

Weifang in Shandong (山東濰坊) is a city famous for kites. Every year it organizes a Kite Festival in April which attracts many tourists. Made with very skilful workmanship, colourful kites of various patterns and shapes flying and dancing briskly in the blue sky is a spectacular sight.

Kites are not the only attraction in Weifang. Its recent teaching reforms have also attracted groups of passionate educators from all over China and Hong Kong to the city. My recent trip there was initiated during a dinner gathering with Professor Hau Kit Tai, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong with a group of principals. We heard about the reforms in Shandong, in which the mode of learning and teaching has been greatly transformed. We were interested in observing this remarkable change in the classrooms and how effective their endeavour could be. Though it is clearly understood that we cannot and should not directly apply the model in the Hong Kong context without considerable adaptation, it would still be a good experience for us.

On 8th April, a group of enthusiasts embarked on the 5-day trip to Weifang. Though I have joined a number of similar study trips before, I find this one particularly impressive. The leading government officials are very dedicated and they are clear about their vision – let students be the master of their own learning. Their lesson reforms are well supported by a solid theoretical basis on self-regulated learning coupled with their professionalism.

We appreciated the well-conceived itinerary and arrangements, which enabled us to visit schools of different types and at different stages of their reform. We were particularly touched by their very genuine and honest sharing that success was not easy to come by and the importance

of standing tall on vision and perseverance.

It is extremely encouraging to see the passion among participants with a great deal of professional reflection and exchanges amongst ourselves and with our Shandong counterparts. Before the trip, articles on self-regulated learning and the background of the Shandong reform have been selected for reading. Questions and enquiry points were set for validation throughout the visit. We all know that the trip will not just end when we return to Hong Kong. The ripples go on and will touch the hearts of many. With further deliberation, it is anticipated that the ripples will set off a current in lesson reforms in Hong Kong in the years to come.

Despite the excitement, we still noticed the big discrepancies in resources allocation on education. One of the schools we visited, Weifang No. 1 Middle School (濰坊一中), has a campus comparable to (or even surpassing) most of the university campuses in Hong Kong. This selective and preferential treatment is not easy for us from Hong Kong to comprehend. This has also generated some debate on standardization, egalitarianism, and elitism.

While what happened inside the classroom during the trip is reported in another piece of writing, I would like to recount a pleasant surprise which has quenched my long-time yearning for locating the whereabouts of the monument that pays tribute to a very special missionary. One of the schools we visited, Weifang Guangwen Middle School (濰坊廣文中學), had a very long history dating back to 1883. It was set up by foreign missionaries, but the tie was cut off upon the birth of new China in 1949. During the Sino-Japanese War, the school was used as a concentration

camp for the internment of foreigners. One of those interned there was Eric Liddell – A Scot who went to serve in China through the London Missionary Society in 1925. He was also the 400m Gold Medalist in the 1924 Olympics Games in Paris, and his story was made into the Oscar-winning movie “Chariots of Fire” in 1982. There were many other touching stories on the work of the missionaries and in the concentration camp. The school now has a museum featuring the missionaries and that part of the history.

A memorial garden was set up near the school, next to a hospital which was originally set up by missionaries. In the central square, there is a big monument signifying the friendship among different nations with all the names of the interned deeply engraved on the sides. This clearly reminds us of the stories of love, dedication and sacrifice. These are distinct core values that inspire us to carry on and pass the torch, especially when we share the common tie of the London Missionary Society. In the beautifully-landscaped garden, a monument was set up to pay tribute to Liddell with the Bible Scripture: “But those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles. They run and don’t get tired, they walk and don’t lag behind”. (Isaiah 40:31)

Regardless of where we are, we share the same sky and surely can fly kites of different makes to chase our dreams.