



何國慶  
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## 超越種族和宗教的 人間清流—慈濟文化

### 與慈濟加拿大執行長何國慶的對談

「慈濟」這個詞對於來自台灣的移民和佛教界人士而言，絕不陌生，但是對於西方社會和其他人來說，也許就一知半解了。它是證嚴法師於1966年在台灣花蓮所創，42年來，慈濟不但開展了「慈善、醫療、教育、人文」四大志業，同時更立足台灣，胸懷寰宇，將「國際賑災、骨髓捐贈、環保、社區志工」加入目標，成為「八大腳步」。慈濟從1985年將這塊福田從台灣拓墾伸向海外，迄今援助了全球超過65個國家，慈濟志工的腳印遍及五大洲，志工人數超過百萬。

### 四大志業 八大腳步

「紅楓傳奇委員會」邀請的多位評審，從眾多被提名者中選出了慈濟加拿大執行長何國慶(Gary Ho)為2008年的「紅楓傳奇」人物之一。從提名到入選，何國慶一再謙辭，認為慈濟被社會各界肯定，絕不是他個人的功勞，而是全體「慈濟人」的努力，他不敢居功。不過，他很願意把他個人的感受說出來，與大家分享。

1947年，何國慶出生於有「天府之國」之稱的四川，兩年後因國共內戰隨著父母來到台灣，台中一中畢業後考上中原大學電子工程系，大學畢業後與友人合創「台北房屋公

司」，何國慶現職是「台北小城公司」董事長。91年聖誕節移民溫哥華，從此成為加拿大人，但由於他又擔任慈濟加拿大執行長，經常因為救援工作必須奔馳世界各地的重大災區。

回想起人生觀轉變的這一段，他歸於一個「緣」字。他說，1986年的某一天，妻子偶然向他提及在台北碰到一位新近加入慈濟功德會的女志工，由於這位女士一向給人的印象是「女強人」，凡事自信十足，但自從加入慈濟以後有了180度的轉變，變得非常溫和謙虛。何國慶的太太心想一定是有高人感化了這位「女強人」，否則不可能有如此重大的改變，這時正好慈濟在花蓮興建了一所醫院，該位「女強人」參與發起募款，何國慶的妻子遂以他的名義捐了台幣一百萬，他成了慈濟的「榮譽董事」，之後有好幾次聆聽證嚴法師的演講，受其感召，從此走上了慈濟路。他擔任過「榮譽董事」的召集人，擔任過花蓮慈濟護專開校的召集人，寫過一本有關證嚴法師的書，名叫「考驗」；他亦曾邀請知名文化人高信疆主編過膾炙人口的「靜思語」。

### 人道援印尼 愛心解仇恨

何國慶表示，慈濟的賑災工作是從愛心出發的，從1991年中國華東大水災，99年九二一台灣大地震，04年南亞大海嘯，05年美國東南部遭受颶風Katrina吹襲豪雨成災，今年稍早的緬甸風災和四川大地震等，慈濟都是在事發後最快的時間內趕到災區。他以慈濟在印尼的工作為例，解說了印尼朝野如何感激慈濟的大愛，甚至改變了印尼政府對當地華人的政策。他說，98年5月13至16日，印尼最多華人聚居的幾個省份都發生排華暴動，當地一些犯罪份子對華人進行姦

淫擄掠燒殺，舉世震驚，華人紛紛捨棄家園，避難他國。2002年雅加達發生嚴重水災，慈濟創辦人證嚴法師有感於種族仇恨宜解不宜結，認為只有愛才能化解仇恨，發動和鼓勵印尼華人參與，毅然推出對印尼的人道援助計劃，將雅加達市中心一條以髒亂出名的紅溪河加以整治，包括疏浚、消毒、綠化、遷村等艱鉅的工程，為沿河兩岸逾萬的貧民免費興建了一千七百戶全新的住宅，並在當地政府協助下，核實了貧民住戶的名單。正式交屋的那一天，當慈濟的代表把鑰匙交到每一位住戶手中時，對方感激地說：「這是我們生平第一次有住家的鑰匙。」過去他們住的是破板爛鐵皮搭蓋的違建，有塊布簾遮住就不錯了，哪裡還指望有門房鑰匙。

慈濟不但捐建了1,700戶住宅，還為當地的孩子們蓋了全新的學校、捐贈了課室裡所有的桌椅設備、以及送出所有學生的制服鞋襪，另外還為當地回教徒蓋了穆斯林的教堂，此外，又運送兩百噸大米給雅加達解決糧荒。慈濟加拿大分會為了響應證嚴法師的這項大愛善舉，當時合共捐出了一百萬美金。

### 雅加達省長的宣言

何國慶說，印尼政府對於慈濟的善舉非常感動，他在捐贈儀式上親耳聽見雅加達省長說：「1998年的排華暴動是最後一次，今後永遠不會再發生這種事了。」印尼軍方的代表也表示，慈濟是世界的楷模，今後只要慈濟有需要，軍方一定提供協助。何國慶說，許多國家和政府都做不到的事情，慈濟都以「大愛」完成了。

今年四月間發生的四川大地震，慈濟同樣發揮了高度的效率。由於有過1991年救助華東水災的考驗，中國方面已

非常信任慈濟的工作。川震災變至今，慈濟人已數度進出災區，他們本著「安身、安心、安生」三個步驟推展救援及災後重建工作，到八月下旬已告一個段落。慈濟加拿大分會在四川震災後一共募得加幣545萬，這還不包括聯邦政府配對的金額在內，在災區建了6個學校的簡易教室，另認建四所學校，培訓志工，並展開下一步的希望工程計劃。何國慶說，當遭受巨變的災民能夠抹乾眼淚，跟隨慈濟人一起投入志工的行列時，他感受災民們已走出陰影，體悟生命之真諦，願以同體大悲之心，共造人世間的大愛，這是慈濟人救災最大的回報。他回顧1991年救助華東水災時所遭遇的難題，當時慈濟是首次踏足中國大陸，他們本著「務實、及時」的原則，堅持要到災區，把捐款人的「愛」直接交到災民手上，這才是對捐款人負責，但是中國政府從中央到地方對慈濟都十分陌生和抱著懷疑的態度，只好派人一路陪同觀察，當時慈濟分別在安徽的全椒，河南的固始，江蘇的興化，一共建了3,000棟房屋分配給災民住，還協助災民重建身心。由於慈濟長久以來秉持的原則是：「不涉政治，不傳教。」如此十幾年走下來，中國方面已對慈濟非常信任。

逾半世紀以來，在兩岸走向和解的艱辛過程中，因為彼此缺乏信任的基礎，步子邁得緩慢無比，慈濟沒有半點政治的色彩，而且透過慈濟的救援工作，台灣人在華東水災和四川震災中展現慷慨和愛心的一面，有助於大陸朝野認識台灣人民的善良，這比任何宣傳都更直接有效。

### 對災民感恩

也許一般人都會認為，如果你是施捨者，當你把救濟物資發放到災民手中，災民理應彎著腰，低著頭，謙恭地收

受，然後表示無任的感激。何國慶說，慈濟人的態度完全不是這樣的，慈濟人是抱著感恩的心去面對災民的，「是災民讓我有機會做善事，是災民以他們的苦難和不幸，讓我悟出人生的意義，英文所說的：Thank you for letting me serve you.」負責聯邦多元文化的國務秘書肯尼(Jason Kenney)對於慈濟在加拿大的工作效率非常吃驚，當他獲悉慈濟所有的經費都是來自民間的捐贈後更是佩服。今年六月初，哈珀總理和肯尼在渥太華總理辦公室接見了何國慶等人，對他們在四川震災所展現的愛心倍加讚揚。

### 什麼是真正的快樂

有關慈濟感人的事跡，筆者只能用一句不當，但絕無惡意的成語來形容，那就是「罄竹難書」。訪談結束前，筆者問何國慶可否拿一句最平常而又最能入心的話來與社區共勉，他引用證嚴法師曾經講過的一句：「真正的快樂不是擁有的多，而是計較的少。」



何國慶接受卑詩省府表揚慈濟日



何國慶於中國四川與無國界醫師分享慈濟



何國慶於中國四川與鄉民互動



何國慶與慈濟志工探訪四川災區與鄉民互動



何國慶探訪中國四川災區學童



何國慶於斯里蘭卡



## **Tzu Chi - Transcending Race and Religion: talking to Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation Canada CEO Gary Ho**

*Tzu Chi Foundation is a charitable organization founded in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, an eastern province of Taiwan. Initially, Tzu Chi's major focus areas were charitable services, medical services, education and humanistic culture. Later, Tzu Chi expanded its work to include international relief, bone marrow donor registry, community volunteerism and environmental protection. In 1985, Tzu Chi volunteers abroad began organizing local chapters to help in their respective local communities. Today, Tzu Chi is an international organization with over five million members in sixty-five countries across five continents.*

The Nomination Committee for this year's Chinese Canadian Legend Award selected Gary Ho, the founder and CEO for Tzu Chi Foundation Canada, to be one of the award recipients, among many nominees. From nomination to selection, Gary Ho was very reluctant to be named because he felt that the recognition for Tzu Chi was not his achievement alone and that the success of the foundation was due to the hard work by all the volunteers of Tzu Chi (often called 'Tzu Chi people'). While he did not want to claim any credit, Gary was very willing to share his experiences with everyone through this process.

Gary was born in Sichuan, China in 1947, and two years later, his family moved to Taiwan. Gary has a degree in Electronics Engineering from Chung Yuan University, and is currently on the board of directors of 'Taipei Xiao Cheng Company'. In 1991,

Gary immigrated to Canada. Based in Vancouver, as the CEO for Tzu Chi Foundation Canada, Gary often has to travel around the world to the various disaster areas because of relief work. All this travel is at Gary's own expense, as is the custom for all other Tzu Chi volunteers.

When Gary thinks back to how his life philosophies changed, he attributes it to 'destiny'. He tells the story that one day in 1986 his wife by chance mentioned to him that she had met a new volunteer at the Tzu Chi Foundation there in Taipei. This lady gave an impression of an 'Iron Woman' to those around her, so full of self confidence was she. However after she joined Tzu Chi, she became very gentle and humble. They were curious as to who had influenced this 'Iron Woman'. At that time, Tzu Chi was building a hospital in Hualien. This 'iron woman' led the fundraising effort, and Gary's wife donated one million Taiwan dollars in Gary's name. With that Gary became one of Tzu Chi's honorary directors. Following that, Gary had the opportunity to listen to Dharma Master Cheng Yen speak on several occasions. He was much moved by her and from that point onward he followed the road of Tzu Chi, becoming a recruiter for 'Honorary Directors' for Tzu Chi, and a fundraiser for a Hualien Tzu Chi school. He has written a book on the Dharma Master Cheng Yen, called 'Test', and invited a well known writer Mr. Kuo to edit the very popular 'Still Thoughts' book.

Gary Ho says that Tzu Chi's relief work is based on love from the heart. From the China Yangzi flood disaster in 1991, the 921 Taiwan's earthquake in 1999, the South East Asian Tsunami in 2004, the Katrina Hurricane in the United States, to this year's hurricane in Myanmar and earthquake in Sichuan, Tzu Chi has always been at the site of the disasters in the shortest timeframe

possible.

He uses Tzu Chi's work in Indonesia as an example to explain how it resulted in a turnaround in the attitude of the Indonesian government towards Chinese expatriates. He says that in 1998 from May 13th to 16th, there were anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia. Local rioters and criminals carried out acts of rapes, robbery, arson and killings against the Chinese population. The world was shocked. Many Chinese had to give up their homes and businesses to escape to other countries. In 2002, there were severe floods in Jakarta in Indonesia. Dharma Master Cheng Yen felt that these racist hatreds could be absolved, not compounded, through flood relief efforts. She felt that only love could take away that hatred. So she encouraged the Indonesian Chinese population to participate and set up a humanistic relief plan to clean up one of the notoriously dirty rivers in the centre of Jakarta, including building drainage systems, reforestation, and moving entire villages, all extremely difficult work and a very large undertaking. They built seventeen hundred new houses for the thousands of poor residents on both sides of the river. With the help of the local government, they registered the names of the residents living along the flooded river. On the day when the houses were ready to be turned over, the Tzu Chi representatives gave the key to each resident household, and the recipients gratefully told them it was the first time in their lives that they had a key to their own house. In the past they had always lived in shacks built with clapboards and broken metal sheeting. When a piece of cloth as a drape was a relative luxury, a key to a house was something they had never dreamed of before.

Not only Tzu Chi donated and built the 1700 residential houses, they also built a new school for the children, donated the

furniture within the classrooms, and socks, shoes and uniforms for the children. In addition they built a mosque for the local Islam followers. They also transported 200 tons of rice to Jakarta to help with the food shortage problem. Tzu Chi Foundation Canada under the leadership of Gary, responding to Dharma Master Cheng Yen's call, donated one million US dollars towards this grand effort.

Gary Ho expressed the view that the Indonesian government was very much moved by Tzu Chi's relief efforts. During the ceremony to mark the donation, he heard with his own ears that the Governor of Jakarta say that the anti-Chinese riots of 1998 would be the last one. From now on there would never be another incident like that. The Indonesian army representative also expressed the view the Tzu Chi is a model for the world. If Tzu Chi needs anything, the military army will provide assistance. Gary says that what many countries and governments cannot achieve, Tzu Chi is able to use 'Great Love' to accomplish.

This year after the May Sichuan earthquake, Tzu Chi also responded speedily with the same high degree of efficiency. Since they had the 1991 China Yangzi floods experience, China was trustful of their relief efforts. From the day of the earthquake to now, Tzu Chi volunteers had been inside the disaster area several times. Their relief and rebuild work was based on these priorities: the quake survivors' physical needs, mental needs and their need to make a livelihood. Towards the end of August, the work in the first phase was completed. Tzu Chi Canada Foundation raised \$5,450,000 Canadian dollars, not including what was matched by the federal government. They built six school classrooms initially in the disaster area, and then built four other schools, trained volunteers, and established the plans for the next phase. Gary says

that when the quake victims can dry their tears, and follow the Tzu Chi volunteers to become volunteers themselves, he would know that these victims have moved out of the shadow of the disaster, and now they understand the truth in life: with compassion they can build a universe of love together. This is the greatest reward for the Tzu Chi volunteers for their relief efforts.

He thought back to 1991 about the difficulties they initially encountered while providing relief for the China Yangzi floods. At that time Tzu Chi people were in Mainland China for the first time, and they followed the principles used in all international relief efforts: Directness and Timeliness. They insisted on going to the disaster area to give directly to the flood victims, so that they could fulfill their responsibility to the donors. Naturally the Chinese governments, both central and local, were suspicious of Tzu Chi because they were not familiar with their organization. So a few government officials were dispatched to accompany them and observe their mission. At that time Tzu Chi people were working in three provinces around Yangzi: An Hui, He Nan, Jian Su. They built three thousand houses for the flood victims and helped with rehabilitation afterwards. Since Tzu Chi's principles have always been 'no politics, no religion', China now has both trust and confidence in their organization.

For over half a century, as the two sides of the coast walk towards a path of mutual understanding, they lack the foundation of trust, and the pace is extremely slow. Tzu Chi has no political agenda, and through their relief work, the Taiwanese have been able to demonstrate their generosity and their love through both disasters. Gary feels that helping the Mainland Chinese recognize the kindness of the Taiwanese people is more effective than any advertisement.

Some people may think when you, as a donor, put the donated supplies in the hands of the disaster victims, the victims should bend forward, bow their heads, accept with humility and express their boundless gratitude to you. Gary says that Tzu Chi people have a completely different attitude. Tzu Chi volunteers help the victims with gratefulness in their hearts. They perceive that the suffering and misfortune of the victims actually give the volunteers an opportunity to understand the meaning of life. As what is often said in English, 'Thank you for letting me serve you.' The federal Minister of Multiculturalism, Mr. Jason Kenney was very surprised at the high efficiency of Tzu Chi's work in Canada. When he learned that all the administration costs come from donations, he was even more impressed. This year in early June, Prime Minister Harper and Mr. Kenney met Gary Ho and others in Harper's office in Ottawa, and praised them for the love they demonstrated through their fundraising efforts for Sichuan earthquake.

All the words in the world cannot describe the enormous and moving work done by Tzu Chi. When Gary is asked to use a common but catching phrase to encourage the community, he replies with the words of Dharma Master Cheng Yen: 'True happiness lies not in possessing more, but in wanting less.'