

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action



Homes of Hope

The Silaunja Great Love Village in India





Master Cheng Yen teaches that even when individual efforts may appear small, the collective power of love can accomplish anything.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

The Strength of Collective Love

Translated by Teresa Chang

At our year-end blessing and volunteer certification ceremonies in December, I saw volunteers from over 20 countries and regions. Some had journeyed tens of thousands of kilometers to Taiwan, enduring over 50 hours of travel and transiting through three countries. Meeting like this was not easy. Some spoke different languages, and although I couldn't understand their words when they shared their life stories and Tzu Chi experiences on stage, I felt immense joy. This joy came from knowing they carry love in their hearts and have chosen a path of compassion and service. I believe they are among the happiest and most blessed people.

As I certified each new volunteer, I said, "Bless you. Be diligent [on the Bodhisattva Path]." I'm deeply grateful to all our volunteers. In a world filled with suffering, no single person can help everyone. That's why our collective efforts are so vital. Regardless of religion or nationality, we are united in a shared mission: to alleviate suffering and serve those in need.

The Buddha was born into this world over 2,500 years ago. As a prince and heir to a kingdom, he lived a life of privilege. However, upon witnessing the suffering of people outside the palace—so different from his own life—he chose to renounce his throne and seek the truth. After attaining enlightenment, he wished for everyone to understand the true nature of life, cultivate wisdom, and sow blessings. He dedicated himself to guiding others along this path.

The Buddha shared a wealth of wisdom with the world, and I've always aspired to repay this kindness. Fulfilling my wish to contribute to the Buddha's birthplace and other significant locations in his life's journey, our volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia have traveled in successive groups to Nepal and India. In underserved villages, they have distributed aid, provided medical care, conducted vocational training, and built homes and school facilities. I deeply appreciate their dedication to uplifting the needy in these regions.

But help is needed beyond India and Nepal. Around the world, countless people contend with difficulties in their daily lives. In drought-stricken areas, even a single blade of grass struggles to survive. In Zimbabwe, for instance, people undertake arduous journeys to collect water—often unclean—

while risking attacks from animals. Since 2013, our volunteer Tino Chu (朱金財) has led a team in building and repairing wells to address the country's water scarcity; they have drilled or repaired over 2,000 wells. With the help of other volunteers, he also provides daily lunches to approximately 17,000 people, six days a week. Working in a country plagued by water scarcity and food insecurity is no easy task. I often reflect on how Mr. Chu has persevered for so many years, and I wonder: How many people have received food aid from us? And how many more suffering individuals remain unseen and unreachable?

Challenges abound in our world. Every evening, I watch global news. Beyond the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, countries are mired in crises as people fight over resources, leaving others to suffer and unable to live in peace. Seeing this fills my heart with sorrow. Why must there be such division, conflict, and strife? Without peace, even the greatest wealth holds no true value.

The Earth provides abundantly, offering plentiful crops. With such resources, humanity should not face shortages. Yet, disputes over resources, divisions, and strife cause unnecessary suffering. If people harbored love in their hearts, supported one another, and embraced openness and tolerance, this world could be a paradise.

It was with this belief that I founded Tzu Chi over 50 years ago. The early days were incredibly challenging, but I constantly reminded myself to stay true to my original aspirations and persevere. Gradually, the positive impact of our efforts became evident, drawing more and more people to join us. While one person alone may not accomplish much, anything is possible when everyone's love comes together.

This year, as I left the Abode to preside over our year-end blessing ceremonies, I felt even weaker than last year. Age continues to take its toll on me. In the face of life's impermanence, I seek only to make the most of each day. Each morning, if I can move my hands and feet and get out of bed, I focus on accomplishing what needs to be done. The Buddha's love embraces the universe, and my aspirations to serve are equally boundless. If I cannot fulfill them all in this life, I will carry them forward into the next. Please be ever more mindful. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

January 2025



10



20



23



28

1 THE STRENGTH OF COLLECTIVE LOVE

Master Cheng Yen highlights the power of unity and compassion as volunteers worldwide dedicate themselves to easing suffering, fostering love, and creating a more peaceful world.

4 TZU CHI EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Read about recent highlights in Tzu Chi's history.

10 WATER FOR ALL

Tzu Chi is transforming lives by improving access to clean water in communities around the globe. Learn how their efforts align with

the UN's goals for safe and accessible drinking water.

20 WATER SCARCITY AND CROP FAILURE IN ZIMBABWE

Drought may dry the land, but it cannot quench the spirit of Tzu Chi volunteers in Zimbabwe. Read about their unwavering efforts to bring food, water, and hope to those in need.

23 WATER CHALLENGES IN GANSU, CHINA

Tzu Chi's water solutions in Gansu, China, created sustainable communities and offered a lifeline to families facing extreme hardship.

26 A LIFE TO INSPIRE

Paralyzed but empowered, a Tzu Chi volunteer uses his story to bring light to those facing their own struggles.

28 HOMES OF HOPE

Through Tzu Chi's initiative, the people of Silaunja, India, left behind makeshift shelters and moved into homes that offer not just shelter but hope.

36 AFTER SUPER TYPHOON YAGI

Typhoon Yagi's devastating aftermath triggered an outpouring of support from Tzu Chi volunteers, who provided food, financial aid,



36



44



54



59

and recovery resources to affected communities.

44 LIFE-CHANGING CARE

When resources are scarce, compassion becomes the greatest gift. Explore how Tzu Chi’s free clinic brought relief, smiles, and new hope to the people of Battambang, Cambodia.

54 A BOND BEYOND BLOOD

Journey through heartfelt accounts of courage and gratitude made possible by Tzu Chi’s mission to enable stem cell donations.

59 MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Read about a mother and daughter whose legacy is built on love and service. Through hard work and generosity, they’ve made a lasting impact on their community, inspiring others to give.

ON THE COVER Tzu Chi volunteers took family portraits of each household before the official handover ceremony of the Silaunja Great Love Village in India. Photo by Huang Rui-fen

To read our magazine online,
please visit our website:
<https://tcmonthly.tzuchiculture.org.tw>
or scan this QR code:



The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time, or clarity. Letters should include the writer’s name, address, and telephone number.
Address: No. 8, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Telephone: 886-2-2898-9000 ext 2001
Fax: 886-2-2898-9994
E-mail: 004741@daaitv.com.tw

Tzu Chi Bimonthly

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

The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 8, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
Copyright © 2025 Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation.
All rights reserved. Printed in Taiwan.
For a free copy of the *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*, please contact your nearest Tzu Chi branch office (see inside back cover).

中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

Tzu Chi Event Highlights

Oct. 20 to Dec. 21, 2024

Nepal



- On November 5, Tzu Chi held a groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion of Siddhartha School in Lumbini. The project will add 13 classrooms to the original Siddhartha Primary School, enabling it to offer education up to Grade 10 and enhancing local educational resources.

India



- At Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, Tzu Chi built modern cement houses for impoverished residents. The first batch of 36 houses, the Silaunja Great Love Village, was officially handed over during a ceremony on October 27.

★ For more information, please refer to pages 28 to 35.

Taiwan



- The Tzu Chi New Shoots Scholarship encourages students from families receiving long-term care from the foundation to apply themselves in school. Between October 19 and November 10, 31 award ceremonies were held and approximately 9,000 students received the scholarship. Since the program began 17 years ago, Tzu Chi has awarded over 100,000 New Shoots Scholarships across Taiwan.
- In November, Tzu Chi was awarded Gold at the ESG & Sustainability Awards for "Best ESG Campaign or Case Study to Improve Education or Access to Education," achieved through its partnership with PaGamO, an online educational platform that promotes learning through gaming. Additionally, the foundation earned Silver for "Best ESG Campaign or Case Study to Improve and Encourage Responsible Consumption and Production," thanks to its eco-friendly vegan food delivery platform. Organized by UK-based PRMoment, the ESG & Sustainability Awards celebrate exemplary ESG initiatives aligned with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Indonesia



- In October, heavy rains triggered flooding in Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province. On October 20, volunteers distributed rice to 300 affected households in the hard-hit areas of Karang Baru and Seruway.

The Philippines



- Six back-to-back typhoons struck Cagayan Province in northern Luzon Island in November, affecting over 50,000 households. Volunteers set off from Manila on November 19 and traveled 500 kilometers (310 miles) to Cagayan to offer assistance. In the following four days, they assessed damage and distributed relief supplies, including rice and essential items, to 4,450 households. They also provided building material vouchers to 93 families whose homes had been completely destroyed.

Cambodia



- Tzu Chi held a large-scale free clinic in Battambang Province from November 1 to 3, during which 454 medical professionals and support volunteers from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia provided care for 3,480 patient visits. The clinic addressed essential healthcare needs, offering services in internal medicine, surgery, dentistry, ophthalmology, and traditional Chinese medicine.

★ For more information, please refer to pages 44 to 53.

Malaysia



- Severe flooding caused by torrential rain struck Malaysia in late November, forcing the evacuation of over 150,000 people. It was the worst flood in nearly a decade. The hardest-hit areas included the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah. Tzu Chi volunteers visited government shelters and temples housing evacuees, providing emergency supplies for approximately 3,500 households. Supplies included blankets, folding beds, food, and other necessities. Volunteers also offered free medical services. The second phase of relief distribution is set to begin in January 2025.



Charity



Medicine



Education



The United States



- Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida in September, sweeping across six southeastern states. In October, Hurricane Milton, a powerful Category 5 storm, caused severe damage in North Carolina and Florida. In November, Tzu Chi distributed cash cards and blankets in Tampa and Fort Pierce, Florida, benefiting 425 people.
- The Tzu Chi Foundation, based in Taiwan, established its first overseas branch, Tzu Chi USA, in 1989. In December 2024, Tzu Chi USA marked its 35th anniversary. To honor Tzu Chi's contributions to American society, Paul Chang (張克塵), Lead for Region 9 Southwest for the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, visited Tzu Chi USA's national headquarters in San Dimas, California, on December 21. He presented a congratulatory letter on behalf of U.S. President Joe Biden, which was received by Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), CEO of Tzu Chi USA.



Brazil



- In April and May 2024, severe flooding struck Rio Grande do Sul. Tzu Chi volunteers conducted multiple damage assessments and, with government assistance, compiled a list of affected households. In collaboration with community representatives, Tzu Chi distributed aid to more than 2,000 households in November.



Azerbaijan

- Representatives from the Tzu Chi Foundation attended the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22. They participated in side events and interacted with a range of organizations.

Zimbabwe

- Amidst severe food shortages caused by a devastating drought, the Zimbabwean government announced plans to cull elephants for meat distribution. Upholding its commitment to safeguarding all living things, Tzu Chi began distributing 600 metric tons of cornmeal in late November. The two-phase distribution is expected to reach seven provinces and benefit approximately 30,000 households.



A woman collects water from a water pit in Goromonzi, a rural community in Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. Despite the poor quality of the water, this pit provides a much-needed water source for local residents.

HLENGISILE UJYANE



Essential Clean Water

Tzu Chi and the SDGs

Water is essential for the survival and growth of all living things, yet freshwater resources are limited and unevenly distributed. As climate change alters weather patterns, the frequency and severity of water-related disasters are increasing. It's time to recognize the true value of water and work towards lasting solutions.

SDG
FOCUS

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



2 ZERO
HUNGER



Water for All

Tzu Chi's Initiatives Around the World

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

From drilling wells in Zimbabwe to harvesting rainwater in Taiwan, Tzu Chi's global efforts bring clean water to those in need while promoting sustainable practices.

In Taiwan, public facilities like train stations, sports venues, shopping malls, and hospitals provide free access to clean drinking water. Anyone with a reusable water bottle can easily find a place to refill it. And that's not just in Taiwan. In developed and affluent nations, water availability is seldom a concern; the question is usually what to drink, not whether water is accessible.

In stark contrast, hundreds of millions around the world struggle to secure even a single glass of clean, safe water. A staggering 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' 2023 report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sadly, the problem is worsening as climate change intensifies water scarcity.



Digging wells, saving lives

A severe drought that swept across much of southern Africa forced Zimbabwe to declare a state of disaster. In Domboshava, near the national capital of Harare, a long line of people gathered at a well under the scorching sun. After filling their buckets, they set out on the challenging journey home. A fortunate few had bicycles to ease the burden, but many young children and mothers had no choice but to carry the heavy loads home on foot.

Though arduous, this routine marked progress. Previously, residents had to walk over ten kilometers (6.2 miles) to fetch water. The new well reduced the distance to just two or three kilometers.

Tino Chu (朱金財), head of Tzu Chi Zimbabwe and a resident of the country for nearly 30 years, spoke about the struggles faced by communities without functioning wells. Many people in such areas rely on rivers or remote pools for water, risking encounters with crocodiles, wild dogs, and venomous snakes. With no other options available, residents have no choice but to take their chances. What's worse, the water they collect—shared with wildlife and contaminated with waste—is often unsafe and has led to frequent cases of diarrhea and cholera outbreaks.

Chu recalled a harrowing incident in 2008 when he witnessed a cholera patient succumb to the disease just seven hours after the symptoms first appeared. That year, Zimbabwe recorded over 79,000 cholera cases and more than 3,700 deaths. Experiences and dire statistics like this prompted Chu to take action to make clean water more available. Since 2013, he has led a professional-level team specializing in drilling deep wells to provide clean underground water.

"Zimbabwe's underground water is generally very clean due to the lack of industrial pollution," Chu noted. However, drilling or repairing a well requires careful planning to ensure that there is an aquifer, the land is public, and the well is conveniently located near settlements. "I often tell our volunteers that although we are drilling or repairing wells, what we are truly doing is saving lives," Chu added. "If we don't take action, many lives could be lost to bacterial infections."

Chu's team began with just one well-drilling unit but expanded to five after another major cholera outbreak in 2023, which prompted five provincial governors to seek Chu's assistance. The team has also greatly improved its efficiency; while drilling a well once took 19 hours, it now takes just five.

The wells drilled by Tzu Chi's team are deep, providing safer and steadier water supplies than shallow wells or surface water pits. A single well can serve between 1,000 and 5,000 people. Chu's team has thus far drilled or repaired over 2,000 wells, benefiting at least two million people with access to clean, safe water. Each completed well is met with cheers and celebrations from the local community.

Despite these achievements, water remains a precious commodity and is used sparingly. A family of five typically gets by with just five to seven buckets of water a day, amounting to less than 20 liters per person. Even wastewater from dishwashing is repurposed for livestock. "Seeing chickens desperately waiting for this water is always shocking to me," Chu shared.

Chu's efforts to provide clean water in a country with severe water shortages align with the first target of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6: ensuring universal access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water. Tzu Chi, alongside other humanitarian organizations, is addressing water challenges in the world through sourcing, purification, and conservation. Zimbabwe is just one example of Tzu Chi's broader mission to provide water aid. In August 2024, for instance, the foundation launched its first slow sand filter facility outside Taiwan, in Mozambique, further expanding its efforts to improve access to safe drinking water.

Slow sand filtration

Residents of the Kura Tzu Chi Great Love Village in Sofala Province, Mozambique, cheered with joy before lining up to fill their containers with clean water from a newly installed filtration facility. A Tzu Chi team from Taiwan was present to officially inaugurate this much-welcomed addition to the village. Tzu Chi had built the housing village after Cyclone Idai, with residents gradually moving in starting in 2023. In 2024, a slow sand filter was added to ensure access to clean drinking water.

Xie Yao-lian (謝曜聯), the chief engineer for the project, explained that due to the lack of public electricity in the village, solar-powered pumps are used to draw well water into a storage tank, which

A resident of Tica, Nhamatanda District, Mozambique, draws water from a makeshift well, as witnessed by Tzu Chi volunteers providing care after Cyclone Idai.

CAI KAI-FAN





then feeds water into the slow sand filter for purification. However, the solar-powered system limits the filter's operation to daylight hours, making it essential for residents to use water judiciously. If the filter runs dry, it takes about a month to restore its purification process.

Slow sand filtration is not a new technology; it has been in use since the 19th century in England. Unlike modern tap water systems that use chlorination to disinfect water, slow sand filters utilize a natural biological process to remove harmful pathogens.

The Kura Village filtration system was made possible through a collaboration between Tzu Chi and the Taiwan Water Corporation, which provided technical expertise and guidance during construction. Chen Wen-hsiang (陳文祥), director of the corporation's water quality department, described the system's structure: layers of sand, pebbles, and bricks. After the system is filled with water, a maturation period allows a biofilm of microorganisms and algae to develop on the top layer of sand. This biofilm helps remove bacteria and impurities from the water.

"This ecosystem functions like an African rainforest," Chen explained, drawing an analogy to the law of the jungle. "Pathogenic bacteria, such as *Vibrio cholerae*, are consumed as food within this environment." In this natural process, organisms regulate one another, eliminating the need for chemical chlorination or replaceable filter cartridges. In addition to being all-natural, the system is highly effective. The coliform bacteria count in the water drops from over 7,000 CFU per 100 mL before filtration to fewer than 20 CFU per 100 mL after. This is nearing Taiwan's potable water standard of fewer than six CFU per 100 mL. This level of purification effectively reduces the risk of waterborne diseases like cholera.

Tzu Chi has previously employed advanced water purification technologies, such as ultrafiltration membranes to remove harmful bacteria and reverse osmosis systems to desalinate seawater. However, those systems require specialized materials and skilled personnel, making them less suitable for long-term use in developing regions. Slow sand filters, in contrast, offer a more practi-

Tzu Chi built a slow sand filter facility using natural methods to provide clean water.

XIE YAO-LIAN

Residents of Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe, fetch water from a well drilled by Tzu Chi.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI ZIMBABWE

Tzu Chi's Efforts to Address Water Challenges

Drought Assistance

• Water Cistern Construction

Between 1998 and 2009, Tzu Chi built **19,060** water cisterns across six counties in Gansu Province, China, benefiting **100,000** people.

• Well and Water Pump Projects

These initiatives have been carried out in Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Indonesia, and Nepal. Notably, Tzu Chi has drilled or repaired over **2,000** wells in Zimbabwe since 2013, improving water access for more than two million people.

Disaster Relief

• Water Supply and Purification Equipment

Tzu Chi has supplied water and purification equipment to disaster-affected areas in Venezuela, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, and Taiwan.

Improving Water Resources

• Slow Sand Filter

In 2024, Tzu Chi constructed its first slow sand filter outside Taiwan at the Kura Great Love Village in Sofala Province, Mozambique.

• Rainwater Harvesting

In collaboration with Love Binti International, Tzu Chi completed **11** rainwater collection systems in Uganda.

In Vietnam's Bến Tre Province, Tzu Chi distributed water storage tanks and **3,000** water filters.

• School Water Supply

In 2021, Tzu Chi provided **30** schools in Xide County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, China, with drinking water dispensers, benefiting **14,000** teachers and students.

cal solution, as they can be built using locally available materials and maintained with minimal training. “Regular scraping, sand replenishment, and basic upkeep are all that’s needed,” Chen emphasized.

Now that the first slow sand filtration unit in Mozambique is operational, more units are being planned. Tzu Chi is also introducing this technology to other regions, including Zimbabwe, Nepal, and India. In Zimbabwe, volunteers have applied for government approval and hope to begin construction soon.

Rainwater harvesting

Arid regions face a constant battle against drought. Yet, the opposite isn’t always better. The overabundance of water during typhoons or floods brings little relief, as murky floodwaters offer no safe drinking source. After Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and a catastrophic dam collapse in Laos, Tzu Chi volunteers stepped in to provide essential water purification and storage equipment. Every extra liter of clean water brought

a glimmer of hope in those challenging times.

Taiwan enjoys widespread access to tap water, and most residents rarely worry about shortages. However, the island’s steep mountainous terrain and short rivers mean that most rainfall quickly flows into the ocean, leaving only 18 percent available for storage and use. This low retention rate, coupled with pronounced wet and dry seasons, intensifies the challenges of water scarcity. The severe drought of 2021 remains a vivid reminder of the importance of integrating water-saving practices into daily life and the need to mobilize businesses, organizations, and the public to take collective action.

Lin Min-chao (林敏朝), a consultant for Tzu Chi’s construction department, recalled the origins of rainwater harvesting and water-saving

After Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in 2013, Tzu Chi supplied water purification equipment to help ensure clean water for affected residents in Tacloban.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE



facilities in Tzu Chi buildings. “We were in a meeting with Master Cheng Yen at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital one very rainy day in Hualien,” he recounted. “After the meeting, a volunteer pointed out that Hualien’s rainfall in one day exceeded what arid regions in Gansu, China, received in an entire year. Hearing this, the Master reminded us that rainwater is a precious natural resource we must cherish.”

This conversation took place in the late 1990s, a time when concepts like rainwater harvesting, water conservation, and green building were still new in Taiwan, with few industry precedents. Tzu Chi’s construction team decided to begin experimenting with these ideas at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital.

“A single toilet flush uses 12 liters of water,” Lin explained. “The water-saving toilets we introduced in Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital use only nine liters per flush, saving three liters with each use.” He also shared the team’s approach to rainwater harvesting. Traditionally, rainwater is directed to storage facilities at a building’s foundation level,

where it is pumped to water towers on upper floors. Tzu Chi’s team, however, opted for a decentralized system, placing storage tanks directly on upper floors. “For example, rainwater collected on the fifth floor flows down to the third floor, eliminating the need for pumps to bring it back up,” Lin said. This design removes the need for additional electricity to power pumps.

Improving water-use efficiency and ensuring sustainable freshwater supply and reuse are also targets under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). In 2000, the rainwater harvesting system at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital was completed and became operational, significantly reducing tap water consumption. It set a pioneering example for sustainable water management in Taiwan.

Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital in central Taiwan installed rainwater collection tanks to make use of valuable rainwater resources. Placing such tanks on upper floors conserves electricity by eliminating the need to pump the water.

HSIAO YIU-HWA



Larger Tzu Chi facilities constructed after 2000, including schools and hospitals, have incorporated water-saving and rainwater harvesting systems. Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, in particular, has excelled in water and energy conservation, earning the Green Building Silver Label from Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior in 2015.

"Initially, rainwater harvested at our hospital was solely used for watering plants, but now it serves both irrigation and air conditioning needs," stated Yu Xu-fu (余許富), from the engineering department of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. As he spoke, he crouched beneath some rooftop eaves and made his way to the top floor of the hospital's left-side building.

"There are 26 three-ton water tanks here," Yu said. The tanks are part of the hospital's overall water storage system. He added that in the past, rainwater was stored until all the tanks were full. However, with some of the water now diverted for air conditioning, the tanks rarely reach full capacity. "The air conditioning runs daily, requiring 500 to 600 tons of water during the summer," he noted.

Unlike the discreet rainwater harvesting system at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, most of the rainwater facilities at the Tzu Chi Nanbu Recycling Station, located in Nantou County, central Taiwan, are highly visible. The recycling station's water storage system includes nine tanks of various sizes and a six-ton underground cistern, with a total capacity of 96 tons. Together, these facilities can sustain the station for up to six months without rainfall.

Lin Jin-guo (林金國), who oversees the recycling station and designed its rainwater harvesting system, shared, "Our water reserves had dropped to around 50 tons by the end of July, but were replenished and even overflowed due to Typhoon Gaemi."

Efficient rainwater use has significantly reduced the station's reliance on tap water, with bills totaling a mere 200 Taiwanese dollars (US\$6.70) every two months. This impressive result prompted an inspection by the water company, which was initially skeptical. In the end, however, Lin was awarded the Water Conservation Public Welfare Award by the Ministry of Economic Affairs' Water Resources Agency. Now recognized as a water conservation expert, he attracts visits from government organizations and fellow Tzu Chi volunteers seeking to learn from his expertise. Lin has also helped implement rainwater harvesting systems at other recycling stations and the Jing Si Abode, the

Buddhist convent founded by Master Cheng Yen.

"When we first established the recycling station," Lin said, "we envisioned rainwater storage facilities not just for practical use, but also as an educational tool. We hoped to inspire others to cherish rainwater, a gift from nature." Now, their vision has become a reality.

Scarcer than they seem

With tap water widely available around the world, many people are unaware of the severity of water shortages and their global implications. The World Health Organization has warned that "as many as 700 million people are at risk of being displaced as a result of drought by 2030," underscoring the urgent need for greater awareness and action.

To raise awareness of the scarcity and value of water resources, Tzu Chi volunteer Jer Lin Chen (陳哲霖), a recipient of the National Environmental Education Award from Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration (now the Ministry of Environment), created an installation artwork called *Water Cube*, using a thousand PET bottles.

The thousand bottles in the *Water Cube* symbolize all the water on Earth. Of these, only 25 represent fresh water, while the rest signify salt water. Seventeen of the 25 bottles represent polar icebergs, and seven signify underground water. The amount of surface water available for human use is represented by just one bottle.

"Our Earth may seem to have abundant water, but only 0.1 percent is fresh water we can actually use," Chen explained. "The stark contrast between one bottle and one thousand bottles vividly illustrates the scarcity of water resources. That's why we must cherish water as if it were gold."

Water is the elixir of life for all creatures. As Dharma Master Cheng Yen says, "Water is the essence of life." Similarly, the United Nations has emphasized that "Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development, energy and food production, healthy ecosystems, and human survival itself."

As water scarcity becomes an ever-growing global crisis, it serves as a stark reminder of how fragile our access to this life-sustaining resource is. With millions already affected, the need for action has never been clearer. Tzu Chi's initiatives offer hope but also highlight the critical need for widespread, collective efforts to ensure clean water for all. In facing this challenge, we must remember that every action counts in safeguarding the future of our planet and its people. ❀



Lin Jin-guo, a volunteer at the Tzu Chi Nanpu Recycling Station in central Taiwan, designed a rainwater harvesting system using recycled water tanks of various sizes. The collected rainwater is filtered and used within the station, significantly reducing tap water consumption.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Water Scarcity and Crop Failure in Zimbabwe

Providing Wells and Hot Meals

By Xu Fei-li

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

In April 2024, Zimbabwe declared a state of disaster as an ongoing drought left half of the country's 16 million people facing food shortages. Tzu Chi is helping to address this crisis.

Our team from Da Ai TV, together with Tzu Chi's Africa Care Team, arrived in Zimbabwe in mid-August 2024. At volunteer Tino Chu's home in the capital city of Harare, we were greeted with a large pot of vegetable soup made with fresh corn, shiitake mushrooms, and radishes—enough to feed an army. The sight brought me nearly to tears.

What might seem like a simple meal elsewhere is a rare and precious treat in many African countries south of the Sahara. In Mozambique, our previous stop, fresh corn was nowhere to be found. Locals typically dry it, grind it into powder, and cook it into a bland, porridge-like paste mixed with water. This staple dish is not meant to delight the palate but to stave off hunger. For many in these regions, securing even the most basic sustenance is a daily struggle, and meals are dictated by survival rather than choice.

El Niño is a climate phenomenon that has existed for thousands of years, but its impacts on humanity have been significantly more pronounced since the 20th century, particularly in Zimbabwe. In April 2024, the Zimbabwean government declared a national disaster as an El Niño-induced drought triggered severe food shortages, leaving more than half of the country's 16 million people in need of food.

Food insecurity is not new in Zimbabwe. Over the years, Tzu Chi has worked to address this need, establishing 52 hot meal stations that now provide daily lunches to 16,000 people.

At a hot meal station in Domboshava, near Harare, we were deeply shocked witnessing the overwhelming need firsthand. The site teemed with people—some had walked up to two hours for a meal. Many families own farmland, but the relentless drought had caused crops like corn to fail.

The distributions primarily focus on children, so families often bring their little ones along. Mothers carried or led their children through the crowd, each child clutching a large lunchbox. Amid the hubbub, some children became separated from their families and were brought to Tzu Chi volunteers. Announcements were used to help reunite them. Despite tears streaming down their faces, the children clung tightly to their lunchboxes, aware that this meal might be their family's only food for the day.

At the Domboshava station, alongside the staple corn paste, Tzu Chi volunteers had prepared rice, potatoes, mashed beans, and cabbage—a feast by local standards. Volunteer Issac pointed out that due to the large crowds, distributing a single meal could take up to two hours.

Thousands of miles away in Taiwan, Dharma Master Cheng Yen viewed images of the massive crowds at Zimbabwe's hot meal stations when our news was broadcast. Deeply concerned, she sought a clearer understanding of the drought, the food shortages, and how Tzu Chi could optimize its aid efforts to better support those in need.



A single well can provide safe drinking water to hundreds of households within a three-kilometer radius. The aerial photo above shows a long line of people waiting to fetch water from a well repaired by Tzu Chi in Domboshava (photo by Li Wenjie). On average, a family requires five to seven buckets of water each day to meet their needs (photo by Xu Fei-li).



Water: scarce and precious

At Brother Chu’s home, we did not directly experience Zimbabwe’s food shortages, nor were we affected by the water shortage. According to Chu, tap water was supplied only once a week in Harare, “but no one knows which day it will come.” Even when it did arrive, the water often flowed brown from the pipes, making it nearly unusable.

During the severe cholera outbreak in 2008, contaminated water and food posed a significant risk. In response, Chu spent 12,000 U.S. dollars to dig a 55-meter (180-foot) well in his front yard to ensure his family had access to clean water. While the groundwater is clean and sufficient for daily needs, the family still purchases bottled water for drinking.

Originally from Taiwan, Chu has lived in Zimbabwe for nearly 30 years. While he has the financial means to secure a reliable water source, the same cannot be said for most locals. Repairing a well costs around 3,000 U.S. dollars and drilling a new one ranges from 7,000 to 8,000 dollars—unaffordable for the majority.

Understanding this hardship, Chu took action. Over the past 11 years, the Tzu Chi well-drilling team he leads has drilled or repaired more than 2,000 wells. When they receive reports of a broken well, the team heads out to carry out repairs.

We joined the team on one such trip. The journey was rough—the bumpy ride caused us considerable discomfort. As we left paved roads for dirt paths, the landscape turned stark, with sparse trees and vast stretches of barren land.

Our destination was a well in Mhondoro, built decades ago as a rest stop for travelers. It had been broken for 24 years. Upon arrival, Chu and his team dismantled the pump. An earlier survey by the team had revealed large beehives inside the well. After the local government removed the hives, the team returned to complete the repairs.

I was surprised to see female team members working alongside men, skillfully using large pliers to dismantle the pump. Chu had trained them in the necessary techniques. Once the pump was disassembled, the team identified the faulty parts and replaced them.

With training and experience, the team can now repair two wells in a single day. Beyond their technical work, they also connect with villagers, sharing Tzu Chi’s values and philosophy to inspire hope and resilience.

Under Chu’s leadership, the team has expanded from one unit to five, working entirely free of



Sitting on a dry riverbed, Tino Chu looks at a hole dug by local residents to collect water. In Zimbabwe, where a water supply infrastructure is lacking, repairing or drilling wells is a life-saving endeavor.

HLENGISILE JIYANE

charge to provide access to clean water. Their efforts have made the Tzu Chi well-drilling team a trusted name in Zimbabwe.

On our way back, we rode in the team’s vehicle, packed with heavy machinery. Though the ride was as rough as before, the volunteers’ spirits remained high. They clapped and sang, their determination to help Zimbabwe shining through.

A call for greater efforts

After we returned to Taiwan, Master De Hao (德浩) at the Jing Si Abode shared an unexpected fact with me: bananas, a common fruit in Taiwan, are extremely expensive in Zimbabwe. “Master Cheng Yen eats one banana a day to remind herself of Zimbabwe’s needs,” she said. During my visit, I hadn’t seen a single banana.

Master Cheng Yen has said that transforming Africa’s suffering is an incredibly difficult task. It requires not only external aid but also empowering locals to find their own strength. Only through collective effort can they face the challenges brought by climate change and other hardships.

We sincerely hope that one day, with everyone’s support, Zimbabwe’s people will have the infrastructure, food, and other resources they need to live dignified and thriving lives. ❁❁

Water Challenges in Gansu, China

Building Cisterns and Supporting Village Relocation

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Tzu Chi's initiatives in Gansu Province showcase how access to water can transform communities.

Among all of Tzu Chi's global humanitarian efforts addressing water-related challenges, the water cistern construction project in Gansu Province, China, stands out as an especially inspiring example. On the Loess Plateau, Tzu Chi volunteers witnessed firsthand how the newly built cisterns enabled rural residents to store water more effectively, significantly improving their quality of life. However, when rainfall sharply declined, water scarcity resurfaced in some assisted areas, prompting the foundation to support village relocation efforts. These initiatives highlight the vital link between water availability and community well-being.

Addressing water scarcity

"Without water, people cannot live decent lives, no matter how hard they try," said Lin Jing Xiu (林靜修) from the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development. Lin recounted that in the late 1990s, Wang Tuan-cheng (王端正), then vice president of the Tzu Chi Foundation, led a team to Tongwei and Huining counties in the southeastern part of Gansu Province, located on the Loess Plateau, to assess drought conditions and their impact on local farmers. The scope of the assessment later expanded to include Dongxiang, Jingyuan, Yongjing, and Guanghe counties.

The Loess Plateau is one of the world's most severely eroded regions. Situated at an altitude of 1,000 to 3,000 meters (3,280 to 9,840 feet), it suffers from low rainfall and high evaporation, resulting in severe water scarcity. This scarcity hindered irrigation and forced residents to endure grueling journeys, often walking three to four hours, to fetch water for their daily needs.

Farming in this region was a constant gamble against nature. Farmers, uncertain about the timing and amount of rainfall, would still till the land and sow seeds, hoping for sufficient rain and a bountiful harvest. Most of the time, however, their efforts yielded just enough to scrape by—or nothing at all. This inefficient farming further damaged the fragile vegetation, perpetuating a vicious cycle of land degradation and poverty. As a result, young and able-bodied individuals were forced to find work elsewhere. Many children were unable to continue their education, and those fortunate enough to attend school had to leave their homes and families to study at distant institutions.

Recognizing that extreme water scarcity was driving poverty, family separation, and other social problems, Tzu Chi decided to build durable, high-quality water cisterns and rainwater harvesting systems for residents. Volunteers consulted with a drought research institute at Lanzhou University to determine the most effective solutions. They ultimately decided to construct 30-cubic-meter (1,060-cubic-foot) spherical cement cisterns for households, paired with cement rainwater collection surfaces. The cement cisterns addressed the problems of traditional earthen cisterns, which were prone to leakage, collapse, and contamination.

Between 1998 and 2009, Tzu Chi constructed 19,060 water cisterns across six counties in Gansu Province, benefiting over 100,000 people. Although rainfall in the regions did not increase, the amount of water stored grew significantly. After just a few rainfalls, the 30-cubic-meter cisterns would be filled, providing enough water for



daily use and even some for irrigating farmland. Remarkably, these cisterns also helped young locals start families.

Women in drought-stricken areas in these regions often had to shoulder the burden of fetching water, a backbreaking task that continued into old age. As a result, young women were generally unwilling to marry into these water-scarce rural areas. “When we revisited the areas more than a decade later,” Lin Jing Xiu recalled, “the children we had helped were now parents themselves. I asked one woman why she decided to marry a man from this area, and she said, ‘Because his family has a water cistern!’”

Due to the improved living conditions brought about by Tzu Chi’s cisterns, they’ve become known locally as “wealth cisterns” and “happiness cisterns.”

Village relocation

Despite these efforts, climate change proved an overwhelming challenge. In areas like Ruoli Township in Jingyuan County, dwindling rainfall left many cisterns dry, forcing residents to resume their arduous water-collecting journeys.

To help, Tzu Chi partnered with the Gansu provincial government in 2008 to launch a village relocation initiative. The first relocation site was established in Liuchuan Township, also in Jingyuan County. Once a barren and sparsely populated area, Liuchuan was revitalized through government-built facilities that pumped water from the

Tzu Chi helped residents in Gansu Province, China, save scarce water by building water cisterns.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Yellow River for irrigation. This previously arid land was transformed into a thriving agricultural and livestock hub for Gansu Province, with convenient highway and railway access further solidifying its status as an ideal relocation site.

To ensure a smooth transition, Tzu Chi collaborated with local authorities to develop a well-rounded community. The new community provided not only housing but also education, employment opportunities, and agricultural resources to support sustainable livelihoods.

In January 2011, the Laiyao Tzu Chi New Village was inaugurated, providing homes for over a thousand former Ruoli residents across 210 households. By November 2015, a second site, the Baita Tzu Chi New Village in Wuhe Township, was completed, offering a fresh start to 300 families from five townships: Dongsheng, Jing'an, Shimen, Shuanglong, and Wuhe.

With access to irrigation from the Yellow River, life improved significantly for the residents. Freed from the burden of collecting water, they were able to focus on more productive endeavors. The relocation efforts also fostered ecological awareness, inspiring initiatives to restore the original land by converting farmland into forests. After residents vacated their homes on the Loess Plateau, reforestation teams moved in to rejuvenate the parched terrain, planting vegetation and installing drip irrigation systems to gradually transform the landscape into a verdant expanse.

For those using Tzu Chi-built cisterns and those who have begun new lives in the relocation villages, access to sufficient and clean water has been life-changing. It stands as a testament to the value of water and serves as a call to action against the growing challenges of climate change. ☸

More than 200 households from Ruoli Township in Jingyuan County, once plagued by drought, relocated to the Laiyao Tzu Chi New Village in Liuchuan Township. Although water scarcity is no longer an issue, residents remain mindful of conserving water in their daily lives.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE



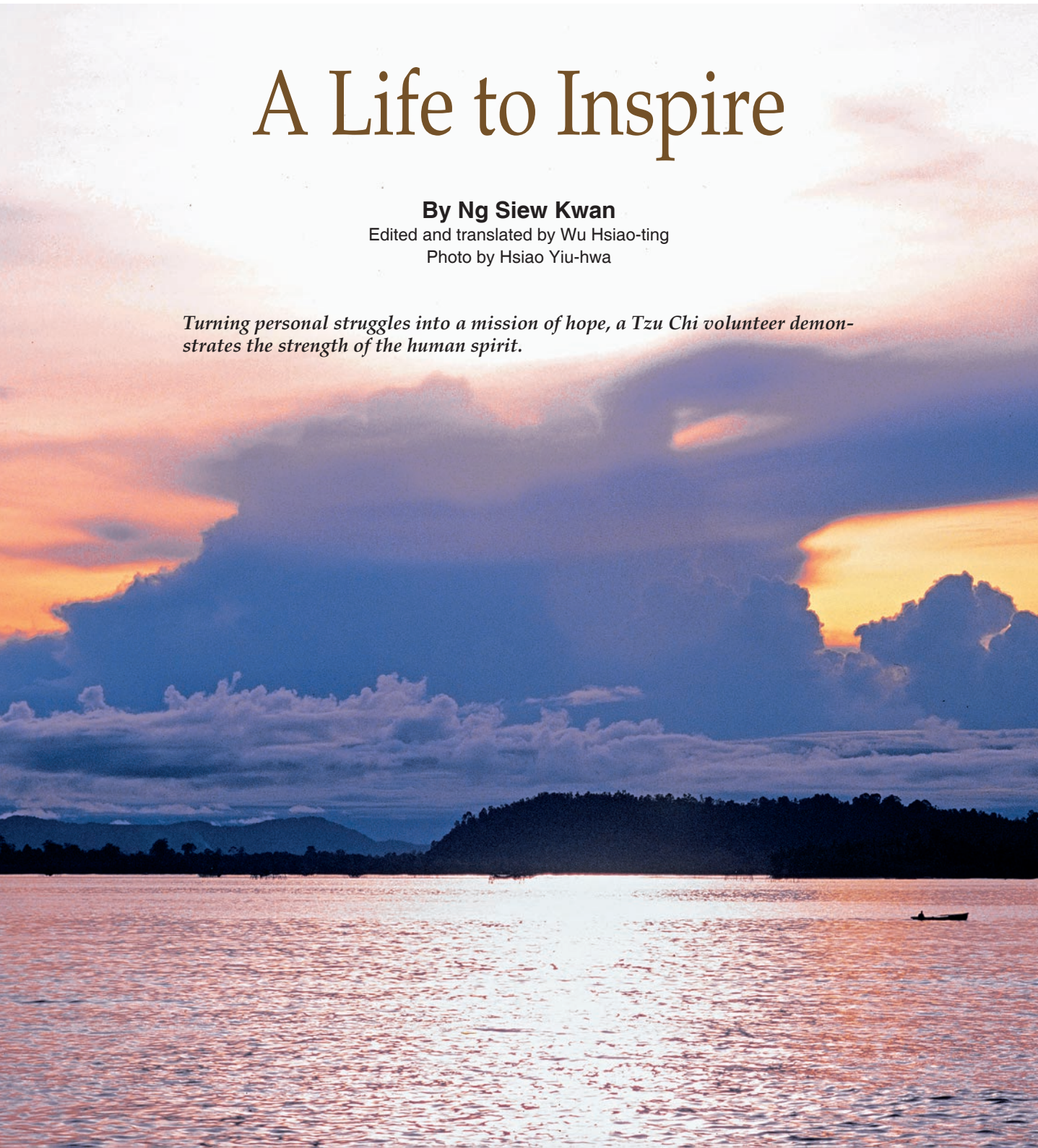
A Life to Inspire

By Ng Siew Kwan

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Turning personal struggles into a mission of hope, a Tzu Chi volunteer demonstrates the strength of the human spirit.





In December 2024, I traveled from Malaysia to Taiwan to receive my Tzu Chi volunteer certification. I may be physically limited—unable to walk, control my bodily functions, or get in and out of a car without assistance—but these challenges will not hinder my desire to make a difference.

My life changed dramatically in 2020 after an accident left me paralyzed, shattering my career in the food and beverage industry and robbing me of my mobility. My wife’s steadfast support kept me from sinking into despair, but tragedy struck again when she passed away from heart disease. Just two weeks later, my child was diagnosed with ADHD. It felt as though the sky had crumbled.

Prior to this, when I was still in the food and beverage industry, my life had revolved around profit. I valued money above all else and strongly disapproved of my sister’s involvement with Tzu Chi. My perspective began to shift during my first visit to the Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall in Kuala Lumpur. An elderly woman offered to push my wheelchair up a ramp. My wheelchair and I together weighed over a hundred kilograms (220 pounds), so I asked her how she could possibly manage. She simply replied, “I can do it!” Her sincerity moved me, and Tzu Chi’s warmth and sense of family left a deep impression on me.

During an online sharing session with Tzu Chi’s headquarters in Hualien, Master Cheng Yen said to me, “Do not give up. Use your life to inspire others.” At the time, I didn’t fully understand her words. Later, a volunteer took me to visit a cancer patient. When I shared my story, the patient said, “Brother, after hearing your story, I feel my problems are no longer problems.”

In that instant, a profound realization dawned upon me: I still possessed the means to contribute—my hands and my voice. I joined Tzu Chi’s volunteer training and committed myself to fulfilling the path Master Cheng Yen envisioned for me. I enrolled in university to study social work and psychology, and also learned to drive a specially adapted vehicle—all to better equip myself to help others.

Today, I stand as a testament to resilience, proving that even in the darkest times, one can rise above adversity. My hope is to inspire others to do the same. I am forever grateful to Master Cheng Yen for never giving up on me. Now, I can proudly declare: I am a Tzu Chi volunteer. ❀

Homes of Hope

The Silaunja Great Love Village in India

By Cai Bai-qiu, Lin Jing-jun, and Zhu Xiu-lian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Rui-fen

Their homes had been transformed from straw huts to sturdy, thoughtfully designed houses. Stepping through the doors of their new homes now feels like a dream come true!

In the village of Silaunja, Bodh Gaya, India, 36 new cement houses now stand where simple straw huts once stood. Families couldn't even wait for the official handover ceremony of the Silaunja Great Love Village on October 27, 2024, before they got busy decorating their new homes. Outside House No. 20, Jayanti Kumari was adorning her bamboo-fenced yard with potted plants. As neighbors admired her small but charming garden, a truck arrived carrying wardrobes. These housewarming gifts from Tzu Chi sparked curiosity and excitement, with neighbors gathering around and some even reaching out to touch the furniture—items they had never owned before.

To enhance the village landscape, horticultur-

ist Ramashish Mali was invited to teach residents how to plant golden dewdrop saplings provided by Tzu Chi. The plant was selected for its drought resistance, ease of cultivation, and sharp thorns, which protect it from being eaten by goats, commonly kept by the villagers. Rather than working individually, the residents came together, helping each other as they moved from house to house. They shared tips on pruning, fertilizing, and caring for the plants as they worked, adding vitality to their community and fostering hope for a brighter future.

Before construction began in February 2024, the area was dotted with dim, low-roofed straw huts. Reflecting on those times, Jayanti said,





“When it rained lightly, our house would leak. When it rained heavily, it would flood. Either way, everything inside would get wet.” Her tone brightened as she added, “Now, with these sturdy, beautiful houses, we must take good care of them and keep them clean!” Resident Rupminiya Devi also expressed appreciation for her new home, especially for the indoor toilet, which freed her from having to go to the riverbank or secluded outdoor spots to relieve herself.

Although residents now cherish their homes, some were initially skeptical about the project, doubting that such a “gift from heaven” could be real. Savitri Devi, from House No. 5, didn’t agree to clear the foundation of her old home until July.

Each house in the Silaunja Great Love Village features two bedrooms, a living room, and a bathroom, along with space for a garden. Residents began planting and beautifying their yards even before the official handover ceremony.

By October, however, she was warmly inviting volunteers to visit her new house, joyfully saying, “I am so happy to welcome the New Year in my new home.”

From huts to homes

In March 2023, Tzu Chi volunteers from Malaysia and Singapore established a base in

Bodh Gaya—the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment—to support underprivileged local communities through charitable, medical, and educational initiatives. They observed that most rural residents lived in straw or mud houses with bamboo or tree-branch roofs. During the rainy season, plastic sheets were added to minimize leaks. These huts had low eaves, about 100 centimeters (3.3 feet) high, forcing residents to stoop when entering or exiting. Inside, the homes were dim and simple, often lacking windows. A single wooden plank bed typically accommodated four or five family members. Clothes hung from ropes along the walls, while small goats occasionally wandered through the living spaces. Kitchens were equipped with earthen stoves, and families

sat directly on the floor to eat their meals.

Nearly every household had a manual water pump for cleaning cookware, preparing food, and bathing—but no bathroom. The absence of sanitary facilities forced residents to relieve themselves in secluded areas, which compromised hygiene and increased the risk of disease.

Located along the Niranjana River, Silaunja became the first community where Tzu Chi built a housing village for impoverished local residents. After obtaining the necessary permits, the construction team rebuilt homes for 36 families who held valid land ownership certificates. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on February 25, 2024.

Contractor Azim Khan and his team arrived at



the site on March 10 to begin preparations for the project. On March 23, residents signed legal agreements in the presence of a lawyer, consenting to the design, layout, and facilities of their new homes. Building materials arrived in April, and several villagers were hired to help construct their own houses.

Azim would invite Tzu Chi volunteers to join him on-site and introduce Tzu Chi's missions when he distributed wages to his workers. He hoped to inspire them to give to the needy, which made him happier than earning profits himself. Beh Chun How (馬俊豪), Tzu Chi's construction project engineer from Malaysia, visited the site daily to monitor the construction and ensure the quality of the project. Smiling, he noted that Azim

likely made little profit from the Tzu Chi project and expressed deep gratitude for his wholehearted support.

Over eight months, the construction team endured scorching heat hitting 40°C (104°F) and downpours during the rainy season. They ultimately completed the 36 homes. Each house, measuring 40 square meters (430 square feet), includes a living room and two bedrooms. With ceilings three meters (9.8 feet) high, the homes provide much-needed space, eliminating the cramped conditions of the old dwellings. Windows throughout ensure light and ventilation, while raised foundations protect against flooding during the rainy season. Respecting local customs, which regard toilets as unclean, the bathrooms were designed with doors that open to the outside.

The interiors balance practicality and appeal. Floors are covered with 60-by-60-centimeter quartz tiles, making them easy to clean and maintain. Kitchen walls feature decorative tiles with an English teapot design, adding a charming touch. A water pump near the front door ensures convenient access to water, while padlocks on doors reflect local preferences and are easy to replace. Each home has an independent drainage system and pre-installed wiring conduits, enabling residents to easily connect to the utility pole outside to obtain electricity. The community also includes a septic system and wastewater treatment facilities. Space around each house was left for residents to beautify with greenery.

Housewarming gifts

Tzu Chi Singapore Deputy CEO Khoo Kean Yee (邱建義) and other volunteers prepared housewarming gifts for the residents before the handover ceremony. The gifts included blankets, beds, dining tables and chairs, wardrobes, cookware, tableware, stoves, toiletries, cleaning tools, mats, and saplings. Additional items included blessing cards from Dharma Master Cheng Yen,

Before moving into the Great Love Houses, most residents lived in simple straw or mud huts with roofs made of bamboo or tree branches. These homes offered little protection, with leaks a frequent problem during the rainy season. During the day, natural light served as their primary source for illumination. Cooking was done on earthen stoves in their kitchens, often requiring them to squat while preparing meals.

YONG MUN FEI





wooden carvings of the Chinese character for “love,” and framed Jing Si aphorisms reading, “Speak kind words, think good thoughts, do good deeds, and walk the right path.”

Khoo, who had been involved in the construction project from the start, felt a deep sense of fulfillment to see how the new homes were improving the residents’ quality of life. Reflecting on the process, he said, “Aside from the complexities of construction, the most challenging aspect was communicating with the residents. They have their own needs and cultural traditions, and we did our best to accommodate their wishes while balancing them with our considerations. The housing we provided focused on practicality—neither extravagant nor overly simple.”

As volunteers prepared the housewarming gifts, they brought a table to the home of Sajina Kumari to ensure it suited the villagers’ needs. “If I had this table, I’d place it in the living room and

A resident cleans her new home, the first modern house she has ever lived in.

YONG MUN FEI

use it as a dining table,” Sajina said. When asked about chairs, she added, “I prefer chairs with backrests—they’re more comfortable.”

Sajina lives with her mother-in-law, Pyari Devi, and seven other family members. Each morning, Pyari herds their goats to graze and then returns to dry cow dung. “The cow dung needs about a week to dry,” Pyari said with a smile as she spoke with the visiting volunteers. With winter approaching, dried branches, palm leaves, and cow dung—free alternatives to fuel—were essential for cooking and heating for villagers who could not afford gas.

Pyari recalled moving to Silaunja 12 years earlier, clearing weeds and shrubs to build a house from wood and mud. That home required annual

repairs with fresh mud and was a stark contrast to their new one. "I'm so happy to have this house with tiles and flooring—it's something I never imagined in my life," she said. "I clean and mop every day, and I avoid cooking indoors to keep the house clean and tidy." She contentedly added that the house had windows that let in fresh air. Like her daughter-in-law, she appreciated the refreshing breeze that flowed through the house.

Building his own home

Jamuna Manjhi, a 49-year-old foreman of the Great Love Village construction crew, is more than a worker—he's also a proud homeowner in the new community. After their old house was demolished to make way for their new one, his family of seven lived in a cramped temporary hut with a door only 120 centimeters (3.9 feet) high, requiring them to stoop just to enter. Those challenging days are now a memory of the past.

Jamuna works hard to support his family. Before his job as a foreman, he took whatever work he could find, from construction work to market labor. "As long as there is work, I take it. I never stay idle," he said. While helping build homes for others in other places, he often dreamed of having a decent home for his own family. But that dream had always felt out of reach, something he thought he might never achieve in his lifetime.

That changed when Tzu Chi brought hope to the village. "With Dharma Master Cheng Yen's blessings, we got a house," Jamuna shared. "It feels as though a divine presence came to our village, bringing us an unexpected blessing that ended our suffering." Now, with a sturdy and beautifully painted home, Jamuna promised to keep it as clean as he keeps himself.

Rajmani Devi, Jamuna's wife, reflected on the changes that had unfolded in Silaunja. She admitted that she had doubts that the housing project would come to fruition, even after the groundbreaking ceremony. "But now that the houses are finished, this is something I never could have imagined!" she exclaimed.

She vividly recalled the rainy day when Tzu Chi volunteers visited their old home. Her kitchen roof was leaking, and water pooled on the floor. As she cooked pancakes, the dim light bulb went out, leaving the room in near darkness except for the flickering light of the gas stove. She was used to it, so she didn't stop. She just kept pouring the batter and spreading it into a large pancake.

Volunteers from India, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam present house keys and housewarming gifts to residents of the Silaunja Great Love Village during the handover ceremony on October 27.





Rajmani is now filled with joy, no longer having to worry about leaks and being able to cook and sleep peacefully. "With this beautiful new home," she said, "I'm excited about this new chapter in my life!"

With their new house, their dream of escaping poverty and living a stable life is moving in the right direction. Jamuna shared his hopes for the future: "I dream of my children learning English and computers, building bright futures. My son works away from home to earn money, but my daughter is still studying. If she can complete her education, it would be wonderful."

Jamuna's role as foreman ended with the completion of the Great Love Village on October 1. However, as Bodh Gaya entered its peak tourist and pilgrimage season, he found work selling

Every household in the Great Love Village hung up decorative lights to celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights symbolizing the triumph of light over darkness.

YONG MUN FEI

clothes at the market, working 12-hour days for a month to earn 14,000 rupees (US\$165). He shared his hope that Tzu Chi would continue building homes for the poor in India and said he would gladly work as a laborer to support such efforts. "This is not just for me, but for the happiness of others too," he said.

Unveiling a new chapter in life

The Silaunja Great Love Village is a continuation of Tzu Chi's long-standing commitment to



providing housing for those in need. Over 20 years ago, the foundation undertook its first housing project in India. After a devastating magnitude-7.9 earthquake struck Gujarat in January 2001, leaving nearly 400,000 people homeless, Tzu Chi partnered with CARE France to build 227 homes in Kotda, Anjar Taluka. These homes were completed and handed over to affected families in May 2002.

Inspired by Master Cheng Yen's aspiration to give back to Bodh Gaya, a significant location in the Buddha's life, volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia began serving the area in early 2023. Supported by fundraising efforts from volunteers around the world, they have honored the Buddha's teachings by working to create meaningful change in the local community.

Residents make the "Happy Face" gesture taught by Tzu Chi volunteers, greeting their future with smiles after receiving their new homes.

On October 27, 2024, the completed houses in the Silaunja Great Love Village were officially handed over to its residents, marking a milestone in the volunteers' work in Bodh Gaya. Flowers now bloom in front of the homes, symbolizing the start of a vibrant new chapter. Filled with hope for the future, residents expressed their gratitude. Jamuna Manjhi described the transformation, saying, "Whenever the wind blows, cool air flows into the house, bringing comfort. Every time I step into my home, it feels like a dream come true—a dream realized thanks to Master Cheng Yen." ❀



Mae Yao, a flood-affected area along the Kok River in northern Thailand

SINGHARAT CHUNCHOM




After Super Typhoon Yagi

By *Tzu Chi Monthly* editorial staff, Budsara Sombut, Lin Jing Xiu,
and Daw Thida Khin

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Typhoon Yagi formed over the waters east of the Philippines on August 30, 2024. It made landfall in the country as a low-intensity typhoon on September 2, quickly traversing Luzon Island. Yagi intensified after entering the South China Sea before sweeping across China, Vietnam, and Laos. Heavy rains caused severe damage in Thailand and Myanmar. The typhoon was Asia's strongest in 2024, affecting over 20 million people and leaving widespread devastation in its wake.



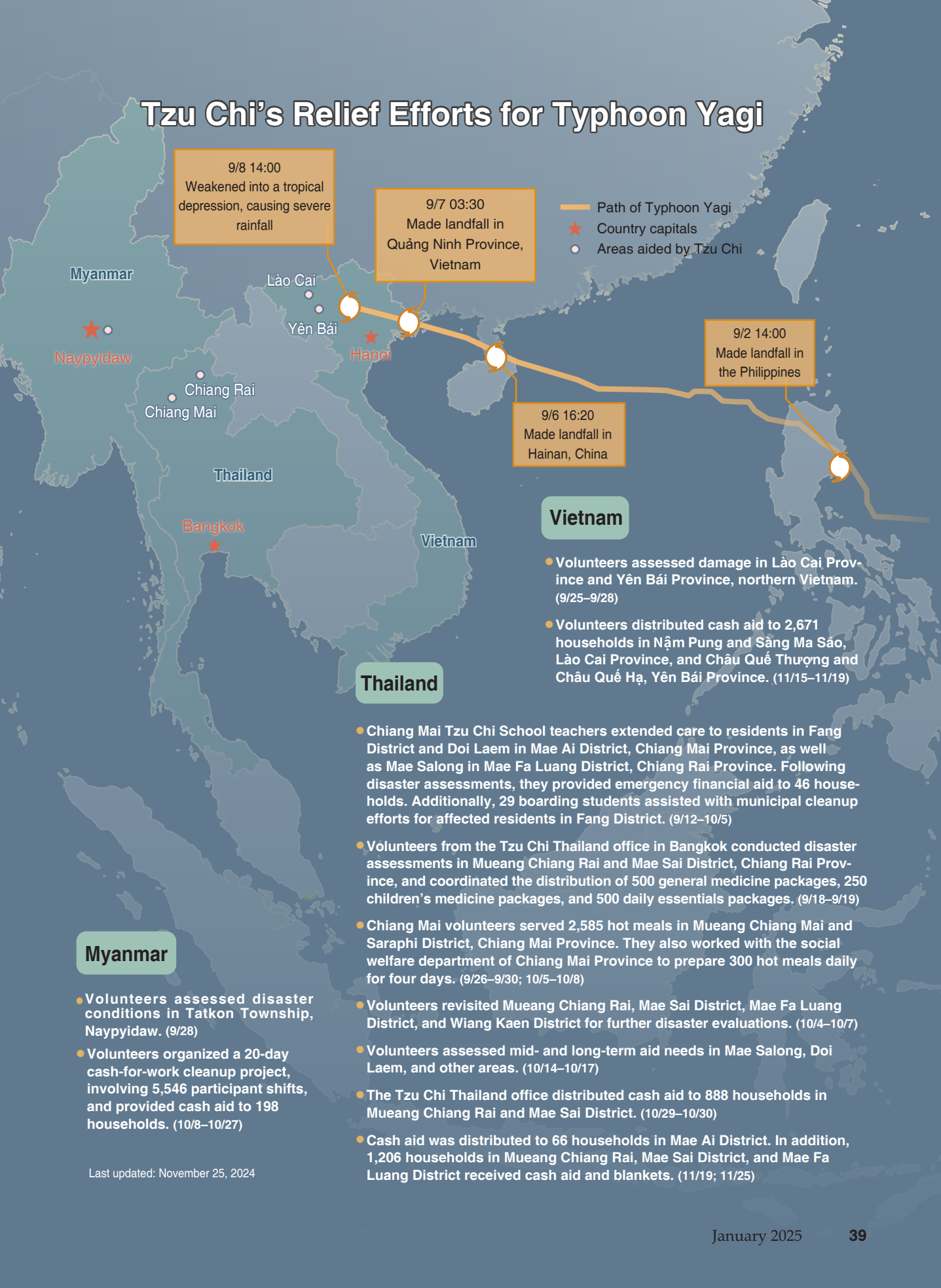
Typhoon Yagi made a near 90-degree turn on its path, sparing Taiwan but wreaking havoc across Southeast Asia. On September 2, 2024, it made landfall on Luzon Island in the Philippines, bringing landslides and floods. A major landslide occurred in the province of Rizal, just 25 kilometers (15 miles) from Manila. The Philippines endure an average of 20 typhoons every year, so local Tzu Chi volunteers have developed a rapid disaster response system. Following Typhoon Yagi, they distributed rice and other supplies to over 1,100 families and provided construction material vouchers to families in two severely affected barangays in Antipolo, helping them repair their homes.

Yagi made landfall in Hainan, China, on September 6, and gradually weakened as it moved into Vietnam. What was left of the storm combined with the region's heavy rainy season while crossing Mainland Southeast Asia toward the Indian Ocean, triggering severe flooding and landslides in Myanmar and Thailand. Rivers overflowed, and landslides buried farmland in mountainous areas. By the time it was over, the disaster had claimed over 500 lives across Southeast Asia.

The government of Vietnam declared it the strongest typhoon to hit the country in 30 years. In its aftermath, Tzu Chi volunteers assessed damage in the northern provinces of Lào Cai and Yên Bái, where most victims were impoverished farmers. Some homes were nearly destroyed, with rebuilding nearly impossible for those living in disaster-prone areas. With government assistance, residents in those areas prepared to relocate. In mid-November, Tzu Chi provided cash aid to over 2,600 affected households to help them through this critical period.

In Thailand, the northern provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai suffered the worst flooding in 80 years. Teachers and students from Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School were the first to respond, assessing damage, distributing aid, and assisting with cleanup. Volunteers from the Tzu Chi office in Bangkok soon followed, surveying conditions and providing relief in affected regions. They set up two distribution centers in mid-September in Mueang Chiang Rai and Mae Sai District, both in Chiang Rai Province. With the help of village leaders, they distributed daily necessities and cleaning tools. Volunteers also delivered supplies to remote villages in Mae Sai, areas often overlooked in relief efforts due to their small populations. They transported goods by truck and

Tzu Chi's Relief Efforts for Typhoon Yagi



— Path of Typhoon Yagi
 ★ Country capitals
 ● Areas aided by Tzu Chi

9/8 14:00
 Weakened into a tropical depression, causing severe rainfall

9/7 03:30
 Made landfall in Quảng Ninh Province, Vietnam

9/2 14:00
 Made landfall in the Philippines

9/6 16:20
 Made landfall in Hainan, China

Vietnam

- Volunteers assessed damage in Lào Cai Province and Yên Bái Province, northern Vietnam. (9/25–9/28)
- Volunteers distributed cash aid to 2,671 households in Nậm Pung and Sàng Ma Sáo, Lào Cai Province, and Châu Quế Thượng and Châu Quế Hạ, Yên Bái Province. (11/15–11/19)

Thailand

- Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School teachers extended care to residents in Fang District and Doi Laem in Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province, as well as Mae Salong in Mae Fa Luang District, Chiang Rai Province. Following disaster assessments, they provided emergency financial aid to 46 households. Additionally, 29 boarding students assisted with municipal cleanup efforts for affected residents in Fang District. (9/12–10/5)
- Volunteers from the Tzu Chi Thailand office in Bangkok conducted disaster assessments in Mueang Chiang Rai and Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province, and coordinated the distribution of 500 general medicine packages, 250 children's medicine packages, and 500 daily essentials packages. (9/18–9/19)
- Chiang Mai volunteers served 2,585 hot meals in Mueang Chiang Mai and Saraphi District, Chiang Mai Province. They also worked with the social welfare department of Chiang Mai Province to prepare 300 hot meals daily for four days. (9/26–9/30; 10/5–10/8)
- Volunteers revisited Mueang Chiang Rai, Mae Sai District, Mae Fa Luang District, and Wiang Kaen District for further disaster evaluations. (10/4–10/7)
- Volunteers assessed mid- and long-term aid needs in Mae Salong, Doi Laem, and other areas. (10/14–10/17)
- The Tzu Chi Thailand office distributed cash aid to 888 households in Mueang Chiang Rai and Mae Sai District. (10/29–10/30)
- Cash aid was distributed to 66 households in Mae Ai District. In addition, 1,206 households in Mueang Chiang Rai, Mae Sai District, and Mae Fa Luang District received cash aid and blankets. (11/19; 11/25)

Myanmar

- Volunteers assessed disaster conditions in Tatkon Township, Naypyidaw. (9/28)
- Volunteers organized a 20-day cash-for-work cleanup project, involving 5,546 participant shifts, and provided cash aid to 198 households. (10/8–10/27)

Last updated: November 25, 2024



Volunteers in Vietnam distribute pastries to residents of Nậm Pung, Lào Cai Province, during a late September 2024 trip to assess damage caused by Typhoon Yagi.

NGUYEN DINH HUNG

While traveling to Nậm Pung in Lào Cai Province to assess conditions after Typhoon Yagi, volunteers encountered several landslides that had blocked the roads, making car access impossible. They had to walk or use motorcycles to continue their journey.

NGUYEN DINH HUNG





trekked into hard-to-reach areas to ensure no one was left behind.

In early October, volunteers returned to four districts in Chiang Rai Province to conduct further damage assessments and distribute aid. They hoped to reach as many people in need as possible. Accompanying them on part of their journey was an assistant to a village head in Mae Sai District, Saowalak, whose own home had been severely damaged. With her guidance, volunteers delivered supplies to affected residents. “My parents and other family members are busy restoring our house,” Saowalak shared, “but they fully support me going out to help the villagers. Although we were strangers before, you have shown us so much love, reaching out to us in our time of need. We are truly grateful and hold you in great affection.”

In addition to distributing relief goods, volunteers provided cash aid to over 2,100 affected households in October and November to support their rebuilding efforts. At the same time, they evaluated medium- and long-term reconstruction plans for Doi Laem in Mae Ai District and Mae Salong in Mae Fa Luang District. In Doi Laem, 28 households needed land to rebuild their homes. During one visit, volunteers were accompanied by Suradej, then deputy village head, to the

Residents of Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, pose with cash aid provided by Tzu Chi.

PINTICHA JANSUKSRI

mountaintop to survey the government’s proposed construction site. The official expressed gratitude for Tzu Chi’s dedication, noting that they were the only organization so far to have made the climb to the mountaintop to carefully assess the proposed land for rebuilding. He sincerely hoped to collaborate with the foundation to help villagers rebuild their homes.

The devastation from Typhoon Yagi was even more widespread in Myanmar than in Thailand. Floodwaters submerged low-lying areas in Naypyidaw, Mandalay Region, Bago Region, and Shan State. A total of 64 townships nationwide were affected, and essential infrastructure like roads and bridges sustained severe damage. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers provided emergency cash aid and launched a cash-for-work cleanup project in Tatkon Township, Naypyidaw. This initiative encouraged local residents to collaborate in clearing debris and restoring their villages, helping to speed up recovery.

Daw Thida Khin (李金蘭), head of Tzu Chi Myanmar, shared her experiences conducting relief efforts in Tatkon Township. In some areas,



Residents of Tatkon Township, Naypyidaw, Myanmar, work together to clean up in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi.

HEIN PYAE SONE



Buddhist monk U Thiha Nyar Na addresses participants of a Tzu Chi cash-for-work cleanup project in Tatkon Township, Myanmar. He provided significant assistance to Tzu Chi volunteers in their relief efforts in response to Typhoon Yagi's impact.

HEIN PYAE SONE

houses were wrecked and paths were blocked by trees that had been swept down from the mountains. Overwhelmed village heads, unsure of where to begin the cleanup efforts, admitted to feeling helpless. To inspire them and other local residents, Daw Thida Khin and her fellow volunteers shared Master Cheng Yen's teaching: with

unity and determination, even small ants can move great mountains—a principle central to Tzu Chi's spirit.

At first hesitant, the villagers soon recognized the volunteers' sincere intentions and joined the cleanup effort. They collected garbage using baskets and plastic bags salvaged from the debris, working together to restore their community. The cleanup in Tatkon Township lasted 20 days, ending on October 27. Residents contributed nearly 5,550 work shifts, significantly aiding the recovery of the area. Afterward, Tzu Chi launched a second phase of aid, distributing relief supplies to further support victims.

Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to global climate change. The areas impacted by Typhoon Yagi, primarily agricultural nations, suffered significant crop losses that threatened food security, drove up food prices, and deepened poverty and hunger. Severe damage to infrastructure further complicated relief efforts. Tzu Chi volunteers remain committed to standing by affected communities, helping them navigate their challenging journey of recovery. ❀

A Quiet Ripple

By Christina Wu

Graphic by Su Fang-pei

A stranger's smile sparked reflections on the quiet power of kindness.

For a time, on my way to work every day, I often passed a middle-aged woman who seemed to work at a nearby hospital. Though we never exchanged words, I found myself looking forward to seeing her because she always carried a trace of a smile. On hectic workdays, when most people appeared harried and burdened, her calm, cheerful demeanor stood out. I often wondered, "Why is she in such a good mood every day? Is she naturally cheerful?" Whatever the reason, her smile felt like a gift.

Though it might not have seemed significant to others, her smile always uplifted me, giving me a sense of hope that I carried with me that day. My mind was often consumed by work-related worries and looming deadlines, but her smile was like a breath of fresh air—cutting through the fog and lightening my load in a most unexpected way. It also encouraged me to work on cultivating more positivity in my own life.

In a world filled with struggles and uncertainties, her smile reminded me that even the smallest of gestures can have a profound impact. A simple, unintentional act can create ripples of hope, offering a meaningful lift to someone's spirits. This experience reinforced my belief in the quiet power of kindness and underscored how each of us can contribute to positivity, helping others see the silver linings behind the clouds.

Her smile also brought to mind Buddhist teachings on the three types of giving: the giving of material goods, the giving of the Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. Material giving involves offering physical or financial resources to meet others' needs. The giving of the Dharma means sharing wisdom or teachings that guide others toward inner peace. The giving of fearlessness entails providing comfort and support to help others overcome their fears.

Even without material wealth, anyone can give. Once, when I shared with my young niece



the importance of giving, she said, "I'm still young and don't have money. What can I give?" I told her that a smile, a kind word, or an encouraging gesture is also a form of giving—and that it can have an impact that surprises you.

We often underestimate our ability to make a difference, believing our small actions are too insignificant to matter in a vast, imperfect world. But the woman's smile taught me otherwise. However unintentional it might have been, her smile planted a meaningful seed in my mind and inspired me to pass that same positivity and warmth to others.

This is often how a cycle of goodness begins. The starting point may seem insignificant or unexpected, but it ripples outward in ways we may never fully anticipate or see. So, why not start your own ripple?





A traditional Chinese medicine practitioner checks a patient's pulse during the November 2024 free clinic.



Life-Changing Care

A Free Medical Clinic in Cambodia

**By Tan Kim Hion, Sia Ah Tong, Kong Siew Yen, Chan Shi Yih, and
Chong Pei Fen**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Sam Pin Fook

*A Tzu Chi free clinic provided much-needed relief in rural Cambodia,
offering services ranging from cataract surgeries to dental treatments.*

Every day for a week leading up to the Tzu Chi free clinic, tuk-tuk driver Sak Kosal navigated the streets of Bavel District, Battambang Province, Cambodia, to promote the event. He eagerly announced through his loudspeaker, "From November 1 to 3, there will be a free clinic offering ophthalmology, dentistry, and more!" His tuk-tuk was adorned with a banner advertising the clinic, and he distributed flyers along his route. He also personally informed his friends and neighbors about the event and planned to seek treatment himself. "We are too poor. Seeing a doctor is very expensive, and we can't afford it," he shared.

Meanwhile, a flower vendor shared her difficulties with Tzu Chi volunteers. She had been suffering from rapid heartbeats and difficulty breathing but had avoided seeking medical care. "My child was born with a heart condition and needs frequent hospital visits," she explained. "I have no money left for my own treatment. At last, free care is here!"

Serving a great need

Cambodia, ravaged by years of conflict and prone to natural disasters, is a key focus for the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO is collaborating with the Cambodian government, international partners, and NGOs to address the nation's health challenges.

Limited medical resources and prohibitive costs often prevent residents in remote areas from accessing medical care. To help alleviate this issue, Tzu Chi organized a free clinic in early November 2024 in Battambang Province. Medical professionals and support volunteers from Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia brought equipment and medications, joining local healthcare workers and volunteers to provide services in internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, ophthalmology, dentistry, and traditional Chinese medicine. The clinic recorded nearly 3,500 patient visits over the course of three days.

The clinic operated at two locations: Bavel Referral Hospital served as the main site, while ophthalmology treatments were conducted at Battambang Provincial Hospital. Sixty-four-year-old Nhem Phoeuk, the chief of a village near Bavel District, traveled to the ophthalmology site for surgery aboard a bus rented by Tzu Chi. A year earlier, he had undergone cataract surgery on his right eye at a private hospital but couldn't afford treatment for his left eye. The free clinic finally made the long-awaited procedure possible. "I felt

comfortable lying on the operating table," he said with relief. "It was over in no time—so quick!"

Another patient, Pen Voeurn, felt fortunate and deeply grateful for Tzu Chi's assistance. "I couldn't see the road [due to my eye condition]," she said. "I was so worried about falling, getting injured, and becoming a burden to my family. But after my cataract surgery at the free clinic, the doctor reassured me that my vision would gradually improve." Stroking a volunteer's face, she happily added, "Now I can see the outline of your face—you're so handsome!"

Dr. Heng Ton, an ophthalmologist at Battambang Provincial Hospital with 20 years of experience, shared insights into Cambodia's healthcare challenges with Tzu Chi volunteers. He explained that most medical graduates prefer to work in larger cities like Phnom Penh, where salaries are higher, leaving hospitals in less developed areas understaffed. Even government-run hospitals in these areas often charge fees that are unaffordable for many citizens.

As a result, low-income individuals often rely on support from non-profit organizations for medical treatment or hope to raise funds through community efforts. Dr. Heng expressed his willingness to care for impoverished patients but admitted that his efforts alone were not enough. He commended Tzu Chi's free medical services as a much-needed blessing for many locals. At the same time, he noted the government's recent efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure and reduce medical costs, expressing hope that more people will soon be able to access care at government hospitals.

Seizing the opportunity

The parking lot of Bavel Referral Hospital was transformed into a bustling dental clinic during the free clinic event. Dentists, wearing transparent face shields, worked tirelessly to perform tooth extractions, cleanings, and fillings. Their assistants stood nearby, wiping sweat from the doctors' brows and efficiently passing instruments, ensuring each patient received attentive care.

The waiting area was crowded with people seeking care, from young mothers cradling their children to elderly individuals in wheelchairs. The scent of sweat mingled with a light breeze as sunlight filtered through gaps in the canopy, illuminating faces filled with a mix of hope and anxiety. For many, this was a rare and precious opportunity to see a dentist—an opportunity they couldn't afford to miss.



Dental clinics are scarce in Cambodia's rural areas, often requiring villagers to travel long distances for treatment that can be prohibitively expensive. A tooth extraction, for example, can cost as much as 30 U.S. dollars. Faced with these obstacles, many endure dental pain or resort to traditional remedies for relief, such as chewing medicinal plants or rinsing with saltwater. Unfortunately, these methods rarely resolve the underlying issue and can sometimes lead to infections.

Over three days, 741 patients received dental treatment at the clinic. Dr. Li Yi-bang (李彝邦), a dentist from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in eastern Taiwan, observed that many villagers only sought treatment when the pain became unbearable.

People wait for their turn to see a doctor.

"Cleaning their teeth is like mining," he remarked, referring to the thick tartar deposits he removed. Dr. Eugene Tang (鄧國榮), a dentist with 43 years of experience in Singapore, noted that in earlier years of Tzu Chi's free clinics in Cambodia, many patients came seeking pain relief, often opting for extractions. However, Tzu Chi dentists have always prioritized saving teeth whenever possible, even providing root canal treatments—procedures that are otherwise unaffordable for many locals.

One patient, 22-year-old Keo Muysan, had suffered for a decade from severe tooth pain when-

ever she ate. Her local dentist could only prescribe painkillers, which cost 25 U.S. dollars for a five-day supply. Her parents, vegetable farmers with limited income, even sold a small plot of their land to afford her medication.

The dental team at the free clinic arranged for Keo's teeth to be examined via X-rays. The X-rays revealed that several of her teeth were beyond saving. Her dentist gently explained that they would extract one tooth that day and address the rest the next day. Keo tightly gripped her mother's rough, calloused hand as she braced herself for the procedure. Her mother's face showed both worry and relief, hopeful that her daughter's suffering would finally end.

When the decayed tooth was removed, the tension in Keo's face softened. Her mother, overcome

with emotion, said, "Thank you all. What you took away wasn't just a bad tooth; it was ten years of suffering for my daughter."

Separating a nine-year-old's fingers

The day before the free clinic, a medical team visited the home of nine-year-old Horm Tola, who was scheduled for surgery during the event. When Horm saw the strangers, he hid his hands behind his back and watched them with wary eyes. His mother, Chiw Sok Phana, quickly explained that Horm had been born with syndac-

Medical professionals perform an oral X-ray examination on a patient prior to dental treatment.

LEONG CHIAN YEE



tyly, a congenital condition in which fingers are fused. On his right hand, the middle and ring fingers were joined, as were the thumb and index finger; on his left hand, the index and middle fingers were fused. This condition had made him especially sensitive and self-conscious.

Horm had undergone surgery at age three to separate his right thumb and index finger, but his doctor had deemed further treatment too risky. Since then, he had been unable to use his right hand for tasks requiring strength and relied solely on his left hand for eating and writing. The emotional toll was even greater—his classmates often ridiculed his fused fingers, calling them strange. With her husband supporting the family of six through farming, Chiu Sok Phana couldn't afford treatment at a large hospital in Phnom Penh, leaving Horm to endure his condition along with the impact to his self-esteem.

In early October 2024, Horm's father heard at the market that Tzu Chi would be holding a free clinic, with doctors conducting initial screenings on the 13th. "We immediately brought our son in," Chiu Sok Phana said, "and he was approved for surgery on November 1. Knowing foreign doctors would handle the procedure gave us so much confidence." The news that her boy would finally receive treatment moved her to tears.

The surgery was performed by Dr. Fong Poh Him (馮寶興), a plastic surgeon from Singapore with over a decade of experience at free clinics. After reviewing Horm's medical records, Dr. Fong explained to his mother, through a translator, that separating the fused fingers on Horm's right hand would be extremely difficult because of shared bone structures. However, since the condition didn't pose a risk to his overall health, he reassured her not to worry. Instead, they would focus on his left hand, ensuring that it would have five fully separated and functional fingers.

As the surgery was set to begin, Horm lay on the operating table, crying in fear. Volunteers and a nurse quickly stepped in to comfort him. During the procedure, the nurse gently turned his face away from the surgical area, while his mother blocked his view with her hand. At the same time, a volunteer played cartoons on a phone to help distract him.

Two hours later, Horm emerged from the operating room. He told his mother that it hadn't hurt at all. She assured him that when the bandages came off the following week, he'd have a left hand with five separate fingers.

Dr. Fong was deeply moved when Horm shyly thanked him. "The surgical facilities at the free clinic are very basic," he said. "Cases like this require experienced surgeons to ensure everything goes smoothly. If I hadn't performed this surgery, the child might have lived his entire life burdened by the limitations of his condition."

The backbone of the free clinic

Preparation for the large-scale free clinic began in April, when Tzu Chi Cambodia expanded its recruitment of local volunteers. They also invited an experienced team from Singapore to provide training. On October 30, two days before the event, an advance team from Malaysia and Singapore arrived at Bavel Referral Hospital to begin setup. The Taiwanese team, led by Dr. Chien Jui-teng (簡瑞騰), superintendent of Douliou Tzu Chi Hospital, departed from Taiwan on October 31—just before flights were canceled due to Typhoon Kong-rey.

Volunteers used farm tractors to transport desks and chairs borrowed from a school to prepare the venue. Dr. Soo Jia Ying (史家盈), a Malaysian surgeon, played a pivotal role in setting up the operating room, carefully arranging equipment and even washing slippers for use inside. As she worked, she considered how to thoughtfully communicate with patients too fearful to undergo surgery and how best to reassure them.

The dental clinic was built almost entirely from scratch. Volunteers installed water and electrical systems to meet various needs, including enabling a large compressor to supply the air pressure required for dental equipment. They also created a functional drainage system and set up tents, fans, and lights.

Lin Jin-an (林金安), a seasoned volunteer from Tainan, Taiwan, had arrived in Cambodia earlier than the team led by Superintendent Chien. He joined his Malaysian and Singaporean counterparts in setting up the dental clinic. A skilled equipment repair specialist with over 20 years of experience supporting free clinics in Taiwan and abroad, he recognizes the importance of every piece of medical equipment in ensuring proper patient care. He meticulously prepared a range of spare parts, from simple switches to more complex components, to keep the dental instruments and equipment running smoothly at the free clinic. Even though it meant carrying over 30 kilograms (66 pounds) of luggage from Taiwan, he was



determined that no machine would stop working due to a lack of parts.

The day before the clinic, six dental treatment devices required testing and adjustments. One machine was so severely damaged that it required two hours of work to repair. Despite the challenges, Lin's face reflected focus and determination. His skilled movements demonstrated years of accumulated experience, allowing him to diagnose the needs of each machine almost instinctively.

Lin had battled cancer, which had forced him to leave his job and completely let go of his career. However, those hard experiences led him to rediscover the value of life through volunteering. He has since devoted himself to maintaining equipment for Tzu Chi's free clinics, becoming a reliable support for the medical team. "It fills my heart with joy to finish my work and see the machines functioning properly," he said.

Lee Mong Kee (李夢奇), a volunteer from

Three surgeries are performed simultaneously in a temporary operating room.

LEONG CHIAN YEE

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, reflected on the scale of the dental clinic, which involved 19 dentists and exposed him to different work styles across teams from various countries. He also learned to use new equipment, such as sterilizers. But more than all that, helping local patients relieve their dental pain provided the greatest reward.

Preparing ophthalmic equipment

In tropical regions, prolonged exposure to sunlight and intense UV radiation often leads to lens clouding. Coupled with high-sugar diets that accelerate lens oxidation, this significantly increases the need for cataract surgery as people age. Dr. Chan Boon Huat (曾文發), a member of the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor chapter's medical coordination team, explained that



cataracts are the leading cause of blurred vision and blindness in Cambodia.

Providing ophthalmology services at the free clinic required various medical equipment, including phacoemulsification machines, surgical microscopes, slit lamp microscopes, and autoclaves. Dr. Chan acknowledged, “The ophthalmology team is fully staffed, but our biggest challenge is the lack of medical equipment.”

To address this issue, the team explored every possible avenue, leveraging personal networks to secure the necessary tools. Dr. Goh Siew Yuen (吳秀雲), a pediatric ophthalmologist from Hospital Tunku Azizah in Kuala Lumpur, went above and beyond, even contacting hospitals where she had no prior connections. Her efforts paid off when two institutions each agreed to lend a phacoemulsification machine. In addition to working to secure equipment for the free clinic, she and Dr. Chan brought screening devices to Cambodia as early as October 13 to conduct preoperative evaluations.

A patient thanks a medical worker after surgery.

LEONG CHIAN YEE

While coordinating logistics with Dr. Heng Ton of Battambang Provincial Hospital, the team discovered that the hospital’s autoclave required about 90 minutes to sterilize instruments after surgery. This posed a significant challenge for the time-sensitive clinic, as it would limit the number of patients that could be treated.

Volunteer Chong Li Lei (張綠蕾) acted swiftly, reaching out to a network of industrialists through a group chat. Remarkably, within five minutes, an autoclave capable of sterilizing instruments in just 15 to 20 minutes was donated, much to the team’s delight. Unfortunately, just before the machine was scheduled to be shipped by airplane in late October, it was rejected due to its weight. The team scrambled for alternatives. Finally, with the assistance of Optimax Eye Specialist, Eyetechnology



Volunteers check each dental chair in preparation for the free clinic.

ZENG QIU LI



Support volunteers play a vital role in the success of a free clinic. Here, a group of interpreters pose for a photo. Their assistance was crucial in bridging the language gap between many of the doctors at the November free clinic and the locals seeking treatment.

KONG SIEW YEN

Cambodia stepped in to lend a suitable autoclave, resolving the issue.

The ophthalmology team successfully performed 21 surgeries on the first day of the free clinic. Dr. Goh expressed gratitude for the team's collaboration, saying, "Every surgery we complete allows a patient to regain their ability to lead a normal life and care for their family. This brings me immense satisfaction."

This marked the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor chapter's first ophthalmic medical mission, an experience that deeply inspired the team. Dr. Chan shared that they are prepared to provide long-term support and plan to participate in future international free clinics and outreach missions in Malaysia's rural areas.

Leaving with smiles

In 1994, when Cambodia was devastated by floods and droughts, Louth Saly, the current chief of Bavel District, received rice from Tzu Chi. In 2020, following another flood, he accompanied Tzu Chi volunteers late into the night to survey disaster-stricken areas. Prior to the free clinic this time, he visited the ophthalmology screening to show his support and took the opportunity to have his own eyes examined. The medical team assured him they would provide him with a suitable pair of reading glasses. When he tried them on later, he was delighted to see the text on his documents clearly. He expressed his gratitude to Tzu Chi and the local Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association for their collaboration in bringing free healthcare to residents of nine villages in Bavel District.

Battambang Deputy Governor Peng Piseth also received unexpected treatment during a visit to the free clinic. He had come to inspect its operations and convey the governor's thanks when he mentioned that his lower leg, injured 40 years earlier, still caused occasional pain. Dr. Fong Poh Him, assisted by Dr. Chien Jui-teng, performed a 40-minute surgery that resolved the long-standing issue. Reflecting on the experience, Dr. Chien remarked, "If even the deputy governor has such needs, the needs of the general public must be even greater."

Over 600 people were treated on the first day of the free clinic. As word of the services spread, the number of patients increased significantly on the second day. On the third day, the clinic was scheduled to close at 3 p.m. but the medical team extended their hours to help as many people as possible. Seeing patients leave with relieved smiles warmed the hearts of all the volunteers. ❁

A Timeline of Tzu Chi's Work in Cambodia

- **1994-1997** Tzu Chi initiated humanitarian aid efforts in response to severe floods and droughts, providing assistance eight times. Further work was discontinued due to political instability.
- **2011** The Tzu Chi Cambodia branch was established, focusing primarily on charitable activities.
- **2017** Tzu Chi conducted a large-scale free clinic in Kampong Cham Province, in partnership with the nonprofit Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association (TYDA).
- **2018** Tzu Chi's medical mission signed a memorandum of understanding with TYDA, committing to hosting two large-scale free clinics annually. Unfortunately, these events were halted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **2024** Tzu Chi resumed its free medical treatment in Cambodia. In November, the foundation held a free clinic in Bavel District, Battambang Province, with Malaysian volunteers being the main organizers. A total of 454 medical professionals and support volunteers from Cambodia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia provided care for 3,480 patient visits.



A Bond Beyond Blood

By Lai Yue-hong, Wu Hui-li, and Chen Hui-yu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Lin Qun-jie

Stem cell donors and recipients come together in a celebration of hope, healing, and life-saving compassion.

When Chen Chang-long (陳昌隆) learned that he had cancer, one thought flashed through his mind: “I just pray Heaven lets me live a little longer; if I must go, let it be after my parents.” Unmarried, optimistic, and deeply devoted to his parents, his greatest fear upon receiving the diagnosis was causing them the unbearable pain of losing a child.

Reflecting on his journey, Chen recalled how he began suffering from troubling symptoms in early 2016, just before Chinese New Year: a rash, severe itching, dizziness, and diarrhea. He consulted doctors from various specialties—dermatology, nephrology, neurology, rheumatology, and hematology—but after seeing seven doctors, the cause of his illness remained a mystery. Each visit left him feeling disheartened, wondering where his true adversary lay hidden.

Eventually, a bone marrow biopsy revealed that he was suffering from myelodysplastic syndrome, a type of cancer in which the bone marrow fails to produce enough healthy blood cells. Although the diagnosis was serious, he didn’t feel overly saddened; instead, a sense of relief settled in—at least he finally knew what he was up against. Chemotherapy and targeted therapies began in August 2017, but they proved ineffective. His doctor then recommended a hematopoietic stem cell transplant, and fortunately, a matching donor was found. Chen underwent a conditioning regimen and received the transplant in March 2018. (A conditioning regimen is a rigorous pre-transplant treatment to prepare one’s body for the procedure.)

A few weeks after the transplant, he suffered

severe rejection, marked by excruciating headaches, jaundice, and other liver complications. High doses of steroids were needed to stabilize his condition, which resulted in side effects such as hand tremors, blackened nails, swelling, and gum inflammation. When a kidney infection required a CT scan, the contrast agent injected before the scan triggered a life-threatening allergic reaction, requiring four doses of epinephrine to save his life. He also battled severe trigeminal shingles.

A year after his transplant, with rejection behind him except for some residual allergies, his health gradually improved. Now back on his feet, he was eager to meet his donor and express his gratitude. He wrote to the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center, which had helped him find a match, hoping for a chance to meet his donor. However, due to privacy regulations, he had to wait longer before fulfilling his wish.

A long-awaited meeting

On October 18, 2024, Chen traveled from Taichung, central Taiwan, to New Taipei City. The next day, he went to the Tzu Chi Sanchong Campus for a donor-recipient gathering hosted by the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center. It had been six years of waiting, but the time had finally come for Chen to meet his donor.

The moment that Chen had eagerly anticipated arrived—it was his turn to go on stage. Seeing his donor, Zou Yi-qing (鄒宜青), for the first time, he smiled shyly and, with encouragement from the host, embraced her joyfully. Zou said that seeing him so healthy finally put her mind at ease.



Full of gratitude, Chen shared how fortunate he felt to have found a matching donor.

Zou's own journey to this moment had started 14 years earlier, when she signed up as a donor. Even so, she initially hesitated when she was contacted and informed that she was a match for a potential recipient. She wasn't sure about the process, but after learning it was similar to donating blood, and after receiving support from her family, she decided to proceed, knowing she might be Chen's only hope.

When Chen learned at the gathering that Zou had felt unwell during her donation at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, his heart went out to her. Zou explained that at the time, she knew Chen had already completed his conditioning regimen and was waiting in a sterile room for the transplant. There was no turning back—she could only hope for his survival. Thankfully, she fully recovered and remained as healthy as before.

Following the transplant, Chen's blood type changed from A to O, and he noticed that he had become more cheerful than before. He now regu-

Chen Chang-long (right) shares a heartfelt embrace with his donor, Zou Yi-qing. After waiting six years, he finally had the chance to meet her and express his gratitude in person.

larly donates to charities as a way to honor Zou's kindness, feeling that, because of her, he gained a deeper understanding of selfless love. Zou, in turn, told him, "Because of you, I was able to achieve something extraordinary. Thank you for staying strong and surviving."

A gift of life

During the gathering, seven donor-recipient pairs shared their stories on stage. The event also honored 81 individuals who had donated their stem cells between July 2023 and June 2024. Each donor received a medal as a token of gratitude for their incredible generosity.

Over the past 31 years, the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center has facilitated over 6,800 transplants across 31 countries and regions. Of these, over 3,300



donations benefited patients in Taiwan, while more than 3,400 helped those in other parts of the world. With odds of just one in 100,000, finding a non-familial match is as difficult as searching for a needle in a haystack. This life-saving mission is made possible by the dedication of Tzu Chi volunteers, who recruit potential donors, and the donors themselves, who selflessly step forward to give the gift of life.

In 2018, Chen Zheng-bin (陳政彬), then 28, received an unexpected call informing him he had matched with a patient in critical need of stem cells. “Honestly, I thought it was a scam!” he admitted, having forgotten he had joined the donor registry while in high school. Persistent follow-ups from volunteers eventually jogged his memory, but misconceptions—such as the belief that donation involved painful bone marrow extraction—gave him pause.

After receiving explanations from volunteers and conducting his own research, Chen learned that the procedure was much simpler than he had imagined. It involved receiving granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF) injections to stimulate stem cell production, followed by a procedure similar to donating blood to collect peripheral

Jian Cong-liang (right) presents a card, written by him and his family, to Chen Zheng-bin as a gesture of gratitude for his life-saving stem cell donation.

blood stem cells.

Understanding that his donation could save a life, Chen agreed without further hesitation. His family wholeheartedly supported his decision. To ensure his stem cells were in optimal condition, he adopted a healthier lifestyle, avoiding late nights and exercising regularly. Because the recipient was physically larger, Chen’s donation required two sessions—eight hours on the first day and four hours on the second. Despite the lengthy process, he felt no discomfort and even described the experience as relaxing, likening it to a brief vacation from his busy work schedule.

The recipient, Jian Cong-liang (簡聰良), 21 years Chen’s senior, experienced only mild rejection symptoms after the transplant. He was immensely grateful after regaining his health, and now celebrates two birthdays every year: his actual birthday and April 24, the day of his life-saving transplant. His brush with death profoundly changed his outlook on life. “I used to stress about



earning enough money to provide material comforts for my children," he said. "Now, I'm more relaxed and philosophical, realizing that nothing is more precious than life itself."

Jian, from Taiwan, had lived in Suzhou, China, for many years due to work, where he married and started a family. In January 2018, his life took an unexpected turn when he developed puzzling symptoms and returned to Taiwan for medical care. He was shocked when he was diagnosed with severe aplastic anemia. His doctor recommended a stem cell transplant. Jian, who had been healthy up to that point and rarely needed medical attention, agreed to the procedure.

For Jian, the diagnosis brought with it immense uncertainty: "Will I find a match? What will happen to my young children if I don't?" Throughout the ordeal, his family was his greatest source of strength, supporting him through the uncertainty and rigorous treatment.

Fortunately, just two months after he opted for a transplant, the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center found him a donor with a perfect match. When Jian met Chen at the October 19 gathering, he presented him with a heartfelt card, in which he had written: "Though I faced great misfortune [by falling seri-

Painter Liu Feng-lai (fifth from right) conveys her appreciation to her donor, Zeng Hui-ping (third from left), by gifting her a traditional Chinese painting of flowers and birds that she had created herself.

ously ill], I am also incredibly fortunate. Your generosity gave me a second chance at life during my darkest hour."

Since his donation, Chen has remained in excellent health, with regular follow-ups confirming his well-being. He often shares his story to inspire others to register as donors. Encouraged by his example, both his sister and wife have joined the registry. Speaking about his experience, Chen said, "I'm so glad the recipient survived. Saving his life is one of the most meaningful things I've ever done."

Recently, his perspective deepened when his mother was diagnosed with cancer, allowing him to better empathize with recipients and their families. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to donate six years before, realizing it might have been his only chance to save a life. He was truly happy he had seized it.

Fueling life-saving efforts

Zeng Hui-ping (曾惠平) received notice of a successful preliminary match 16 years after registering her blood sample in Taipei. Over those years, she had changed jobs several times and moved south to Taichung. To contact her, Tzu Chi volunteers waited outside the building where her parents lived, as there was no doorbell. Luckily, they caught her sister-in-law as she was leaving, and she called Zeng to inform her: “Two Tzu Chi sisters are looking for you.”

When Zeng learned that the recipient’s genes might be influenced by hers—potentially changing his or her hair texture and blood type—she was deeply moved and cried, feeling as though she were gaining a new “baby.” She experienced no side effects during the G-CSF injections, and with the encouragement and support of her friends and family, she felt truly blessed.

Zeng’s “baby” turned out to be 68-year-old painter Liu Feng-lai (劉豐來), who held her fifth exhibition in September 2024. Liu’s entire family attended the gathering to personally thank Zeng—a moment Liu herself had eagerly awaited for six years. At every follow-up appointment after her transplant, Liu would ask, “When can I meet my donor?” During the gathering, even before discovering Zeng was her match, Liu instinctively sensed it. When the two finally embraced, Zeng said, “You’ve done great!” Fighting back tears, Liu replied, “Without you, I wouldn’t be here with my family.”

Liu had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in March 2017. None of her three sisters were a match, so she was deeply grateful to find one in Zeng, which allowed her to continue pursu-

ing her passion for art and living a full, vibrant life.

Initially, Zeng’s mother was worried about her daughter’s decision to donate and even considered urging her to reconsider during their train ride to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for the procedure. However, after seeing how the doctors and Tzu Chi volunteers safeguarded not just the recipient’s but also the donor’s well-being, her concerns eased. Now, six years later, she feels proud of her daughter’s wise, admirable decision.

“At first, I didn’t understand why such a wonderful act [stem cell donation] wasn’t shared more online,” Zeng remarked. Motivated by this realization, she began documenting her donation experience and post-donation health updates on her blog and social media. Her aim was to promote the cause and help future donors prepare both mentally and physically.

Currently, the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center has over 483,000 registered donors. However, half of them are over 55 and nearing the end of their eligibility. New donor registrations have also declined, and fewer than half of matched donors agree to donate. Compounding these challenges is Taiwan’s declining birth rate, which has reduced the likelihood of family-member matches. These factors make expanding the database of unrelated donors more critical than ever.

Relieving great pain takes immense love. Between January and October 2024 alone, more than 1,100 individuals sought donor matching services through the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center. This database, made up of voluntary donors, is a vital lifeline for patients. You might hold the key to saving someone’s life. Be the hope a patient is waiting for. ❁

Statistics From the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center (1993 to October 31, 2024)

Total transplants facilitated

6,801

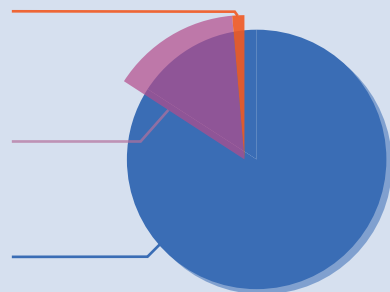
Within Taiwan: 3,331
Outside Taiwan: 3,470

Registered patients seeking matches

70,433

Registered voluntary donors

483,014



Mother and Daughter

Together in Giving

By Zhang Li-yun

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

Chen Lin Shui-jin, though 102 years old, continues to find joy in helping others and working diligently. Her resilience, diligence, and generous spirit have been passed down to her daughter Qia.

Chen Lin Shui-jin's (陳林水錦) century-long life has been marked by tireless hard work. Born into a farming family in the mountains of Zhushan Township, Nantou County, central Taiwan, she grew up in an era when Taiwan was a relatively impoverished society. In those days, having enough to eat was a blessing, and an education was a luxury beyond reach. Consequently, she never attended school or learned to read.

After marrying, she left the mountains and settled by a waterway, where her husband cultivated water spinach hydroponically. Every morning, around three or four, she would head to the fields in the dark, wading through water to harvest the fresh, tender greens. At daybreak, her husband would take the produce to the market for wholesale.

As their family grew to six, the income from farming and selling water spinach became insufficient to support their household. To make ends meet, her husband started a wood processing factory, and Shui-jin began working there as well. Even after their children grew up and she no longer needed to help support the family, she couldn't sit idle. She began collecting discarded cardboard and scrap metal to sell, earning a small income for herself. Her daughter Chen Qia (陳洽), who ran a general store in Zhushan, readily gave her the shop's used boxes.

In the early 2000s, Qia suggested, "Those cardboard boxes don't bring much money. Why not donate them to Tzu Chi?" Moved by the suggestion, Shui-jin agreed without hesitation, turning her recycling efforts into a meaningful contribution. She even made up the difference herself when the proceeds fell short of a thousand Taiwanese dollars (US\$33).

For a time, Shui-jin volunteered at the Tzu Chi Zhushan Recycling Station on Wednesdays and Saturdays. But at home, she remained restless. Over time, signs of memory decline emerged, leaving her confused over simple things. For example, she would often pick up fruits from the table, squeeze them, and ask, "What is this?" Her daughter-in-law, who lived with her, discussed the situation with Qia. Hoping to slow her cognitive decline, they arranged for her to attend a Tzu Chi senior day care center on weekdays. On Saturdays, she continued volunteering at the recycling station.

Now over a hundred years old, Shui-jin continues to work with remarkable precision at the recycling station. She sorts bottles with accuracy and folds newspapers neatly. Qia noted her mother's deep devotion to recycling. Though Shui-jin may not understand complex philosophies or know how to read, her simple wisdom and heartfelt desire to help others shine through in her words: "Recycling is great—the proceeds can be used for charitable purposes."





Willingly repaying her karmic debt

Chen Qia was born in 1953. She remembers helping her father at the wood processing factory even as a young elementary school student. She assisted with tasks like moving lumber, which was turned into everyday items such as clothes hangers, rice spatulas, and spoons. She shared that her father had suffered a severe burn on his right hand in an oil lamp accident during his childhood. The injury required treatment at Camillian Saint Mary's Hospital Luodong. The hospital, aware of the family's financial struggles, waived the medical expenses. While her father recovered, four fingers on his injured hand eventually atrophied. In the end, only his thumb remained functional. Undeterred by this disability, he continued to develop new products for the factory, including bamboo fruit baskets, plates, and handbags for export.

Before her marriage, Qia was her father's right-hand helper, skillfully balancing factory work and household tasks. These experiences shaped her

Mother and daughter, Chen Lin Shui-jin and Chen Qia, are hardworking, resilient, and share a generous spirit.

In this childhood photograph, Qia (second from left) nestles against her mother, Shui-jin (third from left).

COURTESY OF CHEN QIA

into a hardworking and resilient person, like her mother. These qualities became vital when her life took a new direction after marriage, when she took on the demanding role of caring for her elderly father-in-law and two mothers-in-law. (It was not uncommon for men of earlier generations to practice polygamy.) These caregiving responsibilities made it impossible for her to continue to assist her father at the factory. Around the same time, Taiwan's rising labor costs and increased global competition led many factories to relocate overseas. Consequently, her family decided to close the factory and open a mom-and-pop store instead.

In 1998, Qia found herself caught in a financial crisis when a member of a private credit group she managed misappropriated funds and disappeared, causing the group to collapse. She told her husband, "I'm the head of this credit group. I can't betray the trust of those involved. I'll find a way to fix this. Money can be earned again, and if I work hard, we'll get through this." Determined to protect others from the fallout, she took full

responsibility for the debts and vowed to repay them. She seized every opportunity to earn money, sacrificing sleep and enduring physical exhaustion to meet her goals.

Her challenges intensified in September 1999, when a massive earthquake struck central Taiwan, devastating Zhushan Township. The earthquake damaged her store and warehouse, leaving goods scattered in disarray across the floor. It took nearly two months to restore order. The strain of repair costs, combined with her existing debts, left her feeling overwhelmed.

Life's trials didn't stop there. In 1998, her father-in-law passed away. After that, her older mother-in-law lost her sense of purpose and gradually developed dementia. Then her younger mother-in-law began showing similar symptoms. For over a decade, Qia and her sister-in-law took turns caring for them. Despite these challenges, Qia remained committed to giving back to society. She continued her long-term financial support for the Taiwan Fund for Children and Families, a nonprofit that aids vulnerable children and families. Grateful for the care her father had received years earlier, she also made regular

donations to Saint Mary's Hospital. In addition, she became a Tzu Chi donating member through a recommendation from Xie Jin-mu (謝金木), a wholesaler in southern Taiwan.

One day, Tzu Chi volunteer You Shu-juan (尤淑娟) visited her store and noticed a portrait of Dharma Master Cheng Yen on the wall. Curious about the portrait, You asked about it, and Qia explained that it had been a gift from Xie Jin-mu. The two women quickly bonded, and Qia shared the burdens of her debts and family responsibilities, expressing her frustrations. You offered gentle guidance: "Master Cheng Yen teaches that this is 'shared karma.' If you accept and repay karmic debts willingly, you'll get a discount; if you resist, you'll pay double. It's not worth it." She urged Qia to face her challenges with a positive mindset, reminding her that resistance only deepens suffering.

You also urged her to open her heart: "There are others who suffer even more than you. By

Shui-jin, 102, expertly sorts recyclables, placing each item in its designated basket.



focusing less on your difficulties, you'll feel lighter." She suggested that Qia inspire goodness in her customers, encouraging them to contribute to worthy causes to help those in need.

Your words resonated deeply with Qia, sparking a shift in her mindset. From that point on, whenever she felt frustrated or down, she reminded herself to shift her perspective from negativity to positivity. Gradually, she found greater peace of mind. In addition to managing her store, she began volunteering with Tzu Chi, collecting recyclables to support the foundation's recycling efforts.

Putting oneself to good use

After closing her store in the evenings, Chen Qia and her neighbor would each grab a large plastic bag and take a walk along a local road, collecting recyclables as they went. The evening market proved to be a goldmine, with cardboard boxes, bottles, and cans scattered everywhere, waiting to be collected. By the end of the night, their haul would create a small mountain of recyclables in Qia's family's unused factory, giving her mother something productive to do the next morning.

This was in the early 2000s, and Shui-jin, then in her 70s, was still very agile. She would quickly and efficiently sort the paper, metal cans, and plastic bottles. Once everything was organized, she would call her daughter, and no matter how busy Qia was at her store, she'd say, "Hurry up and take the sorted recyclables to the recycling station!" or "Quickly bring more recyclables back so I can sort them!"

Qia often encouraged her mother to volunteer at a local Tzu Chi recycling station, but Shui-jin hesitated and frequently made excuses not to do so. She didn't know any of the volunteers and was concerned about feeling out of place. However, when she finally visited the station one day, she was greeted warmly by the volunteers there and quickly enjoyed the lively atmosphere. Turning to her daughter, she exclaimed, "Why didn't you bring me here sooner?" From that day on, she went every day. On occasions when Qia was too busy to drive her, she would complain, "I'm so bored at home! So bored!"

Because Shui-jin had spent long hours in the fields picking water spinach and soaking her feet in the water when she was younger, she often struggled with swollen feet in her later years, which kept her awake at night. Sometimes, she would get up in the middle of the night and walk

around to reduce the swelling before finally managing to fall back asleep. Her reliance on sleeping pills grew, and her memory began to fade. Even after taking her pills with dinner, she would ask for more before bed. However, after she started volunteering at the recycling station, she began to fall asleep more easily, and over time, her dependence on sleeping pills greatly decreased.

The most trying but also happy times

Chen Qia inherited not only her mother's diligence and resilience but also her generosity. Shui-jin consistently donates money to help whenever she hears of someone in need. When impoverished people pass away, she covers the cost of their coffins. Qia said, "Children are often encouraged to perform good deeds to accumulate spiritual merits for their parents, but I believe my mother has already earned countless blessings through her own actions."

Qia's father passed away at 89. She feels fortunate that she didn't marry far from home, as it has enabled her to care for her mother. Her greatest joy has been introducing her mother to Tzu Chi, allowing them to work together as recycling volunteers. Qia has endured some of the most difficult times of her life over the past 20-plus years, yet she remains confident that she has made the most meaningful choices.

Giving has become second nature to her. Despite injuring her right hand while moving recyclables and undergoing three surgeries to treat trigger finger in her left hand, she never hesitates to respond to calls for recycling collections, regardless of the volume or weight of the materials. She approaches the work with gratitude, growing stronger with each challenge and feeling fulfilled through her service. "Recycling feels like my second career," remarked Qia. "Even if I work as hard as an ox every day, I see it as a form of spiritual practice. I willingly take on these tasks and complete them with a contented heart."

The thought of retirement has never crossed her mind. She deeply appreciates her husband's unwavering support, which has been a source of strength. "Tzu Chi is already a part of my life—an essential aspect of who I am," she affirmed.

Through their shared commitment to recycling and steadfast dedication to helping others, the mother and daughter have not only enriched their own lives but have also left an indelible mark on this Earth. Together, they have found joy in their work—not driven by material rewards, but for the peace and purpose it brings. ❁

The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

People must help themselves.
Don't count on gods or luck.
Except for you yourself,
no one else can help you
any more than the stars and the moon in the sky.



People today
often think that the
Buddha is a god. He is not.

Every living
being in the world has an
innate buddha-nature. The Buddha is
that venerable person who transcended this
world and entered sainthood. He became
enlightened and he enlightens others. He
is our guide to true human life.



Why do Tzu Chi volunteers always talk about Tzu Chi to everybody, even to people that they don't even know?

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "Good deeds need to be promoted so that more people will be moved to join in."

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

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

TAIWAN

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

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

ARGENTINA

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

AUSTRALIA

Adelaide
Tel: 61-8-82319008

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

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

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

Perth
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

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

BRAZIL

Tel: 55-11-55394091

BRUNEI

Tel/Fax: 673-3336779

CANADA

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

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

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

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

DOMINICAN REP.

Tel: 1-809-5300972

EL SALVADOR

Tel/Fax: 1-503-7293905

FRANCE

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

GERMANY

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

GREAT BRITAIN

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

GUATEMALA

Tel: 502-22327648
Fax: 502-23675872

HONG KONG

Tel: 852-28937166
Fax: 852-28937478

INDONESIA

Tel: 62-21-50559999
Fax: 62-21-50556699

JAPAN

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

JORDAN

Tel/Fax: 962-6-5817305

LESOTHO

Tel: 266-28312566

MALAYSIA

Ipoh
Tel: 60-5-5471013

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

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

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

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

MEXICO

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

MOZAMBIQUE

Cell: 258-849530241

MYANMAR

Tel: 95-9-260032810

NETHERLANDS

Tel: 31-629-577511

NEW ZEALAND

Tel: 64-9-2716976

PARAGUAY

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

PHILIPPINES

Tel/Fax: 63-2-7320001

SINGAPORE

Tel: 65-65829958

SOUTH AFRICA

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

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

Gauteng
Tel: 27-11-4503365/4502256

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

Port Elizabeth
Tel/Fax: 27-41-3607033

SWEDEN

Tel/Fax: 46-31-227883

THAILAND

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

TÜRKIYE

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

UNITED STATES

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

Atlanta
Tel: 1-770-4581000

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

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

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

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

Cleveland
Tel/Fax: 1-440-6469292

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

Dallas
Tel: 1-972-6808869

Detroit
Tel/Fax: 1-586-7953491

Fresno
Tel/Fax: 1-559-2984894

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

Houston

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

Indianapolis
Tel: 1-317-5800979

Kansas
Tel: 1-913-3976517

Las Vegas
Tel/Fax: 1-702-8805552

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

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

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

Madison
Tel: 1-608-2687692

Miami
Tel: 1-954-5381172
Fax: 1-317-6459907

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

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

Oakland
Tel: 1-510-8790971

Orlando
Tel: 1-407-2921146
Fax: 1-407-4793662

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIETNAM

Tel: 84-28-38535001
Fax: 84-28-38535055



*Everything will appear difficult if we do not take action.
Action transforms even the driest land into an oasis.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA