

## I Found Tzu Chi Through My Wife

Written by Wu Hsiao-ting

Monday, 25 February 2008 00:00

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His wife was so involved in a religious group that he threatened to divorce her. But as he himself grew more and more familiar with the group, his attitude took a turn.

"All the stuff in my home was imported from foreign countries. Even my wife comes from abroad," Kosaka Michio said humorously as he welcomed us into his house.



Michio is a dentist in his sixties. His wife, Rumi (Lu Ying-ying, 呂瑩瑩), is from Taiwan. They have been married for 21 years and have no children. Though a native Japanese, Michio learned to speak Chinese in order to show his love for his wife and to entertain Taiwanese guests.

### Doubts about Tzu Chi

As a professional medical worker, Michio admits that he has a mania for sanitation. He takes a shower four times a day; to meet his demands for cleanliness, his wife mops the floor three times daily. Michio also pays close attention to his diet. He dislikes greasy or strongly flavored food, and so he only eats meals prepared by his wife.

After they got married, Rumi concentrated all her energy on looking after her husband. She did grocery shopping and took care of household chores. She had only three Taiwanese friends in Tokyo. Aside from an occasional chitchat with them, she had no other pastimes.

Five years ago, invited by one of those friends, Rumi went to the Tzu Chi Japan branch office to help tend the bookstore there for some volunteers who had gone back to Taiwan to participate in some Tzu Chi events. During her week there, she read many books about this Buddhist charity foundation. Moved by its altruistic philosophy, she decided to become a volunteer and serve the needy.

After she joined Tzu Chi, Rumi's uneventful and peaceful life began to change. Michio would sometimes find himself returning from work to an empty home, and his wife was often wanted on the phone after eight in the evening. He did not notice that the pocket money he gave her also ran out more quickly than before.

The round-trip train fare from their home in Sagami-hara, Kanagawa, to the Tzu Chi office in Shinjuku, Tokyo, amounted to 1,000 Japanese yen (then US\$4.35). That, coupled with her traveling expenses when visiting Tzu Chi care recipients, made a big hole in her savings. To make ends meet, she had to cut down on her other expenses.

Even so, she felt she had really found her niche after she became a Tzu Chi volunteer. She had always been an enthusiastic person who liked to take care of others, and becoming a volunteer gave her the opportunity to do just that. However, she did not foresee that her enthusiastic participation in the group's activities would lead to discord and tension between her and her husband.

Not long after Rumi joined Tzu Chi, she wanted to pay a visit to the Tzu Chi headquarters in

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Hualien, eastern Taiwan. When she told her husband about it, he refused to let her go and even threatened to divorce her if she insisted on going.

At that time, the only thing Michio knew about Tzu Chi was that it was some religious group from Taiwan. His inadequate knowledge of the organization and his dependence on his wife made him put his foot down on her visiting Hualien. He wanted her to focus more of her attention on being a good housewife. In the end, Rumi had to give in.



"The Tokyo subway was fast enough, but still I found myself constantly racing against time." Rumi recalled that when she first began participating in Tzu Chi charity activities, she often had to rush to beat her husband home so that she could clean up the house and have dinner ready for him.

One time, her husband arrived home earlier than she did. When she entered the house, she saw him looking at her gravely. She apologized for coming home late and immediately went into the kitchen to prepare dinner. Her mind was so focused on getting the dinner ready that she did not notice him going out. That night, he ate out and did not return home until late—that was his way of protesting against her failure to do her wifely duties.

Actually, Michio was not opposed to her volunteering for Tzu Chi; he just did not want her volunteer work to affect their family life. Apparently, they both needed to make compromises to work out a solution.

During our visit, Rumi pointed to the television set in their living room. Half the screen showed a Japanese program and the other half was tuned to Da Ai TV, the Tzu Chi channel. She told us, "At first, when I proposed that we subscribe to Da Ai TV, he objected. He said that it was not a matter of money; he was worried that I would get even more caught up in Tzu Chi if we subscribed to the channel."

Conscious of her husband's feelings, Rumi did not persist. Later, however, when Michio got to know the foundation better through contacts with other volunteers and even began translating Tzu Chi articles into Japanese, his attitude changed. He himself subscribed to the cable channel.

After they began watching Da Ai TV at home, Rumi's life was full of Tzu Chi. Whenever she went out, it was to participate in Tzu Chi events; when she was home, she watched Tzu Chi programs. Her eyes were glued to the TV screen even during dinnertime.

Seeing her acting like this, Michio could not help complaining: "Is this what your Master teaches you to do?"

Rumi reflected on her behavior and promptly corrected it. Her sensibilities to her husband's feelings once again won his heart. Now Michio often generously allows the whole TV screen to

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be occupied by Da Ai programs.

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### Visit to Hualien

Two years after Rumi joined Tzu Chi, she and Michio went together to Hualien, Taiwan, to visit the foundation's headquarters. Michio had a delightful trip to Hualien. He and Rumi felt greatly welcomed. As soon as they arrived at the airport, even though they were not in their volunteer uniforms, they were immediately greeted by Tzu Chi volunteers who had spotted a small Tzu Chi badge on their luggage. The volunteers enthusiastically helped them carry their luggage. A taxi driver even gave them a free ride when he learned that they were Tzu Chi volunteers visiting from Japan. "They treated me so nicely just because I was a Tzu Chi volunteer from Japan," Michio marveled.



They happened to have the chance to meet face-to-face with Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi. Full of reverence for the Master, Rumi did not dare say a word. Michio, on the contrary, was poised and at ease. He told the Master, "My wife has changed a lot since she joined Tzu Chi."

During their visit to Hualien, Michio saw a lot of Tzu Chi volunteers at the headquarters. He said that the visit "polished his heart," and his own devotion to Tzu Chi deepened.

### A "different" wife

Michio said that every time Tzu Chi volunteers took to the streets to raise money for charity, he always saw Rumi take money out of her own pocket and put it into the collection box before she began soliciting donations from others. He appreciated this little act of hers. "You must do it yourself to set an example before you can motivate others to do likewise." Apparently proud of his wife, he added, "This volunteer uniform really suits my wife."

Unlike most women, Rumi does not like buying beautiful clothes and she rarely wears makeup. Her wardrobe, which contains only a few of her own clothes, is chock-full of Michio's clothes and neckties. Michio collects watches and he also buys expensive watches for Rumi, but she never wears them.

"For her, inner beauty is more important. I, on the contrary, like to eat, play, and buy stuff. I spend a lot of money." Michio is still a child at heart. Every year, he makes a point of visiting the Tokyo Disneyland to try out new attractions. His greatest passion is collecting mandolins. One of the mandolins he owns, made in Italy in 1774, costs as much as a big house. He also formed a music group with some friends.

What is special about Michio is that he is not attached to his collection. One time, Rumi read in a magazine about the Chi Mei Museum in southern Taiwan. Established with the aim of promoting art and culture and enriching the spiritual life of the general public, the private

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museum is open to the public free of charge. Impressed, Rumi talked about it to Michio. After doing his own research and learning more about the museum, Michio wrote a letter to the museum expressing his wish to donate some of his collection.

"I have so many mandolins at home, it's impossible for me to play all of them," said Michio. "What's even more important is that instruments with historical value need to be maintained regularly to remain in good condition and retain their value." He believed that the museum would take good care of his mandolins. In the end, he donated 38 valuable mandolins to the museum.

"Actually, when we buy stuff, we only get to be its temporary owners. Michio admitted that although he takes pleasure in buying things, he often gets tired of them when the novelty wears off. So whenever Tzu Chi holds a charity bazaar, he generously lets volunteers come to his home and take away things to sell for philanthropic purposes.



As his knowledge of Tzu Chi deepened, Michio began to participate more enthusiastically in Tzu Chi activities. Now he translates articles for Tzu Chi, provides guided tours for visitors at the Japan branch office, arranges for his music group to perform at charity bazaars, and provides free medical counseling at Tzu Chi activities.

In the past, he would get angry at Rumi for returning home late from a Tzu Chi event. But today he often asks her, "Do you want to go to Tzu Chi today?" Not only that, when Rumi wants to visit care recipients, Michio helps her check the map, finds out the subway routes, and writes down where to transfer.

On holidays, Rumi and Michio sometimes go to the Shinjuku district in Tokyo together. When they get off at the stop, Rumi goes to the Tzu Chi office and Michio to nearby bookstores. "Rumi likes to go to the office to chat with the other Taiwanese volunteers," Michio teased his wife.

He fully understands how much Rumi enjoys her visits to the office, where she can talk to her heart's content in her mother tongue. He also knows how she loves helping others. He said with a hearty laugh, "Now I can't be happier when she volunteers at Tzu Chi, because it means that she won't be at home nagging me."

By Ye Wen-ying

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photographs by Yan Lin-zhao

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document.getElementById("J#1368718413bl8eb0b0e3").style.display = "none";