



A Case Study of Buddhist Tzu Chi Humanistic Education in Siddhartha Primary School, Lumbini.

Cheah Chen Yee and Ng Sor Tho

INTRODUCTION

Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation

Tzu Chi Foundation was established in 1966 by Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen on the poor east coast of Taiwan. Over the years, the foundation has been contributing to better social and community services, medical care, education and humanism in Taiwan and around the world. From the first 30 members, housewives who saved two cents from their grocery money each day to help the poor, the foundation has volunteers in 50 countries, with 502 offices worldwide.

Master Cheng Yen firmly believes that suffering in this world is caused not only by material deprivation but, more importantly, also by spiritual poverty. She feels that the lack of altruistic love for others has been the root of many problems in this world. Thus, the foundation's guiding principle on charity is to "help the poor and educate the rich."

Tzu Chi's missions focus on giving material aid to the needy and inspiring love and humanity to both givers and receivers. In addition to charity, the foundation dedicates itself in the fields of medicine, education, environmental protection, international relief work and the establishment a marrow donor registry. It also promotes humanistic values and community volunteerism. Through helping those in need, Tzu Chi volunteers take on the path of bodhisattva practices, the way to Buddhahood.

With offices in 47 countries, the Tzu Chi Foundation is one of the largest charity organizations originating from Taiwan. For over forty years, the organization has provided services for those in need worldwide. What began as simple charitable work with Dharma Master Cheng Yen and thirty housewives has gradually expanded into the eight fields of compassion in action. They are: charity, medicine, education, culture, international relief, bone marrow donation, environmental protection and community volunteerism. To this day, nearly all services are provided by foundation member volunteers, who labor with an attitude of love and gratitude towards all people (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2014).

Everyone has great love

The Buddha's teachings are neither so difficult nor profound. They are simple directions for our daily lives. The Tzu Chi Foundation endeavors to put the spirit of Buddha's teaching into daily life. "We learn from what we do and we do what we have learned." In this way, we experience the meaning of the admonition, "Let the Buddha be in your heart, the dharma in your words and love in your deeds."

Education in the essence of purifying human minds must not be overlooked. Tzu Chi teachers "treat all children with the hearts of parents and treat their own children with the wisdom of bodhisattvas." In this way, the love that they teach will truly sprout, grow and blossom. For over forty years, millions of people have enthusiastically responded and joined in Tzu Chi's cause for compassion relief work, without complaint or regret. We deeply believe that in every heart there exists priceless, great love (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2009a).

Tzu chi humanistic education -Jing Si Aphorism

Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms

"Following and applying the teachings of Buddha in our daily lives and transforming ourselves into living Bodhisattvas" is the goal that Master Cheng Yen has ardently, and without reservation, pursued for more than four decades. How can one combine the Buddha's teachings and life lessons? How can one make the Bodhisattva path the spiritual goal of present day people? Master Cheng Yen accomplishes these goals by translating the essence of the Buddha's teachings into simple and easy to understand language and uses everyday events to exemplify life lessons. Her exquisite words and caring thoughts inspire wisdom and provide direction amidst delusional thinking.

Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms books transcend racial and religious barriers. They promote heart-to-heart dialogues. Through the efforts of Tzu Chi volunteers, they have reached schools, businesses, government agencies, armed barracks, stores and every corner of communities. They have become learning material for students' moral education, running brooks that cleanse the minds of the business world, and the inspiration for self-examination and reflection for all human beings (Lin, Chen & Lin, 2011; Chua, 2017).

Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms, Volume 1 was first published in 1989. Over 3.5 million copies have since been printed in 11 languages, including traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, English, Spanish, French and German. In addition, Jing Si Aphorisms have been published via different media such as in Jing Si books for children, Jing Si cartoons, bookmarks, small decorative items, and cards (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2009b).

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objective of this paper is to examine the outcome of the implementation of Tzu Chi humanistic education in Siddhartha school at Lumbini.

The Origin of the name of Siddhartha School

Siddhartha Gautama, most commonly referred to as the Buddha, was a wandering ascetic and religious teacher who lived in South Asia during the 6th or 5th century BCE and founded Buddhism.

According to Buddhist tradition, he was born in Lumbini, in what is now Nepal, to royal parents of the Shakya clan, but renounced his home life to live as a wandering ascetic (Sanskrit: śramaṇa). After leading a life of begging, asceticism, and meditation, he attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya in what is now India. The Buddha thereafter wandered through the lower Indo-Gangetic Plain, teaching and building a monastic order. He taught a Middle Way between sensual indulgence and severe asceticism, leading to Nirvana, that is, freedom from ignorance, craving, rebirth, and suffering. His teachings are summarized in the Noble Eightfold Path, a training of the mind that includes ethical training and meditative practices such as sense restraint,

kindness toward others, mindfulness, and jhana/dhyana (meditation proper). He died in Kushinagar, attaining paranirvana. The Buddha has since been venerated by numerous religions and communities across Asia (Wikipedia: The Buddha).

The Siddhartha Primary School is located at Kewatalia Wad 2, around 300 students. This school was chosen as one of the schools that Tzu Chi would like to assist not only in terms of school building and facilities, but also on the character building of the students.

METHODOLOGY

The Teaching of Humanistic Education

During Distribution

The shared goal of Tzu Chi volunteers is to cultivate sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty within while exercising kindness, compassion, joy, and selflessness to humanity through concrete actions. Transcending the bounds of race, nationality, language, and religion, they serve the world under the notion that “when others are hurting, we feel their pain; when others suffer, we feel their sorrow”. Not only do the volunteers endeavor to promote the universal value of “Great Love,” they also fully employ the humanitarian spirit of Chinese culture to its utmost (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2009c).

During the distribution, Tzu Chi volunteers inspired the school teachers, parents and students through a sketch on the 4 missions of Tzu Chi: Charity, Medical, Education, and Humanity, follow by sketch on the Bamboo Bank Era. Students were also being informed that the materials they received are from the love of all walks of life around the world.

In line with Tzu Chi distribution of school bags, shoes and sweaters to all students in Siddhartha School, the educational team from Malaysia led the students to practise on the procedure of distribution on 9th December, 2022. They taught the students about the life education such as dressing etiquette, to line up, to greet and to be grateful when receiving distribution materials.

On 16th December 2022, the distribution of school bags, shoes and sweaters was conducted in a discipline and respect way. With the Jing Si Aphorism “Let us cherish and be content with what we have and take good care of everything around us”, the education volunteers taught the students to take good care of the materials they had received during the distribution.

Seven steps of hand washing

Government schools in Lumbini provide food to their students everyday. Tzu Chi volunteers observed that students do not practise hand washing before taking their meals to keep good hygiene. Thus, seventeen persons of Tzu Chi Education volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia came to Siddhartha Primary School to teach the students correct way of hands washing on 20th December, 2022.

The seven steps of hands washing was carried out by doing an experimental method by using pepper powder. Firstly, a finger was dipped into a bowl of water full of pepper powder (imagine it was like germ) on the water surface. We could obviously see a layer of pepper powder (germ) stick on the finger. Later on, a drop of hand wash liquid was put on the fingers of students and later dipped the fingers into the pepper powder water, we could see the hand wash liquid cleared up the pepper powder, no pepper powder was found on the fingers.

This could be related to our hands were cleaned up by using the washing detergent with a correct way of washing. This experimental method could also tell the students about the importance of hands washing.

Following that, education volunteers taught the students the seven steps of hand washing that they would remember for a long time (Tzu-Chi Malaysia, 2023).

Parent-child Sports Day

On 22nd December 2022, the education volunteers organized a parent-child sports day for the school in order to strengthen the relationship between parent and children. The event was started by marching in by students holding National flag and Tzu Chi flag, followed by National Anthem and speech by Principal. One parent and one child were paired up to complete the games during the sports day. They needed to work together to accomplish all six games. The games are organised in such a way that all have the meaning for parent and child to work together to complete the tasks in daily life. One of the games was three-legged race, where one of their legs were tied together to complete the race, so that they had to walk in the same pace, implying that in life, parent and child are to be in the same pace for any tasks they do.

Giving of Jackets and Tea Serving Ceremony to teachers

Due to the cold winter in Lumbini, Tzu Chi volunteers came to the school to distribute winter jackets to teachers on 2rd January 2023 to show the appreciation to the teachers from Tzu Chi. On the same time, they also conducted a ceremony for students to serve tea to teachers to express their gratitude and thankfulness. During the ceremony, with the guidance from Tzu Chi volunteer, a student representative read out a speech of gratitude dedicated to all teachers.

Zero Drop-out Campaign – Home visits to Irregular attendance students

Tzu Chi volunteers together with the school principal and teachers went for home visit on 12-13 January 2023 to those students who did not attend the class regularly. They had visited 13 students, most of the students did not come to school due to the reasons that they need to do housework and go to the farm especially during the harvesting season and planting season. The volunteers explained to the parents the importance of education for their children in terms of their future and also character building. For those families with financial difficulty, Tzu Chi volunteers brought the case to the charity committee to assist the family financially by providing food assistance, and all the students came back to school after the home visits.

Teaching of Jing Si Aphorism (JSA)

Ten JSA had been selected to bring to the school with the intention to guide the students' behaviour and character, and thus to be a better person. The 10 JSA are:

1. Let us cherish and be content with what we have and take good care of everything around us (class conducted immediately after the distribution).
2. The most beautiful face is a smiling face (conducted on 12 March 2023).
3. Not making our parents worry is what it means to be a good son or daughter (during the foot bathing and rice bank ceremony on 23 February 2023).
4. Count me in when doing good deeds. Count me out when doing bad deeds.
5. The more we do, the more we gain.
6. To those who use time well, time is precious like a gem; but to those who don't use time wisely, it is worthless like mud.
7. If we are easily distracted and do not pay full attention to the task at hand, it will be difficult to accomplish anything (20 February 2023).

8. Don't underestimate yourself, everyone has unlimited potential (20 February 2023).
9. Do everything with a willing heart and accept all that comes joyfully. The more effort you put in, the more skills you will gain.
10. Look, listen and act mindfully, and what we learn will benefit us all our life.

The educational team introduced the Jing Si Aphorism to the students by using the experience activity and life practice. The teaching of JSA had been conducted mainly in Class 4 and Class 5 by Tzu Chi overseas volunteers together with local volunteers. The procedure for the teaching of JSA is as follows:

1. Teach the students to greet the teachers and then volunteers (address in Mandarin: Shi Gu & Shi Bo);
2. ice-breaking with students using a Nepali Lyrics Phool Ko Aakha Ma Phoolai Sansara with simple sign language;
3. Repeat previous JSA (for 2nd lesson onwards);
4. I can do it! (Check on previous life practice, if any).

The class teacher is encouraged to be with the volunteers when the teaching of JSA is on, to know more about the Tzu Chi humanistic education. Children were also being taught to read the JSA in Mandarin (the original language of JSA), other than in Nepalese and English Languages. The poster of the JAS was fixed on the wall of the classroom after the lesson. The students are being reminded to read the JSA everyday when they come to school. Life practice of the JSA was also being mentioned in the class for students to practise in their daily life.

Foot Bathing for Parents

In order to promote the value of filial piety among students, Tzu Chi education team conducted a foot bathing ceremony on 23th January 2023. During the ceremony, a student representative read out a letter of gratitude to all parents or guardians. While foot bathing, some parents were so touched and in tears. A father shared that he had never let her daughter to touch his feet before, but he realised that this is the life education that his daughter must learn, then he was very happy to let his daughter to wash his feet (Tzu-Chi Nepal, 2023a).

The Results of the teaching of Jing Si Aphorism

The students are becoming more discipline, and they line up properly during the assembly, going into classes and going back to home. According to the Principal, Mr. Altaf Hussein, students are more polite and greet teachers and Tzu Chi volunteers spontaneously. They are more aware of their life practice such as dressing and eating manner. They always picked up rubbish voluntarily from the ground whenever they see the rubbish and threw it to dustbin. They always kept their classroom and school clean. The students are more self-confidence and they are very happy to be in the school now (Tzu-Chi Nepal, 2023b).

Conclusion

Venerable Cheng Yen's "Aphorisms" was used as an educational material for students in Siddhartha Primary School. In addition, it explores the significance of Jing Si Aphorism teaching in character development among students. Finally, it is hoped that this study will help educators to have a more in-depth understanding on

Venerable Cheng Yen's "Aphorisms" as an educational material for children, and by emphasizing on universal values, it is hoped that this will be integrated in teaching syllabus to build children's character. It is hoped that more research in other aspects of Venerable Cheng Yen's "Aphorisms" can also be conducted. (Chua, 2017).

Reference:

1. Chua, Soo Sien (2017). *Exploring the childhood educational doctrine of Venerable Cheng Yen/s Aphorism*. Master of Arts (Chinese Studies), Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur.
2. Tzu Chi Foundation (2009a). This is Tzu Chi. https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=353%3Athis-is-tzu-chi&catid=58%3Atzuchi&Itemid=181&lang=en
3. Tzu Chi Foundation (2009b). Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms. https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=314&Itemid=294&lang=en
4. Tzu Chi Foundation (2009c). Tzu Chi Missions. https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=293%3Atzu-chi-missions&catid=58%3Atzuchi&Itemid=283&lang=en
5. Tzu Chi Foundation (2014). About Tzu Chi. https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=96%3Aabout&catid=58%3Atzuchi&Itemid=182&lang=en.
6. Tzu-Chi Malaysia, 2023. Bringing Jing Si Aphorism Teaching to Buddha's Birthplace. <https://youtu.be/PNQA3DGIjo>.
7. Tzu-Chi Nepal (2023a). Promoting the Values of Filial Piety and Generosity in Lumbini https://youtu.be/ROeT_HpUOco.
8. Tzu-Chi Nepal (2023b). Tzu Chi's Aid Distribution and Humanistic Culture Promotion in Lumbini Schools. <https://youtu.be/TT8cKqBD7uA>
9. Lin, Hsiu-Lien, Chen, Hui-Fen, Lin, Hsui-Chen (2011). The Application of Jing-Si Aphorisms teaching to improve Personal Responsibility of Elementary School Students: An Action Research. *Educational Science Journal* 10(1): 81-104. National Chung Hsing University (in Mandarin).
10. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. The Buddha. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Buddha