

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Healing Encounters

A Free Clinic
in Cambodia



**When small acts of love are combined, they become a boundless
force for good.**

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

The Sum of Small Acts

Translated by Teresa Chang

Tzu Chi began in Taiwan more than 50 years ago. Today, its footsteps span the globe. We sprinkle drops of love through our work, like rain nourishing the earth. We hope the seeds of kindness we plant will sprout, grow strong, and one day flourish into a forest. Our deepest wish is for love to fill the skies, the earth, and human hearts around the world. No act of love, however small, should ever be underestimated—for when taken together, they create a boundless power that can bring about great good.

I often talk about how Tzu Chi began when I encouraged 30 housewives to each save 50 NT cents (about 1.2 U.S. cents) from their daily grocery money in a bamboo coin bank to help those in need. Why did I ask them to save 50 cents a day instead of 15 dollars once a month? Saving once a month would have sparked the thought of compassion only once, whereas setting aside 50 cents each day nurtured the intention to help others every single day. In this way, compassion was cultivated daily, and their kindness became a habit in thought, word, and deed.

To spread this idea further, the housewives were encouraged to ask the marketplace vendors they bought from to put 50 cents less worth of vegetables into their baskets, rather than saving the money silently from their own household budget. This created an opportunity to share the message in the market: “Saving 50 cents a day can help others.” Because it was simple and easy, many people responded. This is how Tzu Chi’s mission of relieving poverty began.

This spirit of sparking compassion in daily life continues today. In recent years, Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan have walked through streets to promote the Loving Store campaign. They share messages of kindness, explain Tzu Chi’s philosophy, and invite shop owners to place Tzu Chi coin banks in their stores, giving customers a chance to create blessings as they shop. Shop owners willing to participate can

also share the story of Tzu Chi’s Bamboo Coin Bank Era, inspiring customers to drop coins into the bank.

Even if customers do not contribute, shop owners are already spreading kindness and benefiting humanity by introducing Tzu Chi and encouraging others to join in doing good. Whether coins are placed in the bank or not, the shop owners have already helped blessings grow.

To further highlight the spirit of compassion, I later added the word “Rich” to the Loving Stores, calling them “Rich Loving Stores.” This was not to indicate the size or wealth of the shop, but to show the richness of love: These shop owners have generous hearts and willingly allow Tzu Chi to place donation banks in their stores so that good deeds can be done together. Each participating store fosters opportunities to do good, becoming a focal point for cultivating blessings and planting seeds of love in people’s hearts. Some customers may have heard of Tzu Chi before and had a basic understanding, but had not yet had the opportunity to participate personally. Now, seeing Tzu Chi’s banks in the stores, they can contribute coins themselves. When they give with joy, it also reveals the richness of their own hearts.

A Chinese proverb says, “A family that accumulates virtuous deeds will have blessings in abundance.” If we wish for a harmonious and peaceful society, each of us must cherish our time and seize every opportunity to contribute to the common good. The purpose of “saving 50 cents a day” and the Loving Store campaign is not about money, but about providing an easy and meaningful way for everyone to take part, harnessing the power of love to benefit all. I hope everyone will continue encouraging others to contribute, however small the contribution—for drops of water can form a mighty river. Each person who participates adds another drop of compassion, and every drop helps to purify the human world and bring greater peace to society. ❦

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

September 2025



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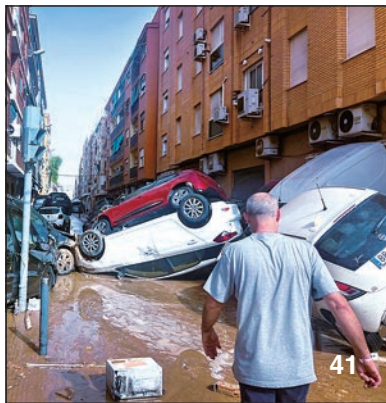
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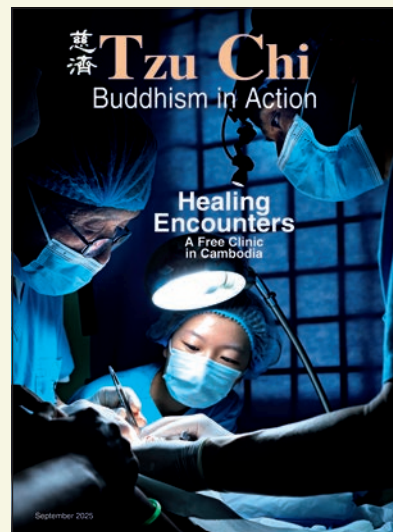
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Photo by Choong Keat Yee

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

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Tzu Chi Event Highlights

Jun. 20 to Aug. 25, 2025

Myanmar

- Rising prices following the strong March earthquake in Mandalay made life even harder for survivors. In early August, Tzu Chi returned to Amarapura and provided each of 3,901 households with 24 kilograms (53 pounds) of rice and one liter of cooking oil. In mid-August, 2,559 households in Pa Late received rice, cooking oil, and folding beds.

Malaysia

- This year marks the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi's environmental protection mission in Malaysia. There are 71 recycling stations and 248 recycling points in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor alone. Since 2024, Tzu Chi has also organized plogging events, where participants pick up trash while jogging or walking. One such event took place on June 29. The main activity kicked off at the Kuala Lumpur Jing Si Hall, while concurrent activities were held in about 50 locations across Malaysia, including in Pahang, Sabah, and Sarawak. Over 8,000 people participated, collecting 3,646 kilograms (8,040 pounds) of recyclables and 3,937 kg of general waste.

Taiwan



- In late June, Dr. Chen Peir-rong (陳培榕), vice superintendent of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, received the 2025 Medical Contribution Award from the Taiwan Head and Neck Society. The award honors his three decades of service to remote communities in eastern Taiwan and his establishment of the Multidisciplinary Head and Neck Cancer Treatment Team, which has helped improve survival rates and quality of life for patients.
- To support the health of foreign migrant workers, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and Taipei City Government hold free healthcare events at Taipei Main Station three to four times a year. Services include medical treatment, physical checkups, and consultations. One such event on June 29 brought together over a hundred medical professionals who provided care in dentistry, gynecology, dermatology, traditional Chinese medicine, and other specialties, logging 904 patient visits.
- Typhoon Danas struck southern Taiwan in early July, damaging the roofs of many old homes. Tzu Chi began repair efforts in Chiayi and Tainan in mid-July, aiming to restore over a hundred homes by mid-September. Volunteers across the island also organized charity sales to aid recovery in the affected areas.

★ For more information, please refer to pages 48 to 59.

The Philippines



- From August 14 to 16, Tzu Chi Philippines held its 283rd large-scale free clinic in Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay, where a team of 427 medical professionals and volunteers offered services in internal medicine, ENT, pediatrics, dentistry, OB/GYN, ophthalmology, surgery, and prosthetics. In total, 5,249 patient visits were recorded.



Charity



Medicine



The United States



- Flash floods hit Central Texas over the Independence Day weekend, claiming more than 130 lives. After visiting disaster areas, Tzu Chi volunteers organized three cash card distributions in late July and August, supporting 71 households from Burnet, Travis, Williamson, and Kerr counties.

Mexico



- Tzu Chi volunteers from the US and Mexico hold monthly free clinics for impoverished families in Tijuana. Noticing a lack of dental care for people with disabilities, they invited specialists from the Taiwan chapter of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association to provide free treatment and education. Between July 9 and 12, 119 patients received care. A seminar on dental care for people with special needs attracted 130 local dentists.

Argentina



- In mid-May, flooding struck San Cayetano, Campana, Buenos Aires Province. Volunteers made six on-site visits and learned that the items most needed were cold-weather gear and cleaning supplies. With the local government's help in preparing a distribution list, they returned on July 7 to deliver blankets, buckets, rags, laundry detergent, and toilet paper to 735 households.



Spain

- Tzu Chi provided relief to residents affected by the October 2024 floods in the province of Valencia. From July 9 to 15, about 50 volunteers from ten countries conducted seven distributions in six hard-hit areas, with 3,044 households receiving gift cards.

★ For more information, please refer to pages 41 to 47.

Ethiopia

- Cuts in foreign aid this year—including from the US—have made life difficult for families in displacement camps in Debre Birhan. To help, Tzu Chi has provided meals for 1,350 vulnerable children under eight since July and distributed food packages to 3,000 families in July and August.

Tzu Chi's work in Ethiopia dates back to 1993, starting with the construction of water and medical facilities. In 2022, it partnered with Kidmia Mahiber to provide food for people displaced by conflict in the north. Since 2023, it has also extended relief to those affected by conflict in the west and drought in the south. By May, over 550,000 instances of aid had been provided.



Growing Sustainability

Tzu Chi and the SDGs

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



Chen Sheng-hua (陳生華) and his wife, You Rui-zhen (游銳臻), natural farmers in Fenglin, Hualien, eastern Taiwan, are members of a Tzu Chi-supported crop production and marketing team. With guidance from Tzu Chi University faculty, they have improved their farming techniques and strengthened the resilience of their fields.

Can the goals of naturally-grown safe crops, sustained soil fertility, and fair returns for farmers truly coexist as climate change lowers yields and pesticide overuse degrades the land? The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 15 calls for protecting ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, and preventing land degradation. For over a decade, Tzu Chi has been working to help make this vision a reality in eastern Taiwan.

SDG
FOCUS



In addition to majestic mountains and expansive, beautiful plains, Taiwan's Hualien and Taitung regions are also blessed with rich, fertile land. Agriculture has long been a vital pillar of the eastern region's economy. But as industrialization and urbanization have progressed, many young people have moved to Taiwan's more prosperous western region in search of work, leaving behind aging elders and increasing stretches of fallow farmland. How can local agriculture be revitalized—creating greater value, providing stable income for farmers, and drawing young people back home to farm? Tzu Chi's charity and education missions have been working together on this challenge for years.

Eco-friendly farming

Tzu Chi's commitment to agriculture began with concerns about climate change and potential food crises. In 2010, the foundation leased 20 hectares (50 acres) of land in Zhixue Village, Shoufeng Township, Hualien County. This opportunity came about when Taiwan Sugar Corporation, having reduced domestic sugarcane production in favor of imported raw materials, began offering large tracts of idle farmland for lease. It was on this plot that Tzu Chi established Zhixue Great Love Farm as a model for charity-based farming, with various crops grown on a trial basis.

In 2016, the leased area was reduced to 12 hectares and was taken over by the Jing Si Abode, the Buddhist convent founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen. The harvest of the farm now helps sustain the Abode's daily needs and supports charity efforts, including local relief and international disaster aid.

Volunteers from across Taiwan cooperate to work the land—preparing fields, clearing irrigation channels, and using organic rice-farming methods. They control pests using non-toxic biological formulations and manually weed instead



of using herbicides. For more than eight years, Zhixue Great Love Farm has not only yielded clean, toxin-free rice but has also seen its surrounding ecosystem thrive.

"We farm organically from start to finish, and the environment has flourished," said volunteer Ye Li-qing (葉麗卿), who manages the farm's administrative affairs. "In April, you can see fireflies. We've also seen wild boars, Reeves's muntjacs, and snakes." She recalled a time when a mother boar and her piglets wandered into the fields, a clear sign of successful land conservation efforts, prompting volunteers to install fencing.

But Tzu Chi's involvement in the area extends beyond merely tending to the Great Love Farm. The foundation has also recognized that many farmers in Hualien could benefit from some support. "Farming is not easy," noted Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川), director of Tzu Chi's Department of Charity Mission Development. Many fields in Hualien have been left idle, he explained, while those still farming often lack the tools, techniques, and other resources needed to succeed. These challenges, coupled with their unfamiliarity with modern sales channels, have made it difficult for many farmers to earn a profit.

To help address these issues, Tzu Chi has partnered with the Hualien District Agricultural Research and Extension Station and the Hualien County Government's Agriculture Department. Since 2013, they have supported farmers in five Indigenous townships—Xiulin, Wanrong, Guangfu, Fengbin, and Zhuoxi—by helping them form crop production and marketing teams.

The initiative has introduced high-value crops, like Inca nuts, and improved cultivation techniques for crops such as red quinoa. At the same time, it has guided farmers in a transition away from conventional agricultural methods to more sustainable and eco-friendly practices. Instead of using pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and herbicides, they now farm in greater harmony with nature and the land's capacity.

Tzu Chi volunteers are committed to using organic farming methods at Zhixue Great Love Farm.

SHI DE QIAN

"Hualien and Taitung have the cleanest soil, water, and air in Taiwan," Lu said. "Our first priority is revitalizing local farmland. The next goal is to bring young people back to farming and reverse the trend of skipped-generation households, in which grandparents are raising grandchildren in the absence of their adult children." He added that by returning home, young people can avoid the high living costs of city life, be their own boss, and build a meaningful future in their hometown.

Support from the education mission

While Tzu Chi's charity mission has offered strong support, its education mission has also assisted farmers in many areas, including farming techniques, product processing, and marketing.

"In 2011, some students expressed interest in doing service learning at Zhixue Great Love Farm, which led us to connect with Director Lu from the Charity Mission Development Department," said Professor Chiang Yun-chih (江允智), director of the Sustainable Development Office at Tzu Chi University (TCU) in Hualien. At the time, the university already had faculty engaged in environmental sustainability and eco-friendly farming research and had established connections with local practitioners of non-toxic, organic agriculture. After helping students connect with the farm, faculty also began collaborating with Tzu Chi's farming team.

Back then, Tzu Chi University and the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology (TCUST), also in Hualien, were separate institutions. (A merger of the two would be completed in 2024.) Faculty and students at TCUST took a different route into charity-based farming. In 2013, Professors Liu Wei-chung (劉威忠) and Keng Nien-tzu (耿念慈), both of the Department of Medical Imaging and Radiological Sciences, led students to form the Huayu Club, which grew medicinal herbs and flowers. The club also produced small quantities of crops to supplement the diets of financially disadvantaged students.

The university allocated a plot of land near the dormitories for the club to cultivate, but the soil was rocky—hoes would strike stones imme-



diately, and even cassava, a hardy crop whose tuberous roots usually grow downward into the ground, grew sideways across the surface. Tzu Chi volunteer Xu Wen-long (徐文龍), who had a background in construction, brought in heavy machinery to help remove the rocks and prepare the land, which was then named Blessings Farm. What began as a student horticulture club gradually evolved into an agricultural biomedical research and development effort.

Red quinoa, which is relatively easy to grow and can be harvested within three to four months, became a focus. Faculty and students made notable strides in its cultivation and processing. After Typhoon Nepartak struck Taitung in July 2016, Master Cheng Yen tasked TCUST with helping

affected farmers by offering courses on red quinoa cultivation, processing, and marketing. Professors Liu and Keng led cultivation and processing training, while Professors Chen Hwang-yeh (陳皇曄) and Kuo Yu-ming (郭又銘) from the Marketing and Distribution Management Department provided instruction on marketing and distribution.

In addition to red quinoa, the agricultural biomedical team visited several Indigenous villages to study traditional crops and wild edibles, such as star jelly (*Nostoc commune*), the branched string lettuce (*Ulva prolifera*), and bird's-nest fern (*Asplenium nidus*), a vegetable favored by both Indigenous and Han communities. The team identified and developed new uses for these wild

Tzu Chi University faculty and students (top right) take part in harvesting star jelly in the Jiamin tribal settlement. Professor Vivian Tien (opposite) from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature teaches young farmers how to introduce their agricultural products in English, helping them expand marketing channels for their high-quality produce (bottom right).

COURTESY OF TZU CHI UNIVERSITY

edibles beyond eating them directly.

For more than a decade, TCUST faculty and students helped farmers in Hualien and Taitung, as well as agricultural biotech companies, solve technical challenges. At the same time, the university produced skilled graduates ready to enter the workforce. “Our students were willing to get their hands dirty,” said Professor Liu, with pride. “It was amazing to see them one moment wearing conical hats and picking stones in the fields, and the next operating precision instruments in a lab. This kind of hands-on experience gave them a deep understanding of both the crops and the conditions in which they grow. Many companies wanted to recruit our graduates—so much so, there weren’t enough to meet the demand!”

Carbon reduction

A collaborative system gradually took shape in the agricultural sector when TCU and TCUST joined forces with the Tzu Chi charity mission. The Tzu Chi Foundation led charity-based farming efforts by supplying farmers with machinery, seedlings, and other supplies, while TCUST’s agricultural biomedical team, drawing on its strong research and development background, took on the role of guiding product processing and marketing.

Meanwhile, TCU responded to the Ministry of Education’s call for universities to fulfill their University Social Responsibility (USR) by establishing a USR Center. The center’s mission is to support local communities in solving real-world challenges and to promote regional revitalization through sustainable agricultural practices and economic models.

In 2024, TCU made its debut at the USR



Awards, hosted by *Global Views Monthly*. Its project—*Satoyama* United Carbon Economy: Local Practice of Sustainable Consumption and Production—received the Model Award in the Ecological Co-Prosperity Category.

The term “*Satoyama*,” which originated in Japan, broadly refers to a mosaic of natural and human-managed landscapes—such as hills, forests, fields, grasslands, homes, ponds, and streams—where people live in harmony with nature. This concept closely reflects the geography and traditional way of life in Hualien, making it an ideal framework for TCU’s social responsibility work. For this reason, the university’s USR Center incorporated *Satoyama* into the project’s name.

"We're currently promoting low-carbon and natural farming methods," explained Professor Chiang Yun-chih, who also serves as the project lead at the USR Center. "Once these practices are well established, the entire farmland ecosystem and its biodiversity will improve." He noted that the 4 per 1000 Initiative, introduced at the Paris climate conference in 2015, proposes that increasing soil organic carbon by 0.4 percent annually could help halt the rise in atmospheric CO₂ levels. This underpins the carbon economy, which offers economic benefits to farmers who adopt sustainable practices.

"We guide farmers in adopting organic or natural farming methods and applying circular economy principles by returning agricultural waste to the soil," Chiang added. "We then regularly test for increases in soil organic carbon."

He went on to emphasize that there is now a global consensus on the value of carbon reduction. If farmers can provide credible data showing how much greenhouse gas emissions they've reduced, they can sell the resulting carbon credits to businesses seeking to offset their own emissions. In essence, they can generate income through soil carbon sequestration—the more carbon stored in the soil, the greater the profit.

At present, TCU's USR team is working with rice farmers on a "low-carbon rice" cultivation experiment, tracking carbon emissions from planting to harvest to explore its potential in the carbon economy. Yet, no matter how diligently farmers work to reduce emissions and improve their practices, they still need to sell quality crops to earn a sustainable income.

To help address this need, TCU's USR team has developed sales channels for farmers. In 2018, several like-minded professors spearheaded the creation of the Sustainable Food Consumption Cooperative at TCU, providing a platform for small farmers to sell their crops and processed foods directly on campus.

"In simple terms, it's about keeping money flowing locally rather than letting it leave the community," said Professor Chiu Yie-ru (邱奕儒), one of the cooperative's founders. The cooperative is jointly invested in and operated by faculty, students, and volunteers. Every member has a

say in its operations and can use their purchasing power to support local agriculture and the rural economy.

Professor Chiu explained the cooperative's criteria for selecting products to sell: "We prioritize organic and environmentally friendly products, especially those grown locally in Hualien. We also make a special effort to support items from local farmers' cooperatives."

Beyond selling produce at the campus store, TCU hosts a monthly small farmers' market, giving farmers another opportunity to showcase and sell their foodstuffs.

"Who you buy from determines where your money ultimately goes," said Professor Hsieh Wan-hua (謝婉華) of TCU's Department of Public Health, who is also associate chair of the cooperative. "We aim to support sustainable production through responsible consumption."

By emphasizing value over price, the university's effort fosters a win-win scenario for consumers, producers, and the broader community. In doing so, it brings the ideals of the Satoyama United Carbon Economy into everyday life.

From cultivation to innovation

It has been 12 years since Tzu Chi began working in the five Indigenous townships mentioned earlier in the article, providing farmers with seedlings, supplies, and guidance on cultivation, processing, and sales. Over the years, the foundation and Tzu Chi University have built strong ties with local farmers, who in turn have welcomed faculty and students into their fields for hands-on learning and offered students part-time job opportunities.

"Last year, we collaborated with Professor Vivian Tien [田薇] from TCU's Department of Foreign Languages and Literature," said Lin Xiuying (林秀瑛), a young farmer of the Taroko Indigenous group from the Jiamin tribal settlement in Xincheng Township. "She brought her students to help us practice giving farm tours and product introductions in English. She also helped us recruit students for paid internships through a school-industry partnership. When foreign visitors come, they serve as our English-speaking guides and interpreters."



Farmer Lin Xiu-ying in the Jiamin tribal settlement weeds a plot of bird's-nest ferns. Following advice from Tzu Chi University faculty, local Indigenous residents replaced black shade nets with natural tree cover, allowing their ferns to grow in a more environmentally friendly way.



Lin recalled how her connection with Tzu Chi began. In the 1990s, bird's-nest fern became a popular crop in Jiamin. At its peak, it sold for 230 New Taiwan dollars (US\$7.70) per catty (600 grams). Its profitability drew many villagers to start growing it. But lacking marketing know-how and an understanding of market dynamics, they were exploited by middlemen offering them much lower prices. Eventually, when the price dropped to just 15 dollars per catty, many villagers gave up, feeling it was no longer worth the effort. Fortunately, things began to turn around as younger people who had returned to their hometown established direct sales channels with restaurants and hotels, securing better prices for farmers and restoring the crop's viability.

Beyond the economic context, bird's-nest fern posed another challenge: It begins to wilt and darken within two or three days of harvest, limiting its shelf life and making storage and transportation difficult. To overcome this, younger farmers in Jiamin sought help from TCUST's agricultural biomedical team. Professors Liu

Wei-chung and Keng Nien-tzu led students in developing a method to process the fern into powder. This innovation paved the way for a range of processed products, including Jiamin's signature treats: bird's-nest fern nougat, cookies, and ice cream.

Yet more challenges lay ahead. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a heavy blow to Hualien's tourism industry, leaving local leisure farms largely empty. Despite the setback, Jiamin's younger farmers continued working with faculty from TCU and TCUST to improve their farming practices. For example, under the guidance of Professor Chiu Yie-ru, they replaced black shade nets with natural tree cover, adopting more environmentally friendly and sustainable methods for growing bird's-nest fern.

Tourism began to recover in 2023, but fresh challenges weren't far behind. The April 3, 2024 earthquake and Typhoon Kong-rey caused serious damage, including widespread destruction of bird's-nest fern fields, and once again led to a steep drop in tourist numbers. Despite the adversity, the younger farmers in Jiamin remained committed to their work—with Tzu Chi faculty standing by their side.

Lin shared that after the earthquake, Tzu Chi professors encouraged them to use the lull in tourism to build skills and develop new products. "Professors Liu and Keng are incredibly dedicated," she said. "We reach out to them with questions all the time, so much so that I sometimes feel bad. But they're always so patient and willing to help." The gratitude in her voice was unmistakable.

Food forest

Tzu Chi has promoted charity-based farming in Taiwan for over a decade, upholding eco-friendly principles that avoid the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The journey has been one of continuous experimentation, learning, and adaptation—filled with the joys of harvest as well as unpredictable challenges brought on by natural disasters.

For example, members of a production and marketing team in Fengbin Township had been cultivating Inca nuts when a cold snap last winter

Glossary

The 4 per 1000 Initiative

The 4 per 1000 Initiative was introduced at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, where the Paris Agreement was adopted. This initiative suggests that increasing the organic carbon content in the Earth's soils by 0.4 percent each year could significantly offset greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity.

Conventional farming practices, such as applying chemical fertilizers, spraying pesticides, and over-cultivating land, lead to the loss of organic carbon from soil into the atmosphere. In contrast, adopting more sustainable methods and restoring degraded land can help sequester carbon in the soil.

Tobias Neugebauer, a German soil biology expert and visiting instructor at Tzu Chi University's USR Center, explains the structure of a food forest. In addition to food crops, it includes supportive plants that enrich the soil and provide shelter.

caused their crops to wither *en masse*, unable to withstand the chill. In response, Tzu Chi provided camellia seedlings—another crop used for edible oil production—to help the farmers replant their fields and start anew.

In another initiative, following the merger of Tzu Chi University and the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, the combined institution has been actively involved in exploring and promoting “food forests.” Through its USR Center, the university transformed the Blessings Farm at its Jianguo Campus into a living laboratory, using seeds and saplings to build a food forest from the ground up. In collaboration with the school's Continuing Education Office, the USR Center also launched a related course titled “The Way of Resilient Farming: From Stones to Forests,” which has drawn farmers from across Taiwan.

At Blessings Farm, German soil biology expert Tobias Neugebauer, a visiting instructor, explained that building a food forest begins with nourishing the soil. Crops are then planted according to their growth patterns and functions, forming layers of vegetation—low, medium, tall, and emergent. This approach integrates a mix of cash crops and supportive plants, such as tall, hardy trees that provide protection from wind and intense sunlight.

“When typhoons strike, strong trees stay standing while weaker ones fall and decompose, becoming nutrients for the others. That's what we're trying to do here,” Neugebauer said. He emphasized that food forests still require human care, such as regularly pruning trees and allowing the fallen branches and leaves to return to the soil as organic matter. Over time, as the system matures, it becomes more self-sustaining and requires less intervention.

From the perspective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, combining eco-friendly farming with sustainable economic



models promotes not only environmental sustainability but also the resilience of urban and rural communities. Through the charity-based farming efforts of its charity and education missions, Tzu Chi is helping to produce clean, healthy food while also fostering mutual flourishing between people, communities, and the Earth. The dedicated efforts of volunteers, faculty, and farmers are already yielding promising results. Looking ahead, it is hoped that continued advancements in technology, concepts, and operational models will help Tzu Chi generate an even greater positive impact in eastern Taiwan and beyond, wherever the foundation is working in the future. ❦

In Harmony With the Land

The Cultivation of Great Love Farms

By Yeh Tzu-hao Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Tzu Chi volunteers come together to grow toxin-free crops and nurture the land with mindful, eco-conscious farming.





Tzu Chi volunteers from Taoyuan weed the fields at Zhixue Great Love Farm using a combination of machinery and manual labor. Herbicides are avoided to maintain a toxin-free, organic environment and protect the farm's ecosystem.

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As February gives way to March, Taiwan often sees overcast skies and periods of rain. On one such chilly, damp day, more than 30 Tzu Chi volunteers from Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, arrived at Zhixue Great Love Farm, nestled at the foot of Liyu Mountain in Shoufeng Township, Hualien, eastern Taiwan. A biting wind swept across the rice paddies with temperatures dipping below 10°C (50°F). Fortunately, the volunteers were well prepared with warm clothing, hats, raincoats, rain pants, and high rubber boots. Once they got busy with work, they warmed up and the cold no longer seemed to matter.

"In summer, the sun and heated water in the paddies make the work more exhausting," said volunteer Lu Chun-tao (呂春桃), drawing on her years of experience at the farm. "Though it's cold in winter, it's actually more bearable, and we've gotten used to it."

Their focus this time was weeding. First, the volunteers removed the protective barriers that keep wild geese and ducks away. Then, they pushed weeds that had sprouted beside the rice seedlings, such as barnyard grass, back into the mud, preventing them from competing with the rice for sunlight and nutrients.

"Barnyard grass absorbs nutrients faster than rice," explained team vice leader Yang Zhi-ming (楊志明). "Since fertilizer will be applied tomorrow, we need to remove the weeds today. This will allow the rice plants to better absorb the nutrients."

Yang also offered an overview of the farm's rice-growing cycle. The first crop is planted at the end of winter or in early spring and harvested after about 128 days. Following a fallow period of over a month, a second crop is planted in the summer. Because of the warmer weather, this crop matures slightly faster and is harvested after about 120 days.

These two annual harvests are made possible by the collective efforts of volunteers from across



Taiwan. Teams from Taoyuan, Taichung, Kaohsiung, Pingtung, and Taipei take turns helping with weeding, installing protective barriers, operating farm machinery, and maintaining the irrigation system, ensuring that the farm runs smoothly.

Zhixue Great Love Farm follows eco-friendly farming practices, such as avoiding the use of chemical pesticides, to help preserve the land's natural ecology. As a result, the rice grown here is certified as organic and toxin-free. In addition to supplying the Jing Si Abode—including meals for visiting Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan and abroad—the rice is also processed into products such as instant rice. These products are sold to the public during normal times and used to support disaster relief efforts or to aid the impoverished when needed.

Master Cheng Yen has long expressed concern about potential food crises and often reminds fol-

lowers of the importance of preparing for difficult times. The Great Love Farm in Hualien is part of Tzu Chi's response. It not only provides organic rice for the Jing Si Abode, the spiritual home of Tzu Chi volunteers, but also reflects a mindful response to climate change, supports food security, and promotes the sustainable vitality of the land.

The farm in Yunlin

Another Tzu Chi Great Love Farm is located at the foundation's Yunlin office in Dounan Township, Yunlin County, southwestern Taiwan. Due to its relatively convenient location, this 1.8-hectare (4.4-acre) farm is often open to Tzu Chi volunteers and members who want to experience farm work firsthand. Whether they are healthcare professionals from Tzu Chi's medical mission, teachers and students from the education mission, or families participating in parent-child

Yunlin Great Love Farm (right) covers nearly two hectares. Its rice harvest supplies Tzu Chi offices in southern Taiwan, with a portion also used to make red blessing packets for the foundation's year-end blessing ceremonies. Medical staff from Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital (opposite) take part in harvesting.

OPPOSITE-PAGE PHOTO BY HUANG SHU-YING; RIGHT PHOTO BY WEI QING-TANG

classes, all are welcome to take part in planting seedlings or helping with other farming tasks.

"Our annual rice yield is about 14 metric tons [15.4 short tons], mainly supplying Tzu Chi offices south of Taichung [in central Taiwan]," said volunteer Jian Zhen-quan (簡圳銓), who currently oversees the farm. "We also set aside about a hundred kilograms [220 pounds] of unhusked rice each year to make *fuhui hongbaos* [literally 'red envelopes of blessings and wisdom']." These small red packets, distributed during Tzu Chi's year-end blessing ceremonies, each contain three grains of unhusked rice, most of which comes from the Yunlin farm. In this way, the rice grown here reaches people all over the world.

Tzu Chi's commitment to toxin-free, organic, and eco-friendly farming requires more time and effort than conventional methods, but Jian is unwavering in his dedication to the farmwork. In addition to volunteering at a Tzu Chi hospital and participating in recycling efforts, he works on the farm tirelessly—even during the middle of the night or early morning, guided by the beam of his headlamp.

He shared the principles that guide the farm's practices: grass retention, meaning weeds are left alone unless they interfere with the crops; root protection, which focuses on preserving root systems and maintaining soil moisture; and coexistence with and respect for life, living alongside insects, snails, mice, and birds—creatures often labeled as pests—without using pesticides to eliminate them for the sake of higher yields. This last principle is in accordance with Master Cheng Yen's teachings.

This "field of blessings" has been cultivated for 17 years and has produced over 200 metric tons (220 short tons) of food. Whether it's the rice



served in the dining halls of Tzu Chi offices in southern Taiwan or meals delivered to disaster survivors in times of need, every grain carries love and sincerity from this piece of land.

Everything for sustainability

Tzu Chi's Zhongli Campus in northern Taiwan, where nearly 90 percent of the grounds are dedicated to green space, is home to another Great Love Farm. Volunteers there have cultivated the farm with impressive results.

Eighty-five-year-old volunteer Chen Hong-yong (陳鴻永) said that the fruits and vegetables grown on the farm are highly desired due to their organic, toxin-free cultivation methods: "Every time we hold a charity sale, everything sells out quickly! The proceeds go toward supporting Tzu Chi's poverty alleviation and disaster relief efforts."

These prized harvests are the result of dedicated, hands-on care. To protect crops from insect damage, volunteers have constructed net houses made mostly of recycled materials. These structures are highly effective despite their humble origins, not only shielding vegetables from pests but also providing insulation during cold snaps.

Volunteers also repurpose herbal dregs from a nearby traditional Chinese medicine factory to make compost, and use fruit peels and vegetable scraps to produce enzyme solutions. "We dilute



At the farm on Tzu Chi's Zhongli Campus, leafy greens nourished with diluted enzyme solutions grow large and healthy. Produce grown on-site are available for charity sales from time to time (top).

Volunteers at Tzu Chi's Zhongli Campus make compost from herbal dregs, fruit peels, vegetable scraps, and other natural plant waste. It helps improve soil quality when mixed into the soil.

the enzyme solution to water the crops and mix the remaining solids into the soil as fertilizer," explained volunteer Wu Wen-xiong (吳文雄), sharing one of their secrets to growing quality produce.

Like the Great Love Farms in Hualien and Yunlin, the Zhongli farm follows eco-friendly, organic principles and strives to coexist harmoniously with nature. But that doesn't mean everything always goes according to plan. Last winter, for instance, the farm's signature crop, Inca nuts, suffered major losses due to pest infestations and low temperatures, sharply reducing the harvest. Shifting rainfall patterns and water shortages in recent years have also forced the farm to stop growing rice, a water-intensive crop.

"In the past, rainfall was more evenly distributed," said volunteer Chen Wen-yin (陳文印), who takes care of most of the farm work. "Now, during summer when we need water, it often doesn't rain—or when it does, it pours all at once.

When the pond water gets too low, we have to use electric pumps or even draw from wells. That's not sustainable." In response, the campus rice paddies were converted this year to drought-tolerant oil-seed camellia trees.

In addition to adapting by adjusting crop varieties, the Zhongli campus is planning a broader transformation: to become a certified Environmental Education Facility recognized by the Ministry of Environment. This will involve enhancing the farm and other outdoor areas with reforestation efforts to support Taiwan's net-zero emissions goals.

"We hope to help visitors learn about plant diversity and biodiversity [through this transformation], inspiring them to cherish the land," said volunteer Pan Fu-shou (潘福壽). He envisions the Zhongli campus and farm evolving to play a greater educational role and also to serve as a place of healing. Achieving this vision requires long-term thinking in the cultivation of crops and other plants, as well as in overall land stewardship.

This transformation is especially important in light of Taiwan's declining birthrate and aging population. As volunteers grow older, maintaining the expansive campus and farmland will become increasingly difficult. By fostering a self-sustaining, forest-like ecosystem, the need for manual labor can be reduced, while providing a tranquil sanctuary that nourishes both body and spirit.

Whether cultivating the Great Love Farms or transforming them, the volunteers' mission remains clear: despite ongoing challenges from climate and environmental change, to preserve the land beneath our feet for generations to come. ❧

The Hand That Held Mine

By Joe Guo

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*A fleeting gesture between father and daughter
left a lasting memory of love.*

My 83-year-old father, who for many years had been the steady pillar of our family, needed surgery to remove a benign tumor. He was expected to stay in the hospital for about six days.

In the past, whenever Dad was hospitalized, Mom, now 80, was always by his side, tending to his every need. But six months earlier, she began showing signs of dementia. This time, she could no longer take on the role she had so lovingly fulfilled for decades.

My siblings and I took turns filling her place. I took a few days off from my job in the city to care for him. As I sat beside him, an unexpected sadness welled up. This man, always a rock of stability, now seemed so vulnerable. Seeing him in this state made me painfully aware of how much time had passed and how little we might have left. Tears came to my eyes as I fought to keep my composure, not wanting to sadden him as well.

The next day, it was time to leave and hand my caregiving duties over to my older sister. Afraid my voice might betray me, I kept my farewell short: "Take care, Dad."

He reached out, his hand enveloping mine in a tight, firm squeeze. In that brief touch, I could feel the weight of his emotions. It was as if he, too, was afraid to speak, worried his voice might break. Though no words were exchanged, that squeeze said everything—his gratitude, his love,



and perhaps a touch of guilt that I had taken time from my busy job to care for him.

On the train ride back to the city, the dam holding back my emotions finally broke. I turned toward the window and quietly wiped my tears away, hoping no one would notice. An elderly couple sat beside me, their eyes closed, giving me the privacy I needed to let my heart ache. I found myself clinging to the hope that things could stay the same forever, despite knowing that life is impermanent. Even in the midst of my tears, I could still feel the lingering warmth of my father's hand.

It was then I realized something important: Even a single moment can hold an eternity. That tight squeeze expressed more than any words ever could. It was a precious gift—not something tangible, but a reminder that even as time takes away the people we love, it can never erase the bonds we have formed. Those memories, etched deep in our hearts, remain untouched.

Life moves forward. One day my father's road will narrow to its end. But when that time comes, I hope to carry with me not the heavy grief of parting, but the simple, powerful memory of his hand holding mine—a reminder that love, in its purest form, never vanishes. ❦

Let's Play Together

By Li Qiu-yue, Tzu Chi Teachers Association

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Zhong Ting-jia

When children experience exclusion at school, how can parents support them with wisdom and love?

A concerned mother asked, “My child feels hurt because some classmates have formed cliques and are deliberately excluding him. How can I help him handle these social interactions?”

Around the age of three years, children often say things like, “My mom says...” or “My dad says...” At that stage, their parents are the center of their world. As they enter elementary school, up until around fifth grade, their focus begins to shift outward. They start saying, “Our teacher says...” After fifth grade, it shifts again to, “My classmates say...” A child’s development follows a clear and observable path, with peers playing an increasingly important role over time.

The need for belonging is a constant part of human development. But as children grow and peers become more central in their lives, exclusion can feel increasingly more personal and painful. When a child feels left out because others have formed exclusive groups, how should parents respond?

Trust your child to find a way

If your child comes home saying, “My classmates formed a group and won’t play with me,” it’s only natural to feel anxious, or to think, *I need to step in and do something to fix this*. But in that moment, what your child needs most is your calm presence and willingness to listen

Begin gently by asking, “What’s wrong?” or

“Are you okay?” Then give your child space to share their feelings and frustrations. You might follow up and ask, “What do you think you can do?” With emotional support and open conversation, children can begin to find their own way through social challenges. Moments like these aren’t just about problem-solving—they’re part of how children learn to build relationships and engage with the world around them.

Model connection and kindness

Modern social life often lacks warmth. Sometimes neighbors even pass each other without a word—rarely greeting one another, let alone offering help. When parents behave this way, children unconsciously absorb the same emotional distance, making it much harder to build meaningful relationships as they grow up.

That’s why it’s so important for parents to model connection and kindness from an early age. When you pass a neighbor, greet them together with your child: “Hello, Auntie Hong!” or “Thank you, Mr. Ma, for the vegetables!”

And when someone needs help, involve your child. Not long ago, our neighbor Mrs. Liao rang the doorbell and said, “There’s a patch of weeds in our yard we can’t reach. Could you help us?” I agreed immediately and mentioned it to my son. He quickly responded, “My arms are longer; I’ll help!”

While some friendships form naturally, inter-



personal skills grow best through a thoughtful and caring upbringing.

Navigating social struggles together

In reality, most social groups are small. People naturally gather with those they get along with, or they find another group, or form one of their own. What matters is having a sense of belonging and feeling comfortable. Trying too hard to fit in or constantly seeking others' approval is one of the first major pitfalls in forming healthy relationships.

Of course, it's heartbreaking for parents to see their child rejected. But using material things to help them gain acceptance won't work in the long run. Please resist this instinct—it's a second major pitfall.

Instead, ask yourself: Is my child consistently being excluded? If so, it's worth reflecting on whether there are aspects of their personality or approach to handling situations that might need adjustment. No one is obligated to include your child. That's why helping them develop noticeable strengths—traits that make them stand out in a positive way—is so essential.

Real change only happens when a child recognizes the need and is willing to reflect and take action. There's no one-size-fits-all guide for building strong social skills. It comes down to a parent's wisdom—responding thoughtfully in the moment, offering guidance, and helping the child learn through real-life experience. Above all, remember: Parental example is the most powerful form of education. ❧

Goodbye to a “Tango Life”

Narrated by Yen Chieh-tsung

Compiled by Cai Jia-qi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Painting by Wen Mu

Diagnosed with Parkinson's in middle age, Shu-zhi struggled with symptoms that affected her body, spirit, and family life. But with care at Qing'an Residence at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, she gradually regained her strength and spirit.

At age 51, Shu-zhi began showing signs of Parkinson's disease. Her body grew stiff and rigid, making movement extremely difficult. She began what she called her “tango life,” with her husband holding her as they moved about and carried out daily activities in a way that resembled dancing the tango.

Unwilling to undergo Western medical tests or treatment, she spent the next four years using health supplements in an effort to manage her symptoms. Her husband looked after her with great devotion, but the strain gradually wore down his own health. Their daughter struggled to understand why her mother would rather suffer in silence than seek professional help. It was as if the illness had restricted not only Shu-zhi's body but her mind as well, leaving her unwilling to explore other treatment options. In time, she sank into despair and even began to contemplate ending her life.

A turning point came when she and her husband visited Qing'an Residence, a long-term care facility at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. They had been encouraged to go by university friends—Lin Ming-nan (林名男), vice superintendent of the hospital, and his wife. The cheerful environment and the warm, attentive care from the medical staff gave Shu-zhi a glimmer of hope. She decided to move in.

After her admission, the medical team evaluated her physical and mental condition. Respecting her preferences, they began treatment

with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Through her TCM doctor, Shu-zhi gradually learned about the latest advances in Western treatments for Parkinson's. That's when I, a neurologist at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, first met her. She shared her journey since falling ill, and I offered emotional support. After a few more meetings, she began to accept my treatment recommendations.

Just one week after starting the medication I prescribed, she was able to take slow, steady steps on her own. She no longer needed help to stand or walk. Her husband, half-jokingly, exclaimed, “I was fooled for four years! With treatment, she can move on her own after all!”

At first, her limited mobility made her anxious about leaving her room. But three months after moving into Qing'an Residence, she bravely stepped out and began moving around in the hallway. I often visited her after clinic hours, and her TCM doctor continued to provide care and encouragement.

After a pleasant year at Qing'an, feeling that her mobility had improved enough, she discussed with her family her next steps. That's when she decided to leave the residence and move to Kaohsiung, in southern Taiwan.

She began a new chapter of her life there. Every day, she walked 50 laps around her kitchen island to maintain her strength. She returned to Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital every three months for follow-up visits, and our team continued to sup-

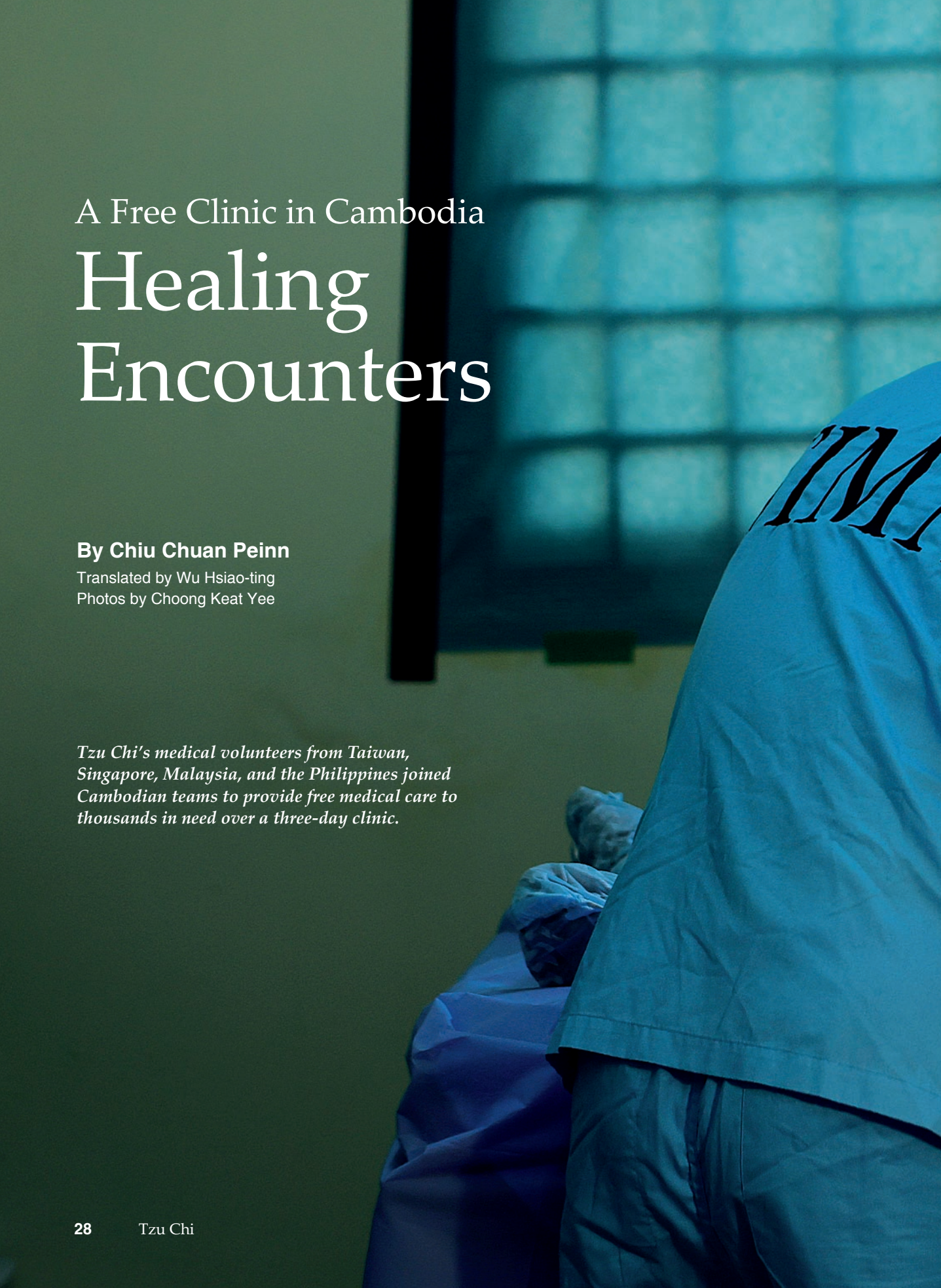


port her. The head nurse, social workers, and volunteers even took time off to celebrate her birthday with her.

A year after moving to Kaohsiung, she went shopping at a nearby supermarket with her family. Long-lost smiles had returned to their faces.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen once said, “Love is

the most powerful force for happiness in the world.” I believe every encounter is the result of karmic affinity—even those between medical teams and patients. Our team strives to make the most of this connection, helping patients find happiness and reminding them that love is always by their side. ❦



A Free Clinic in Cambodia

Healing Encounters

By Chiu Chuan Peinn

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Choong Keat Yee

Tzu Chi's medical volunteers from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines joined Cambodian teams to provide free medical care to thousands in need over a three-day clinic.



A surgeon taking part in a Tzu Chi free clinic held in Cambodia this past May operates on a patient to remove a tumor. Instead of a disposable surgical drape, white sterile wrapping paper from a surgical glove box was used—an environmentally conscious choice that reflects Tzu Chi's values.

In late spring, I traveled with a Tzu Chi team from Taiwan to Cambodia to report on a free clinic for *Tzu Chi Monthly*. Our 90-minute drive south from Phnom Penh International Airport to Takeo Province offered a vivid glimpse of Cambodia's blend of old and new. Tuk-tuks, motor scooters, and Japanese-imported cars shared the roads, while the route was lined with garment and shoe factories, snack stalls and carts, traditional stilt houses, and Buddhist temples. This mix of modern and traditional scenes reflected the country's closely intertwined urban and rural life.

Our destination was Prey Kabbas Referral Hospital, where Tzu Chi held a large-scale free clinic in partnership with the Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association (TYDA). This event, one of the free clinics regularly conducted by the two organizations, offered services in five specialties: ophthalmology, dentistry, surgery, internal medicine, and traditional Chinese medicine. Over three days, from May 30 to June 1, the clinic recorded nearly 3,700 patient visits.

The clinic began at 10 a.m. on the first day. By the time the Taiwan team and I arrived around noon, a sizable crowd had gathered outside the hospital, waiting to register. Tzu Chi volunteers and local youth helped patients fill out basic information forms and sign up for the appropriate departments based on their medical needs. Though the young volunteers still carried a sense of innocence, their focus and sense of responsibility stood out.

Tzu Chi's Singapore team had visited the site a month prior to the clinic to conduct a field survey. Then, two days before the event, they joined Cambodian volunteers to begin setting up the venue in preparation for the arrival of teams from Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

The surgery and ophthalmology departments were located in the same building. It was there that I saw Chhom Sophea undergoing surgery. His broad frame made the operating table seem small. Dr. Chien Sou-hsin (簡守信), superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital in central Taiwan, performed the procedure, removing

Cambodia at a Glance

Location: Mainland Southeast Asia

Capital: Phnom Penh

Official Language: Khmer

Population: More than 17.84 million, with about 90 percent ethnic Khmer

Religion: About 95 percent of the population practices Theravada Buddhism

GDP per Capita: Approximately 2,700 USD

Area: Approximately 181,000 square kilometers (69,900 sq mi)

Historical Highlights

- 9th–15th centuries: Center of the Khmer Empire, which constructed Angkor Wat, now Cambodia's most iconic heritage site
- 1863–1953: Under French colonial rule as a protectorate
- 1975–1979: Governed by the Khmer Rouge regime, resulting in widespread atrocities and humanitarian crises
- 1991: Paris Peace Agreements signed, marking the end of civil war
- 1993: Elections held under UN supervision; constitutional monarchy restored





tumors from his back and arm.

After the operation, I found Chhom waiting to receive medication and attend a health education session. I was able to interview him with the help of a college student volunteering on-site, who translated Chhom's Khmer into English. He told me he had been living with the tumors for six years, and that whenever he lay down, the pressure on them caused him discomfort.

Although speaking to a reporter, Chhom answered my questions without hesitation, his eyes gentle and at ease. In fact, I encountered this same openness and calm sincerity throughout the rest of my interviews with local residents, who all shared their experiences freely.

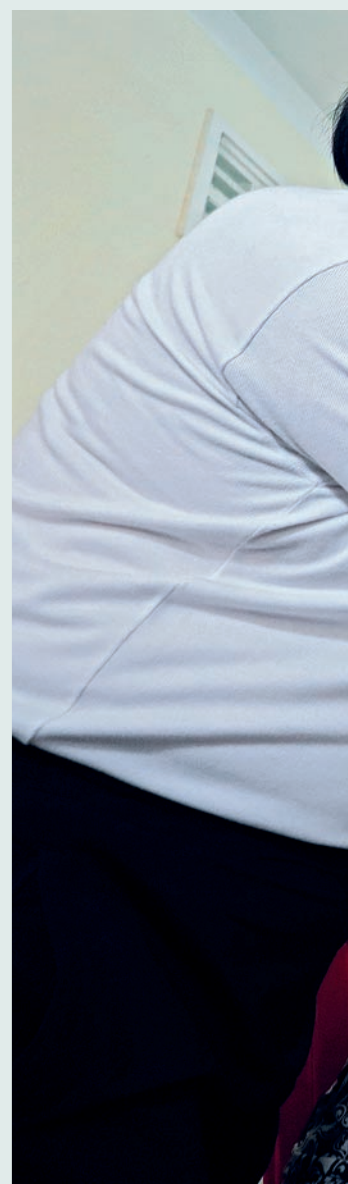
Dr. Chien later explained that in Taiwan, doctors would typically monitor benign tumors like Chhom's through follow-up visits, and only proceed with surgery if needed. "But since this is a free clinic in Cambodia," he said, "monitoring a tumor is often difficult for patients. Thus, we opt to remove them immediately, giving them peace of mind."

Orthopedic doctor Hung Shuo-suei (洪碩穗, middle) and Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital Deputy Superintendent Chang Heng-chia (張恆嘉, second from left) conduct a joint consultation at the internal medicine department during the free clinic. Cross-department collaboration boosts the clinic's effectiveness.

The surgery removed not only the tumors, but also a burden of anxiety that had weighed on the patient's heart for years.

Caring for vision

When I visited the ophthalmology department on the second day of the free clinic, the waiting area was full of patients. Most had undergone preoperative screenings earlier that month, on May 3 or 4. Each patient wore a label affixed to their forehead above the affected eye, marked with either a "C" for cataract or a "P" for pterygium. For those scheduled for cataract surgery, the label also displayed a number that matched the serial code on their intraocular lens box, helping



to ensure the correct lens was used during the procedure.

Nearby, over a dozen patients were having their pupils dilated with eye drops, which would take at least 15 minutes to take effect.

One woman stood out to me: Kart Eng, dressed in a blue shirt, her eyes tinged with sorrow. Through an interpreter, I learned she was 69 years old and had experienced blurred vision for some time. About two months before the clinic, she also began noticing a dark shadow in her right eye.

She soon changed into a surgical gown and cap and waited quietly for her turn. Before the operation, her surgeon administered local anes-

thesia. Then, under a surgical microscope, the surgeon used an ultrasonic probe to break up and suction out her clouded natural lens. Each cataract surgery typically took between ten and 30 minutes to complete.

Dr. Antonio Say (史美勝), who led the ophthalmology team from the Philippines, pointed out that all the surgeons on this mission were highly experienced. They worked with care and precision, and were determined to ensure that every registered patient received the treatment they needed. Four operating tables were in constant use, with patients rotating in and out in a steady rhythm. Rapid sterilization equipment allowed for quick turnover between procedures. In this



manner, the ophthalmology team completed 108 surgeries for cataract and pterygium in just two days.

After her surgery, Kart slowly sat up, her expression dazed, as though she hadn't quite regained her bearings. As soon as she saw us, she brought her palms together in a gesture of gratitude. Her well-meaning gesture, bringing her hands close to her face so soon after eye surgery, carried a risk of infection. The surgeon, clearly concerned, quickly cautioned us to ensure she didn't touch the surgical site.

Postoperative patients were then guided to a recovery area, where they rested briefly, received anti-inflammatory eye drops, and listened to

Patients in surgical gowns and caps (top left), with labels affixed to their foreheads, wait for cataract surgery. A volunteer applies dilating eye drops to a patient before the procedure (bottom left). Dr. Antonio Say (second from right in the right photo) from the Philippines examines a patient's recovery the day after her surgery.

RIGHT AND TOP LEFT PHOTOS BY JAMAICA MAE DIGO; BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO BY CHAI MONG PING

instructions for post-surgical care. Kart said her vision was still a bit blurry and that she felt a mild stinging sensation in her eye.

The average monthly income is relatively low



in Cambodia. A single cataract operation can cost between 200 and 500 U.S. dollars, depending on the type of intraocular lens and surgical method used. When factoring in travel, hospital stays, and medication, the overall expense can be a heavy burden—especially for retirees like Kart Eng. Thus, free eye surgery represents a significant opportunity for many people in the country.

Free yet effective care

Mao Sareorn, 60, was among the patients in the dental department. For nearly a year, she had endured a persistent toothache that severely impacted her daily life. The pain would, at times, trigger intense headaches that left her unable to work. She weaves fabric at home, earning about a hundred U.S. dollars for each bundle, which takes her two months to complete. With such modest earnings, the dental pain that from time to time forced her to stop working only added to her financial strain.

It wasn't that she had never sought treatment for tooth pain. Five years earlier, she had visited a

One dentist performs the treatment as others assist with suction, lighting, and other supportive tasks.

CHAI MONG PING

private clinic for a tooth extraction, which cost ten U.S. dollars. Though that might not seem expensive to some, it was enough to deter her from seeking dental care when she experienced the same problem again. According to dental students volunteering at the free clinic, current fees at private clinics can range from 20 to 50 dollars for tooth extractions—a financial stretch for many patients.

After her tooth was removed at the free clinic, Mao bit down on a cotton ball to stop the bleeding and then headed to the internal medicine department to address digestive issues. Because of the cotton still in her mouth, she could only nod or shake her head in response to the doctor's questions. I wasn't able to interview her, but I silently hoped she felt some relief, now that the source of her pain had finally been taken away.

Nearby, Yin Sarim had just received her first-ever teeth cleaning. She proudly showed us her bright white teeth before making her way to internal medicine. Like Mao Sareorn, she earned a living through weaving, often working long hours at her loom. Recent financial pressure at home had left her feeling anxious, pushing her to work even harder. Perhaps because of this stress, she had begun experiencing gastrointestinal discomfort. The doctor advised her to eat meals at regular times—simple advice, but often hard to follow for someone preoccupied with making ends meet.

Dr. Ho Ching-liang (何景良) from Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, who treated Yin Sarim, observed that many patients at the clinic suffered from digestive issues. Given the limited diagnostic tools on-site, he relied heavily on clinical judgment and patient interviews to prescribe appropriate medications and offer guidance on symptom management—doing what he could within the constraints of the setting.

Hsieh Ming-hsuan (謝明勳), head of Tzu Chi Cambodia, explained that while public clinics offer subsidized consultations to those with work permits, assistance usually ends there. Patients are often required to cover the cost of medication themselves, which can be a significant financial burden for those with limited means.

The meaning behind the numbers

On the third morning of the free clinic, as the medical team arrived, patients waiting in the ophthalmology area stood and applauded—they could already see more clearly.

We happened to run into Kart Eng during her follow-up visit. She was wearing the sunglasses the doctor had given her after surgery to protect her healing eye. She told us that the vision in her right eye had noticeably improved and that her recovery had gone smoothly, with minimal discomfort. She was very happy.

Her husband, nearly 80, had come with her and was preparing to undergo cataract surgery himself. He didn’t appear nervous, perhaps reassured by how well his wife had fared. We took a photo of the couple—both smiling brightly, a moment full of warmth and joy.

2025 Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Cambodia

Location: Prey Kabbas Referral Hospital, Takeo Province
Dates: May 30 to June 1
Total Patient Visits : 3,686

Specialties & Visits

Internal Medicine	1,657
Traditional Chinese Medicine	901
Dentistry	757
Ophthalmology	215
Surgery	156

Looking back on the three-day event, surgical care often provided the most immediate relief, whether patients were dealing with recent problems or conditions they had endured for years. The internal medicine and traditional Chinese medicine departments focused on diagnosis and patient education. While doctors prescribed medications when needed, they also emphasized guidance on healthier daily habits. In the dental department, services such as extractions, cleanings, and fillings helped patients maintain quality of life and prevent further pain.

No matter the department, doctors went the extra mile for their patients, hoping to offer just a little more care and make just a little more difference.

Behind the nearly 3,700 patient visits logged over the three days were thousands of brief yet meaningful encounters between doctors and patients. Though fleeting, many of these moments are sure to leave a lasting impression—on both sides.



Behind the Scenes of the Free Clinic

A month before the event, Tzu Chi's Cambodian volunteers and doctors from TYDA began conducting preoperative eye screenings to prepare for cataract and other surgeries that would be performed by physicians from the Tzu Chi Eye Center in the Philippines. The ophthalmology team from the Philippines brought 22 boxes of instruments, medications, and medical supplies (top right photo) and conducted multiple equipment tests and trial runs (left photo). Meanwhile, Tzu Chi's advance team from Singapore arrived with 31 boxes of equipment and essential items. They set up the site at Prey Kabbas Referral Hospital in Takeo Province, organizing areas for consultation, treatment, and pharmacy services (middle and bottom right photos).

TOP RIGHT AND LEFT PHOTOS BY JAMAICA MAE DIGO; MIDDLE AND BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTOS BY YANG ZHI HUANG



Hope in White Coats

By Chiu Chuan Peinn

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Young medical volunteers supported patients and their doctors, embodying warm care and a spirit of learning—the very qualities that bring lasting hope to Tzu Chi free clinics.

On the third day of the free clinic in Cambodia, a young doctor in a white polo shirt was tending to a female patient in the internal medicine area. Unlike the ethnic Chinese doctors volunteering from other countries, his skin tone and facial features suggested that he was local. His name was Chhay Daro, an emergency medicine physician. The logo on his shirt identified him as a member of the Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association (TYDA), a nonprofit organization that has partnered with Tzu Chi for years to organize free clinics in Cambodia. He had made the trip to the free clinic to lend his support, despite just having completed a night shift.

TYDA is a leading medical volunteer association in Cambodia, boasting over 10,000 members. Its clinics operate across the country, aiming to bridge the healthcare gap between urban and rural areas. Dr. Chhay, the son of a farmer, said he had long hoped to help reduce disparities in access to medical care—a goal that closely aligns with TYDA's mission.

Because TYDA members are affiliated with medical institutions across Cambodia, they can refer complex cases encountered during their joint clinics with Tzu Chi to larger hospitals. Tzu Chi volunteer Hsieh Ming-hsuan added that the foundation covers both transportation and treatment costs for referred patients.

Great help

Dr. Chhay first encountered Tzu Chi in 2018, when he was still a medical student. That year, he participated in a Tzu Chi free clinic held at the Dangkor landfill in Phnom Penh. Now in Takeo Province, he once again saw how many

local residents could not afford medical care and was glad that the clinic offered services across various specialties, especially ophthalmology.

Another TYDA physician, Thay Vireth, remarked that healthcare in Cambodia has been steadily improving. Both the healthcare-related infrastructure and medical services have advanced significantly, even compared to just a decade ago. Today, citizens with ID cards and work permits are eligible for medical subsidies and can choose between local clinics and government hospitals in the cities. Even so, access to medical care remains difficult for some. That's where TYDA has stepped in to help connect these patients with needed resources.

Like members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), those of TYDA are all volunteers. They volunteer on weekends or take leave from work to participate in free clinics, an experience that Dr. Thay says allows him to witness compassion in action. The clinics also provide additional opportunities for professional exchange and collaboration beyond his regular work.

In addition to TYDA members, 90 students from the private University of Puthisastra and the public University of Health Sciences in Phnom Penh also volunteered at the event. Dental students served in the dentistry department, while others contributed in various areas by registering patients, interpreting for doctors, supporting health education efforts, and more. Of all these services, interpretation was in highest demand.

Dr. Hsu Jung-yuan (徐榮源), deputy superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, described this free clinic as the most extensive he had ever



Cambodian medical student Eng Sonita (back row, left) serves as an interpreter for Malaysian traditional Chinese medicine doctor Ong Boon Hock (in white), helping to bridge communication between doctor and patient.

LAI TONG HENG

participated in. He praised everything from the blood testing and electrocardiogram equipment to the referral system. He was especially impressed by the medical student interpreters, noting that sometimes they completed every item on the consultation form before even being asked. One such student, Visal, humbly said he had learned a lot through the experience.

A long road for medical students

Tzu Chi's dental team from Singapore guided local dental students in performing extractions, fillings, and cleanings. Dr. Koh Tieh Leong (許智亮) praised the students' performance and was especially moved to see them serving their own community.

Lay Chhaykong, a fourth-year dental student at the University of Health Sciences, observed that the visiting physicians brought a wealth of clinical experience and were able to diagnose conditions quickly. He also noticed differences in how they handled instruments during extractions—details not typically covered in textbooks—which made the experience all the more eye-opening.

During one procedure, Lay used his phone as a light source to help ensure a clearer view while an upper-year student, Sor Narin, extracted a decayed tooth root from a patient. Dr. Koh explained that the case was the result of severe tooth decay—so advanced only the root

remained—something rarely seen in countries like Singapore, where dental care is widely accessible. In rural Cambodia, however, poor oral hygiene and the inability to afford cleanings or fillings often lead to more advanced cases like this one.

Sor performed between 25 and 30 extractions over the course of the clinic, while Lay contributed what he could. He said participating in the clinic all three days was well worth it, as it gave him more opportunities to put what he had learned into practice.

The path to becoming a doctor in Cambodia is a long one. Dental school takes seven years, while medical school requires eight. After graduation, students must spend another two to five years, depending on their specialty, to earn certification. Most graduates seek positions in well-equipped urban hospitals, where they feel their skills are best utilized.

Eng Sonita, a third-year medical student, reflected on her long journey. She admitted that at times she had felt like giving up, but now that she was nearly halfway through her studies, she was committed to seeing it through. She hopes to specialize in either pediatrics or pulmonology. Including her internship, it will take her nine more years to become a fully licensed physician.

Although Eng often volunteers at free clinics, this time marked her first experience with traditional Chinese medicine—she even tried her



hand at pulse diagnosis. She felt she wasn't very expressive, and that the past few days of interacting with patients had been valuable training for her future as a doctor.

Dr. Ong Boon Hock (王玟富) is a traditional Chinese medicine physician from Malaysia. He said that while treating patients was important at the event, connecting with students and nurturing their compassion was just as meaningful. Dr. Koh expressed hope that Cambodia might one day establish its own TIMA chapter, giving local medical students and doctors another platform to serve the needy. For experienced physicians like Ong and Koh, guiding students like Eng and Lay on their path to becoming doctors is one of the most meaningful and lasting aspects of such free clinics.

The greatest asset in healthcare

Renowned Filipino ophthalmologist Dr. Antonio Say said that whenever he joins a Tzu Chi medical mission abroad, he hopes to work with local doctors. He remembers his early trips to Indonesia, when most team members were volunteers from other countries. Now, he says, the Tzu Chi medical team in Indonesia is even bigger than the one in the Philippines. He emphasized the importance of providing sustainable eye care by empowering local doctors to lead and

Chhay Daro (fifth from right), a young TYDA member, rushed to the free clinic to serve even though he had just finished his night shift in the emergency department. The presence of young TYDA members like him and medical students in Tzu Chi volunteer vests filled the clinic with a sense of hope.

CHAI MONG PING

giving more doctors opportunities to volunteer. He believes this is the only way to establish lasting, self-sufficient care.

Veteran Singaporean surgeon Dr. Fong Poh Him (馮寶興) said that Tzu Chi's greatest contribution to the communities it serves is its humanistic approach to medicine—compassionate, people-centered care. He considers this its greatest asset too, one that resonates with local medical students as well as mid-career physicians, both local and international, who participate in its free clinics.

Dr. Fong pointed to Dr. Lu Pei-jie (呂佩潔), a cardiovascular surgeon from Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in southern Taiwan, and Dr. Zheng Jia Hui (鄭嘉慧), a surgeon from Singapore, who were working together at the free clinic to remove a skin tumor. He remarked modestly that he was getting old, and that the future of such medical service would soon rest in the hands of these younger doctors.



Cross-Border Aid for Flooded Spain

Compiled by *Tzu Chi Monthly* editorial staff

Information provided by Wang Su-zhen and Debby Pan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Rare torrential rains in late October 2024 triggered the deadliest floods in Spain in decades. Even six months later, many communities were still struggling to recover. Tzu Chi volunteers from other countries visited the area, saw firsthand the extent of destruction, and distributed much-needed aid.



A street in Benetússer is covered in mud after floodwaters subsided, with flood-damaged vehicles lying overturned by the roadside.

COURTESY OF VERONICA CHAPARRO SORNOSA

Eastern Spain was hit by catastrophic flash floods in late October 2024. Some areas received rainfall exceeding their annual average in a very short period, causing waterways to overflow and swiftly inundate residential neighborhoods and major roads. More than 200 people lost their lives, many of them elderly residents unable to evacuate in time.

The province of Valencia was among the hardest hit. Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe conducted an initial disaster assessment, followed by six rounds of follow-up inspections. Working with local government agencies, they compiled lists of affected households and, beginning on July 9, 2025, carried out a week-long relief operation distributing supermarket gift cards to more than 3,000 families.

The scars left behind

In addition to government agencies, Tzu Chi volunteers collaborated with Fundación Altius España (Altius Spain Foundation) and Caritas to assess the flood's damage and distribute aid. Altius launched emergency relief efforts in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, but even months later was still responding to requests from affected households and providing essential items, including furniture. The organization maintained a meticulous registration system, evaluating eligibility based on the extent of damage and whether the potential aid recipients had been living in the affected homes. Home visits were conducted to verify conditions when necessary. Tzu Chi volunteers later used these records to carry out additional follow-up visits.

The gift cards distributed by Tzu Chi were redeemable at the Mercadona supermarket chain, allowing recipients to purchase everything from fresh produce to shelf-stable foods and household essentials.

Of the more than 3,000 families who received aid, about half lived in Picanya, a town of nearly 12,000 residents. Around 1,700 households, or 5,000 people, were affected. Among these households, 80 homes were deemed uninhabitable. Those residents were relocated by the government.

In mid-May, Rosario González, first deputy

mayor of Picanya, personally led Tzu Chi volunteers on a disaster assessment tour. All five bridges across a local river had been destroyed by the floodwaters. A temporary bridge had been constructed to restore traffic flow, and cleanup efforts along the river were still underway. Homes on both sides of the river had also suffered severe damage from floodwaters that reached one to two meters in height.

The Tzu Chi team learned during their visit that the municipal government established an emergency response center after the floods, on November 2, to register survivors' damage and needs. The government, in cooperation with the Red Cross, then provided subsidies and other forms of assistance to victims. However, at the time of Tzu Chi's visit, data showed that over 50 households had yet to receive appliances or were still lacking basic supplies. Also brought to the Tzu Chi team's attention was one neighborhood that—although not deeply flooded—was home predominantly to elderly residents living alone, some of whom were possibly in need of aid too.

Altius Foundation volunteers later accompanied Tzu Chi volunteers on another round of visits to the disaster zone. Conditions across several towns were similar: Many homes remained uninhabited, were under renovation, or had been furnished with donated items from charitable organizations.

Maria, an elderly woman who had resided in Picanya for 35 years, lived near the river. She recalled that when the floodwaters came, she and her family fled upstairs. But then her husband decided to go back down to retrieve important documents and was tragically swept away. His body was found 15 days later, not far from their home.

Another elderly woman told volunteers that the disaster had taken a deep emotional toll on everyone on her street. For a long time, people wore blank expressions. Only slowly did they begin to recover from the trauma. Some were grateful that they had a second floor to which they could retreat and survive, but long after the flood had receded, the cries for help—and the sudden silence that followed—continued to echo in their minds.



Elderly residents and old homes

The town of Utiel was hit hard. Heavy rain began on the morning of October 29, causing river waters to spill over and surge into buildings, rising to heights of up to two meters. It took more than 24 hours for the waters to recede. Some houses were left structurally unsound, with walls broken open by the flood. When Tzu Chi volunteers visited, they saw walls still seeping water and ceilings badly stained with mold and water damage.

Catarroja was another severely affected town. Torrents of water rushing down from mountains

In Chiva, signs of devastation from floodwaters, mud, and debris remain visible along a watercourse, as witnessed by volunteers during a disaster assessment from January 21 to 24. WANG HUI-ZHEN

turned the area into a swamp-like landscape. Accompanied by Caritas staff, Tzu Chi volunteers visited affected households there.

Seventy-three-year-old Vicenta Juana Yusa Ciscan told the visitors she was home alone when the flood struck. The water quickly rose to her waist. Alarmed, she climbed onto a table, but the



Tzu Chi volunteers visit households listed in disaster registries provided by Caritas and the Utiel municipal government. Many homes in severely flooded areas were badly damaged.

LIANG XIN-LING

water kept rising until it reached her neck. The power had gone out, so she stood there in darkness for four hours before rescuers finally arrived.

Another resident, Juana Pacomo, had limited mobility and walked with a cane. She was saved by grabbing a bedsheet tossed to her by a neighbor, which kept her from being swept away in the current. As the floodwaters flowed around her, she saw the body of a neighbor float past. The trauma of that day left lasting effects on her family. Afterwards, her three-year-old grandson would cry and shout “No!” every time he heard the sound of water running in the shower.

Most of the affected residents were elderly and living in old homes. Once damaged, such homes were difficult to repair—especially for those without the financial means to rebuild.

While the assistance offered by charities was heartfelt, it often felt like a drop in the ocean.

Some elderly survivors made it through the flood, only to face the heartbreak of returning to ruined homes alone, having lost loved ones. Volunteers listened with compassion as grandmothers and grandfathers shared their stories, always responding with a warm, comforting embrace.

Painting away sorrow

Between January and May, Tzu Chi volunteers from France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland worked in teams to assess flood damage and conduct follow-up inspections. In addition to visiting stricken areas and meeting with personnel from local governments and organizations, they scouted potential venues for aid distributions. In June, they rented a temporary office in Paiporta to coordinate the work.

Paiporta itself had been badly affected. The flood left its streets coated in mud and disrupted electricity, water, and natural gas supplies. Residents living near the temporary office soon

learned why the volunteers were there. Many stopped by to greet them and learn more about the foundation. Neighbors often brought vegetables, fruit, and homemade cakes to share. Over time, more locals began visiting regularly and donned volunteer vests to lend a hand.

One of them was Lidia, who was deeply moved to learn that the Tzu Chi volunteers had traveled from across Europe at their own expense. She began coming to the office almost daily to help with errands and call flood survivors. “Seeing so many people suffering and losing everything—it may seem like making phone calls is a small thing, but it’s my way of contributing,” she said. “With so many Tzu Chi volunteers coming from other countries to help us, a voice inside told me I should do my part too.” Since most local residents were unfamiliar with Tzu Chi—a foundation based in distant Taiwan and comprised predominantly of ethnic Chinese—volunteers were often hung up on, mistaken for phone scammers. Thus, help with phone calls from locals like Lidia proved invaluable.

The temporary office also hosted a creative activity called “Fans of Love, Acts of Kindness,” inviting residents to paint paper fans that would later be given out during distributions as tokens of encouragement and connection. It was also hoped that the act of painting would help participants feel calmer and more at peace. A group of older residents came every day—often staying for three hours at a time—and even took fans home to continue painting. They pledged to complete 2,000 fans, saying that forming good affinities through this creative activity was deeply meaningful to them.

Holding seven distributions across six towns required considerable manpower, underscoring the need to recruit locals who could speak English or Chinese. On June 3, Tzu Chi held its first volunteer recruitment event in Paiporta. The venue was generously provided by Zheng Xiao-ling (鄭小玲), owner of a local Chinese restaurant, who offered her space during off-hours. “Life shouldn’t be just about making a living—we should do our best to help others. That’s what gives life meaning,” she remarked.

Zheng also often prepared lunch for the vol-



A flood survivor in Utiel flips through a photo album, recalling that her first thought during the flood was to save it. The album holds precious memories—from her mother doing her hair and makeup on her wedding day to the birth and growth of her children—capturing the warmth of her family’s story.

LIANG XIN-LING

unteers, offering a variety of delicious vegetarian dishes. Her kindness brought warmth and comfort to the teams, who had been traveling back and forth to disaster areas for more than half a year, giving them a feeling of home even while far from their own.

Interfaith cooperation

In late June, with help from local residents, Tzu Chi volunteers began delivering notification slips to flood-affected households across the towns where distributions were planned. On July 8, over 50 volunteers from Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Argentina gathered in the disaster zone to help with the distributions.



A local Spanish volunteer presents a gift card to a flood-affected resident in a church in Chiva. At Tzu Chi's July distributions, many locals volunteered to serve their fellow citizens.

WANG SU-ZHEN

The first event, held on July 9, focused on supporting ethnic Chinese store owners affected by the disaster. The next day, a second distribution took place at a church in Catarroja. To help things run smoothly, Monsa, a local volunteer and psychologist, recorded a video explaining the distribution process and used a piece of cardboard to show where recipients should sign on the forms, making it easier for fellow volunteers to assist efficiently.

Teresa, an architect, had lost all her furniture in the flood. Her parents, both nearing 90, moved in with her after their own home was badly damaged. Teresa said the supermarket gift card from Tzu Chi would cover her parents' living expenses for three months. She herself had also received assistance from other organizations. All this support would help them on their path to recovery—something for which they were deeply grateful.

After receiving her gift card, an older woman stepped outside the church, saw volunteers handing out small keepsakes in the square, and burst into tears. Even ten months after the disaster, it was clear that many survivors were still carrying deep emotional wounds—grief and trauma they had had to set aside simply to keep going and rebuild their lives.

In Utiel, aid was distributed in the historic Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, a centuries-old building. Father Cristobal solemnly lit six

large white candles—symbols of reverence and sanctity—as if it were a Sunday Mass, and offered his blessings for the relief work.

Tim Lu (呂宗翰), representing Tzu Chi's headquarters in Taiwan, addressed those gathered. He reflected that a Buddhist organization from Taiwan distributing aid in a Catholic church in Spain was a beautiful example of interfaith harmony and a reflection of the spirit of Great Love—a selfless love that embraces all of humanity—that the world truly needed. “We’re sorry we came late,” he said, “but we’ve done our best to be here and help. What we’re most grateful for is the support of so many local Spanish volunteers. Without your help, today’s distribution wouldn’t have been possible.”

Father Cristobal then shared a message inspired by the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of St. Luke, which teaches the importance of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. He expressed how moved he was by the long journeys many Tzu Chi volunteers had undertaken, and encouraged the local community to follow their example by reaching out to those in need without waiting to be asked.

Chen Yao-ming (陳耀明), a businessman in Spain who had supported the Tzu Chi team from the beginning, described a scene at the close of the distributions: Guided by Tzu Chi volunteers, residents joined hands and signed the lyrics of the Tzu Chi song “One Family” in sign language. The scene, he said, was filled with warmth and a sense of sacred unity. When applause broke out at the end, all the effort expended and every challenge faced during the relief mission felt completely worthwhile.

Spain has no Tzu Chi office, which made carrying out the relief work more challenging—yet the volunteers never complained. Their fatigue vanished when a young mother from Paiporta said, “When the world had forgotten us, Tzu Chi still remembered our pain.”





⊙ National Capital

● Hard-Hit Areas Aided by Tzu Chi

Tzu Chi's Aid for Flood Victims in Spain

Background

In late October 2024, extreme rainfall in eastern Spain caused devastating flash floods, resulting in at least 232 fatalities. It ranks among the deadliest natural disasters in Spain's modern history.

Cause

Spain often experiences a weather phenomenon in the fall known as DANA (a Spanish acronym for "high-altitude isolated depression"). It occurs when cold air in the upper atmosphere meets warm, moist air from the Mediterranean, triggering intense storms and heavy rainfall. Climate change is believed to be increasing the frequency and severity of such events.

Most Affected Area

The province of Valencia suffered the heaviest damage, with rivers swelling rapidly and overwhelming drainage systems in many areas. This led to road closures, damage to buildings, and power and communication outages. The provincial capital, Valencia, has a history of over 2,000 years and is Spain's third-largest city after Madrid and Barcelona. Its traditional festival, *Las Fallas*, is recognized by UNESCO as an element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



Distribution Summary

- From July 9 to 15, Tzu Chi held seven distribution events for flood victims.
- Gift card amounts were based on household size:

1 to 2 people | **€600** (US\$700)

3 to 4 people | **€900** (US\$1,050)

5 or more people | **€1,200** (US\$1,400)

Town	Households Assisted
Picanya	1,507
Paiporta	890
Utiel	222
Catarroja	205
Chiva	173
Benetússer	47
Total	3,044 households



Over a Hundred
Roofs Repaired
After Typhoon Danas



By Chiu Chuan Peinn

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

After Typhoon Danas struck Taiwan, Tzu Chi helped restore over a hundred roofs. Racing against time and making the most of every spell of good weather, repair teams brought smiles to disadvantaged residents—a reminder that after the rain, the sky always clears.

When It Rains, It Pours

Blue-and-white striped tarps, like giant bandages, temporarily cover roofs damaged by Typhoon Danas in Xiliao, along the coast of Qigu District, Tainan. Debris from homes, collected in white nylon bags, is set aside on open ground. Tzu Chi volunteers arrived in Xiliao just two days after the typhoon to provide initial support, followed by emergency cash and tarps. After three weeks of intermittent wind and rain, the second phase of relief began, with professional contractors enlisted to repair the roofs of vulnerable households.







Insulated corrugated panels and other roofing materials were stacked in front of a temple in Dingshan, Qigu District, Tainan City. On August 5, 2025, teams of three lifted C-channels—each four to five feet long—from the stacks onto their shoulders and carried them into narrow lanes.

Suddenly, the sky opened. Scattered raindrops gave way to a heavy downpour, shrouding the scene in a white haze. The volunteers from Kaohsiung hadn't had time to put on raincoats, and soon their clothes—down even to their socks—were soaked. They ducked under a resident's canopy, as the rain was too intense to continue working. The homeowner didn't seem to mind, and they exchanged smiles and a simple greeting.

Surprisingly, no one spoke of the sudden storm that had driven them to seek shelter. It was as if everyone was accustomed to such moments—like fishermen at sea who take the waves as they come.

Contractors joining volunteers

Just a week before, a group of people had gathered early one morning at the Fishermen's Activity Center in Xiliao, also located in Qigu District. Most were Tzu Chi volunteers from Kaohsiung. The center, serving as a temporary service hub, buzzed with activity as the team prepared to repair the roofs of three old homes damaged by Typhoon Danas, which had devastated Tainan City and Chiayi County in early July.

Volunteers had begun arriving at the activity center by 8 a.m. Some prepared breakfast and invited everyone to eat, while others handled the day's tasks. After everyone had gathered, Pan Ji-li (潘機利), coordinator of the Tzu Chi Kaohsiung Disaster Response Center, and Wu Zong-hua (吳宗樺), deputy coordinator, thanked the team for coming. Pan reminded them: "Please don't take risks. There is a site supervisor, and we respect the supervisor's authority. Volunteers mustn't climb onto the roofs."

A volunteer documents damage and assesses repair needs for a household in Xiliao.

The volunteers then formed two neat lines and walked to one of the homes scheduled for repairs. Two skilled workers from Yuanxing Engineering were already on the roof, with a one-story-high scaffold set up beside it. Once the volunteers arrived, work to remove the remaining roof tiles began. The workers carefully passed intact tiles down to volunteers on the ground, who carried them to the homeowner's storage room.

Pan explained that volunteers had reached out through their personal networks to bring in professional contractors so they could tackle the repairs together. With damaged roofs causing serious inconvenience for residents, speed was essential—often, several houses had to be worked on at the same time.

Unfortunately, the weather was rarely on their side. The outer circulations of Typhoon Co-may and Tropical Storm Francisco had strengthened southwesterly airflows, bringing frequent rainstorms to southern Taiwan. Such heavy rain made it unsafe to work with electricity or on rooftops. Even so, whenever the rain eased or stopped, volunteers rushed to resume repairs.

As the work continued, the number of households willing to accept Tzu Chi's help steadily grew. Moved by the foundation's sincerity and reassured by the use of quality roofing materials, more residents signed up. The number of homes in Xiliao quickly expanded from single digits to more than 30.

"We are responsible for two neighborhoods in Qigu District: Xiliao and Dingshan," said Pan. The Kaohsiung team, with extensive experience in repair work, took on the more severely affected areas while coordinating both frontline labor and administrative tasks.

Teamwork and shared responsibility

After Typhoon Danas, demand for roof repairs surged across Tainan. With local contractors in short supply, reinforcements arrived from other areas. In addition to the experienced Kaohsiung team, volunteers from Pingtung stepped forward, handling repairs for nine homes in Longshan, Qigu.

The Pingtung volunteers, following the Kaohsiung model, reached out to local contrac-

tors in their own county and invited them to join the effort. The coordinator and deputy coordinator of the Tzu Chi Pingtung Disaster Response Center were always present during site inspections and repair work, supported by administrative, logistics, and documentation teams. Notably, the Pingtung group also included social workers from the local Tzu Chi office. Social worker Zhang Zhi-xiang (張智翔) said that the Pingtung team was still in the early stages of providing this kind of repair assistance, and was eager to gain experience.

Huang Li-xiang (黃麗香), coordinator of the Tzu Chi Pingtung Disaster Response Center, shared that Master Cheng Yen had encouraged volunteers and social workers to see this large-scale disaster relief mission as an opportunity for growth. "Earlier this year, after the Dapu earthquake in Chiayi, Tzu Chi helped repair homes in Nanxi, Tainan, which was badly affected," Huang said. "Brother Zheng Qiu-cheng (鄭秋成) from our Pingtung area formed a team and joined that

effort. But this time, being solely responsible for one neighborhood, we first needed to confirm everyone's willingness to take part." With a broad smile, she added, "In the end, everyone was more than willing to participate."

While volunteers and contractors from Kaohsiung and Pingtung traveled from their regions to help their "adopted" areas, local Tainan volunteers shouldered responsibility for districts such as Beimen and Xuejia. All of the affected areas—whether managed by Tainan teams or supported by Kaohsiung and Pingtung—required a range of logistical support. "Each day, about 40 to 50 Tainan volunteers are spread across the different districts, providing assistance for the frontline teams," said Lin Qian-

Pan Ji-li (second from right) and Wu Zong-hua (third from right) of the Kaohsiung team brief fellow volunteers on the day's tasks and safety precautions before beginning roof repairs in Xiliao.



Tzu Chi Relief for Typhoon Danas and Heavy Rain

Typhoon Danas

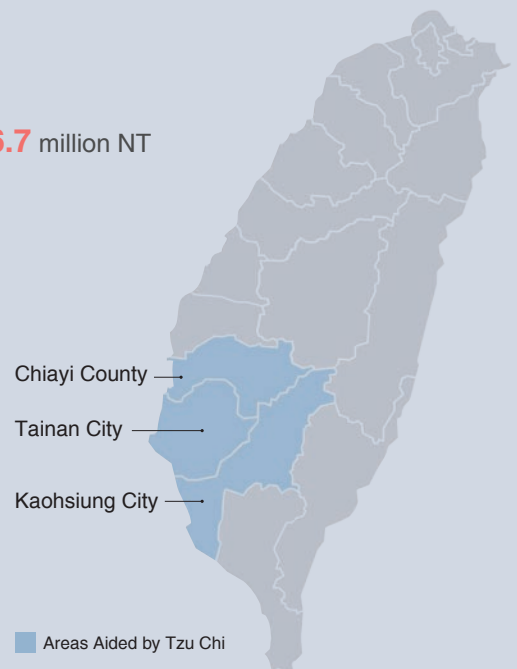
- Made landfall in Chiayi County at 11:40 p.m. on July 6—the first to do so there since records began in 1958. The strongest winds and heaviest rainfall hit Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan, with exposed coastal areas battered by gusts over 184 km/h (114 mph). Tainan Meteorological Station (established 1897) recorded its third-strongest gust on record.
- Across Taiwan, the typhoon caused two fatalities and 708 injuries.
- Extensive damage to power infrastructure left nearly one million households without electricity, some for over 14 days. Disruptions to electricity and internet services hampered disaster relief efforts.
- Over 17,000 homes in Chiayi and Tainan were damaged, mostly from roofs being blown off.
- Residual moisture from Typhoon Danas, combined with a low-pressure trough and southwesterly winds, brought heavy rainfall to central Taiwan on July 8, causing severe flooding in Lukang, Changhua County.

Heavy Rain From Southwesterly Airflows

- Central and southern Taiwan experienced two peaks of heavy rain due to southwesterly airflows: from the evening of July 28 to the morning of July 31, and from the afternoon of August 2 to August 4. Some areas in Kaohsiung and Pingtung recorded cumulative rainfall approaching levels seen during Typhoon Morakot in 2009. For the first time in 28 years, maximum daily rainfall exceeded 200 mm for seven consecutive days.
- During this period, 181 severe thunderstorm alerts were issued. The heavy rain temporarily halted ongoing typhoon recovery efforts.
- Combined agricultural losses from Typhoon Danas and the heavy rain exceeded 3.2 billion NT dollars (about US\$106.7 million) across Taiwan, with Tainan accounting for 45 percent of the damage, followed by Chiayi at 22 percent.

Tzu Chi Aid Efforts

- **Volunteer Mobilization:** **23,862** volunteer shifts over 46 days
- **Support for Affected Households:** **11,145** home visits
 - Emergency cash distributed: **2,626** households, totaling **26.7** million NT dollars (about US\$0.89 million)
 - Gift packs distributed: **3,480**
 - Households identified for follow-up long-term support: **369**
- **Home Repairs:**
 - Households reported for inspection: **275**
 - Households approved for repairs: **176**
 - Households with repairs completed: **115**
- **Other Emergency Assistance:**
 - Hot meals provided: **20,862**
 - Environmental cleanup: **87** schools



Statistics cover the period from July 6 to August 21



yong (林千用), deputy coordinator of the Tzu Chi Tainan Disaster Response Center. Their work covered administration and documentation as well as daily logistics. Veteran volunteer Huang Hui (黃惠), also from Tainan, added, “For each team coming from outside Tainan, we arrange a dedicated administrative contact.”

One essential task was preparing and delivering meals and snacks to repair teams at various sites. This work was divided among the Tzu Chi offices in Jiali, Rende, and Anping. Sudden downpours sometimes forced last-minute cancellations, and unexpected requests required rapid responses, but the volunteers adapted with ease.

“For example, just last night we learned we needed to prepare 350 servings of snacks today,” explained Lin Su-xiang (林素香) from the Jiali office. She wasn’t worried, though, about the large request. With a smile, she remarked that on occasions like this, volunteers always seemed to emerge like bodhisattvas from the ground, so shortages of workers were rarely a problem.

Cross-sector cooperation

On August 2 and 3, downpours driven by strong southwesterly airflows were so heavy that work and classes in Tainan had to be suspended. By August 4, although the weather was still far from ideal, Tzu Chi repair teams returned to disaster areas one after another, determined not to let progress stall. At noon that day, a sudden cloudburst hit Longshan in Qigu District, sending everyone hurrying for shelter at the local activity center.

At 1:30 p.m., Sun Qing-rong (孫清榮), who has an engineering background, noticed the rain easing. Rising to his feet, the burly volunteer called out, “The rain’s letting up. Let’s get moving!” His grandson and grandnephew immediately followed his lead.

Volunteer Lin Qi-ming (林啟明) explained the strategy the teams had adopted for unpredictable

weather: When conditions allowed, they would pull back tarps covering a damaged roof and remove the underlying tiles. As soon as the rain returned, the tarps were quickly repositioned and work halted. Though cumbersome, this stop-and-go method prevented water from leaking into homes and damaging furniture.

Among the Tzu Chi volunteers who joined the foundation’s repair effort after the typhoon was a unique group composed entirely of those with engineering experience: the Abode Maintenance Crew. Usually responsible for maintaining the Jing Si Abode, the Buddhist convent founded by Master Cheng Yen, they had traveled to southern Taiwan to lend their skills to disaster relief.

Unlike the Kaohsiung and Pingtung volunteers, who commuted at least an hour each way daily, the Abode Maintenance Crew, whose members came from across Taiwan, lodged at Tzu Chi’s Jiali office. Early on the morning of August 5, more than 30 members rose in succession and prepared to have breakfast. Around seven o’clock, volunteer Chen Chong-guang (陳重光) looked up

Work above two meters (6.6 feet) is handled by professional crews using certified safety equipment, while Tzu Chi volunteers assist by moving building materials and clearing the ground.





at the sky and said cheerfully, “Finally, we see the long-missed sun.” Though the sky remained hazy, the forecast promised only a 30 percent chance of rain. Spirits lifted immediately. After breakfast and a brief prayer, the volunteers grabbed their safety helmets, boarded their vehicles, and within minutes, the convoy was on its way—ready for a new day of work.

In this repair effort, Tzu Chi partnered with the Tainan City Government to restore the roofs of disadvantaged households in five disaster-prone areas. Similar collaborations with public agencies were carried out in Chiayi County. Tzu Chi’s construction department coordinated volunteers and professional contractors; selected durable, weather-resistant materials; and helped



plan construction methods—all with the goal of enabling affected families to return to normal life as soon as possible.

In total, 18 professional contractors were brought into the repair effort, most from outside the affected area. Many temporarily set aside their own projects to support typhoon-stricken households. They came forward without hesita-



After Typhoon Danas, disaster areas faced shortages of building materials. Contractors handling repairs went to great lengths to secure what was needed. Although styles and material types varied, priority was given to materials that offered heat resistance, corrosion protection, and rapid construction (left). Volunteers smile for the camera after completing repairs on a house in Dingshan, Qigu District, on August 3 (above).

tion, prioritizing the needs of families in recovery over their own schedules and costs.

Lin Bao-lu (林保爐), a contractor from Kaohsiung, recalled arriving in Xiliao and seeing half the village's rooftops covered with tarps. "It was really severe," he said. "I put the projects I had been working on on hold and came here with my son and employees. Even though this isn't our home, we couldn't just stand by." He added that he was impressed by the steel roofing panels Tzu Chi was using—they were thicker and of better quality than what's usually available. "For our part, we'll do as much as we can and finish the repairs as quickly as possible," he affirmed.

The damage to residential homes was both widespread and severe, creating an urgent need for skilled workers. Tzu Chi volunteers and contractors from different counties and cities converged into a coordinated force, forming an alliance of collective goodwill dedicated to helping communities rebuild. ❀

Together for the Earth

By Wu Chunying and Liao Yamian

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Zheng Aijiao

Husband and wife Wu Gonghe and Su Liya turned environmental protection into a shared mission, inspiring others along the way.

“It’s doing good deeds, and that’s a good thing,” said Wu Gonghe (吳共和) of his recycling work. Newly retired at the end of 2014, he accepted his cousin Wu Jinlian’s (吳金煉) invitation to volunteer at the Tzu Chi recycling station in Xike Township, Xiamen, Fujian Province, China. Tzu Chi’s environmental principle—“Don’t use, use less, and recycle”—deeply resonated with him.

He reminisced about his childhood, when rivers were so clear you could see the bottom and the water so clean you could scoop it up to drink without fear. Adults washed clothes along the banks while children caught shrimp in the shallows. But such scenes are now a thing of the past. Severe pollution has taken over. Garbage litters the riverbanks, and some ditches, even covered, emit a foul smell. “It would be truly wonderful if everyone were more eco-conscious and developed recycling habits,” he mused.

Usually quiet, he began sharing Tzu Chi’s environmental efforts with his wife, Su Liya (蘇麗雅), leaving her wondering what had come over him. Each time he returned from volunteering, his clothes were stained and difficult to clean. His once neatly styled hair was sometimes disheveled, even covered in dust and spiderwebs—a stark contrast to the husband she knew.

As a blue-collar worker, he had always worn work clothes on the job and suits off duty. No matter the occasion, his hair was neatly pomaded, with a small comb in his pocket at the ready.

To those who didn’t know better, he looked more like a teacher or civil servant.

“How can someone who loves cleanliness so much stoop down to pick up garbage?” Liya wondered. Curious, she followed her husband to the Xike Recycling Station. There, she saw heaps of recyclables piled up like small mountains. Her husband was crouched on the ground, carefully sorting through them. But he wasn’t alone; his cousin Jinlian, volunteer Chen Hongmei’s (陳紅梅) mother, and several other gray-haired volunteers also worked diligently among the “garbage mountains.”

“They’re all old and still doing it—how can I not do it too?” her husband later said to her, referring to the elderly volunteers. His words made her realize that beyond his wish to help the environment, he was moved by their dedication.

“Only by reducing waste can we lessen the burden on the Earth,” Liya said. She decided to join him. For the past ten years, the couple has worked side by side, collecting recyclables and promoting environmental awareness in local shops—walking their path together.

Sharing the journey

Liya’s willingness to join her husband may have stemmed from more than just environmental concern—he had always been a devoted partner.

Married for over 40 years, Liya still gets emotional when talking about her husband.

"Whenever we argue, he always lets me win," she said.

Gonghe shared his philosophy on marriage: "Arguing or fighting is exhausting and unpleasant. When my wife and I are on the verge of an argument, I usually just stay quiet and let her vent—then the tension naturally fades."

"He also takes great care of my parents," Liya said. Once, when her father fell ill, Gonghe rushed over on his motor scooter, carried him down the stairs, and took him to the doctor. He stayed by his side at the hospital, tending to his every need. "I couldn't hold back my tears seeing him care for my father like that," Liya said. "His thoughtfulness truly moved me."

Gonghe's devotion to her and her parents earned her wholehearted support for his recy-

cling work, which in turn motivated him even more. When Gonghe saw that volunteer Chen Dongsong (陳冬松) was the only one who could drive a truck to collect recyclables, he decided to help—even though he didn't know how to drive. In 2016, at 62, he signed up for driving lessons. Friends and relatives teased him, saying, "You'll never pass the driving test!"

His age and slowed reflexes made the test a challenge. Two years went by, and he still hadn't passed, but he refused to give up. After three years of perseverance, he finally got his license, at 65. "Now that I can drive, whenever someone

Every Wednesday, volunteers gather at the Shangfeng Recycling Point in Xiamen, China, to sort recyclables.

ZENG LANGYI





calls, I go as soon as I can," he said. He now often drives the truck to collect recyclables in Jimei, Tong'an, Xiang'an, and Zhangzhou. Worried for his safety, Liya accompanies him.

They are partners not just on the road but also in their work. "If we lift a 50 kg load together, we each only have to lift 25 kg. We help each other out and look after each other," Liya said.

At the Xike Recycling Station, the couple can often be seen emptying bags of PET bottles into a compactor. Once the bottles are compressed into bales, they work together to lift and stack them. "One, two, three—lift!" Liya counted as they heaved each load onto the pile.

Shaking out her hands, she brushed back a

few stray silver strands from her forehead. "At our age, how much longer can we wait?" she said. "Recycling lightens the burden on the Earth. So many people admire us—they say that my husband and I working together like this is romantic and a blessing."

Two couples together

In 2017, Ye Kuizhi (叶奎治), who had taken up recycling following Liya's example, noticed that Gonghe always spoke to Liya in a gentle tone. She couldn't help but feel envious. Her own husband, Ye Mingzhi (叶明志), had a bad temper and a loud voice. Hoping that Tzu Chi's environment and the influence of other volunteers would help



Taking a break from their recycling work, volunteers sit in a circle for a group activity, singing and clapping along.

him change, she invited him to join as a volunteer.

The two couples now often team up to collect recyclables from Xiamen No. 10 High School. The round-trip drive alone takes two hours, with additional time required to load the recyclables, transport the plastic bottles to the Xike Recycling Station for compressing, and handle other tasks. In the end, each trip takes nearly four hours.

When they arrived at the school on this partic-



Su Liya (right) was inspired by her husband, Wu Gonghe (left), to join Tzu Chi's recycling work.

ular day, they first loaded several large bags of plastic bottles onto the vehicle before moving stacks of bundled paper and books tied up by students. With so many items to load, they needed to plan carefully. "Let's place the bags of bottles on both sides, put the other recyclables in the middle, and stack the heavier books on the outer edges. That way, it'll be easier to unload later, and the books can help hold everything in place," Gonghe explained, easing Mingzhi's worries about how it was going to all fit in.

Gonghe repeatedly climbed up and down from the truck, stacking the materials with patience and care despite being drenched in sweat. Mingzhi felt a deep sense of admiration. "When I first started doing recycling, he taught me how to stack and arrange everything properly," he recalled.

Thinking back, Mingzhi remembered how hot it used to get, because the old truck had no air conditioning. On a hot day, the heat from the ground radiated up, and the blazing sun beat down on the vehicle, leaving those inside dripping with sweat. Once, after spending over an hour on the road under the scorching sun, Gonghe arrived at a collection point in Jimei. The rental building had no elevator, and discarded liquor bottles and appliances were piled on the second floor. After making multiple trips to carry everything down, he started experiencing heat stress—his head felt heavy, his stomach

twisted in pain, and sweat poured from his body. Only after taking heat-relief medicine and resting in a well-ventilated area did he recover. Despite it all, the very next day, when another call for a pickup came in, Gonghe got behind the wheel once again.

Seeing Gonghe's dedication firsthand, Mingzhi felt motivated to deepen his own commitment to recycling efforts.

Additional benefits of recycling

In 2020, at a gathering of recycling volunteers, Mingzhi heard his counterparts from Quanzhou, also in Fujian Province, pledge to establish recycling points in every village in their area. Inspired, he offered his 100-square-meter (1,075-square-foot) storefront as a space for residents in his community to participate in recycling. With help from other volunteers in Xiamen, the Tzu Chi Shangfeng Recycling Point opened in July of that year.

"At first, few people wanted to come," Mingzhi recalled. He and his wife went door to door, encouraging neighbors to join. "Recycling protects the Earth and keeps us active, which helps us stay healthy!" they would say. They also prepared delicious snacks for participants. Touched by their sincerity, more and more people joined.

"Thank you! You've brought another truckload of recyclables!" Mingzhi said to a neighbor, beaming as he helped carry the load inside. Every Wednesday morning, the recycling point at his store buzzes with activity—locals dropping off or sorting recyclables, with ten to 20 people regularly taking part.

"I'm here!" called out a 79-year-old woman known as Grandma Li as she arrived with her makeshift cart, which consisted of a single wheel, a wooden board, and two discarded iron rods tied to the sides. Her cart brimmed with bottles and cardboard. "Picked these up from trash piles, haha!" she said with a chuckle. She had made a habit of collecting recyclables whenever she was out and about.

Gonghe emerged from the back room carrying a nylon sack as tall as a person, filled with plastic bottles. As he emptied it, volunteers—

young and old—quickly got to work, peeling off labels and crushing bottles. The rhythmic sounds intertwined, creating a melody of cheerful activity.

"Compared to before, life feels much happier now!" said Li Miaozen (李妙珍), who had just arrived on her electric scooter with a load of recyclables. "My husband wasn't pleased when I first started, but recycling makes me feel good, so I became more patient with my family. Because of my change, everyone is happier, and we all get along much better than before."

Hearing that, Mingzhi, as the host of the recycling point, felt warmth and gratitude. Seeing volunteers transformed through recycling—and not only themselves, but their families too—filled him with joy.

He, too, had undergone a profound transformation since joining Tzu Chi.

Mingzhi had started drinking in his teens and couldn't sleep without alcohol. Two years into volunteering, he decided to stop. The first two weeks were tough, with sleepless nights, but he persevered. "A promise is a promise. No drinking means no drinking!" he affirmed.

He also switched to a vegetarian diet and felt its benefits. "Before, I suffered from gout so badly I couldn't even get out of bed. My blood pressure was high too. Now, my blood pressure is normal," he said.

Perhaps no one was happier than his wife about another one of his changes—his improved temper. "I used to have to close all the doors and windows before talking to him, or else his yelling would shake the roof tiles," Kuizhi said, laughing. Beside her, Mingzhi softly admitted, "I was in the wrong back then."

Gonghe and Liya, Mingzhi and Kuizhi—these two couples embarked on their recycling journeys for different reasons, yet along the way, they found the same sense of fulfillment. Through their shared dedication, they not only lightened the burden on the Earth but also nurtured harmony in their families and communities. For them and their fellow volunteers, the impact of recycling extends far beyond environmental protection—it brings people together, strengthens families, and even changes lives. ❊

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Remember the impermanence in life when times are good; accept our karma when times are bad.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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