



Adventure for a Good Cause

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Qi meets Zhang Tingjun, former netball player of Singapore, now founder of The Chain Reaction Project. Using adventure as a platform for philanthropy, she began the endeavor in 2009 with Tour de Timor.

BY WANG LIN



Tingjun (in black, at the back) with Timorese President and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta (in white, middle) and TCRP 2010 catalysts

QI: How did the Chain Reaction Project start?

Tingjun: TCRP's journey began in August 2009 with the Tour de Timor, Timor-Leste's inaugural five-day, 450-kilometre mountain bike race. Using the race as a platform, and thanks to the power of social networking and media, TCRP successfully raised more than US\$35,000 for HIAM-Health, a local malnutrition rehabilitation centre for children.

Besides raising funds for our adopted charities, TCRP adventures are also designed to draw positive attention from the media to countries which are struggling to get their tourism industries off the ground.

With over 10 news features across various media, including Readers' Digest Asia and Channel News Asia, TCRP's endeavor contributed to the change of perception that Timor-Leste was an unsafe tourist destination.

I was fortunate to work with the President of Timor-Leste, Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta on a number of projects and I heard about Qi Global from him.

QI: How did HIAM become TCRP's first adopted charity?

Tingjun: The founder of HIAM, Rosaria Martins Da Cruz and Jill Hillary had been working on tackling malnutrition in Timor-Leste for seven years. Believing every child should have access to a healthy diet, HIAM trains families to improve their economic situation through the Home Kitchen Garden Project.

In 2009, Rosaria and Jill planned to move into their own centre, where they could rehabilitate malnourished children and run training courses for parents to break the vicious cycle of malnutrition. Unfortunately, a major donor was unable to deliver his fund promise due to the economic crisis. TCRP directed proceeds from the first fund raising efforts to HIAM Health, and encouraged the government to support HIAM Health's fight against malnutrition. TCRP continued to advocate for HIAM Health and brought in a group of 22 catalysts in 2010 to further work with the centre.

I think we needed HIAM Health as much as it needed us at the time. Our success and failure during that first year was closely intertwined. It was pretty much on a wing and a prayer that my teammates and I threw ourselves into the project.

"We were new to the NGO world, and had no idea what we were doing would even matter at the end of the day. We had grown to genuinely care for HIAM Health, and were desperate to see the centre succeed."

QI: What is the most significant moment for you?

Tingjun: On December 11, 2010, I received an email from HIAM saying that the centre had been awarded a certificate of recognition from the Timorese government for their contribution in the area of children's rights. The award ceremony was broadcast on national TV, and for the first time, after 7 years of hard work, HIAM Health was finally recognized for their efforts.

This was the most significant moment for me and remains till today as a source of inspiration. We will never be able to match the sacrifices that Rosarias and Jills have made. It is our hope that by working alongside them, we could make a tangible and sustainable difference to the world together.

"On days when I feel jaded or cynical, I read through the email from HIAM Health. It reminds me that although it takes time, and an insane amount of passion and dedication, everybody is capable of being a catalyst for change."



Tingjun (in black) with founders of HIAM, Rosaria and Jill

QI: What initiatives are TCRP organising this year and what do you plan for 2012?

Tingjun: This year, TCRP took part in the annual Killi(MAN)jaro Adventure Challenge in Moshi, a small town at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. We raised over US\$30,000 to fund the purchase of a larger farm for Amani Children's Home. This farm could enable the home to grow crops for own consumption, teach the children animal husbandry (an essential skill in Tanzania) and raise animals for some extra income.

2012 will see the team head to the city of Davao, in southern Philippines. Despite being a peaceful and progressive metropolis, Davao has suffered the spillover effect of the unrest in its neighboring provinces. And tourism continues to suffer. TCRP will be taking part in the 24-hour Mt Apo Boulder Challenge held in Davao del Sur, an initiative to raise the profile of Davao as a safe tourist destination.

QI: What do you hope to encounter at the big Qi meeting on October 12-14?

Tingjun: Interested partners, investors and sponsors to help the team increase its capacity to explore new opportunities for TCRP adventures in other regions around the world.

About Zhang Tingjun

Of American and Chinese descent, Ting was born and raised in Singapore. Since a young age, she was passionate about sports and fiercely competitive on the court, characteristics which prompted her to becoming a national netball player for Singapore. Through her 10-year experience as an athlete, she fostered a respect for the underdog and a desire to better understand human behavior. So she pursued a degree in Psychology from Pepperdine University. She moved on to become a producer with regional news broadcaster Channel News Asia. It was during her time with CNA that she heard about the Tour de Timor, a 450km mountain bike race in Timor-Leste. In 2010, she left CNA to focus on growing TCRP as a non-profit organization. Contact Tingjun at tingjun@thechainreactionproject.com



About Qi GLOBAL

Qi is a Global Network of Innovators. We believe that it is time to take Asia to the next level. We call it the 2.0 version. Member companies include innovation leaders such as BMW, Diageo, Aviva and Nestle. Each October, Qi hosts an annual meeting in Singapore, gathering business and community leaders from around the world. This year the meeting will take place on October 12-14 and is particularly beneficial for CEOs, investors and heads of design, innovation and product development. Find out more at www.qi-global.com/conference

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