

# David Mahon: Boosting Ningbo's Interactions with the World

By Dong Na

Recently, David Mahon, co-founder of Georgia School Ningbo (GSN), was interviewed by our correspondent, sharing his personal tales and insights on education and life in Ningbo.

Georgia School is the first school in Ningbo licensed by the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Education as an independent school for international families. Currently, it offers an enriching learning environment for students from over 25 countries.

"I think it's a privilege to be involved in a school like this and to be able to participate in something which is helping bring new ideas to Chinese education," Mahon said.

## Bringing New Ideas to Chinese Education

David Mahon is an old friend of Ningbo. In 1984, Mahon, then in his twenties, came to China from New Zealand to take part in the Beijing Great Wall Hotel's furnishing project. The six months he spent in Beijing became a turning point of his life. "I had this feeling that I was home. It was like an instinct. I want to stay in this country and I like this country. So, I started learning Chinese," he said.

Some years later, he met Chen Hui, the founder of Zhicheng School in Ningbo; together, they founded GSN.

Having lived and worked in China for many years, Mahon is now a China expert. He has been investing in Ningbo since the early 1990s, a decision that turned out in his favor. In his perspective, Ningbo is an open-minded place.

"Ningbo has created an atmosphere of innovation, of technical creativity. This is a city where a school like this [GSN] can actually flourish quite well," he said.

Mahon had collaborated with New Zealand's Ministry of Education to bring Shakespearean theatre education to schools. He also helped found two international schools in Beijing, including the International Montessori School of Beijing. These experiences deepened Mahon's insights on collaborative transnational



▲ Mahon (right) with GSN faculty.  
◀ Mahon (left) discusses his educational concepts with Ningbo Times correspondent. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

these are universal human wisdom. An international school can provide uniquely enriching learning opportunities. "What I understand is they will take the best from those [western education] systems... In physical education and sports, the school is very active," he said.

To assemble the best faculty and administrative leadership, GSN recruits top teachers from around the world and also from within China. At present, there are over forty international faculty members, including the headmaster, Mr Cavan Ahangarzadeh.

In Mahon's view, one of the greatest hurdles of operating an international school is dealing with cultural integration properly. He pointed out that when there is more than one culture in the school, the biggest challenge is synthesizing them and bringing them together in a harmonious way. In this process, cultures can learn from each other. Therefore, it is a good challenge for the school to take on.

## Helping Establish a Meeting Point for Ningbo's Interaction with the Rest of the World

Mahon is proud to see that

When it comes to formulating a school's educational philosophy, Mahon believes there are universal principles. A school's values may be based on Confucian or Socratic views, but in essence, all of

GSN has helped realize the individual potential of its students. "There's a collective responsibility as well, that everyone is working hard and fulfilling the requirements of the education system."

"I think a school like this is a meeting point, a platform for China's interaction with the rest of the world," he said. Increasingly, international students will come and study at GSN, and return to their countries with a deeper understanding of Ningbo and China.

## Cultivating Young Talents to Promote Ningbo's Development

Mahon is optimistic about Ningbo's future development. "Ningbo is a rich city now. It's a city of tremendous technological development... The companies will thrive, and they will keep creating more products and more jobs," he said.

Mahon would like to see Ningbo strive to be a city of both good natural environment and well-

preserved heritage that truly benefits all citizens. He noted that Ningbo's education should concentrate on raising the students' awareness of the importance of heritage and culture. He is confident that GSN can provide a pleasant campus environment for students, all the while improving its education quality.

Mahon frequently introduces GSN to his overseas friends. He foresees more opportunities for student exchanges, as well as more international students from all over the world coming to GSN for the entirety of their schooling.

Mahon's children were brought up in China, and he believes that his close relationship with China will continue with the next generation. "They speak Chinese; they prefer Chinese food... China is very much their home. Already I have children who are partly Chinese in their thinking and in their emotional selves... It's up to them to choose how they use that in their lives, but I did my best to give them that opportunity," Mahon said.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Chinhai Spiny Newt: Ningbo's Unique Species, Rarer than Pandas

By Jin Lu, Zhang Chaoliang

The Chinhai spiny newt (*Echinotriton chinhaiensis*), a unique species found only in Ningbo, was recently designated as a Level One protected species, receiving the highest level of protection under China's List of Wildlife under Special State Protection.

*E. chinhaiensis* is one of the most critically endangered salamanders in the world. It is found only in Beilun district of Ningbo, part of China's Zhejiang province. It usually inhabits dark and moist burrows in soft soil or rock crevices.

A nature reserve for the Chinhai spiny newt has been established in Ningbo, and many measures have been taken to protect the species from extinction, including habitat restoration. Professor Xu Aichun, a biologist from China Jiliang University, has successfully bred more than 1,000 individuals of *E. chinhaiensis* in captivity.

"The wild population of *E. chinhaiensis* is estimated to be no more than 600, even smaller than that of the giant panda," said Prof Xu. To protect this endangered species, Prof Xu's team has made resolute efforts in recent years and achieved notable results.

Since 2008, the team has been conducting scientific research on the Chinhai spiny newt, which involves sample investigation, population conservation, habitat modification, as well as captive breeding, all to shed more light on this unique species.

"I hope to enlarge the species' population through captive breeding, cultivate the larvae to adulthood in the lab, and ensure that the adults can naturally reproduce and hatch larvae in captivity," Prof Xu said.

During the breeding season, female salamanders lay eggs under dead leaves near water. The researchers searched the forests of Beilun every day to collect eggs from wild, which were brought back to the laboratory for artificial incubation.

"I will never forget the surprise and joy I felt upon seeing the birth of new life." After a long period of feeding, observation, and recording, the researchers finally witnessed the hatching of the first larvae.

However, keeping the larvae alive in the lab proved to be even more challenging. *E. chinhaiensis* can only survive and thrive within a very specific temperature and humidity range. Furthermore, as the weather grew hot, finding the right food for the larvae became increasingly difficult for the researchers.

To secure adequate and diverse food sources for the larvae, Prof Xu and his team set up camp deep in the forests of Beilun. They collected benthos from muddy pond bottoms, bought rotten fruits to cultivate various insects, and even invented creative contraptions to breed mosquitoes.

When the young salamanders are able to survive independently, Prof Xu's team will release them back into the wild.

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## HISTORY&CULTURE

# Vernal Equinox: Spring is in the Air

By Gou Wen

The Vernal Equinox or Spring Equinox, the fourth of twenty-four solar terms in China's lunar calendar, falls on March 20 this year. On this day, the length of day and night are the same.

Soon after the Equinox passes, rainfall will increase significantly, and the average daily temperature in Ningbo will rise to above 10° C, reaching the threshold of spring as defined by climatology.

Migratory birds such as swallows will fly back from the south, adding a touch of vitality to the seasonal landscape. Thunderstorms will occur more frequently.

Flowers such as the begonia, pear blossom and magnolia will bloom after the Spring Equinox. The begonia flower, also known as the *hai*

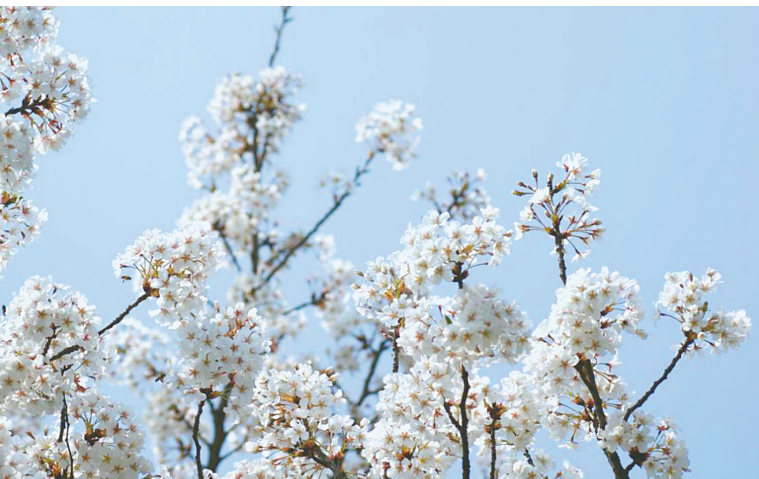
*tang* or Chinese flowering crabapple, is regarded as a symbol of vernal beauty. Since the Song Dynasty (10th to 13th century), the people of Ningbo have cherished the begonia as "the empress of all flowers".

Pear blossoms represent purity and perfection; they have been valued by generations of Chinese people as the embodiment of true love and commitment. The magnolia flowers in full bloom stand proud and erect upon branch tips, evoking a sense of dignity.

The people of Ningbo celebrate this solar term with many unique local customs. Attempting to stand an egg upright is a popular game among children. It is believed that if you can make the egg stand on its end, you will have good luck for the rest of the year.

The Spring Equinox is also a good time to fly kites. Local children enjoy flying kites out in nature, competing to see whose could fly the highest. This is also a good time to have a spring outing, or *taqing* ("stepping onto the greenness") in Chinese. Many people go on day trips in and around Ningbo with family and friends during the Spring Equinox to appreciate the sight of flowers in full bloom and bask in the warm spring sunlight.

Eating "spring vegetables" is also part of Ningbo's Spring Equinox traditions. Markets will set up special stalls selling seasonal vegetables such as shepherd's purse, *ma lan* (*Kalimeris indica*) and Chinese toon sprouts. People believe that consuming spring vegetables will help to maintain health and bring good for-



The Spring Equinox is a good time to admire cherry blossoms. [Photo by Gou Wen]

tune.

The Spring Equinox also heralds a busy period of spring planting for farmers: overwintering crops in

most parts of China enter their growth stage, while early-season rice must be planted soon after the passing of the Equinox.