddha's teachings comes after putting them into practice.

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HUANG XIAO-ZHE