

In July 2012, Hiroyuki Niiyama from Japan traveled in South-Eastern Taiwan on his own with a backpack. Different from his past ten visits to Taiwan, this is a trip of reciprocity and gratitude: he made a stop at Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital to donate his money and volunteer his time. Two months later, he returned and volunteered another day at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. This is a special trip he made to express his appreciation to Taiwan and Tzu Chi for the aid to 311 Earthquake in Japan.

A photograph showing two men in conversation. On the left, a man with glasses, wearing a red t-shirt and a yellow vest, is smiling. On the right, an older man with glasses, wearing a blue jacket, is looking towards the first man. They appear to be outdoors, with a chain-link fence and greenery in the background.

Mr. Niiyama's Trip to Taiwan

By: Shi-Yuan Chen, En-Sing Liang, Ze-Ling Huang, Yueh-Wei Li

Unforgettable Logo in Eastern Taiwan

Mr. Niiyama, 46-year-old, from Sakura of Chiba Prefecture, Japan, worked at an Internet marketing company. When the tsunami warning was issued during the 311 Earthquake in 2011, Niiyama and his colleagues fled to higher ground, where they witnessed the office building torn away by tsunami. Fortunately, his home was safe; however, because the road conditions prevented him from getting home, he stayed in an emergency shelter in Chiba. His first meal after the disaster was a warm rice ball served by Tzu Chi volunteers.

"I was in tears when I saw so many Tzu Chi volunteers who had come to help us," Mr. Niiyama recalled. He wished that one day he could return the kindness to those

who came to him when he was most vulnerable. On the eleventh trip to Taiwan on July 9, 2011, he coincidentally saw Tzu Chi's logo on the map at Yuli Train Station and took a taxi to Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital by pointing out the logo on the map to the driver.

Making a donation was his first gesture of appreciation, so Mr. Niyama arrived to Yuli Tzu Chi hospital with cash. However, he struggled to cross the language barrier. Fortunately, Brother Jung-Tai Tseng, a Tzu Chi volunteer from Bei-Tun, Taichung, showed up and was able to help him translate. Niyama stated his intent to make a donation and to volunteer for a day in the hospital to thank Taiwan and Tzu Chi for their aid during the 311 Earthquake.

Putting on the Tzu Chi volunteer vest, Mr. Niyama was able to fulfill his wish. Coincidentally, Venerable Master Cheng Yen visited the hospital on the same day. Niyama was deeply touched when he met Venerable Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi Foundation. He gave her his regards and sincere appreciation for the aid that Taiwan and Tzu Chi had offered during the 311 Earthquake. He wanted to thank them on behalf of all the victims Tzu Chi had helped. Mr. Niyama stated that Venerable Master Cheng Yen exhibited an incredible power of compassion, so at that moment, he made a vow to volunteer with Tzu Chi again in the future.

Volunteer to Recycle and Serve Tea

With the help of Tzu Chi Japan Chapter and coordination of Brother Jung-Tai Tseng, Brother Chin-Chong Hu, Social Services Office of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, Mr. Niyama made another trip to Taiwan two months later, as he had promised. Mr. Niyama arrived at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital the next day. Jing-Chung Hu, on behalf of all Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital staff, welcomed him with a set of books, "Recovery from 311," as a gift.

Mr. Niyama also visited Hsintien Tzu Chi Recycling Center behind the hospital, where he learned how PET bottles are



With the assistance of Jung-Tai Tseng (left), a Tzu Chi Taichung volunteer on duty at Tzu Chi Yuli Hospital, Hiroyuki Niyama (right) fulfilled his wish to become a one-day volunteer.

processed for recycling from Sister Cheng-Er Chang, a Tzu Chi recycling volunteer. Mr. Niiyama rinsed the bottles, removed the caps, and arranged the bottles in the bin for drying. He and Jung-Tai Tseng had fun compressing the bottles by foot. Their laughter, accompanied by the bottle rattling, made a beautiful father-son image.

When returned to the hospital, Brother Tseng Showed Mr. Niiyama the blankets and scarves made from the recycled PET bottles by Da-Ai Technology at Jing-Si Book Store. Mr. Niiyama then understood why the PET bottles had to be rinsed and dried to become clean material for better quality products. He

praised Master Cheng Yen for her wisdom of using recycling income to support Da Ai TV station, establishing a cycle of love by transforming unwanted trash to valuables.

In the afternoon, Mr. Niiyama volunteered to serve tea to patients in the lobby, examination room, and the waiting area in Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. With his newly learned Mandarin, Mr. Niiyama said, "Please have tea" while serving. Ms. Lin, who was amazed, complimented his action: "It is incredible to be served by a humble and respectful volunteer from Japan!" Seeing the patient's smile, Mr. Niiyama was elated and felt more confident of his Mandarin.



On the spur of the moment, Hiroyuki Niiyama decided to visit Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital, where he acquainted Master Cheng Yen. He seized the chance to express his gratitude in person for Tzu Chi's humanitarian aid to the Japanese who suffered from 311 Earthquake.



Sister Chen-Er Chang (left), a Tzu Chi recycling volunteer from Tanzi, Taichung, is showing Hiroyuki Niyama the PET bottle recycling process.



Though his Mandarin lacked fluency, patients in the waiting area received his sincerity through his humble gesture and grateful attitude.



Performing Buddhist rituals with sincerity, Hiroyuki Niyama thanked Bodhisattvas for his survival from the tsunami and for helping him begin a new chapter of his life by knowing Tzu Chi.



Hiroyuki Niyama (right) was happy when seeing on a poster the Tzu Chi volunteer who helped him during 311.

Heartfelt Reunion with 311 On-site Tzu Chi Volunteers

Brother Jung-Tai Tseng, Like a father, guided Mr. Niyama in performing Buddhist rituals, introducing him to Tzu Chi's charter, historical exposition and familiarize the hospital queue management system. When Mr. Niyama joyfully pointed at a familiar face on a poster of Tzu Chi Japan volunteers and said, "It's him, it's him! He was the one who led me to the park for the rice ball distribution!" The automated patient-queuing system in the hospital also impressed Mr. Niyama, who said,

"It is very thoughtful to keep patients from standing in a long line. It has surpassed many hospitals in Japan." Mr. Niyama also purchased the CD of the song, "Prayer," in Japanese at the Jing-Si Books & Cafe.

In Mr. Niyama, there grew a seed of appreciation at the time he received the warm rice ball, and he acted on it. Not only did he learn more about Tzu Chi during the two trips to Taiwan, he also gained a deeper understanding of Tzu Chi's love for Mother Earth and for patients. This was such a fruitful trip: he made many friends and bare witness to how love can bring people closer together.