

FRIENDLY HEALER

Israeli doctor Moris Topaz's ties with China have grown since a massive earthquake struck Sichuan in 2008, Liu Xiangrui reports.

Moris Topaz sees medicine as a unique link between China and his home country, Israel. "This is the beauty about cooperation in medicine. It's never a one-time project, because we need to improve all the time," says Topaz, 66, who has maintained his relations with Chinese doctors with whom he has cooperated in the past. "We are a bridge between the two countries."

Topaz, who heads plastic surgery at Hadera's Hillel Yaffe Medical Center, a prestigious Israeli hospital, has dedicated decades to research. He has also served on the International Committee for Quality Assurance and Medical Technologies and Devices in Plastic Surgery, of which he was secretary-general.

In 2015, Topaz visited China on invitation from the government, and traveled to Taiyuan, capital of North China's Shanxi province, which has since become a "base" for him in the country. His local colleagues at a hospital helped him to know more about China, even though he cannot speak Mandarin.

"We speak the same professional language of medicine and surgery. This way we can bridge a lot of verbal gaps and make friends everywhere," he says.

In 2008, Topaz had volunteered to help those injured in a massive earthquake that hit Southwest China's Sichuan province after learning about the natural disaster in the news back home. He soon arrived in Deyang, among the worst-affected areas, and worked for days along with an army unit overseeing rescue and relief work there.

He also donated medical devices and medicines worth 100,000 yuan to a local hospital. He revisited the area during the later stages of relief work to train local medical professionals with advanced wound-healing methods. He was impressed by how the government was able to rebuild the whole area with hospitals and other facilities just a year later.

"That was a very difficult situation at the time. I think the entire world can learn from China about how to deal with this kind of crisis," he says of the aftermath of the 8-magnitude quake.

His involvement also allowed Topaz to establish close ties with the People's



Dr. Moris Topaz (right) joins the rescue work in Deyang, Sichuan province, during the earthquake in 2008. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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Moris Topaz, Israeli doctor

Hospital in Deyang.

Topaz has visited Deyang many times to teach and help doctors there in the past years. Chinese doctors from the hospital were also invited to his medical center to study with Israeli experts.

Thanks to his help, the hospital has expanded its burns and plastic surgery department. It now has dozens of doctors and nurses, from an original count of two doctors.

Topaz has also brought in the latest in medical technology from Israel, including TopCloser, a groundbreaking method for closing large wounds. The method can reduce the complexity of such injuries and shorten the duration of a surgery. It also allows a wound to heal faster and reduces the aftereffects.

Since the method was first used during the earthquake relief in 2008, it has been adopted by more than 150 hospitals in Sichuan, helping many injured people recover relatively quickly.

"I see it as a mission (to

promote the method), because it would substantially change medicine globally," he says.

Topaz now returns to China on a monthly basis as his organization has expanded its collaboration with more medical institutions in the country. He usually stays for about one week during each visit. Modern technology has made communication between him and his Chinese colleagues easier, he says.

When he is in Israel, he uses WeChat, a popular Chinese phone app, to exchange ideas with Chinese doctors. His colleagues from here also frequently consult with him by sending him photos of patients' wounds, and he guides them on surgeries by making illustrations.

Topaz's dedication has been recognized by authorities here.

In 2009, he was given the Friendship Award, the highest honor given by the Chinese government to foreigners who have made significant contributions to

the country's social and economic development.

Besides his own activities in China, Topaz has tried to bring in more support. For example, he introduced his colleague Meir Oren, a former CEO of Hillel Yaffe, to China so that their organization could establish deeper collaborations with Chinese hospitals and expand them to fields like emergency preparedness.

In the past years, many Chinese doctors from quite a few partner hospitals have received training at their center in Israel and delegations of Israeli doctors have also visited China.

In the eyes of Topaz, the cooperation with China is both a process of sharing and learning. "This is for the benefit of both countries," he says. "We can use this as a tool to improve Sino-Israeli relations. If I now look back, I can say we have achieved a lot."

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Policeman bonds with locals in rural Guizhou

By YANG JUN in Guiyang
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When Tian Maoshun was released from prison in 2013, the first thing he did was to visit a local police station to find Yang Jiafa, the policeman who had arrested him.

Tian wasn't there for revenge but rather to show his gratitude to Yang, who volunteered to help his parents while he was in jail. Tian knelt before Yang in tears.

"If it weren't for Yang, I probably wouldn't see them alive any longer," Tian, 41, a resident of Guiyang, capital of Southwest China's Guizhou province, says of his elderly parents.

In 1994, after Tian, an only child, was sentenced by a local court for intentionally hurting someone, Yang promised to look out for Tian's parents.

Tian had earlier spoken of his concern about his parents to Yang during interrogations.

For 20 years, Yang set aside money from his income every month to support Tian's parents.

He visited them twice a month with supplies such as rice and cooking oil. In addition, he helped them with their farm work during farming seasons.

"I feel lucky and thankful for Yang's help. Otherwise, I don't think I could have survived to see my son come out of prison," says Yang Zhengqin, Tian's mother.

Tian's family has since moved to a house provided by the local government. The family's financial condition has improved with him taking up part-time jobs like renovating houses during slack farming seasons.

"I'll remember Yang's favor forever," says Tian.

This is just one of the many stories about Yang Jiafa, the 53-year-old police officer, who has been helping needy people in the community that he serves.

In 1989, Yang Jiafa, after five years in the military, was transferred for civilian work to the Gaopo township's police station in Guiyang's Huaxi district, an undeveloped rural place back then. More than 70 percent of the



Yang Jiafa (right) has won the trust of locals with his sincerity and dedication. PU MOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

area's population belonged to the Miao ethnic group, and as many young people went to work in the cities, most residents of the villages were women, children and the elderly, who only spoke the local Miao language.

For Yang Jiafa, a native of a different part of Guizhou, language became the first major challenge at work. To better communicate with the locals and to help them solve

practical problems, he started to learn the local language.

In recent times, he has not only used his fluency in Miao language for work, but also to act as a bridge between his colleagues and the local community, according to Wang Sen, a former colleague of Yang. Sometimes he is called by phone to assist his colleagues to communicate with the local people.

“I'll do anything that is helpful for the local people. I also enjoy being around them.”

Yang Jiafa, police officer in Guiyang

The highland township witnessed a lot of land-related disputes in the past due to local traditions as well as the people's relative poverty. If not carefully handled, such disputes could have escalated.

Winning the trust of the locals with his sincerity, Yang Jiafa handled many cases successfully by following his principles like "comparing one's feelings with those of the other".

Over the past years, he has paid numerous visits to people involved in the many cases he has handled, and has

acquainted himself with most residents of the township's 20 villages.

Living for a long time in the mountainous region and riding a motorbike often in the cold wind have contributed to his rheumatism. His hands are swollen and his knee joints ache due to the condition. But Yang Jiafa has tried to avoid letting such challenges affect his work.

"He works very hard," according to Wang Ping, a local village head. "He is easygoing and is familiar with all the villages in the area."

His long-term commitment has not only won Yang Jiafa the respect of locals, but also the recognition of authorities. He was honored as a national heroic model by the Ministry of Public Security in 2015.

"I'll do anything that is helpful for the local people. I also enjoy being around them," says Yang Jiafa, who is affectionately called "bilingual policeman" by the local residents.

Liu Xiangrui contributed to the story.

Yoga teacher strong at age 98

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE in New York

She is the "world's oldest yoga teacher" who, at age 98, still teaches five classes a week. But above all, Tao Porchon-Lynch is a poster child for health and positivity in a world obsessed with wellness and longevity. The former model and Hollywood contract actress — who earned her title from Guinness World Records — still has a delicate, slender physique.

Tao, as everyone calls her, grew up in India and lives in the suburbs of New York, traveling the world attending yoga retreats. Stylish and fashionable, she zips from her Hartsdale home in Westchester County to the studio in a smart car. Once in the studio, she happily demonstrates yoga poses, even if she sometimes calls on one of her dedicated students to show off others.

But more than yoga, she imparts a zest for life that has sustained her through nearly a century of existence, marked by encounters with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Marlene Dietrich.

"Don't be afraid," she tells her class. "Don't let others tell you what you can't do."

She cautions her pupils against giving in to fatigue. "Breathe, feel this life force within you."



Tao Porchon-Lynch (pink shirt) instructs a yoga class in Hartsdale, New York. AFP

In a Western society increasingly determined to ward off the onset of aging, Tao's bracing cocktail of longevity and practical spirituality has made her a celebrity with an avid online following.

"I believed in nature and I believed in breathing. I did not want to pray to something or somebody out of space. I wanted to pray to something that was inside of me," she explains.

"Look at the trees. The trees are hundreds of years old, at this moment they are all bare, they look like skeletons, they look dead, but they are not — they are recycling themselves," she says in a nod to the winter season. "Those trees are not getting any older, they are strong."

Her life did not begin, however, in the most auspicious of circumstances.

Born on Aug 13, 1918, at the end of World War I, her mother died when she was 7 months old, and her father entrusted her to an uncle and aunt who brought her up in Pondicherry, then part of French colonial India. She was raised a vegetarian. French and Hindi were her first languages.

The onset of World War II saw her leave for Europe looking for her father, who was called up in France. She found refuge with an aunt in the Rhone area.

After the war, she modeled for Lanvin before traveling to the United States for the first time in 1948. She returned to the US for good a year later and worked in Hollywood, under contract for MGM for several years. She was married to Bill Lynch, an insurance broker, for 20 years until his death in 1982.

And if yoga is not enough to keep her young at heart, she takes ballroom dances with partners 70 years her junior.