

## China Biodynamic Trip 2015

The year had gone very quickly, and it was time to head off to China again. The ninth of June I had arrived in Shenzhen and was been pick up by Peng Yinghao. We went to his shop and office for some food, and to wait for Tien and Shui Yun to arrive. Only caught up with them briefly as I was very tired. On Wednesday we went to Peng's farm for a look. Disappointingly it was gone backwards in regards of the soil structure. Partly due to a wet season but also contributing was ineffective cultivation equipment and the timing of the cultivation. All things considered, the plants expression was still OK. He has started to plant sugarcane and has more papaya as well as planting guava. Both of these crops are looking good and quite healthy. I would consider it should more suitable for these crops in this area, rather than the constant struggle with vegetables.

We travelled to Longmen to the watershed project of Peili, IUCN, and Danone. They have a small piece of land that grow rice without chemicals and of course applying biodynamic methods. Shui Yun will help and guide them through the process. It is a difficult piece of land and quite wet, fine for rice but makes the timing and practice of green manuring more difficult, with only a short window of opportunity for this to happen. On Friday I had taken ill and could not to fulfil my commitment to Peili, so Shui Yun and Tien did that for me. We travelled back to Huizhou to Peng's farm. We had to postpone the association meeting and to get more rest before the seminar the next day. Many people looked after me with many Chinese medicine remedies. I'm sure that I will see through the first day of the seminar.

Saturday was the first day of the seminar, I struggled through the first day but all of the usual topics were covered. There were about 115 people in total. There were more farmers this time but also the usual Steiner teachers and consumers component. During the evening meal on talking to some of the participants all seemed to be happy about the first day of knowledge they had acquired. It's always comforting and encouraging to receive such feedbacks. Some had been to Demeter International training and had been bombarded with anthroposophy and cosmos, with nothing on soil, plants and practical farming.

On Sunday Tien and Shui Yun did their usual morning session, in the afternoon it was back to me to finish off and to reiterate the major components of the seminar. All was received well, and as usual we wait to see if there is any farmer to take action. We had a meeting of some of the association board where Peng gave a report on the progress of BD farm development. We discussed a farm certification program and marketing program they want to implement. Again Shui Yun and I advised them to slow down and that in reality they had neither the quality nor quantity to market. I reminded them that the major limiting practical factor in the development of BD in China was the preparations and that while we could supply some 500 we could not supply all of China.

On Monday morning we did a mock farming inspection on Peng's farm to show what would happen during an inspection of the soil and plants. Spent another long session on stirring, and other practical aspects, with workers and others from Yinghao's farm to make absolutely sure they had correct stirring technique. We said our goodbyes to all and headed to Shenzhen for the night.

The next morning we flew to Chongqing to visit a proposed 1000 acres BD farm and community. The proposed land was meant to be abandoned by the villagers. The project is going to include the building of houses with plots of land for each house to grow food. We were told that the proposal was while the development is happening the farmers get paid rent for their land. The rent would continue after the project is finished as well as the farmers get to rework the land if they choose and share the food and any profit from it. For this part of the visit I made very little comment and just

looked and listened. Next morning I arranged for a very early morning discussion with Tien and Shui Yun about the proposed project. The fact was the land was not abandoned and was still in use by the village peasant farmers. So we were not comfortable with the situation. We went back and spoke to the village farmers on the biodynamic system. Basically they are not seeking change and seem happy with what they are doing. At lunch I had to tell the developer that I could not support such a project that would force some farmers off the land and force other farmers into the BD system. I did however inform him that I would support him personally to practice BD on his own piece of land. As usual the government officials were involved. I informed them that they had to be realistic in their expectations of a BD farming system, they cannot just give lip service to the process and expect unrealistic results in just 2 or 3 months. Headed off for Chengdu.

Got up early next day to fly to Nanyang in the province of Henan. Flights cancelled so we filled in the day with some unplanned sightseeing.

Got up early again for the flight to Nanyang, this time with no delays. We were picked up by Peng Bin and taken immediately to a local factory where the local stirring machine had been made. The machine needed a fair bit of tuning, but fundamentally it was ok, achieving both good vortex and chaos. We went to the farm where the Australian rehabilitator had just recently been delivered. The farm had shown some good soil development and humus building results from the green manure crops. Due to the current cultivation equipment the hard pan was still evident, this will of course change once the rehabilitator has been used. There was generally good plant expression and colour, with the vegetable flavour development in accordingly.

Saturday was the first day of the seminar and this time with about 50 participants. Once again all the relevant topics were covered and this time the information flowed a lot better than in the first seminar. We went to tea with one of the seminar participants who is an agronomist from one of the universities. He is extremely interested regards what we speak of on our BD agricultural method and he seemed to get what we present even having heard nothing similar before.

The Sunday of the seminar run as normal, with Tien and Shui Yun adding their much required contributions. Shui Yun in particular giving very direct information on what it means to be a farmer, bringing some of the seminar participants to tears. During the day I had confided to Peili that I was really struggling with some of the food. One of the seminar participants was a lady call Miss Yang, who has an Italian husband and restaurant. She very kindly arranged to make some bread and an Italian pasta meal. This was a saviour. We finished the seminar at the farm looking at the plant expression, soil structure and humus development. We gave a demonstration of using the rehabilitator as well as looking at the stirring machine in action. Shui Yun had to head home for some harvest and will re-join us for the next seminar.

We were picked up early next day and taken for two-day break to stay in the mountains. Two days of very fine food, company and treatment.

The following Thursday we came back down from the mountain and headed towards Chengdu for the next seminar. Extra-long delay and sleepless night sitting in a plane on the tarmac had us arriving in Chengdu well behind time. Shui Yun and Tien arrived late that evening with an armful of food and bread sent by their wives.

The seminar in Chengdu was held on the farm of Aming and Gaomin. Gaomin had her first introduction to the Australian Demeter Biodynamic method while undergoing Steiner teacher training in Australia. Their farm has had good soil development and the plants showed good

expression for that area of China. The Chengdu area only has 1 in 10 days of sunshine so 501 in this area of China is essential even though the opportunity to use it does not present often enough.

This seminar was easily the best of the three of this trip with all participants very attentive and concentrated. The overall feeling of the seminar was one of excitement energy and willingness to accept change in their farming practises. The relevant information seemed to flow much more readily, mostly due to the fact that I was feeling 100% again.

On the Sunday of the seminar Tien's small presentation reiterated the information that I have given the previous day. And Shui Yun as usual caught the crowd's attention with a passionate and emotional talk on what it means to be a farmer. He also provided, as in previous seminar, very specific and pertinent information on growing biodynamic rice.

I also had time to share some history of Alex and how he came to Australia to start professional biodynamic method. It was time to say goodbyes, which each time getting harder as we built stronger and deeper relationships with the positive aspects of knowing that we know we will reunite for another trip.

This trip was somewhat of a watershed moment. Finally it seems that our hard work and efforts over the last three years are starting to pay off. We are reaching and working with more and more practical farmers in different areas of China, and some of the results they are achieving are quite astonishing. As always the mission is to make China totally independent in their biodynamic development. We have found skilled and sensitive people that will come to learn the art of preparation making this year. This is the next most important step and task along with the biodynamic development of practical farmers.