

PHOTO STORY  
MALAYSIA

# REMINISCENCES OF A NATURE-BASED SCHOOL

by Hans Lim







I was a city kid, but when I was in elementary school, I used to stay at my grandmother's house, which happened to be located behind the school. Just a few minutes' walk from a neighbour's backyard is a forest on a hill. Thus, forest exploration was my only after-school pastime in childhood. Catching insects, chasing pheasants, digging 'caves' and rolling in the mud were nothing new, and rattan canes were often the 'main dish' for dinner (my punishment for coming home covered in dirt).

Times have certainly changed—it is now almost a challenge for urban children to get in touch with Nature, let alone watch poultry roam within the vicinity of their homes.

In 2022, on Malaysia's National Day, Kuala Lumpur Steiner School had a one-day open house for the public. Architect Clement Wong, one of the school's founders, who was also a speaker at an upcoming TEDxPetalingStreet event, led a guided tour for the team, including me, of the urban forest school, which was established in 2019.

## 森林学校

我是个城市小孩，小学时常常待在祖母家，那里位于靠山的学校后方。只需几分钟，我就能通过邻居的后院直接抵达后山的森林。因此，森林探险成为我童年唯一的课后消遣。抓虫、追野鸡、挖山洞、在泥巴里打滚，变成了我日常生活的一部分。晚餐时藤条更是成为我的“主菜”。

随着时代变迁，今天的城市孩子接触大自然几乎成了一种挑战，甚至在家门口见到活生生的家禽，也成为了一种奢望。

2022年，马来西亚国庆日当天，吉隆坡施泰纳学校举行了为期一天的开放日活动。学校的创始人之一、建筑师黄晓斌 Clement Wong，他也是当年TEDxPetalingStreet其中一位讲者，亲自带领团队，包括我在内，参观了这所成立于2019年的城市森林学校。

<sup>1</sup> Built on a hill, the school comprises small masses of classrooms and various supporting spaces, including a book store, parents' lounge and teachers' residence







The car stopped at a curvy road, and the first part of the way to the school was a large slope surrounded by trees, with the first building flanked by artificial terraces and small pools. Walking up, you could see individual school units—classrooms, cafeterias, bookstores, etc. Running through the school units were small wooden kiosks and children's play equipment. Further upwards, there is a forest that leads to a hill. I spotted a handsome rooster on the hill looking down and surveying our group of visitors.

Small classrooms, built on the hill, had traditional blackboards. The laminated wooden walls were also covered with children's paintings, exuding warmth. There were all kinds of handmade teaching materials in the corner of a classroom. There are no exams in the curriculum—the school wanted to adopt a more 'humanistic' approach to education. Teachers use guidance and games to bring out children's curiosity—tapping into children's most fundamental analytical and understanding skills, and innate imagination, to stimulate their interest in learning.

车子停靠在弯曲的路旁，走向学校的第一段路是一个绿树成荫的大斜坡，来到第一栋建筑时，旁边是人工梯田和小水池。继续向上走，逐渐看见课室、食堂和书店等。贯穿学校，还有大大小小的木亭和儿童游乐设施，再往上，则是通往后山的树林。在山上，有只雄鸡俯瞰着我们这群访客。

小课堂依山而建，仍旧使用传统的黑板，木板墙上挂满了孩子们充满温度的画作。课堂角落摆放着多种手作教材，显得非常古朴。学校没有考试，而是采用更加人性化的教育方式。老师通过口述引导和思维游戏，激发孩子的好奇心，并利用他们的分析理解能力和与生俱来的想象力，点燃学习的兴趣。



2 Slope leading to the entrance of the school 3 Artificial terrace with small pool  
4 & 5 Wooden kiosk and children's play equipment 6 Aerial view of nursery and kindergarden unit









Learning from Nature is a key part of the Steiner education system's focus. The children were guided by teachers to go out into the woods, so that they can be inspired by Nature physically, mentally and spiritually. Watching the children shuffle through the pavilions and slopes of the mountain behind the school, with beads of sweat on their foreheads and mud on their hands and feet, I thought to myself that this scene was not too different from what I had experienced as a child. Except for the more 'glamorous' clothes of urban children today, every child is still curious to play pretend, holding branches as makeshift bows and arrows, plucking leaves to use as 'cups' for playing house—games that seem to have been carried on from one generation to the next, with children of every age improvising and using their own creative imagination to play.

In Malaysia, in addition to international schools, there has been a rising trend of alternative private schools in recent years. Parents who are more financially capable tend to prefer sending their children to such schools as they hope that their children can study with more personalised attention and international outlook, which could perhaps encourage them to be more independent and expressive.

Clement said that it takes a certain amount of courage for parents to send their children to Kuala Lumpur Steiner School in the face of doubts from their closest areas or social spheres of influence. Under the Steiner system's holistic approach, children do not learn to write until they are six or seven years old, so it can be challenging to gain the approval of parents who grew up with a more traditional rote-based learning system.

I heard from a friend that the first condition for their children to be sent to another Steiner school was to turn off the TV at home. Parents are also encouraged to accompany their children to participate in school activities. The parent-child relationship is indeed full of challenges for dual-income families in the city. Can a parent's mind accept sacrificing their personal time for the sake of their child?

After leaving the forest school and driving away in my car, I could no longer smell the dirt, see the birds, nor feel the dragonflies flying over my palms. As soon as I got on the highway, life seemed to return to the same boring mode, and I thought of how in this 'flash mob' age full of digital distractions, contact with Nature has become a thing of luxury! Perhaps adults like us also need to be closer to Nature, not just the children, to 'recharge' and to remember our roots.



在华德福教育中，向大自然学习是其中一项重要内容。孩子们在导师的引导下走入树林，让他们从身体、心理和精神上受到大自然的启发。我看着孩子们穿梭于后山的亭子和斜坡，额头渗出汗珠，手脚沾满泥巴，心想，除了今天都市孩子更「华丽」的衣服外，这一幕和我小时候的经历並沒有太大的不同啊？孩子即兴发挥的拿著树枝作为临时的弓箭，摘树叶当家家酒的「杯子」——这些激发每个年龄层孩子想像力的游戏似乎已经是一代代相传的童趣。

在马来西亚，除了现有的国际学校，近年来私立学校的兴起趋势也逐渐上升。经济能力较强的父母往往更愿意将孩子送到私立学校，希望孩子能够在更个性化和国际化的环境中学习，也许可以培养他们更多的自主性和表达能力。

Clement 提到，面对他人的质疑，送孩子来这里上课的家长需要一定的勇气。在全人教育的理念下，学校不设考试，孩子们在6、7岁时才开始学习写字，要取得一般采用传统填鸭式教育长大的父母认同，实属不易。

有朋友告诉我，他们的孩子被送到另一所施泰纳学校，首要条件是关掉家里的电视，同时家长们也被鼓励更多地参与学校活动。对于城市中的双收入家庭来说，亲子关系无疑是一大挑战。为了孩子，家长们是否愿意牺牲更多属于自己的个人时间呢？

离开森林学校，开着车，一头栽入高速公路的车流中。周围不再弥漫泥土的气息，鸟儿不见踪影，连蜻蜓飞过手掌的轻盈触感也消失了。生活似乎又回到了单调的模式。我不禁想到，在这个充满数字干扰的「快闪族」时代，亲近大自然已经成为一种奢侈。不仅仅是孩子，也许像我们这样的成年人更需要接近大自然，替自己充充电，再继续打拼！