

“Our Long March”

Zewu Li and Li Zhang¹

Chengdu Waldorf School

A milestone was reached for worldwide Waldorf education on 10 January 2012 when the Chengdu Waldorf School received a full license as a grade school (as well as kindergarten) from the education authorities in Chengdu, Sichuan province. This was the result of a “Long March” and some tireless work over seven years by the whole faculty, especially the three founding teachers Li Zhang, Harry Huang, and Zewu Li.

The city of Chengdu suffered severe damage during the May 2008 earthquake. With their own school in shambles, the teachers went out into the city to hospitals and parks to play games and tell stories to the children they would meet. The school also received some donations from Australia and New Zealand to rebuild the new kindergarten.

A number of Teachers from New Zealand and Australia have travelled to Chengdu (and elsewhere in China) in recent years to assist in Teacher Preparation programs there. Chengdu is a focal point for all of China, where around 30 new Waldorf Schools initiatives have been founded by the end of 2012.

“If we do it, we will realize it.”

– Chengdu Waldorf School Song

2011 was over, we had entered into 2012. It is a good time to reflect on our work and a joy to share with friends who helped us. Last year was important – the 7th year in the cycle of Chengdu Waldorf School development. We have accomplished some significant mile stones.

The first notable milestone was granting the Grade School License. We applied for the license 3 years ago and the local Education District issued permission allowing us to undertake the preparation process over the next 3 years. We negotiated with the educational department and they agreed we could start with a single class for each grade, not the previously required 3

classes for each grade. The government made an exception for us. But, we needed to build a new school building that met the code for schooling. We started to raise funds for building the new school building. We had some money from our school, some money from our parents, and some - which is so important - from German Friends of Waldorf. We had leased our land for the school from local village with condition that we could only build temporary buildings. Once the money had been raised we had to negotiate with the government for permission to build.

We had to work hard to get around this and build the new school building. We built for the children! We take some risks without a building permit. It took only half year to complete the ground and structure work. We tried to complete



¹ On behalf of Chengdu Waldorf School Executive Group, Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, China

the building before the government knew about it and stopped the building process. That is something you may not be able to understand of life in China.

We thought we can go on without the government stopping the process. But then the Fire department stopped the process. The Fire Department would not come to inspect the building if it had been built without proper permission. But as we said we could never get that due to the land lease issue. Just like a chicken and egg puzzle. We used all the people we knew related to the fire department to get the department to give us permission to run a school. Then we did it.

Third challenge: inspection. The educational department inspected us four times. They made a long list of items for us to improve after first inspection two and half years ago. We made progress through that. They came again after a year and gave us another list of improvements which we did. Then last September. Then last November. It was a Long March. Then the license came. They said that the school was more and more like a school. And in reality, it was so. The environment and administration of our school really was more like a school which should be formal and mature. The process was a big learning for us as well.

We finished the grade school's new building and yard and moved in September 2011. It was really beautiful with flat "M" shape traditional Chinese style, which we designed by ourselves. The classrooms are bigger than before with wooden floor and nice lazure-painted walls. The

environment of classrooms had been totally changed. Our students felt so good and more peaceful in a beautiful environment.

The other important thing for the school is that our student numbers kept growing this year. Now the kindergarten has reached about 110 children, with about 140 in the grade school. Future enrolment is full as well for the lower grades – only the higher grades have a little flexibility. All the staff of the school number about 60.

Financially this year is cheerful and also a milestone for the school development. We raised the tuition fees by around 58%. We went little bit crazy but it succeeded. We did an annual review of our finance and created a clear budget for coming year. We had lots of core group meetings and met with our parents. We showed our financial reality leaving illusion behind. Our training programme gave 2000 Yuan to each student per year for their expenses in school whereas in fact it should have gone to hardware for building or school equipment. On other hand our teacher salary level was low. We did not have enough money to reward their work. Our goal is to manage over state teacher salaries eventually. Maybe in 5 years. We have to survive financially to create stability for teachers and manage the long term running of our school. We decided fully that we did not want our previous situation continuing. When we told our parents it caused struggling – no one want to pay more and, also, the increase was too sharp. But the other reality is the parents have money mostly and we give up to 8% of total amount of school tuition fee for scholarship. In the end we did raise the fee successfully. Simultaneously we raised our teachers' salaries



New school building and yard which we moved into in September 2011.



about 58%, same as tuition fee raising ratio. Before we raised the salary we reviewed our payment policy carefully with the core group of teachers. And then we announced to others and got feedback to adjust it. In September 2011, we all received new salaries and everyone's face was smiling. The other good sign was donations from domestic fund raising was up largely. The school got around 1,200,000 RMB at home and only 3,400 RMB from abroad. This was just upside down. In the school's beginning the donations came mostly from abroad, from USA and mainly German. The year before last year there had been a crisis between teachers and parents: it seemed parents mostly did not trust teachers. So it was good that at last through our work we seemly gained their trust again. That is good base for farther work with parents.

Last year we also got more recognition from government and other institutions. Firstly, Fu Yonglin, the Vice-Mayor of Chengdu came to the school with district-related people following. He said this is 'a new education' and after the visiting he promoted our school to others which gave a good reputation for our school and also directly influenced our license.

The other important person for us is Zhu Yongxin. Mr Zhu is standing member of Chinese



People's Congress. He is the Executive Chair of Minjin Party, which is one of the democratic parties of China. He met Zewu and Li in Beijing and wanted to put some Waldorf content into the New Education which he has been promoting for years. His influence from Beijing is a useful umbrella for us. We also got labelled 'New Educational School' from his stream, but he allows us try what we could do in Waldorf. We also successfully hosted on our school Campus the first half of Sichuan Normal University Kindergarten Training Program which gained college credits. That means it is a beginning of Waldorf content being recognized at an Academic level.

We continuously study curriculum. We are leading local grade-based curriculum research in our country, hopefully finishing in this coming



year. This will give a solid foundation for our school itself as well as the whole of China.

Graduation is a key issue of our school. Where will our students go after eight years of Waldorf study has been a big problem. After serious discussion we decided to start a High School Training Program and eventually set up a High School in several years' time.

More things are still hovering in our mind that have to be done in the next few years:

- to build up curriculum strongly.
- to make administration work professional.
- to train more good teachers.
- land issues - we have to solve the land issue totally because we rented this beautiful piece of land and have to make it stable for use. We do not want to move the whole school somewhere else.
- expanding kindergarten and school classrooms.

Thanks to all those of you who have helped us in various way – we are really grateful. ♦



TARUNA
ESSENTIAL EDUCATION

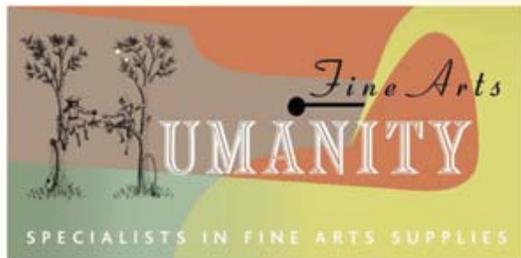
Steiner education provides an holistic approach through a balance of arts, crafts and academic subjects addressing the needs of 'head, heart and hands'. Taruna offers practical and artistic foundations in Rudolf Steiner Education through a Certificate (part time) or Diploma (full time) programme in Steiner Education. Develop valuable insights which will transform your understanding of childhood and education.

There is a national and international shortage of qualified Steiner School teachers. The **Diploma in Rudolf Steiner Education** can be your passport to a whole new world of possibilities! This full time one year programme is ideal for qualified teachers wanting to develop valuable insights and skills that will renew your understanding of childhood, healthy development and the delivery of education.

The **Certificate in Rudolf Steiner Education** is accessibly designed to allow teachers and teacher aides currently employed and those studying to participate. Each 7 day seminar allows a weaving of the content, bringing the opportunity for a deeper reflective understanding of the creative human being. Supporting the seminars is a home-based self-directed programme of assignments.

For a prospectus or to enrol for 2013, please contact Taruna on phone: 06 8777 174 or email: info@taruna.ac.nz or visit our website: www.taruna.ac.nz

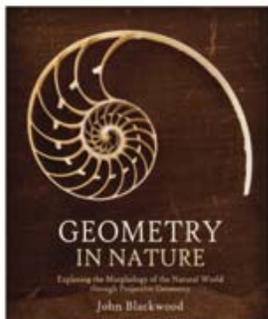




107 KARAMU RD HASTINGS PH: 06 8707069 FX: 06 8763017

Humanity Books & Fine Arts
107 Karamu Road, Hastings
Phone: 06 870 7069 • Fax 06 876 3017
Email: humanitybooks@xtra.co.nz

Open Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm
 Saturday 10am - 1pm



Geometry in Nature :Exploring the Morphology of the Natural world through Projective Geometry

\$49.95

John Blackwood
 Floris Books, 2012, large paperback, 190 pages, 500 colour illustrations

From the simplest observations in nature to detailed measuring of intricate forms, we find geometry everywhere in the world around us.

In this magnificent book, John Blackwood explores different kinds of symmetry in the diverse realms of nature. He considers the fundamental forms of minerals, plants, animals and humans, before going on to look at spirals, vortices, buds and other complex shapes.

Using projective geometry as a basis, he shows how many forms in nature are generated by the same basic geometrical process, but significant disparities lead to the wondrous variety found in our universe.

Fully illustrated with over 500 photographs, drawings and diagrams, this is both a beautiful and inspirational book.

