

News from China

Li Zhang

Li Zhang spent several years in Spring Valley doing the early childhood training and working in the Rudolf Steiner Fellowship Community. She and her husband, Harry Wong, also a Sunbridge graduate, nurtured their dream of bringing Waldorf education to mainland China. Over the course of the past few years, they formed an initiative group and, together with other colleagues in China, were able to acquire land and buildings and the dream began to become a reality. After completing her early childhood training in July, she returned with her young children to prepare for opening day two months later. This article is compiled from recent reports and personal correspondence with Susan Howard.

Our kindergarten just started last week after almost two months of solid hard work. I have six children right now, but there are still numbers of parents who plan to send children to our kindergarten as soon as we work out the transportation problems. I am very happy, though, to have a small group at the beginning.

We have done a lot these last two months besides very hard and endless renovation work; we are not only building a kindergarten, but also a little grade school for four children so far, and a small community of friends, parents and teachers. We had organized a three-day Waldorf education seminar at the beginning of this month. Our good friends and teachers Ben and Thanh Cherry came from Australia and were the main speakers for the seminar. We also had some singing, movement and painting each day during the seminar. I translated for the three days. More than fifty people came from all over China to attend the seminar, mostly parents or teachers. It was an amazing and rich experience for everybody, especially on the last day, when Ben talked about the spiritual world and how each human being is a spiritual being. It was so powerful to see how the attendees were really touched. A lot of people started to think and review their lives and beliefs. As Ben said, he wasn't surprised that many people came to this seminar, because there is a huge need for the spiritual life in China.

Last Monday was a historical moment for Waldorf education in China. We have written the first page of the history with six children in the kindergarten and four in the grade school. There are a few more children who will join us soon. It rained the whole night before Monday, our opening day. We were worried about the weather for the opening, but it turned out to be a beautiful day.

The rain helped clear the dust on the ground that was left from the renovation and gardening work. It also cleared the dust in the air. The sky was so blue, bluer than usual for Chengdu.

Before 9:00 a.m., children and their parents were waiting outside the gate while all the teachers and staff lined up in two lines waiting inside the yard. Children were peeking through the bamboo door, full of wonder, their one hand holding a flower and the other was holding their parents' hand. The children and parents were encouraged to knock on the door at 9:00 a.m. Teachers and staff started to sing a Chinese song while the door was pushed open. The Chinese song we chose is well known to every parent and child. It means, "The sun shines in the sky, the flowers are smiling at me, the birds say good morning, why are you carrying your school bag? I am going to school and I will be on time every day. Love to learn, love to work; I will be helpful for others when I grow up."

We also sang a song in Chinese called "Stone Song" that was composed by Eckart Loew, who is a German Waldorf educator and has been working in China for seven years and another song, "In the Valley We Will Build a Home," which was composed by Ben Cherry for his school opening twenty years ago in Australia. The singing accompanied the children and parents who were finding a seat in the yard.

After the singing, I welcomed the children and parents. I gave a very brief introduction of our school and how the school came to using the image of a baby's birth. I thanked all the friends who have supported us both spiritually and physically. After my talk, one by one, each child came to the front to put a flower in a vase and receive a flower crown on

his or her head. It was so special for all the children and their eyes were full of light. They turned into angels at that moment. Parents were very touched by our hard work, too.

While children and parents were enjoying this wonderful mood, a drum started a rhythmical sound from somewhere out of sight. A dragon slowly came out from the back of the building. The children's eyes opened wide for they have never seen such a lively dragon. Eckart and another friend made this dragon. It was so creative and beautiful-a symbol of etheric forces. Everyone joined the dragon and danced with joy and wonder. The dragon slowly went through the whole school, blessing every corner of our space, and then took all the children to their classrooms to start the first day of school with their teachers. The parents went to the common room to have some tea and socialize with others. The ceremony lasted for an hour, but it was so special that it will live in our hearts and memories for a long time to come.

Right now, I have six children in the class, one boy is five, one boy is four, three girls are three, and Shihong is two-and-a-half. Only the boys have been to the kindergarten before. There were two children who visited for a day, but they are too young for the kindergarten. I suggested that the parents wait until the children get older. There are two other children who will begin with us next month. They already paid one month of fees to another kindergarten. But

I am very happy to work with a small group at the beginning. It gives me energy to build up the form and to help children to settle into the new life. They are very sweet children and enjoy the kindergarten very much. I have been trying to do everything as simple as possible. I feel the form getting better and better, the rhythm is getting more consistent. The children are very happy in the kindergarten.

We finally have the school started, but this is just a beginning of our journey, we still have a lot to do, to learn and to grow. We still need your continuing support to help our school run and the Waldorf movement to grow in China. Both spiritual and physical support will be appreciated. Right at this moment, the financial needs are our biggest challenge. If you are interest in what we are doing in China, please visit us at www.waldorfchina.org.