

The Role of Tzu Chi Commissioners

Written by He Chen-Ching
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No matter what role they play in a changing society, Tzu Chi commissioners continue to show their most inspiring characteristic--their loving concern for people.

The changes over time have left their marks on the faces of Tzu Chi's senior commissioners--a few more wrinkles, and eyes radiating a lot more wisdom. Old, middle-aged and young commissioners, all wearing the same navy blue chi-pao (a traditional gown for women), still walk through unsightly alleys to visit poor families. And they are as enthusiastic and energetic as ever.

A grassroots approach

In its early stages, the Tzu Chi Foundation was a local charity organization in a traditional society. It was founded near Hualien, a small town on the backward, undeveloped east coast of Taiwan, isolated by the vast mountain ranges of central Taiwan. Because of limited transportation, man power and resources, [Master Cheng Yen](#) and her followers began their charity work by giving rice to the poor in neighboring communities.



Housewives with their shopping baskets in hand would gather in a corner of a market in Hualien to chat and tell one another that there was a Buddhist nun who wanted to help the poor. Each of the housewives donated NT\$0.50 (then just over one US cent) each day to support the charity work.

That was how Tzu Chi started. It was 1966, a time when U.S. economic aid was coming to an end and when Taiwan's economy was about to enter a period of rapid expansion.

During the early years, those housewives went out to raise funds and to visit poor families. They themselves were only moderately well-off, and they did all this merely to help their dharma master, that Buddhist nun, to do some good deeds. Because of their limited man power and financial resources, their charity could only be a local effort. But as they followed their master visiting people everywhere, rain or shine, every day was a memorable, worthwhile experience.

From their limited endeavors in raising funds and caring for the needy in their own area, those first commissioners went further and became concerned for the larger welfare of society. Thus was formed Tzu Chi's core concept of "Respect all life and care for the poor."

The physical strength of those commissioners may have diminished over time, but their traditional Tzu Chi spirit has continued on unabated.

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