

慈濟

# Tzu Chi

## Buddhism in Action



Pulling Together  
Through the  
Pandemic



**Human beings share the Earth with other living creatures. Their lives are precious, just as ours are precious. Dharma Master Cheng Yen encourages everyone to help protect all lives by eating vegetarian.**

HSIAO YIU-HWA

# Love and Protect All Living Beings

Translated by Teresa Chang

**T**orrential rains recently inundated Kyushu in Japan, Johor in Malaysia, and many provinces in China. The world once again witnessed the immense power of nature, capable of destroying everything in an instant. In comparison, how seemingly insignificant is our power to withstand such destruction. My heart goes out to the many families who have had to suffer through the impact of the natural disasters.

More than 20 provinces in China were affected. Heavy downpours turned rivers into gushing torrents, breaching dikes, severing roads, and triggering landslides. Many homes were damaged beyond recognition. Tzu Chi volunteers quickly visited disaster areas in the aftermath to assess damage and carry out relief work. It wasn't easy for them. Floodwaters had left behind thick layers of mud in some areas, making roads difficult to walk on. It took great effort to trudge through the thick mud, but our volunteers forged on. They knew there were people needing their help, and they didn't think of turning back. They needed to reach the needy as soon as possible.

Natural disasters arising from extreme weather events cause people to suffer, but man-made disasters have caused a lot of distress and pain too. Many people have fled their home countries to escape from war, persecution, or poverty. Some have taken to the sea to travel to other nations. Sadly, after COVID-19 forced many nations to close their borders, some of these refugees were stranded at sea on overloaded boats, their lives on the line.

Isn't it a blessing if one can live in safety and peace? When we are fortunate enough to possess safety and peace, we should learn to count our blessings and do good to sow more blessings. When we do good, we create blessings and help reduce the chance of disasters occurring. Let's all nurture a loving heart. In addition to doing good deeds, such as donating money to help the needy, we should also strive to protect all lives.

When we see people in trouble, we give them a hand because of love. We should extend the same love to animals and refrain from making them suffer. We can show our love and compassion for animals by preventing them from being killed for human consumption.

Estimates have shown that it takes 38 chickens

and a 120-kilogram (265-pound) pig to make just 500 non-vegetarian boxed meals. This illustrates how many lives are being killed to satisfy human beings' craving for meat. Animals, like humans, feel pain and fear as they are being killed. Resentment can arise in their hearts when they realize they are being slaughtered. Such ill feelings accumulate as more and more animals are killed. This will eventually cause a backlash and bring harm to the human world.

To help change that, Chen Ying-ru (陳映儒), a student at Hualien Tzu Chi Elementary School, started a movement to promote vegetarianism after the coronavirus pandemic broke out this year. So far, she and her schoolmates, along with teachers at the school, have inspired people to eat 36,000 vegetarian meals. That is equivalent to saving the lives of more than 2,000 chickens and pigs.

Eating vegetarian is a great way to protect the lives of animals, but it has other benefits too. For example, we can reduce the pollution from animal husbandry, since no animals will need to be raised for our consumption. Scientists have confirmed that a vegetarian diet can significantly lower carbon emissions. If more of us can switch to vegetarianism, that will go a long way towards mitigating global warming and climate change.

Let us follow the lead of that elementary student, Chen Ying-ru, and invite others to adopt a vegetarian diet for the good of the world. Such positive actions help our collective good karma to grow. A love that extends to all living beings, not just humans, is love in its truest form.

We should never underestimate ourselves and think, "I'm just one person, what difference can I make?" When each and everyone's strength comes together, the resulting power will be tremendous. We are in the middle of a critical time—the action of a handful of people won't help. We need everyone to pull together if we want to alleviate climate change and dispel the pandemic and other disasters.

Repenting of our wrongs, eating vegetarian, and practicing gratitude are three things we must do every day. Be grateful for what you have, repent and start anew, and take up vegetarianism. When everyone cultivates purity of heart, cherishes what they have, loves one another, and protects lives by eating vegetarian, our world will be very blessed indeed. ❁❁

# Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

September 2020



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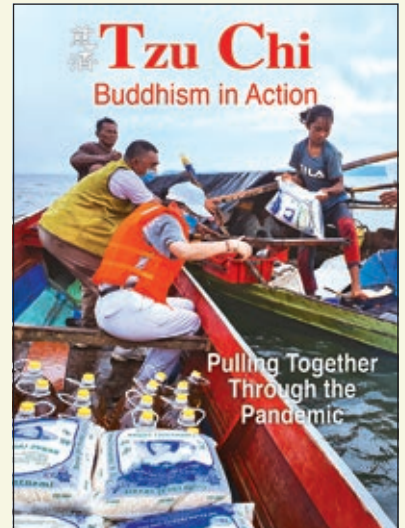
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right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

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Tzu Chi volunteers distribute food to the Bajau Laut in Kampung Panji, Sabah, Malaysia. The Bajau Laut are sea nomads who making a living from fishing. They couldn't go out to work during the Movement Control Order enforced by the Malaysian government to contain the pandemic, making their already difficult lives more challenging. Tzu Chi helped by providing them with aid. LEONG CHIN WAH





# Pulling Together Through the Pandemic

*Many Tzu Chi volunteers thought they would be out of work when shelter-at-home orders were implemented in response to the coronavirus pandemic, but much to their surprise, they became even busier. The pandemic has made life harder for the impoverished. The underserved need a hand now more than ever to pull them through this difficult time.*



# Aid to a Nameless Village

**By Chuang Ching Chih**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Liew Zing Yi

*Malaysia's Movement Control Order helped to stem the spread of the coronavirus, but it had another effect as well: stateless people were suddenly thrown out of work.*





The Malaysian government initiated a Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18 to tackle the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. After more than one and a half months, a Conditional MCO (CMCO) superseded the original MCO. Lockdown restrictions were eased under the CMCO; certain businesses were allowed to resume operations and people were permitted to move about more freely. The Tzu Chi office in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, reopened during this time. In no time, staffers there were deluged with phone calls asking for help.

Among those asking for help were residents of a nameless village not far from Kota Kinabalu. About 80 to 90 families there needed aid. The villagers were Muslims who were originally from the Philippines, and though they had been born in Malaysia, they hadn't been able to obtain citizenship. As such, they were stateless. That status limited their job opportunities, leaving them no choice but to work as day laborers to cover expenses. The MCO, originally intended to last two weeks but extended again and again, plunged the entire village into dire straits. Residents didn't even have enough food to eat.

On May 19, 25 Tzu Chi volunteers set out to the village for a distribution. After arriving at SJKC Yue Min Penampang, a local primary school, the volunteers made the arduous trek on foot up a steep mountain path to their destination. The village was close to Taman Sahabat, a residential neighborhood, so villagers call their community "Kampung Taman Sahabat." Kampung means "village" in Malay.

Volunteers set up the distribution venue with the help of village leader Murib Bin Kurais. Then they took the villagers' temperatures, sanitized their hands, and validated their claim checks. Items distributed included emergency cash (160

**Rosmawatti Binti Jun's daughter holds powdered milk distributed by Tzu Chi in her arms, refusing to let it go. She hadn't had milk in about two months, during which time she drank nothing but plain or sugar water.**



**Villagers return home after receiving aid from Tzu Chi.**

ringgits [US\$38] for each family), rice, cooking oil, powdered milk, and other items. Vehicles couldn't make it up the path to the village, so after the cash aid was distributed, residents had to walk some way down the mountain to receive their food supplies.

Seventy-three families benefited from this distribution. They were surprised to receive so many practical items from the foundation. The food they received was enough to last each household for a month. They were ineligible for any government aid due to their stateless condition, so the help from Tzu Chi meant a lot to them. It was like timely rain to them.

Village representative Mudanrisa Binti Murib told Tzu Chi volunteers that most of his fellow villagers worked as temps for contractors. Some families had electricity supplied by power generators or solar panels, while others had to rely on candles for illumination at night. Getting by was a struggle for them.

Volunteers thanked each other for helping to make this mission possible. They had a hard time establishing the recipient rosters and purchasing the relief goods, but they felt that everything was worth it when they saw the villagers' smiles. They were happy to have lived out Master Cheng Yen's teachings: "If suffering people cannot come to us, we must go to them." ❀

# Helping the “Sea Gypsies”

**Text and photo provided by the Tzu Chi Tawau office**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Tzu Chi helped the Bajau Laut, nomads of the sea, to cope with financial challenges posed by the pandemic.*

Sabah, a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo, is one of the poorest states in the country. Non-Malaysian citizens account for nearly 30 percent of Sabah’s total population. Many of these non-citizens are descendents of paperless immigrants. Even though they were born and raised entirely in Sabah and consider themselves locals, they have no identity papers to prove who they are. Because they are regarded as “stateless,” they are denied access in Malaysia to education or healthcare. Deprived of these basic rights, many children are doomed to live in poverty.

There are five Tzu Chi offices in Sabah, located in Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, Tawau, Keningau, and Tenom. After the Movement Control Order instigated to contain the coronavirus was eased, volunteers from these locations began visiting villages where such stateless people live to extend aid to them. The volunteers saw during their visits how the pandemic had made the lives of these underserved people even more difficult. Food was running so low in some households that only salt was left; some children had to stave off their hunger with sugar water.

One of the villages the volunteers visited was Kampung Mangkalinau, which has been branded a “black area” due to its high crime rate. When the police learned that Tzu Chi volunteers were visiting the area to distribute aid, they were worried about their safety. Even the police feared to enter this area. They asked the volunteers, “Aren’t you afraid?”

The volunteers assured the police they were not afraid, and explained they had worked there for some time. They first visited the village a few years before to help administer vaccinations to local stateless children. Since then they have been holding free clinics and promoting recycling there. They even made weekly visits to the region last year to encourage residents to save their spare

change in coin banks and donate the money to help needy people. The volunteers hoped to help the residents realize that everyone can help others no matter how poor one is.

Kong Teck Ngie (龔濟晟), a volunteer from Sandakan, said that villagers in Kampung Mangkalinau live in stilt houses erected above the sea. The houses are connected by raised boardwalks. He and other volunteers had crossed boardwalk after boardwalk and visited family after family to enlist more than 300 “coin bank members” from among the residents. Although what the villagers can save and donate isn’t much, Kong and his fellow volunteers are always deeply touched when they receive their donations. The volunteers realize that what matters is not the amount of a donation, but the heart to give.

The pandemic had made it harder for the villagers to make ends meet. Tzu Chi volunteers distributed emergency cash to them to tide them over the crisis. Families with young children also received powdered milk.

News quickly spread that Tzu Chi was helping “stateless villages” through this difficult time. Volunteers’ cell phone numbers were widely disseminated, and every day they received many requests for help. Others visited Tzu Chi offices in person to ask for help. In May alone, Tzu Chi distributed aid to 4,300 families spread across many villages in Sabah. The aid recipients included citizens and non-citizens.

Among the villages receiving Tzu Chi’s aid was Kampung Panji. Most of the residents there are Bajau Laut, also known as “sea gypsies” due to their nomadic life on the sea. They have lived off the sea generation after generation, making a living from fishing. They are among the most marginalized and underprivileged groups in Malaysian society.

Kampung Panji is located behind private property and has no dedicated entrance. People must



enter the village by way of a neighboring village or by small boat. Tzu Chi volunteers arranged for three boats to help them transport their goods into the village for a distribution, but that plan hit a snag: it happened to be low tide on the day of the distribution, and the boats they had prepared were rendered useless. The volunteers weren't easily defeated though. They contacted the owner of the private property and asked for permission to enter Kampung Panji through his property. The owner agreed, understanding that the volunteers were doing their best to help the villagers.

The volunteers heard villagers cheering as soon as the goods were transported into Kampung Panji, but they didn't realize why the residents were so happy until they entered the village. All the villagers were barefoot. They lived either on small boats or in crude stilt houses cobbled together with worn metal sheets, canvas, and wooden planks. Whether it was in a house or on a boat, entire families were crammed into very narrow spaces. There was no running water or electricity; a wood fire was necessary to cook a meal. All their household items, including pots and pans, were salvaged from discards.

One hundred and sixty-seven families benefited from the distribution. Volunteer Lo Jin Oi (羅珍愛) explained that they had originally planned to

**Villagers in Kampung Panji curiously skim through a copy of *Tzu Chi Monthly* in a home cobbled together from different materials.**

give each family 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of rice and ten kilograms (22 pounds) of cooking oil, but they learned that some of the families couldn't take so much food because the floors in their stilt homes or the boats they lived on couldn't bear so much weight.

Leong Chin Wah (梁菁華), another volunteer, said that the extreme poverty of the villagers made her forget that she was stepping on a beach strewn with trash and seeped in water contaminated with animal and human waste. Every time she took a step, her weight would squeeze contaminated water from the sand, soaking into her shoes and drenching her feet. Despite that, all she could think of was how to put the aid items into the hands of the villagers as quickly as possible so that they could cook the food and eat.

Hunger is nothing new to these destitute people. Volunteers' hearts went out to them when they witnessed the hardships they faced. They hoped that the food they distributed would warm not only the villagers' stomachs, but also their hearts. ❀



# Helping the Disabled Weather the Pandemic

**Text provided by Tzu Chi Vietnam**

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Wen Tian-liang

*Vietnam has experienced success in fighting COVID-19, but its economy was severely impacted in the process. Here's how Tzu Chi Vietnam helped disabled and visually impaired persons through the lean times.*



Vietnam has been lauded for its effective response to the coronavirus, along with other Asian countries such as Taiwan and South Korea. Despite its noteworthy performance in containing the virus, its economy, like those of most countries around the world, has not been spared from the impacts of the pandemic.

Tzu Chi Vietnam received a letter from the Ho Chi Minh City Union of Friendship Organizations (HUFO) on May 5. In the letter, the union appealed to non-governmental organizations in the city to provide financial aid and medical supplies to underprivileged people and medical teams to help them weather the pandemic. Tzu Chi responded to the appeal by promising to provide 2,000 packages of daily necessities for the needy. Each 18-kilogram (40-pound) package would include a variety of food items, ten cloth masks, and one million dong (US\$43) in cash.

HUFO decided the aid packages should be distributed to people with physical disabilities or visual impairments. Such people generally support themselves by making handicrafts, selling lottery tickets, providing massage services, and singing. The precautionary measures enforced by the government to curb the transmission of the virus—including the temporary suspension of all lottery-related activities—caused their livelihoods to suffer badly. They needed a helping hand to pull them through the hard times.

After discussions with HUFO personnel, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to hold distributions at ten venues in Ho Chi Minh City, from May 27 to June 2.

Volunteer Wu Zhi-qi (吳智琦), 73, helped pack the items to be given out and took part in most of the distributions. She is getting on in years, but hasn't let her age slow her down. When other volunteers asked her if she was tired, she admitted that her feet ached, but she didn't let it bother her. She said she was no longer young and didn't have much time left, and so she wanted to seize every opportunity to give of herself.

One of the distributions was held at a vocational training center in Hóc Môn, a suburban district of Ho Chi Minh City. The center provides free vocational training for orphans and people with disabili-

**A volunteer carries relief supplies to the place where a visually impaired person will catch a ride home. COVID-19 has impacted the livelihoods of many underserved people, including the disabled. From May 27 to June 2, Tzu Chi Vietnam provided aid to 2,000 people with disabilities to help them out.**



**A distribution was held at a vocational training center for orphans and people with disabilities in Hóc Môn.**

ties. Training includes painting, clay art, goldsmithing and silversmithing, and tailoring. Student work is marketed through Facebook and displayed for sale at the center's small showroom or at supermarkets.

The pandemic has greatly dampened sales, making it difficult for the students, most of whom are from destitute families, to sustain their livelihoods. The aid from Tzu Chi thus came at a time when it was most needed. Students were grateful, saying that it would help carry them and their families through this difficult time.

An encounter with an unsighted 19-year-old girl at a distribution held in District 1 of Ho Chi Minh City left a deep impression on volunteer He Xin-yan (何心燕). After receiving her aid at the distribution, the girl used a mobile app to call a taxi to take her home. In the midst of it, she turned to He and asked her, "Could you tell me what color my shirt is?" This simple question tugged at He's heartstrings. Knowing the color of one's clothes is something sighted people take for granted, but it is not so for the blind. The volunteer realized at that moment that we don't need much to be happy—we just need to learn to count our blessings.

Peng Hui-fen (彭慧芬), another volunteer, shared that she heard an older, visually impaired man behind her at a distribution in District 10 exclaim: "I'm so happy! I'm overjoyed to receive this gift!" Though Peng didn't get the chance to talk to the man, the joy she witnessed deeply touched her and made her feel her work was very meaningful, something that made a difference in others' lives.

Volunteers appreciated the opportunity to do something for the underserved during the pandemic. The distributions helped a thousand visually impaired people and a thousand physically disabled people. At a difficult time like the pandemic, people's love and care for each other is good medicine that can help heal the world. ❀



# The Pandemic, the Fire, and the Garbage Dump

**Text and photo by Zhu Yao-lin**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*A prolonged fire at the Duquesa landfill in the capital of the Dominican Republic created thick clouds of smoke that affected people's health. The conflagration also deprived scavengers of their livelihoods, making it harder for them to get by during the pandemic.*

**T**he Dominican Republic has been the Caribbean country hit hardest by COVID-19. The number of infections in the nation had surpassed 80,000 by August 9, with a death toll exceeding 1,300.

The country's first case was diagnosed in early March. By March 16, confirmed cases had reached 21. On March 17, President Danilo Medina Sánchez declared a state of emergency and announced a series of measures to curb the virus. All commercial business activity was suspended, except for supermarkets, pharmacies, and other businesses deemed essential to the provision of the necessities of life. A mandatory night curfew was imposed on March 20.

Despite the lockdown measures, cases surged day after day. A fire at a landfill in the midst of the raging pandemic added insult to injury and made life even harder for some underprivileged people.

The conflagration broke out on April 28 at the Duquesa landfill, located in the country's capital of Santo Domingo, and it continued to burn into May. It disrupted the livelihoods of the people who lived near the dump and supported themselves by scavenging. It also created serious air pollution that affected people living up to several kilometers away.

With the help of two Catholic Franciscan friars, Tzu Chi volunteers distributed aid to affected families to help them ride out this challenging time. Older Tzu Chi volunteers in the high-risk group for COVID-19 couldn't personally take part in the distribution, but they still helped out by packaging the items to be distributed, which included rice, cooking oil, cornmeal, noodles, cereal, ketchup, canned vegetables, salt, powdered milk, toilet paper, soap, and bleach.



Everyone who represented their families to receive their share of the goods from Tzu Chi wore face masks and gloves as a precautionary measure. Social distancing was also duly observed. Most of the people who received the aid were of Haitian ethnicity who are considered to be illegal immigrants and are thus disqualified from any government aid during the pandemic. This makes them especially in need of help.

The distribution helped 70 families. Some aid recipients told Tzu Chi volunteers that they were

struggling to find a job before the pandemic, but now things had gotten worse. They said gratefully to the volunteers that Tzu Chi was the first group to help them during this critical time.

In addition to aiding those living near the landfill, volunteers also provided emergency food supplies to 765 families in La Romana to help them weather the pandemic. Volunteers also donated isolation gowns, surgical masks, gloves, and other personal protective equipment to six medical facilities. ❊





# Alis Susilowati's Good Life

By Khusnul Khotimah  
and Huang Xiao-qian  
Photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro

*Alis Susilowati runs a small grocery store in Jakarta, Indonesia. Eking out a living isn't easy for him, especially during the pandemic. Even so, he is happy with what he has been blessed with, such as his good health, which allows him to look after his physically and mentally disabled son.*



**A**t 65 years old, Alis Susilowati is no longer young. Though he's at an age when most people start to take it easy, he has no such luxury. He can't even afford to rent a decent house on his meager income. He and his two sons live in a small shed of about six square meters (65 square feet) on Pahlawan Revolusi Street in Jakarta, Indonesia.

His shed, located under a large tree, was built against the wall of a school. School administrators were kind enough to allow him to set up the shed and operate his business there, and even allow him to use the school's electricity and shower facilities. The shed serves as a grocery store during the day and transforms into a bedroom for him and his two sons at night.

Though the store is extremely small, it's been around a long time—37 years. Alis sells only a small variety of goods, such as mineral water, snacks, instant noodles, soap, and toothpaste. He doesn't have the money to invest in a greater variety of sundries. After subtracting his overhead, he usually nets a profit of just 10,000 to 15,000 rupiah (US\$0.68 to 1.02) a day.

"This is my bed," Alis said to a small group of Tzu Chi volunteers, pointing to a long bench set in front of his store. Sporting a toothy smile, he told the volunteers that he moves the bench inside at night and sleeps on it. Though the roof shelters him from the elements, nothing can protect him from the mice that sometimes crawl across his body when he sleeps. "They probably think there is food in my stomach," he said with good humor. Even though he sleeps on a bench with mice scampering around, he sleeps very well.

A poor financial situation isn't the only challenge facing Alis. His older son is mentally and physically challenged, and caring for him takes extra effort. He's been the principal caregiver for

**Alis Susilowati puts some rice into a cooker to cook. Rice was among the food items he received from Tzu Chi on this day.**



**A motorcycle taxi driver delivers a box of daily necessities to Alis.**

his son since his wife passed away three years ago. His other son, only educated through junior high, works in a furniture shop. When the volunteers visited Alis in May, that son had not worked in about two months. He was on an unpaid leave due to the pandemic.

Alis became a Tzu Chi care recipient six years ago, after learning through a friend that he could apply for aid from the foundation. Volunteers visited him in person after receiving his application, and soon thereafter added him to the foundation's long-term aid list. He's been receiving monthly financial support from Tzu Chi ever since.

Anastasia is a Tzu Chi volunteer who has cared for Alis for some time. She admires his attitude towards life. "He is grateful for what he has," the volunteer said. "He thanks the school for allowing him to set up a grocery store next to the school. He's never asked for more money from us. On the contrary, it is us who have been hoping to help him get more aid."

### **Gifts from Tzu Chi**

Alis is Muslim and observes the holy month of Ramadan each year. Observers of Islam fast from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan, which began this year on April 24. That's the day Alis started selling coconut water in front of his store. On May

6, half an hour before it was time to break the fast that day, a motorcycle taxi driver pulled up outside Alis's store.

"Are you Mr. Alis?" the driver asked.

"Yes, sir," Alis replied, leaning forward a little.

The driver untied a cardboard box from his motorcycle. Handing it over to Alis, he explained: "I've been asked by Tzu Chi Indonesia to deliver some daily necessities to you."

"Thank Allah, and thank you, sir," Alis said.

Alis immediately set about opening the delivery. Inside were five kilos (11 pounds) of rice, one kilo (2.2 pounds) of sugar, one liter (0.26 gallons) of cooking oil, biscuits, instant noodles, and five face masks. Many people were struggling financially due to the pandemic, Alis included, so the box of necessities was a precious gift.

"Thank our good Lord, Allah," Alis muttered. He started going through the items one by one. He decided to sell the instant noodles for some extra income. Then he went to put some of the rice he had received in a cooker to cook for dinner. He typically cooks rice for a meal, then goes across the street to buy some other food to go with the rice.

Not long after Alis received the food items, Tzu Chi volunteers visited him at his store. They asked him how business had been doing lately. "I sold

only three cups of drinks and three coconuts yesterday," Alis said. "Since Ramadan started, I've only been making about 50,000 rupiah [US\$3.39] a day. There's been no profit to speak of."

Volunteer Johan Kohar took out an envelope and handed it to Alis. It contained some cash aid. "Thank you so much," Alis said. He said he'd use the money to pay for his and his family's three meals. "The only thing I can do is pray for your health and the prosperity of Tzu Chi, so that you can continue to help people like us."

The volunteers finally saw two people coming to patronize Alis's shop. Dusk was gathering. Alis would soon be able to eat. He prepared a glass of coconut water and a plate of rice, which he'd eat along with the omelets the volunteers had brought him.

A few minutes later, the sounds of drums beating filled the air, calling for the Maghrib (sunset) prayer to begin. It also signaled that it was time to break the fast. Alis took a sip of his coconut water, his eyes sparkling with gratitude and contentment.

**Tzu Chi volunteers visit Alis at his store. Alis became a Tzu Chi care recipient six years ago.**



## Tzu Chi Indonesia Responds to the Pandemic

Indonesia recorded zero coronavirus cases in January and February, despite its close links to China and despite being surrounded by infected countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia. Flights from nations with high infection rates also continued to fly into Indonesia. Health experts voiced their concerns, saying that there could be undetected infections in Indonesia. They recommended that the nation strengthen its detection systems.

Indonesia confirmed its first two infections on March 2, after a dance instructor and her mother tested positive for the disease. By the end of March, more than 1,500 cases had been confirmed. In April, the government started imposing large-scale social restrictions—Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar or PSBB—in four provinces and 25 cities/regencies in the nation. This partial lockdown was gradually lifted in the first weeks of June. Business activities could restart, and people were permitted to pray in a mosque. Schools, however, remained closed.

Indonesia has a population of 267 million, of which 25 million live below the poverty

line. The pandemic has made the lives of the underserved even harder. To help out, Tzu Chi Indonesia has been working with the military, police, and local governments to distribute food to the underserved. Volunteers said that they can extend timely aid to more areas and more needy people by working with the governments. By the end of July, 379,300 boxes of food had been distributed in the nation. Tzu Chi Indonesia had also donated personal protective equipment and other medical equipment and supplies to over 1,300 medical facilities and other organizations in the country. The number of confirmed cases in the nation had surpassed 111,000 by early August. Volunteers will continue helping the needy through the pandemic. ❁

**Nedih (left) and his wife, Titi, cheerfully examine items from Tzu Chi. The couple grows cassava, pineapple, and taro on rented lands and sells their crops in a market. Due to restrictions imposed during the pandemic, business was slow and their incomes saw a sharp decline.**





# Care for Single Room Occupancy Tenants

**Text and Photos by Lin Yu-zhen**

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Thousands of people cram into single room occupancy residences in San Francisco's Chinatown. Shared facilities and close living quarters make residents especially vulnerable to COVID-19.*



San Francisco is a bustling metropolitan city that offers beautiful scenery and a mild maritime climate year-round. It's long been a favorite destination for tourists from all over the world. They come for the city's spectacular views, its iconic architecture, its culture and history. One of the city's best-known tourist attractions is its Chinatown. Established in the 1840s, this densely populated area is the oldest Chinatown in North America and the largest Chinese community outside of Asia. It has served as a gateway to the U.S. for many immigrants of Chinese ancestry over the years, some staying temporarily before moving to other locations in the U.S., others settling permanently to build a new life.

With its Asian-inspired architecture and numerous shops and restaurants, San Francisco's Chinatown attracts more visitors annually than the Golden Gate Bridge. But the visitors aren't just tourists—local Chinese people like to visit the place too, to shop for daily necessities and food ingredients. They also come when they miss home and are craving the sights, smells, and tastes of cuisines originating from their homeland.

Behind Chinatown's prosperous facade, however, are the many underprivileged people crammed into tight living quarters—the so-called single-room occupancy tenants.

### Unaffordable housing

Single-room occupancy (SRO) is a form of housing that typically caters to people with low or minimal incomes. An SRO hotel can contain more than ten or 20 units, each smaller than 107 square feet. Costing only one-fifth to one-tenth of the average rent, it is the "housing of last resort" for people of limited means. For these folks, it is often a choice between living in an SRO residence or becoming homeless.

An SRO unit can house a single individual or be home to an entire family. The bedroom usually doubles as a living room, a drying room for laundry, and a baby's nursery. A dining table also serves as a desk. Bunk beds are common in the cramped spaces. Tenants typically share communal kitchens and bathrooms. Some rooms are equipped with washbasins, which allow the tenants to freshen up or wash some clothing by hand

**A building in Chinatown, San Francisco. The upper floors house SRO residences, typically rented out to people with low incomes. Behind each window is an SRO unit.**



**The entire layout and furnishings of an SRO unit can be captured in a single glance. There is usually no private bathroom. Fifteen to 20 households share two bathrooms and a kitchen.**

without having to leave their units.

Because kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared, tenants must stagger their access to the facilities and usually work out a schedule among themselves. A communal kitchen, for example, is used almost 24 hours a day: those who don't work use the kitchen during the day, while those who do work cook at night.

Liang, an SRO resident originally from China, moved to the United States in 1966 after marrying a man from the U.S. Her entire family, including her husband, mother-in-law, and children, are ethnic Chinese born and raised in America. Liang does not speak English. For the last 54 years, she has communicated with her family with body language.

She now lives alone in an SRO unit in Chinatown. She wants to stay because people there speak Chinese, she has friends there, and it's a convenient location for grocery shopping or running other errands.

Ma, another SRO tenant, has lived in the same SRO hotel for more than four decades. He moved from Myanmar to Taiwan before eventually settling in San Francisco with his entire family. His mother, now in her 90s, lives in an assisted living facility. Ma used to help manage the SRO units in his building. He said the rents there used to be remarkably cheap—less than 80 U.S. dollars a month—but now they've risen to more than 400 dollars a month.

The last four decades have witnessed a change in the kind of people who reside in SRO's. Such housing used to be dominated by older people of Chinese descent, but now younger people of all kinds of ethnicities live there too. This is a result of the expensive housing costs in San Francisco. Younger people who can't afford higher rents have no choice but to move into an SRO hotel.

Huang is another SRO resident. Her room is considered "luxurious" compared to other SRO units. It has a full size refrigerator, an area where she can do some basic cooking, and three windows—one of which she uses to sun-dry her laundry. She has lived in her unit since she emigrated from China to San Francisco more than ten years ago, during which time her rent has increased from more than 400 dollars to the current 585 dollars.

One day she opened her door to see a small group of Tzu Chi volunteers right outside her room. As soon as she saw them, she said, "I know about Tzu Chi! I've read in the paper that Tzu Chi volunteers are delivering lunches to SRO tenants." She showed the volunteers a news article about the meal delivery service she had seen on

her cell phone. She explained that she had been too slow to sign up for the meal delivery service organized by the city government during the pandemic, so she was preparing three meals in her room every day. She expressed her wish that Tzu Chi could also deliver a vegetarian meal to her once a week. "I like vegetarian food," she said. "Eating vegetarian is healthy."

The volunteers told Huang that Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, was sympathetic for people whose lives had been affected by the pandemic. To help out, she had sent some instant rice from Taiwan to the United States to distribute to those who needed it. "As soon as we receive the rice," the volunteers said, "we'll visit you and other tenants again." Huang was happy when she heard that, and she said she'd look forward to their next visit.

SRO residents are mostly elderly or disadvantaged people. They don't need much, just some care from society.

### Social distancing made difficult

The United States has been hit harder than any other country in the coronavirus pandemic. To prevent the spread of the disease, people are urged to observe a social distance of six feet (1.8 meters). Such a precautionary measure is difficult if not impossible to practice in the tight living quarters of SRO's. Shared facilities only increase

the possible transmission of the virus.

Because many infections are asymptomatic, the San Francisco city government and Chinese Hospital in Chinatown started a free COVID-19 testing program for local SRO tenants in May to prevent outbreaks. The government also launched a meal delivery service in partnership with local organizations for SRO residents to decrease the chance of transmitting the virus through the use of shared kitchens.

**Tzu Chi volunteers deliver vegetarian meals to SRO tenants while the food is still hot. The food was prepared by a restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown.**



Tzu Chi was one of the organizations participating in the meal service. For nine weeks, until the end of June, they delivered vegetarian meals every Monday to SRO tenants.

Monday, May 11 was one of the delivery days. That morning, five volunteers went to a restaurant and packed 50 lunches consisting of chow mein, spring rolls, rice noodle rolls, and tofu mixed with vegetables. The food was appetizing, fragrant, and attractive. The menu had been decided on by participating tenants.

After they finished packing, the volunteers delivered the food to the SRO households who had signed up for the meal service. The volunteers also gave the SRO tenants cloth masks and encouraged them to take part in the COVID-19 testing program.

Tenant Xie Xue-yan (謝雪艷) told the volunteers that she has known about the foundation for many years. Her two children study at Gordon J. Lau Elementary School, where Tzu Chi has distributed food once a week for 12 years. She expressed her gratitude to Tzu Chi for the weekly distribution, saying that it has eased the financial burden for many families. Her family had also received financial aid from the foundation intended to help them through the pandemic. "We've just received your gift card and cloth masks," she said. "Thank you, Tzu Chi."

### Gift cards

The San Francisco city government started its shelter-in-place mandate on March 17. Students began distance learning online after schools were closed, but many students from underprivileged families depend on their schools for breakfast and lunch to keep from going hungry. The school closures threatened this very necessary source of food, without which kids would go hungry.

Gordon J. Lau Elementary School is the largest grade school in Chinatown. According to school administrators, there are nearly 200 students in the school classified as "homeless." This is because the local school district classifies students who live in SRO units as homeless. They have decided that a single room with a shared bathroom and kitchen isn't enough to constitute a home. Additionally, students that are living with friends or relatives are also counted as homeless. No matter the reason, it is a difficult and unpredictable existence for these students.

School staff appealed to the local community to help these students and their families weather the pandemic by providing them with shopping



**A free COVID-19 testing event organized by the San Francisco city government and Chinese Hospital in Chinatown for SRO tenants**

vouchers so that they could purchase food and other necessities. Tzu Chi volunteers contacted the school principal and social workers when they learned of the students' need for help. They were told that after launching a fundraiser in the community and working for three weeks, the school had raised only enough money to help 150 families.

Tzu Chi decided to distribute gift cards to the remaining 50 families to help them out. Since this was during the shelter-in-place order, volunteers couldn't visit the families in person; instead, they could only contact them by phone or text. To ensure that the families received the gift cards provided by Tzu Chi, volunteers first called them to confirm their addresses and identities before sending them the cards. Then they contacted them again to check that the cards had reached them safely. Only when receipt was verified would volunteers deposit 100 U.S. dollars into a card. This way, they could be positive that the financial aid didn't fall into the wrong hands.

A week later, school administrators asked Tzu Chi for more help. They said that an additional 20 students from extremely indigent families needed aid too. In the end, the foundation helped a total of 69 students.

Through the food and monetary aid during the pandemic, volunteers hoped the underserved could feel some love and care from society. ❁

# We Will Be There for You

By Chen Li-an

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan phoned more than 50,000 underprivileged families on the island during the pandemic to extend care and aid to them.*

It has been some time since the coronavirus situation in Taiwan has slowed down. Some families fared well during the pandemic, but not all were so lucky. The unlucky ones have seen their jobs impacted and incomes decrease sharply.

Yan, a resident of New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, quit her job in December 2019 because long-term stress from work had caused her health to suffer. Her son had just been discharged from his compulsory military service at that time, and he had started working at a company whose business was to organize all sorts of events. It seemed like a good time for her to quit her job.

But when the coronavirus started spreading beyond China earlier this year, the social distancing measures enforced by the Taiwanese government caused the company's business to drop sharply. Yan's son received only half his pay in late February and none in March. With no other choice, Yan began working as a hospital porter in May to help with her family's finances. The job brought in some extra money, but the pay was minimal and still not enough to cover her family's rent, utility bills, and other living expenses. She borrowed 15,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$510) from a relative to tide her over, but she knew that the loan and what little savings she had left wouldn't last long. The anxiety about her finances just kept growing. It was then that she received a phone call from Tzu Chi volunteer Lin Chun-jin (林春金). Yan used to be a Tzu Chi care recipient. The phone call led Tzu Chi to add Yan to the foundation's aid list again.

Lin recalled that phone call with Yan: "When I called Yan, she said to me, 'This phone call feels like I've been given a piece of wood to cling to as I struggle to stay afloat on a boundless sea.' Her statement made me so happy I had called, since I

had the opportunity to help a family that was badly in need of help."

To cushion the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Taiwanese government implemented several relief measures to bail out companies, families, and individuals. For example, disadvantaged children, low-income families, and the physically and mentally challenged were given 1,500 Taiwanese dollars (US\$50) a month from April to June to subsidize their living expenses. These measures helped many people, but not all. Some needy families failed to meet the criteria for government aid for one reason or another, but they needed help just as much. What were they to do?

To help folks who had slipped through the social security net, Tzu Chi volunteers and employees, in response to Dharma Master Cheng Yen's instructions, launched a care program in mid-April for families whose finances had been negatively affected by the pandemic. Volunteers and social workers called the families currently receiving Tzu Chi aid to find out if they needed any assistance during this critical time. They also called families that the foundation had ceased providing aid to in the previous couple of years because their financial situations had improved. There were more than 50,000 such households to contact.

The households were organized and divided into groups by where they lived. As soon as volunteer Lin Chun-jin received her care list, she invited volunteers Xu Shu-yun (許淑雲) and Li Yu-hua (李

**Volunteer Lin Chun-jin (right) hugs a single mother while visiting her at the greengrocer's shop where she works. Tzu Chi launched a care program in Taiwan in mid-April for families whose financial health has been affected by the pandemic.**





玉華) to her home to help phone the more than 50 families on her roster.

### Phone calls of caring

“Thanks to Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi for remembering me!” said Trần, a single mother originally from Vietnam. She divorced her husband because he did drugs and was abusive, and now lives alone with their daughter. She was the first person volunteer Lin called. Lin had cared for her before.

Trần told Lin on the phone that due to the impact of the coronavirus, she had had to close her food stall in the market. Fortunately, she had gotten a job at a greengrocer’s shop, so she had been able to get by. Lin worried that she might not be telling the whole truth because she was too shy to ask for help, so she decided to check on her at the shop where she worked. She paid a visit to the shop a few days later, and was relieved to see that Trần seemed to be doing well at her job. “She gave me a tight hug when she saw me,” Lin recalled of the meeting. “She made me feel that Tzu Chi was an important support to her in her heart.” Of all the people Lin had called, Trần was among those who had done better, having come through a difficult time without a deep impact.

Lin and the two volunteers who assisted her weren’t familiar with the situations of all the families on their list, so the first step in reaching out was to check and review the records of a family. Only when they had some understanding of a family’s background and had discussed among themselves how to go about extending care to the family did they make the phone calls. “For example, if we learned that some family had once been plunged into financial distress because the breadwinner had problems keeping a job,” Lin explained, “we’d inquire whether their job situation had improved.”

Lin knew how much Master Cheng Yen was concerned about how the needy were doing during the pandemic, so she cheerfully tackled the task of calling the households. When she couldn’t reach a family during the day, she’d try again at night. No matter the effort, she didn’t want to miss any family that might need help.

Taiwan has done remarkably well during the coronavirus pandemic, but its economy has sustained damage all the same, especially in the tourism, transportation, and dining sectors. Some underprivileged families, as a result, have taken a hard hit. An example is Yan, mentioned at the beginning of this article. She had done well enough before the pandemic for Tzu Chi to cease their aid to her, but the pandemic turned the tables on her. In the time of COVID-19, she found herself needing help again.

According to statistics from Taiwan’s Ministry of Labor, nearly 30,000 employees had been put on unpaid leave as of mid-June—higher than any time in the past decade. There had been 56 cases of massive layoffs by the end of April. Though by mid-June Taiwan had not recorded a single domestic coronavirus case in over two months, the slipping economy posed a big challenge to people who didn’t have steady jobs, who had little money in their bank accounts, or who were sick and thus needed extra money to stay afloat. Tzu Chi’s aid would help some of these people have an easier time financially during the economic downturn.

### A timely helping hand

“The first day I started making the phone calls, my mood took a nosedive, so much so that I had almost no appetite at lunch that day,” said Cai Xueying (蔡雪櫻), a volunteer who lives in central Taiwan. “My heart grew very heavy because several families I had contacted were doing poorly.” Cai explained that many people had been forced to work reduced hours or had their pay cut as a result of the pandemic, but because they didn’t qualify for unemployment aid, getting by was a struggle. Though the difficulties some families were experiencing were not caused entirely by the pandemic, they needed help all the same. She said that among the families she contacted, as much as one third of them needed further care. She empathized with every one of them, but the story of a single-mother family especially made her heart wrench.

“My younger son and I have actually thought of taking our lives,” said Guan, a single mother, when Cai called her. “Life is simply too hard.” She told Cai that her job was a hired caregiver for hospital patients, but since she was petite and thin, there weren’t many she could care for. That had limited her income already, and the pandemic just made it worse. Her income had decreased during the pandemic because people had tried to stay away from hospitals for fear of contracting the virus. Her older son had graduated from college, but he hadn’t been able to land a job, and thus couldn’t help her out financially. Her younger son studied at a vocational high school. He was working two part-time jobs to support himself through school and ease her burden.

Sadly, one day when the younger son was heading back to his dormitory after work, he had an accident. He was so tired his attention drifted off, and he drove his motor scooter into a car parked on the side of the road. The indemnity he had to pay added insult to their financial injury. Guan and her son were



so depressed they contemplated ending their lives. Cai's timely phone call brought a ray of hope to the family. The day after Cai called, she and other volunteers visited the family in person to express their care. Soon afterwards, Tzu Chi began helping the family again.

Wu was another former care recipient Tzu Chi started helping again after the round of phone calls. Volunteer Cai Shu-hui (蔡淑蕙), a resident of Taichung, central Taiwan, had previously helped care for him. His case was closed last year. But when Cai phoned the Wu family to find out how they had been doing during the pandemic, she discovered that they had not fared well.

When Cai and other volunteers visited the family to learn more about their needs, Wu, who had terminal oral cancer and couldn't talk, wrote these words on a piece of paper for them: "I feel bad that my illness has made my family suffer. I'm so worried I'll drag them down with me." These two sentences, though short, were full of his helplessness.

Cai learned during her visit that Wu had run up a 100,000 Taiwanese dollar (US\$3,400) medical bill. He was very worried that his family would have a hard time paying it. His son had had to cut down on his work hours in order to accompany him on his regular trips to the hospital, and his wife was a cleaner at a supermarket, but her work was not steady. Their

**When the pandemic situation had eased in Taiwan, a group of volunteers and community residents who used to receive aid gathered at volunteer Lin Chun-jin's home to catch up on their lives. The former Tzu Chi aid recipients had now become Tzu Chi donating members.**

landlord, considering their constrained finances, had lowered their rent, but the family was still hard pressed to meet expenses.

After learning about their plight, Cai and her fellow volunteers decided to give the family emergency monetary aid.

"The minute we entered their home to deliver the aid," Cai said, "they took out their coin bank to donate to Tzu Chi. The bank was already 80 percent full." Though the family was having a hard time scraping together a living, they still wanted to help others. Despite being poor, they were rich at heart. Their kindness deeply impressed Cai. Volunteers will continue to provide emotional support to the family in addition to giving them financial aid.

The timely aid extended by Tzu Chi volunteers during this pandemic has brought warmth to many needy families. Hopefully, the pandemic will soon run its course and people's lives will return to normal. ❀

# Something More Important Than Money

**By Abu Alay Ajemy**  
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting  
Photo by Li Bai-shi



I had only one interest when I was in Syria: making money. The more money I made, the better. But then came the war, during which I ran through all my savings. When I came to Turkey as a refugee, I felt sad for all that money that was no longer mine—as if money was all that mattered. I only began to change when I started working at the Tzu Chi office in Sultangazi, Istanbul. It was there that I discovered that many things in the world are more worthy of my attention than money.

It was truly a sad day when we had to close our office due to COVID-19. Our office in Sultangazi is



close to Arnavutköy, where one fourth of all Syrian refugees in Istanbul live. Having fled their homes to escape war, they had lost everything they had. They needed Tzu Chi!

At the Tzu Chi office, we had been like doctors who could give painkillers to patients. But now, when a patient had a heart attack and was in dire need of our help, all we could do was tell him, “Sorry, we’re closed. We can’t help you.” You can imagine how frustrating this was. When people met me on the street and asked when our office would reopen and be able to help them again, I had no answer for them. It made me very sad.

There was one particular incident I will never forget. A woman, holding a one-month-old baby in her arms, stopped me on the street and pleaded, “I have no milk to breastfeed my child, and I can’t afford to buy formula for her. Please help me!” Standing in front of her, I was momentarily at a loss for words. All I could say to her was that our office was closed due to the coronavirus and that I was in no position to help. At the end of her rope, she tried to give her baby girl to me, saying, “Please accept this girl. Find someone to take care of her.”

I cried when I returned home, and I couldn’t stop tears from falling whenever I thought of that baby girl. But then I learned some great news: our foundation had decided to provide emergency aid to those whose lives had become difficult because of the pandemic! I helped spread the good news and we received 1,026 phone calls asking for help. When all was said and done, we were able to provide 2,300 households with ten shopping vouchers each. Each set of vouchers was worth 500 lira (US\$75).

Among those we helped, some had been told by their landlords that they’d be evicted if they didn’t pay their rents, which they were unable to do because they had lost their jobs. Some were even running out of food. Our work brought true comfort to the suffering.

I cried again when I returned home, but this time my tears were of happiness. I cried because I was finally able to do something for my fellow country people.

The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. I’ve begun to care about many things in this world that I never cared about before. This change in my attitude has had a great impact on my life, and improved the lives of others. Now when I see smiles instead of sadness on people’s faces, I feel honored and happy to be a member of the Tzu Chi family. ❀

# Reach Out, Make a Difference

*If we could all reach out to help, we would have a hundred, a thousand, even ten thousand pairs of hands to make the Earth cleaner. If everyone took action to benefit the environment, we would have a healthier Earth, climate change could be alleviated, and the impact of natural disasters reduced.*

*Mere words aren't enough to solve the environmental problems our world is facing today. We need action. There are, for example, over 80,000 Tzu Chi recycling volunteers taking action in Taiwan. They collect and sort reusable garbage every day. Working together, they have reclaimed countless tons of recyclable material that can be used again. They are also protecting the Earth's soil, water, and air by preventing such material from ending up in landfills or incinerators. The miracle they've created is a powerful example for all of us, showing us that it is not difficult to protect the environment. If we are willing, every one of us can make a difference and contribute to a cleaner, better world.*

*The hands pictured here belong to volunteer Huang Mei (黃梅). She took up recycling work after attending a public speech given by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in 1990. In that address, the Master encouraged the audience to use their applauding hands to sort out recyclables. Huang has been recycling now for 30 years, staying the course without ever wavering. Like her fellow Tzu Chi recycling volunteers—more than 110,000 around the world—she uses her hands and her actions to contribute to the sustainability of the planet.*



# A Lifestyle of Conservation at the Jing Si Abode

By Shi De Zao

Abridged and translated by Rose Ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

*Be grateful for this piece of paper. Be grateful for this drop of water. Because of your gratitude for them, you'll love them, cherish them, and do your best to conserve them. —Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

A habit of frugality and conservation is woven into the fabric of daily life at the Jing Si Abode. It's been there since its establishment.

Resources were extremely scarce when the Abode was first established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, more than half a century ago. The Master and her monastic disciples supported themselves through their own efforts, holding firm to a decision not to accept offerings from others. They sewed baby shoes, converted concrete sacks into smaller animal feed bags, grew their own vegetables, and did other work to provide for their basic necessities. Even so, they earned barely enough to support themselves. Amidst this difficult life, Master Cheng Yen taught everyone at the Abode to cherish and conserve everything they had. By doing so, they were able to prolong the life of things, reduce expenses at the Abode, and even cut down on the amount of garbage they produced. A lifestyle of frugality and conservation was thus established at the Abode.

The Master is the living embodiment of her own teachings. The necessity to lead a frugal life aside, she holds a deep-seated appreciation for everything that passes through her hands. For example, most people use a piece of paper once before throwing it away, but not her. "I just can't bring myself to toss a piece of paper after just one use," she says. Instead, she extends its life and usefulness by writing on it first with a pencil, then

a blue-ink pen, then a red-ink pen, and then a writing brush.

Another example of her conservation habits is the memo notepads she uses, which are made of the unused paper in the margins of donation receipts. She doesn't want the unused margins of the receipts to go to waste, so she has the extra paper from the margins made into notepads to use. She even writes repeatedly on these small pieces of paper to make thorough use of them.

The same attitude goes toward the use of water. Master Cheng Yen knows that water is a very precious resource and must be used with care. She makes sure that not a drop goes to waste. She saves the washbasin of water she uses to wash her face in the morning to wash her hands throughout the day. Her shower water is collected and used to flush the toilet.

The Master can't even bear to see rainwater going to waste. "We must treasure and cherish all resources in the world," she said. Rainwater is captured and stored in a reservoir built in the basement of the Tzu Cheng Building at the Abode. It's then used to irrigate plants and clean toilets and bathrooms.

**A sheet of paper shows some outlines for Master Cheng Yen's talks. To maximize the use of the paper, the Master first wrote on it with a pencil, then a blue-ink pen, then a red-ink pen, and then a writing brush.**

COURTESY OF THE JING SI ABODE



醫事 青年 醫學 學 出 具 簡 易 級 永 久

從 愛 的 成 長 中 所 出 同 時 啟 感 恩

謝 一 位 孩 子 留 長 為 上 台 分 享

張 帶 蘭 慈 愛 他 的 勇 敢 從 來

大 陸 新 娘 自 殺 慈 院 搶 救 400 方

大 有 可 為 可 能 不 帶 冷 氣

大 陸 台 生 離 前 依 並 發 願 為

菩 提 種 子



**Memo notepads made of unused paper from the margins of donation receipts. Master Cheng Yen writes on them repeatedly to conserve the paper.**

The Master saves electricity by using as little as possible. Her study is usually dark. If she does need light to read, she turns on just her desk lamp. She's maintained this practice day in and day out for over half a century.

"Turn off lights when they are not in use" is something she often reminds everyone to do, just as she urges everyone not to leave tap water running. Even though these things are lifeless, "it's like we're killing their lives if we let them go to waste," she remarked.

Master Cheng Yen also takes issue with those who replace their cell phones or other items they own too often. She encourages people to harbor gratitude for everything they own. That way, they will cherish and treasure everything that passes through their hands. They will be content with what they have and make it last as long as possible.

"Be grateful for this piece of paper. Be grateful for this drop of water," she said. "Because of your gratitude for them, you'll love them, cherish them, and do your best to conserve them."

### **Waste not, want not**

Following the Master's teachings and example, the nuns at the Abode cherish water as if it was gold. When they do laundry, they wring the clothes as dry as they can and save every drop of water for later use. They also collect the water with which they wash their hands and use it to flush the toilets. Water that is used to wash vege-

tables before cooking is saved to clean tools, mop the floor, or water plants and vegetables. The water used to wash rice prior to cooking is kept aside for irrigation, or to wash pots and pans.

Some of the monastics at the Abode aren't eloquent in encouraging people to practice conservation, but they promote a life of gratitude and frugality just the same by silently practicing the Master's teachings in every possible way. They turn off lights after use, and keep an eye out for those that have been accidentally left on by others. "This is my home," they say. "It's a matter of course I'll do things that are good for it."

Master De Quan (德全) oversees general affairs at the Abode. A devout believer of everything Master Cheng Yen teaches, she adheres to the principle of "Never buy a new item if the old one is still usable." A usable item at the Abode often goes through repair after repair until it is completely worn out. Even when it can no longer be fixed, its parts are sometimes salvaged and adapted for other uses.

For example, Master De Quan will take apart a broken electric fan and convert the blade guard into a drying rack for sun- or air-drying laundry. A recycled metal rack can be fitted with elastic bands and become a holder for laundry basins.

Bottle pumps are great for dispensing just the right amount of product without the unwanted mess, but when the product in the bottles, such as shampoo, is used up, the dispensers are often thrown away along with the bottles. Not so for Master De Quan. She converts the pump dispensers for use in larger bottles of cleaning agents.

Some time ago, all the pillows in a dormitory for male volunteers at the Abode were replaced with new ones. Making use of her spare time, Master De Quan spent seven days sewing those old pillows into a large mattress. She makes sure that nothing goes to waste.

Examples like this abound. Master De Quan constantly taps into her resourcefulness to extend the usefulness of an item. Her ingenuity not only cuts down on expenses at the Abode but, more importantly, prolongs and reinvents the life of things.

### Leading the way

One of the ways the monastics at the Abode support themselves is by making instant rice and multigrain powder for sale. What becomes of the rice sacks and large plastic bags the ingredients come in?

Besides reusing the plastic bags, nuns at the Abode make the rice sacks into all sorts of carrying bags. Aphorisms by Master Cheng Yen are inscribed on the bags to add to their appeal. Learning from the nuns, Tzu Chi volunteers in Africa fashion used rice sacks into carrying bags too. The sacks originally contained rice donated by the Taiwanese government for distribution to needy people in other countries.

The aprons the monastics at the Abode wear when they wash vegetables or do the dishes are made from recycled plastic bags too. Many volunteers have lauded the nuns' inventiveness. "This is really creative. I'll copy it," some said.

"A plastic apron sells for ten Taiwanese dollars [35 U.S. cents] on the market," a nun commented. "But if we make one from a recycled bag, it costs nothing at all."

Every day at the Abode, enough food needs to be cooked to feed hundreds of people. The packaging and plastic bags the food and ingredients come in are also carefully recycled—after they have been washed and sun-dried.

Master De Huan (德煥) used to be the one cleaning and sorting these bags for recycling. "Master Cheng Yen urges everyone to clean their recyclables before disposing of them," said Master De Huan. "We at the Abode have the responsibili-



**Large plastic bags are recycled into aprons for people to wear at the Abode when they do the dishes or wash vegetables.**

ty to set a good example and lead the way." She did the recycling work outside of her formal duties. She tried to make as much time as possible for it, knowing that the more effort she put in, the cleaner the Earth would be.

Sometimes she'd work as late as eight or nine in the evening. At first she doubted that she'd be able to keep it up, but she persisted. "Since I've chosen to follow the Master, I must do what she wants us to do."

Because some bags are soiled or greasy, preparing them for recycling takes a lot of time. Master De Huan volunteered for the work three years running, after which Master De Xi (德皙) took over. It has since been her formal duty. Like her predecessor, she embraces a sense of mission for her work, knowing that what she does is good for the health of Mother Earth. "I never think much about what I do. When it comes to the right thing, we should just do it," she said, summing up her mindset.

Volunteers from Yilan, northern Taiwan, are responsible for collecting the bags at the Abode and transporting them for recycling. They say that the bags processed at the Abode are so clean and well-sorted that they can be sent directly to factories to be melted into polyester pellets for further processing.

### Zero kitchen waste

The Jing Si Abode is like a big family, where steady food supplies are important. Dried vegeta-

A nun at the Abode shells Inca nuts grown on site, using only a single desk lamp in the dark room to save on electricity. The monastics at the Abode lead a lifestyle of frugality and conservation.



bles such as cabbages and cauliflowers are among those regularly stocked up for later use. The bags used to store the dried vegetables are also recycled.

Due to COVID-19, a lot of farm produce could not be exported from Taiwan in February and March of 2020. In response, the Abode purchased truckload after truckload of cauliflower, cabbage, and yam bean from farmers to help them out. The vegetables were then processed and dried for storage. Even after enough had been purchased to fully stock the Abode, the Master asked her disciples there to keep purchasing from farmers. In addition to saving for a rainy day, the Master didn't want farmers' labor of love to go to waste. The extra food they bought beyond their own needs could always be donated to people in need.

Vegetables are dried with fire at the Abode. An old-style smokeless drying machine that uses wood as fuel serves this purpose. The wood used to feed the machine is recycled from discarded shipping pallets. Volunteers transport the pallets to the Abode, then cut them into uniform pieces to make it easier to feed them to the drying machine.

It has long been a tradition at the Abode to dry and preserve food for later use. During the early days when the Abode was first founded, the nuns often didn't know where their next meal would come from. It's no wonder food was deeply cherished, and no parts of a vegetable were wasted. Take daikon radishes, for example. Even the skins and stalks were cooked as food or preserved for later use. Master De Ru (德如) said that necessity helped the nuns develop a habit of frugality. The tradition of wasting no part of a food has endured at the Abode ever since.

In many households, things such as soybean dregs or fruit peels end up in the garbage can. But not so at the Abode: the kitchens here produce zero waste. Soybean dregs are made into food such as vegetarian meat floss. Inedible food scraps are recycled into compost to nourish soil and grow more crops. Fruit peels are used in making soap or as a source of eco-enzymes for cleaning purposes. Even pruned tree branches and leaves



**Blade guards from broken fans are converted into drying racks for air-drying laundry.**

do not go to waste. They are shredded and made into compost.

- Master De Ding (德定) has lived and carried out spiritual practice at the Abode for 33 years. She's been in charge of the recycling work there for the past 20 years and handles recyclable items day in and day out. She says that many people know recycling is important and necessary, but not many people faithfully carry it out in their daily life. That's why she especially admires the Tzu Chi recycling volunteers working in various communities. "They willingly pitch in to collect and reclaim reusable resources no matter what their economic standing or social status is. They don't mind the bad smells from the trash or whether their hands get dirty. They didn't even shy from the work when the threat of COVID-19 was at its most severe."

From the Abode to communities in Taiwan and abroad, members of the Tzu Chi family follow Master Cheng Yen's teachings and personal example and do what they can to help the Earth. Though a single individual may not be able to accomplish much, when the work and effort of many individuals are combined, a big difference is possible.



# A History of Environmental Action

By Ye Zi-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao



Taiwan has an impressive record for recycling. Without a doubt, Tzu Chi volunteers spread across more than 8,800 recycling stations and points in Taiwan have contributed to this success. When did the awakening of environmentalism start in Taiwan? How did Tzu Chi recycling volunteers help in transforming Taiwan from a "Garbage Island" into a global recycling leader?



The year 2020 is the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi's recycling work. It also marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Because of COVID-19, however, many commemorative events or seminars have been cancelled or postponed.

During the first half of the year, the pandemic prevented hundreds of millions of people around the world from working or traveling, and factories and industries were forced to shut down. In fact, entire countries around the world were shut down to stem the spread of the disease. Though such measures negatively impacted worldwide economies, a positive side effect also emerged: fossil fuel emissions were greatly reduced. Mother nature was given a rare breather. Skies once hazy and grey became blue. Even India's Ganges River witnessed a significant improvement in water quality.

This temporary improvement in environmental conditions was far from enough to make a lasting difference though. The degradation of the climate isn't something that can be reversed so quickly. If it is to be improved, we all need to commit to taking action for the environment over the long term.

The European Parliament declared a climate emergency in November 2019. The Oxford Dictionary made "climate emergency" their word of the year for 2019 to remind people that our planet was in peril and immediate action is needed to save it.

Professor Ye Xin-cheng (葉欣誠) teaches at the Graduate Institute of Environmental Education at National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei. He pointed out that climate change is normalizing extreme weather events and that natural disasters in the next two or three decades will become more and more severe. He urged everyone to recognize the urgency of the situation and step up their efforts to reduce carbon emissions and make other adjustments.

Such warnings from experts prove that Master Cheng Yen's concerns about the environment are well-founded. She has constantly reminded us that "time is running out," that we must quicken our pace to safeguard our environment before it is too late. She has urged the international community to reach a consensus to save the planet from further degradation and then act together on that consensus.

Tzu Chi recycling volunteers have realized the urgent imperative for environmental protection and take Master Cheng Yen's mission to protect



the environment as their own. They lead a simple life, conserve water and electricity, and curb their consumption habits. They collect reusable garbage and sort it out at recycling stations for reuse, which reduces the need to extract new raw materials from the Earth. Well aware that we have only one Earth, they work together to cut down on pollution so that we can leave a better living environment for future generations.

### **Speak out for the planet**

When it comes to environmental protection, many Tzu Chi volunteers think of Master Cheng





Yen's appeal for recycling 30 years ago, which launched the foundation's recycling effort. But the environmental consciousness of some people was awakened much earlier than that, by more than 20 years.

American author Rachel Carson (1907-1964) published *Silent Spring* in 1962, a seminal work alerting the world to the dreadful effects of man-made chemicals on the natural world and ultimately, on humans themselves. As a whistleblower, Carson drew a ruthless assault from chemical companies, but her book eventually proved to be vastly influential.

**Recycling volunteers in Penghu, an archipelago off the southwestern coast of Taiwan, sort through a massive amount of plastic bottles for recycling.**

The book sparked a grassroots environmental movement in the United States that helped lead to the first celebration of Earth Day in 1970, the establishment of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the same year, and a ban on the domestic production of DDT in 1972. The reverberations of the book were such that it was lauded as altering

the course of history.

Though *Silent Spring* was causing such an impact in the United States, environmental consciousness had not yet awakened in Taiwan. Neither the government nor private sectors knew enough about the importance of environmental protection to do anything about it. Taiwan's economy took off in the 1960s and 70s, but the impressive economic growth came at a heavy price for the environment.

Many foreign manufacturers chose to set up factories in Taiwan during its early days of economic development. They were attracted to the island by its low labor costs and lax environmental regulations, which allowed foreign investors to save money on things such as waste treatment. But cutting corners like this inevitably resulted in an irreparable toll on the environment.

Pollution caused by Taiwanese people themselves was a serious problem too. The Erren River in Tainan, southern Taiwan, became one of

Taiwan's most heavily polluted waterways due to the industrial waste discharged into it by local scrap metal dealers. The banks of the Dahan River and the Tamsui River in northern Taiwan were littered with garbage.

Fortunately, as the standard of living improved in Taiwan following the growth of its economy, and as people became better educated and informed, Taiwan witnessed a surge in the environmental movement in the second half of the 1980s. Many campaigns against pollution and nuclear power were launched at this time, as well as for wildlife and ecosystem preserva-

**Recycling bins imported by Taiwan from the Netherlands in the 1980s. They were used briefly, only four short years, but they sowed a seed of environmental protection in the minds of Taiwanese people.**



tion. As a result, the Taiwanese government elevated the status of its environmental protection unit to a higher government level in 1987. Many regulations concerning the prevention of pollution were also amended in the late 1980s and early 90s, allowing stricter measures to be enforced to curb damage to the environment of Taiwan.

### Use your applauding hands to do recycling

In addition to amending and making new laws to protect the environment, the government introduced policies and launched programs to ensure a cleaner Taiwan. Major programs were all given catchy names to better attract the public's attention. The Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) also imported large recycling bins from Europe and taught people to separate their reusable garbage by type for recycling. But this recycling effort didn't go well in the beginning.

Eugene You-hsin Chien (簡又新), who headed the EPA at the time, remembered that there was a big backlash to recycling in the beginning. Many people felt that their responsibility ended when they paid their taxes, and that it was the government's duty to clean away and take care of their garbage. Such a backlash pushed the government to increase its focus on environmental education in schools. The government reasoned that a grand-scale transformation of how garbage was handled would be more accepted if the seeds of environmentalism were planted earlier in people's lives. Around that same time, Tzu Chi volunteers, following Master Cheng Yen's teachings, began taking up recycling work to help create a cleaner Taiwan.

On August 23, 1990, invited by the Wu Tsunhsien Foundation of Culture, Education and Public Welfare, Master Cheng Yen gave a speech at a school in Taichung City, central Taiwan. That very morning, she had passed through streets in the city that were littered with garbage from a night market. The litter and messiness disconcerted her and prompted her to start calling on people to recycle.

In her address that evening, she told her audience that Taiwan was a very beautiful island and that if more efforts were expended to make it cleaner, it would only become more beautiful. She encouraged everyone to work with the government to sort out garbage and bring about a better environment. At the end of her talk, more than a thousand people in the audience broke into

thunderous applause. Hearing that, she added, "Everyone, I really hope you use your applauding hands to sort out garbage."

Those in the audience included not only people from Taichung, but from other areas of Taiwan as well. Many were moved into action by the Master's words and began recycling when they returned home. Yang Shun-ling (楊順苓), a resident of Fengyuan, Taichung, was one of them. She started by collecting newspapers and other recyclables from her neighbors.

About a month after Yang had started her recycling work, Master Cheng Yen visited Taichung again during one of her regular trips around Taiwan. Yang presented the money she had earned from her recycling efforts to the Master to donate to Tzu Chi. That was the first sum of money earned from recycling ever donated to the foundation. Though the amount was small, its significance was huge.

The Master praised Yang for taking up recycling, and for not minding the smell and filth of garbage. She said Yang had set a worthy example for everyone to follow. Many more took up recycling work too. Whether it was northern, central, southern, or eastern Taiwan, people collected recyclables and sorted them out in response to the Master's appeal for recycling.

Jian Su-juan (簡素娟), a Tzu Chi volunteer, lived in Liming Community in Taichung. She set up a recycling point—the first Tzu Chi recycling point—in front of her home. Shi Shu-yin (施淑吟), a resident of Yuanlin, Changhua, central Taiwan, learned to drive a truck to transport recyclables. Even though the money she made from recycling wasn't enough to cover the cost of fuel, she wasn't discouraged, but kept going.

Chen Hui-min (陳蕙民) took up recycling after attending another one of Master Cheng Yen's talks. At the end of 1990, the Master had given an address in the city that Chen lived in—Banciao, northern Taiwan. During that address, Chen heard the Master call upon her audience again to use their applauding hands to do recycling work. When the event ended, however, Chen was alarmed to see the trash cans at the venue spilling over with garbage. Scrap paper, plastic bags, and other garbage littered the ground around the trash cans. She wanted to help clean up and pick out the recyclables, but she was too embarrassed to do so.

As she was struggling with herself, something the Master said during her speech came to her mind: "We often treat ourselves too nicely." Those



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1. On August 23, 1990, Master Cheng Yen gives a speech in a school in Taichung, during which she calls upon the audience to use their applauding hands to do recycling.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

2. People recycle paper in an event that is part of the campaign “Preserve a Pure Land on Earth.” That campaign was launched by Tzu Chi and the King Car Cultural and Educational Foundation in the early 1990s.

CHEN SHU-LING

3. Volunteers in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, take part in an island-wide cleanup event. The event was organized by *Common Wealth Magazine* after Typhoon Herb in 1996.

CHEN YU-FANG

words helped her overcome her embarrassment. She went to get a few large bags and, ignoring the smell and filth, began organizing the garbage by putting plastic bags, PET bottles, and metal cans into different bags. Her action inspired others to join her. Just like that, Chen embarked on her recycling road.

### Preserve a Pure Land on Earth

Despite these examples, most people in Taiwan back then hadn't yet formed the habit of recycling. Since environmental problems were created by people, it was essential to get everyone to recognize that the root of the problems lay with them and to inspire them to take action. To that end, Tzu Chi worked with the King Car Cultural and Educational Foundation in the early 1990s and started a campaign called “Preserve a Pure Land on Earth.” Part of the focus of the campaign was to promote environmental protection and motivate people to cherish and conserve the Earth's resources. A series of activities including tree planting, recycling, talks, and



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3

concerts were held to raise people's environmental awareness.

A paper recycling event was held as part of the campaign on April 19, 1992, three days before Earth Day. Eight counties and cities in Taiwan took part. In six hours, more than 160 metric tons (176 tons) of waste paper was collected across nine event venues. The proceeds from the sale of the paper went toward the construction fund for the Tzu Chi College of Medicine.

Sadly, efforts to conserve the environment can never seem to catch up with the speed with which it is deteriorating. A typhoon that pummeled Taiwan on July 31 and August 1 of 1996 sounded another environmental alarm for the island. Typhoon Herb triggered deadly landslides in Sanyi Township, Miaoli County, northern Taiwan, and all but destroyed a village in Xinyi Township, Nantou County, central Taiwan. It also caused severe flooding in Banciao and Xizhi in northern Taiwan.

After that disaster, the Master told her followers with a heavy heart that Taiwan was a small island and if we didn't cherish it, "the topography of the island might be completely changed one day."

Responding to the Master's words, *Common Wealth Magazine*, one of Taiwan's most influential periodicals, invited Tzu Chi, the Taipei City Government's Department of Environmental Protection, the Industrial Technology Research Institute, and 14 other organizations to sponsor an event to clean up Taiwan. Hundreds of private

organizations, including Tzu Chi, mobilized 50,000 people to participate. Among these were over 10,000 Tzu Chi volunteers. The participants, spread across 18 counties and cities around Taiwan, joined hands to clean up the island on October 20, 1996.

Seeing how hard everyone worked to clean up the environment, the Master encouraged Tzu Chi volunteers to step up their efforts to carry out and promote recycling in their various communities. Her repeated appeals for environmental protection helped lead the number of recycling stations and recycling volunteers to grow more and more numerous in Taiwan. Tzu Chi's recycling effort eventually became the important environmental protection force that it is today.

### Making a difference

Taiwan became a lot cleaner with the government and private sectors' combined efforts in promoting environmental conservation and recycling. According to statistics released by the EPA, the total amount of waste disposal in Taiwan in 1998 was 8,800,000 metric tons. That number decreased to 7,800,000 metric tons in 2000 and 5,000,000 in 2006. The amount of recycled garbage, on the other hand, increased nearly 17-fold, from 129,000 metric tons in 1998 to 2,188,000 metric tons in 2006!

The drastic reduction in garbage produced allowed the government to cut its planned construction of 36 incinerators down to 24. A major



After the paper recycling event that was part of the “Preserve a Pure Land on Earth” campaign, Tzu Chi volunteers across Taiwan set up recycling points where people could bring their recyclables at fixed times. The recycling point pictured here was located at Hongde Hospital in Yuli Township, Hualien, eastern Taiwan.

ZHANG CHENG-QI



Tzu Chi environmental protection work expanded to places outside Taiwan in 1992. In June 1992, Tzu Chi volunteers in New York organized a street cleanup event in Flushing, where the Tzu Chi New York office is located. COURTESY OF TZU CHI NEW YORK OFFICE

contributing factor to the commendable decrease in waste generation was a “four-in-one” resource recycling program that the EPA introduced in 1997. This program brings together community residents, local government garbage collection teams, recycling dealers, and a system of recycling funds to encourage the recycling and reuse of solid-waste resources. In this program, manufacturers and importers of merchandise such as motor vehicles, electronics, batteries, plastic containers, etc. have to pay a recycling fee to the EPA, which is then used to subsidize individuals and businesses that do the actual recycling.

While the monetary incentives have been effective in increasing the recycling rate in Taiwan, Tzu Chi volunteers aren’t financially

rewarded for their work. But that doesn’t stop them from willingly taking up recycling. Many feel that the joy and happiness that comes from doing the Earth a good turn is enough reward for them.

“I usually left my house at four in the morning,” said Cai Kuan (蔡寬), a 101-year-old Tzu Chi volunteer. “Then I’d hop on a bicycle with a basket attached to the back seat for the garbage I was going to collect, and head toward the foot of Mount Bagua. When I arrived, I would start up the mountain on foot.” She was recalling her younger days when she used to pick up garbage while hiking Mount Bagua, in Changhua.

Onlookers that saw her working thought she was so impoverished she had to scavenge to make a living, but their sympathetic looks didn’t deter



**The Tzu Chi Bagualiao Recycling Station in Renwu District, Kaohsiung, in 1999. That year, students from National Sun Yat-sen University visited the station to learn how to sort and process recyclables. After that, many more organizations began visiting Tzu Chi recycling stations for the same purpose. This is how larger recycling stations gradually began providing environmental protection education to the public.**

**In 1991, Tzu Chi volunteer Chen Hui-min (third from right) bought a truck for more than 200,000 NT dollars (US\$6,600) to be used as a vehicle to collect recyclable garbage. This became the first truck in the Greater Taipei Area to be dedicated to Tzu Chi's recycling work.** COURTESY OF CHEN HUI-MIN

her. She continued no matter how she was perceived because she knew recycling was very meaningful work. She remembers those days fondly. Even though she is now over 100 years old, she still takes part in Tzu Chi's recycling work. She says that engaging in recycling work has helped her stay fit and healthy and even worry less. Tens of thousands of recycling volunteers like Cai Kuan have helped Tzu Chi's recycling effort to bloom.

In 2006, the Tzu Chi International Humanitarian Aid Association began to use a process by which PET plastic could be recycled into fabric. Thus, the PET bottles sorted by Tzu Chi recycling volunteers could be converted into blankets for the needy. Production of the blankets was ramped up by the end of 2006, and they've been

produced in large quantities ever since. Tzu Chi has distributed over a million such blankets to needy people around the world, including victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, Syrian refugees, and even people in North and South America whose lives have been made difficult by COVID-19.

With global warming and climate change threatening the survival of humanity, countries all over the world need to increase their efforts to address environmental issues. Tzu Chi volunteers, without a doubt, will keep doing their part to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to the sustainability of our planet. But more people need to act to ensure a better future. Our planet is at the crossroads. Its future depends on you and me. ❀

# Think Before You Buy

Graphic by Ling Wan-qi

The next time you want to buy something, ask yourself this question: "Do I really need it?" A significant factor contributing to the global garbage problem is excessive consumerism. Too many of us buy things we don't need, and then throw perfectly usable items in the garbage or recycling bins to reduce the clutter we've created at home. Buy only what you need and take good care of it to make it last as long as possible. Prolonging the life of things prolongs the life of the planet.







# Repurpose and Reinvent From Trash to Products

By Chen Li-an

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



*A Tzu Chi volunteer tells victims of Typhoon Haiyan during an aid distribution in the Philippines that the blankets they will receive were made from recycled PET bottles. The volunteer hopes the message will inspire the victims to cherish the Earth's resources and recycle reusable garbage to help protect the environment.*



Taiwan had achieved a recycling rate of 60 percent by 2017, making it one of the world's top recycling countries. Despite that impressive record, however, many recyclables still end up in incinerators. Many other countries face the same problem. Some of the items collected for recycling are eventually burned or exported because it is not cost-effective to recycle them.

Take plastic products, for example, which comprise the bulk of garbage that could be recycled. Plastic is made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource that took millions of years to form. It's a waste of this natural resource when plastic products are thrown away as garbage. "That's really a pity," said Marshall Siao (蔡思一), inventor of the Tzu Chi folding bed and the R&D chief at Jing Si Pureland Co., Ltd.



But that's not the worst of it. Plastics thrown away as garbage do not biodegrade in the environment. They stick around and cause problems long after they've been discarded. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a prime example. Formed as a result of marine pollution gathered by ocean currents, this "floating junk yard" contains countless polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles, other plastic waste, and discarded fishing

nets. A study published in *Scientific Reports* in 2018 put the area of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch at 1.6 million square kilometers (617,763 square miles)—more than twice the size of Texas and three times the size of France.

"Take the plastics eaten by sea birds or fish," Siao said. "They could be remade into all sorts of different products." He stressed that discarded products, whether made from plastic or paper, are a valuable resource. Instead of letting them go to waste and becoming a burden on the Earth, it would be more sensible to give them a new lease of life and create a "circular economy," which emphasizes the sustainable use of resources.

### From plastic bottles to fabric

Converting waste into high-quality eco-products may be an abstract concept to some people, but techniques to do so have been developed in many industries. In Taiwan, a well-known example is the transformation of recycled PET bottles into fabric. One of the most famous products of DA.AI Technology, a social enterprise founded in 2008 by some entrepreneurs who share Tzu Chi ideals, has been blankets made a hundred percent from recycled PET bottles.

Working with more than 150 manufacturers, DA.AI Technology has developed a great variety of products using fibers extracted from used plastic bottles. Such products include men's suits, baby and children's clothing, and uniforms worn by Tzu Chi volunteers on disaster relief trips. They've even produced backpacks, carrying bags, and shoes made partly of such recycled fibers.

Visitors to DA.AI Technology's website can see how many PET bottles are used to make each eco-friendly product and, compared with polyester fiber made from virgin materials, how much petroleum and water is saved in the production process. The amount of carbon emissions avoided for each item is also available. The company donates all its profits to the Tzu Chi Foundation to help it carry out its charitable work globally.

Some people shun products made from recycled materials because they associate garbage

**News of animals killed by eating plastic and other waste is shocking and sobering. Marshall Siao, the R&D chief of Jing Si Pureland, uses one such example to illustrate the damage garbage can do to the ecosystem.**



with filth, but according to Li Ding-ming (李鼎銘), the executive director of DA.AI Technology, to manufacture high-quality yarn from recycled PET bottles, they have to make sure their raw materials are very clean and pure. Impurities in the recycling process foul things up and result in threads that break more easily.

In 2019 alone, DA.AI Technology purchased more than 1,700 metric tons (1,875 tons) of PET bottles from Tzu Chi recycling stations for processing into fibers. These bottles had all been thoroughly sorted, de-capped, and de-ringed by Tzu Chi volunteers. The bottles were then transported to factories where they were shredded, washed, melted, and extruded into yarn to be made into final products. DA.AI Technology applies for the MIT (Made in Taiwan) Smile Logo for each product it makes. This government certification assures the quality of a product, and proves it has passed rigorous testing and is safe for human use.

In addition to transforming PET bottles into fabric, DA.AI Technology has developed other

products too. For example, they've produced safety goggles and face shields from recycled materials in response to the coronavirus pandemic and provided them for the use of front-line workers. Its current focus is on how to reuse PET and polypropylene (PP) plastic waste. They are continually striving to develop a wider offering of higher value-added products from the many waste materials reclaimed at Tzu Chi recycling stations. Not only will such products be valuable in helping to conserve the Earth's resources, but they can also ameliorate the huge impact of waste on the environment.

### The recycling of paper containers

The potential of trash is unlimited. Products developed from it can be as varied as blankets, suitcases, shoes, and even construction materials. After working on it for two years, Marshall Siao, the aforementioned Jing Si Pureland R&D chief, successfully produced paving bricks from the plastic linings inside discarded paper containers. An outdoor space on the third floor of a Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital building was paved with more than 6,600 such bricks. The non-slip patterns on the surface of the bricks are in the shape of palm prints, which symbolize the hands that have made the recycling of waste plastics into paving bricks possible.

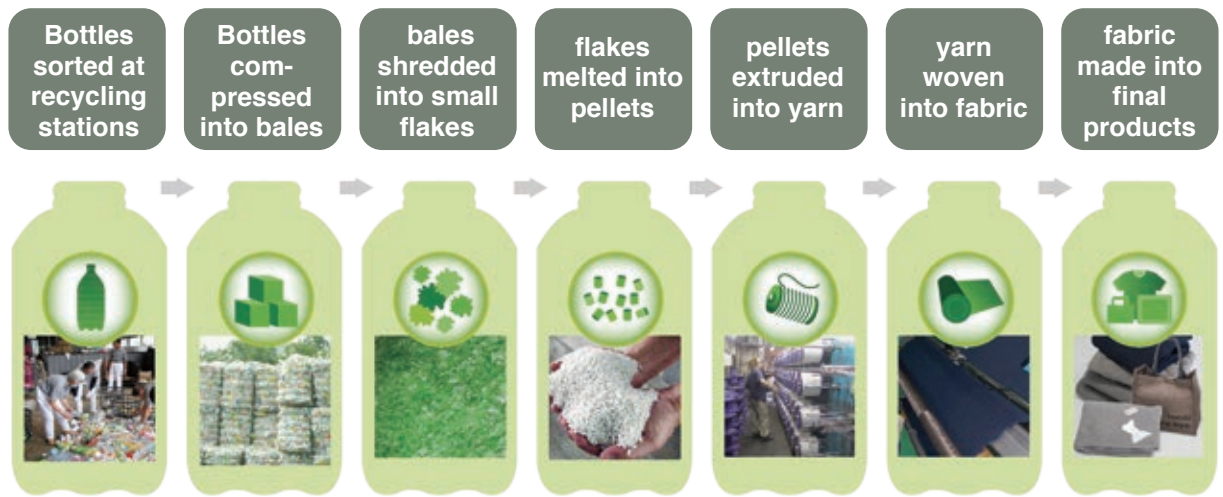
Siao was a Tzu Chi representative and observer at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2019. He was astounded to learn at the conference that the economic cost of air pollution is ten times that of World War II. Most people think that paper containers are environmentally friendly because they are made of paper and recyclable, but they contribute to air pollution too.

According to Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs, close to 6,600 million paper containers were sold in Taiwan in 2018. This is staggering, but the number doesn't even include those whose sale wasn't reported to the Ministry. If paper containers produced by underground factories are also factored in, the estimated total number comes



**Volunteers at a recycling station remove rings and caps from PET bottles and sort the bottles by color for recycling. Rings and caps are usually made of different materials from the bottles and need to be removed to allow the bottles to be converted into quality yarn.**

# The conversion of PET bottles into textile products:



to 8,000 million. Because most of these containers were soiled with grease or other stuff or contained food waste after they were used, they ended up in incinerators.

Siao explained that paper containers are lined with a thin layer of plastic to make them water-resistant. Typically, 30 to 33 percent of the material used to make a paper container is plastic. Recycled paper containers need to be sent to facilities with the necessary equipment to separate the paper and plastic before they can be turned into reusable raw materials. Taiwan currently has only three companies that have such separation equipment, and then only the reclaimed paper is repurposed. Most of the plastic linings are burned because they are made of mixed plastics, which makes them difficult to recycle.

“How to deal with used paper containers has always been an issue,” Siao said. “No effective solution has been proposed to date.” So to help increase the recycling of paper containers and achieve zero waste, Siao came up with the idea of turning the paper pulp recycled from paper containers into toilet paper and the plastic into paving bricks.

A joint effort among Jing Si Pureland, Cheng Loong Corp., and other companies followed. In this joint undertaking, Cheng Loong Corp., a company principally engaged in the manufacture of paper products, provides plastic linings separated from paper containers for partner factories. The plastic linings, such as those from meal

boxes and cups, are then made into paving bricks that have a high degree of permeability and can bear a weight of up to 40 metric tons (44 tons).

Siao explained that 1.7 kilograms (3.7 pounds) of waste plastic is needed to make a paving brick. This is equivalent to the amount separated from 350 meal boxes or cups. As mentioned above, more than 6,600 such paving bricks were used to pave the outdoor space on the third floor of a Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital building. The bricks—6,602 to be exact—were made from the recycled plastic of 2.31 million paper containers. Their production can be further translated into a reduction of 11.7 metric tons of carbon emissions. Using recycled materials to make bricks can also reduce the mining of sand and gravel. “What we hope most of all by converting waste materials into usable things is to lessen damage to the environment,” Siao reiterated.

As for the paper pulp recycled from paper containers, Cheng Loong makes it into toilet paper and packaging paper. A hundred metric tons of recycled paper can be made into 60 metric tons of toilet paper, which can save more than 2,000 trees from being felled. Cai Shi-yu (蔡石玉), director of one of Cheng Loong’s factories, said that his company converts recycled paper pulp that is “cleaner” (uncontaminated by grease) into toilet paper because customers in Taiwan like their toilet paper pure white. The rest is recycled into packaging paper. Cai added, “Though it is faster, more conve-



### **Toilet paper made from recycled paper, such as that obtained from discarded paper containers**

nient, and even cheaper to just cut down trees to obtain paper pulp for processing into paper products, it's less environmentally friendly."

Cai is happy his company is working with Jing Si Pureland to recycle paper containers. In the past, the waste plastic separated from recycled paper containers at his company was incinerated. Now their joint project with Jing Si Pureland has allowed the separated plastic linings to be made into paving bricks. Though the production process is relatively costly, it's a good thing for the environment.

Jing Si Pureland has also been actively transforming other kinds of plastic waste into products. Examples include making recycled polystyrene (PS) into bookcases, and converting the inner tubs of discarded washing machines, made of PP, into folding chairs. Siao believes that to achieve zero waste, everyone needs to have correct concepts about recycling, and more importantly, take concrete action to help.

### **Reducing trumps recycling**

The efforts made by Jing Si Pureland and DA. AI Technology in recycling waste into products with a new, purposeful life has one goal: to protect the Earth. Therefore, though the companies make products from recycled materials, they don't want their takeaway message to be, "continue to use as many plastic products as you want." As Siao reiterates, if people keep churning out garbage, our environment will never be cleaner—no matter how quickly or efficiently reusable trash is recycled and made into new products. The best way to protect our environment is, like Dharma Master Cheng Yen teaches, to cherish and conserve everything we have so we can produce as little garbage as possible and help reduce damage to the environment.

Everyone wants to live in a clean, uncontaminated environment. No one wants to breathe polluted air. And yet, we all contribute to the pollution of the world. To pave the way for a cleaner, greener tomorrow, we all need to do our best to lead an eco-friendly life. And we can magnify our impact by motivating others to do the same. ❊

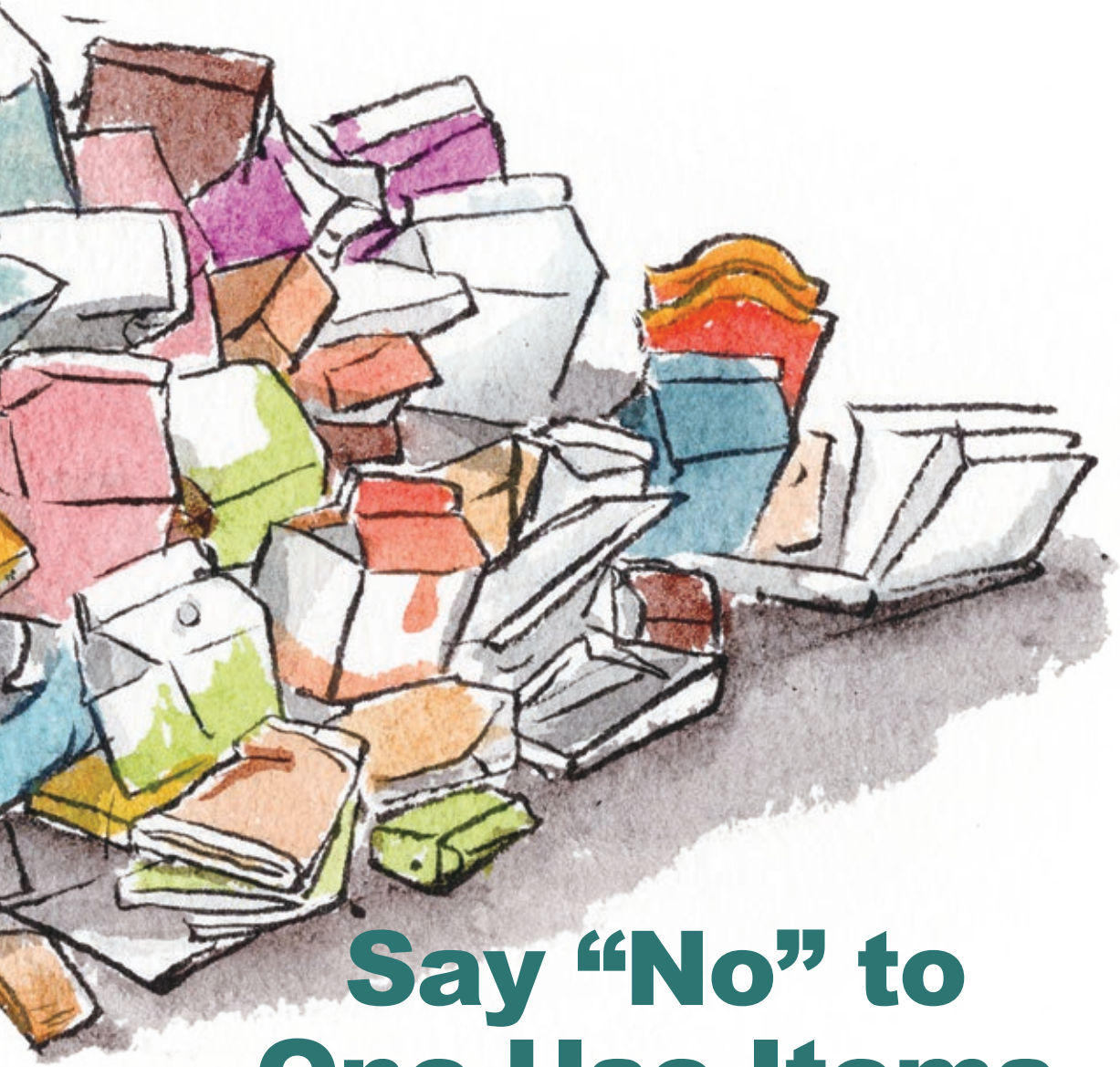




The paving bricks used in an outdoor space on the third floor of a Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital building are made from the plastic linings separated from used paper containers. The durability of these bricks is comparable to those made of concrete. A hundred square meters (1,076 square feet) of such paving bricks can save 20 metric tons of concrete and prevent four metric tons of plastic waste from being burned.

LIN BO-YIN





# Say “No” to One-Use Items

Graphic by Ling Wan-qi

We can all help protect the environment with simple daily gestures. Delivery restaurants are, for example, notorious for loading their customers up with paper boxes, plastic utensils, and packets of condiments. Help reduce this unnecessary waste by requesting no plastic utensils, straws, or disposable napkins when you call in for delivery. You can also bring your own reusable cups or containers when you order to-go to help cut down on waste. Cooking and eating at home is another good way to decrease single-use items.

# Convenience at a Cost

By Chen Li-an

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*More than 15 billion plastic bags are used in Taiwan every year, but less than ten percent are recycled. Sorting and preparing plastic bags for recycling is time-consuming, and the resulting profits are paper thin. Even scavengers have no interest in them.*

Housewives shop for their families amidst the typical hubbub of a market. They weave among stalls that sell an assortment of goods—clothing, pre-cooked food, fresh fruit, almost anything you could want. Vendors are more than happy to proficiently bag their purchases before turning their attention to the next customer. By the time shoppers leave the market, they are loaded with all kinds of sundry items—and all the plastic bags used to carry their purchases home.

Plastic bags are lightweight, durable, and easy to carry, making them extremely convenient to use. Unfortunately, convenience often comes with a cost.

## Raining plastic particles

According to statistics published by Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration in 2019, the number of plastic bags used in Taiwan decreased from 18 billion to 15 billion per year. The decrease happened after two government restrictions on the use of plastics were announced. Despite the noticeable reduction, however, the recycling rate of plastic bags is pitifully low—less than ten percent. That level is about the same the world over. Of the hundreds of millions of tons of plastic waste produced globally every year, only nine percent is recycled. Twelve percent is incinerated, and the rest is landfilled or left littering the environment.

We forget about a piece of garbage as soon as we throw it away. It's a case of "out of sight, out of mind." But discarded plastics do not simply disap-

pear into the environment. Though they are eventually broken down into smaller particles of plastic, they are not biodegradable. In 2019, American scientists discovered microscopic pieces of plastic of various colors in rainwater. This discovery is not an isolated incident. Scientists have also recorded a daily rate of 365 microplastic particles per square meter falling from the sky in the Pyrenees Mountains in the south of France.

Plastic pollution has, no doubt, become a pressing environmental issue in today's world. Surprisingly, plastic bags—one of the most widely used plastic products—were invented to "save the planet." Sten Gustaf Thulin (1914–2006), a Swedish engineer, created plastic bags about 60 years ago as an alternative to paper bags, which were considered bad for the environment because their production involves the chopping down of trees. Plastic bags went into mass production a few years later. The popularity of all sorts of plastic packaging soon followed.

Raoul Thulin, son of the inventor, said that his father believed that plastic bags, being durable, would be used repeatedly instead of just once. This, sadly, has not happened. Though created with noble intentions, the now ubiquitous plastic bags have become an environmental dilemma as they contribute to a serious pollution problem around the world.

## A labor of love

At the Shuanghe Recycling Station in New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, volunteers work diligently with recyclable garbage in various sorting



areas. Among them is a group of people dexterously working through a small mountain of plastic bags. Picking a bag from the mountain, they classify it as one of four types: clear polyethylene (PE), colored PE, clear polypropylene (PP), or colored PP.

“This soft material is PE,” said volunteer Wu Li-mei (吳麗美), who has sorted and processed plastic bags for more than ten years. She pulled a red and white striped bag from the pile and explained that the plastic, soft-to-the-touch and flexible, is PE. Fruit wrappers often seen at fruit stands in Taiwan are, for example, usually made of PE.

Wu next picked out a large, transparent plastic bag from another pile and said, “This one was used to package clothes. It makes a crackling sound when you touch it, and it’s harder to stretch. It is made of PP.”

PP and PE are the two most common recyclable plastic bag materials. They do not contain

**People work inside a factory which converts used plastic bags into raw materials in the form of plastic pellets.** INSET PHOTO BY CHEN LI-AN

toxic substances such as chlorine, and are therefore safer to recycle.

“The first step in learning to sort plastic bags for recycling is to be able to tell the difference between PP and PE,” Wu explained. Plastic bags come in all kinds of designs, she added, and it can be confusing for newbies to tell what material a bag is made of. They usually teach new volunteers to feel whether a material is soft, flexible, etc. to decide whether it is PP or PE.

After the plastic bags are sorted into the four categories, volunteers further process them by removing foreign objects or undesirable parts from them. Volunteers Lin Xiu-chou (林秀綢) and Xie Su-zhen (謝素真) emphasized that some bags

come with sticker labels or sealing adhesive, and that because different materials have different melting points, those foreign parts need to be cut off so that they won't damage the recycling machines when the bags are being processed into raw materials.

Countless plastic bags are sent to Tzu Chi recycling stations across Taiwan every day. They come from shops, factories, or community collection points. If the bags that end up in a recycling station are stained or greasy, they are first washed with recycled rainwater, then sun-dried before further sorting and processing. Only when the bags have been cleaned and sorted and undesirable substances have been removed will they be sent on to their next stop on their journey of rebirth.

The Tzu Chi recycling stations throughout Taiwan collected and sorted 6,424 metric tons (7,080 tons) of plastic bags in 2019. A monthly average of six metric tons (6.6 tons) is processed at the Shuanghe Recycling Station. About ten volunteers work on plastic bags at the station every day, turning out ten kilograms (22 pounds) of colored PE alone every day. The bags fetch pitifully little money—only three Taiwanese dollars (ten U.S. cents) per kilogram. The low price and time-consuming sorting process make plastic bags one of the least desirable recyclable items on the market. Even scavengers won't bother with them.

But the volunteers aren't motivated by profit. What they care about is the damage such bags can do to the environment if they are not recycled. The last thing they want to see is plastic bags lying around, polluting the environment.

### **For sustainability**

In 2002 the Taiwanese government implemented a policy intended to cut back on the use of plastic bags and disposable tableware. The policy was introduced on a more limited scale in July 2002, followed by a second phase of implementation in January 2003. The government further widened the scale of restrictions in 2018, prohibiting stores from providing free plastic bags to customers.

Ding runs a business making raw materials from recycled plastic bags. He has been in this line of work for 30 years. According to his observations, the number of plastic bags recycled over the years has been steady, even though the government has restricted their use. "People in the habit of using plastic bags still use them," he said.

Ding said that many decades ago, people in

Taiwan used to use lotus leaves, banana leaves, ropes woven from plants, and other natural materials to package raw and cooked food in traditional markets. But those days are long gone. Now, even though people are widely aware of the harm plastics do to the environment, they still use bags freely because of their convenience and low cost.

For this article, my photographer and I visited a plastic pellet factory located in an industrial zone in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan. As soon as we walked in, our eyes were greeted by a garbage-bag mountain higher than a single-story building. A pungent odor permeated the air. Wu, the owner of the factory, pointed to some neatly tied up piles of sorted bags and told us that those were from Tzu Chi recycling stations. He said that bags from Tzu Chi are always carefully sorted and washed. The thoughtful preparation that goes into those bags saves his factory a lot of time to process them.

Wu's factory specializes in recycling PE plastic packaging. The process of converting such plastics to raw materials isn't complicated. Recycled plastic packaging is first put on conveyor belts, with workers examining the items and doing further screening. Then the plastics are fed into machines where they are shredded, melted, and pelletized for reuse in the manufacture of new plastic products. "Though the plastic pellets we produce are made from used plastic bags, they can be remade into durable plastic products," Wu explained.

Wu added that the market price of raw materials made from recycled plastics fluctuates with the rise and fall of oil prices, and a lot of manpower and time is required in the recycling process. Even so, it is worth the effort if the tremendous amounts of plastic waste turned out in the world can be reduced—because the pollution caused by the plastic garbage is diminished along with it.

### **Refuse whenever you can**

Nowadays, more and more people are working on how to give used plastic bags a new lease of life. These efforts are not limited to businesses. National Cheng Kung University in Tainan, southern Taiwan, is a good example. Students in the university's Industrial Design Department once launched an experimental project making discarded plastic bags into trays, pen holders, etc.

The environmental problem caused by plastic bags has existed for a long time, but it is not difficult to tackle. Besides recycling, reducing and



refusing are also simple but effective measures to help solve the problem.

Several older volunteers at the Tzu Chi Sanchong Recycling Station in northern Taiwan shared that before they took up recycling, they didn't know that plastic bags could be recycled. They usually just tossed them in the garbage like everyone else. Now they realize how much harm plastic bags can do to the environment if they are improperly disposed of. That realization led them to change their habit in the way they use plastic bags. They avoid using them if possible, and when they have to use one, they use it as many times as they can.

"My daughter always carries several shopping bags in her purse," said Xie Su-zhen (謝素真), a volunteer at the Shuanghe Recycling Station. In addition to shopping bags, her daughter also carries food containers when she shops at a traditional market to avoid using disposable items.

**Volunteers from the Tzu Chi Sanchong Recycling Station make weekly visits to Wufenpu, an area in Taipei with many wholesale clothing shops, to collect used plastic bags. A large amount of plastic packaging is produced there every day.**

When she has no choice but to use a plastic bag, she uses it repeatedly until it is torn before she recycles it. "My daughter lives an ecologically friendlier life than me, a recycling volunteer. I'm really learning from her."

To reduce the damage we are inflicting on the environment and ease the Earth's burden, we can start by cutting down on our use of seemingly insignificant plastic bags. Refuse, reduce, reuse, and recycle: these are the golden rules to follow if we want to be conscientious citizens of the global village, leave behind a smaller carbon footprint, and give the planet more breathing room. ♣

# Volunteers in China Mobilized to Aid Flood Victims

By **Bian Jing, Si Haizhen, Guo Lingling, and Jia Xiongying**  
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting







China entered the flood season in June this year. Torrential rains lasted for more than 40 days, triggering severe flooding in large areas of southern China, mainly around the Yangtze basin and its tributaries. By early August, over 54 million people had been affected, with more than 3.7 million people evacuated.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, Jiangxi, and other provinces quickly mobilized to assess the damage in disaster areas. Tongzi and Daozhen counties in Guizhou Province were hit by flooding five times, resulting in landslides that destroyed homes. Floodwaters breached embankments in Huangmei County in Hubei Province, affecting 16 townships. Among those townships, Dahe was hit by landslides, and Zhuogang suffered sustained flooding—farmland was submerged in water for days, ruining all the crops. Volunteers promptly purchased supplies and held distributions for victims in these areas.

The Tzu Chi Foundation started its philanthropic work in China in 1991, when eastern China was struck by massive flooding. Anhui was the first province to receive Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan, and the first to receive their aid. Now local volunteers in the province have taken over the responsibility of organizing emergency relief work in the area. On July 7, the Xin'an River, which flows through Anhui Province, swelled. The flooding that followed hit Shendu Township in She County hard. Volunteers from Anhui,

**A volunteer interacts with a flood victim in Shendu Township, Anhui Province.**

JIA XIONGYING

Zhejiang, and Jiangsu provinces helped ease the plight of affected villagers by bringing them rice, cooking oil, blankets, and other daily necessities. A resident of Tongling, Anhui Province, who had received aid from Tzu Chi 29 years ago, when he was nine, joined the ranks of Tzu Chi volunteers in distributing the aid.

Tzu Chi volunteers also aided citizens in the city of Chongqing, one of the four municipalities in China under the direct administration of the central government. In Qijiang District, some riverbank houses were flooded up to the second floor. Volunteers launched emergency distributions of cash aid and blankets within 48 hours of assessing damage in the Qijiang and Jiangjin Districts. Cai, an older aid recipient, said to volunteers, "The floods destroyed everything I had. I was so sad I didn't want to live. Your care for us filled me with gratitude." She was so emotionally stirred she broke into sobs in a volunteer's arms. She said that she would use the cash aid from Tzu Chi to pay for her grandson's tuition, and if there was money left, she'd use it to purchase daily necessities.

The disaster areas were huge. Volunteers did their best to reach as many areas as they could. As of August 17, Tzu Chi had helped over 10,000 people in 4,457 families. ❁

**Volunteers waded through water as they visit Tongzi County in Guizhou Province for flood relief work.**

BIAN JING

# The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

## The Buddha says:

What can produce sufferings such as worry, sorrow, bitterness, and anger, and put them together in a world of delusion? It is your own mind!



In spiritual cultivation, we must first work hard at cultivating our minds.

There are three major illnesses of the mind: greed, anger, and delusion. The purpose of spiritual cultivation is to get rid of these three.



**Master Cheng Yen, I am going to Shanghai on business.**

Shanghai is a prosperous metropolitan city. When you do business day in and day out in such a stimulating environment, make sure you take care of your own mind. Don't be influenced by people who indulge in hedonistic and materialistic pleasures.

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

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*Nothing is easy to the unwilling. No  
road is too long for those already on it.  
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA