

Foreign Volunteers, Local Warmth: A Heartwarming Story from Cixi

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On April 28, the Yangtze River Delta Market Cluster in Shengshan Town, Cixi County, was bustling with activity. Tahir, a businessman from Pakistan, was carefully checking a fabric order with a Chinese merchant. Beyond his role as a trader, Tahir also serves as a volunteer, assisting local police in mediating disputes between foreign nationals and local business owners.

Stretching over 2.3 square kilometers, the Yangtze River Delta Market Cluster hosts more than 5,000 registered merchants and sees a daily footfall of 50,000 to 80,000 people. As a well-known fabric distribution hub in China, it has attracted a large number of foreign businesspeople to settle and operate here for a long time.

To date, the market is home to over 300 foreign nationals, who have naturally formed more than 20 foreign merchant communities. Traders from Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries have put down roots here through a peer-mentorship model, where experienced foreign merchants guide newcomers.

"Basically, every foreign merchant community has one or two warm-hearted individuals who have lived in Cixi long enough to become familiar with Chinese customs and practices," explained Ying Kanhua, a police officer



Yangtze River Delta Market Cluster, Shengshan, Cixi.

from Shengshan Police Station.

"They now act as both interpreters and liaisons." Supported by the Exit-Entry Administration Brigade of Cixi Public Security Bureau and Shengshan Police Station, these warm-hearted individuals have formed a special volunteer service team, consisting of 38 members — 27 foreigners and 11 Chinese nationals.

The team has no official name and no founding ceremony, yet it has gradually come together through daily assistance, mutual support and dispute mediation. Each volunteer takes charge of one foreign merchant community, helping to convey government policies, collect information and conduct preliminary conflict resolution.

Late on New Year's Day this year, a foreign national was rushed to

Cixi People's Hospital for emergency treatment due to a sudden heart attack, and his family members urgently needed to be contacted. Police quickly activated the volunteer network, and with the help of Saifullah, a Pakistani volunteer, the family was located within just a few hours.

"If you encounter any communication problems with Pakistani people, you can send me a message. I am ready to cooperate with you in every way," said Saifullah.

Such emergency assistance is not uncommon. Previously, another foreign patient with cardiomyopathy needed to return home for treatment, and foreign volunteers helped coordinate exit-entry procedures, ensuring the matter was resolved smoothly.

The volunteer team also includes many Chinese merchants who interact frequently with foreign nationals and have voluntarily joined the group to offer support.

Near the market, Xincheng Hotel is affectionately known as the "Mom's Hotel" among foreign friends, as 95 percent of its guests are from other countries.

Sun Yeting, the landlady of the hotel, has also joined this special volunteer team. Although she does not speak English, she communicates smoothly and cares for foreign guests through a unique combination of Chinese and gestures, becoming a heartwarming bridge between the police station and foreign residents.

Not long ago, a Nigerian volunteer found a wallet containing more than 5,000 yuan in the market. Without hesitation, he handed the wallet to the landlady and asked her to help find the owner.

Minor frictions are unavoidable in fabric trading. On one occasion, a Chinese merchant accidentally cut a foreign customer's hand while cutting fabric, and the two sides became deadlocked over compensation. Foreign volunteers stepped in to interpret and mediate, and the merchant finally took the injured person to the hospital for treatment, resolving the dispute on the spot.

Up to now, the volunteer team has successfully mediated 142 foreign-related disputes with a success rate of over 90 percent, and the number of police reports involving foreign-related conflicts has dropped by 23 percent year on year.

"Doing business here feels very secure," said Asad from Afghanistan, adding that the city has made foreign nationals feel genuinely at home.

Another foreign merchant once said emotionally: "Working here is as good as being in our own country. Thank you to the Chinese people and their great government. Long live China."



Foreign children joined the Lantern Festival activities held by the police office of the Yangtze River Delta Market Cluster.

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