

Waldorf Education in Korea

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Ancient Chinese texts refer to Korea as “Rivers and Mountain Embroidered on Silk,” and as “the Eastern Nation of Decorum.” Still today, Koreans are considered one year old on the day they are born because of the period of pregnancy. The country's population is almost 75 million people with some 50 million residing in the southern Republic of Korea. North Korea remains fairly inaccessible due to its closed regime, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, South Korean schools rank second in the world for their math education and third for their science scores. However, their strict school system is much criticized for an emphasis on passive learning and memorization. Dissatisfaction has grown as a result of the social problems caused by “cram-schools” and their high costs. The exceptional scores in math and science reverse themselves after the first year of university, demonstrating a clear lack of authentic learning.

The ideas of Steiner/Waldorf Education first came to Korea in 1998 when the German embassy in Seoul sponsored a German-Korean cultural sharing. Since that time Waldorf education has become better known and has spread throughout the South Korean peninsula with the establishment of seven schools, six in and around the capital city and one in the far south. A staggering number of one hundred Waldorf inspired kindergartens has been reported in Korea.

Cheonggye Free Waldorf School

Cheonggye Free Waldorf School was initiated as Gwacheon Free School in 2002, in Gwacheon city, near Seoul. Recognizing many problems in the public school system, the new school initiative set itself the goal to influence society by creating a place for a truly alternative education. It consisted of five students from five families and one teacher when it first began. Since then, the school community has tried to keep the Waldorf pedagogical values and curriculum as the school has flourished. In 2011, with the need for more space the school moved to Cheonggye, on the outskirts of Uiwang city, and changed its name to Cheonggye Free Waldorf School. An ample new building was designed specifically for the school and was erected with two separate but closely linked buildings, one for the lower school and one for high school. Now in its tenth year, the strong and vibrant school is located in an



Third grade students working in their main lesson books as part of their farming and gardening studies.



Cheonggye Free Waldorf School in Seoul, Korea, was the first Steiner school (with a different name and in a different location) in the country.

agricultural valley, along a pilgrimage path to a local Buddhist temple. At present there are 35 teachers and 270 students in grades one through twelve. Cheonggye means open heavens.

Yangpyeong Steiner School

"The Steiner School is a place where we can make our dreams come true." This is the song that six teachers and sixteen pupils sing together in Yangpyeong, a town that is famous for its beautiful natural surroundings. The school community hopes that it can work harmoniously together with children that have special needs as well as children that don't. There are two classes in the school combining grades from class two to class eight. There is a vision of establishing a Camphill Community in the future, especially for the present upper school students. It has only been four years since the Yangpyeong Steiner School has opened and yet the commitment for its future is filled with strong hopes and dreams.

Purunsup Waldorf School

Purunsup Waldorf School is located on a hilltop from where we can see the wide river flowing and is surrounded by evergreen forests ("purunsup" in Korean). In 2002 some parents in an Educational Community got together to initiate a new kind of education in a small community near Seoul. Their children, in class 1~3, began school lessons in a temple. The following year Purunsup School came into being in a dilapidated, rented warehouse where the parents had built some classrooms together from the proceeds of a large gift. In 2009, construction of a school building took place in Teochon. Now there are 170 students from classes one to twelve and 15 kindergarten children in two school buildings and one kindergarten house. Some parents built their houses around the school forming a community village called Purunsup Maeul. In 2008 the teachers' college resolved upon Waldorf Education

and then drew a commitment from all the members of the Purunsup community. Both teachers and parents have been seeking truthful education and are trying to fulfill this goal through Waldorf education in Korea.

Gurmsan School

Gurmsan School is a small independent school serving about 22 students from first grade to fifth grade. Located in Gyeonggi, South Korea. Gurmsan School is the only Waldorf School offering elementary education in the regional community. It started by offering after-school programs to the community in 2001. Officially founded in 2006, it has provided children in the

community with strong academics enlivened by the arts and a well-rounded education so that they grow to be independent and responsible human beings who love learning for its own sake.

Dongrim Free School

School preparations began in 2007 and the Dongrim Free School started in March 2009. Waldorf educational practices provide time and space for children to grow by themselves and the adults also learn and grow together with the children. There are 7 classes, totaling 65 children, from first-grade to seventh-grade, 9 homeroom teachers, 7 subject teachers, and last year in 2011, it was decided that a ninth grade class being, offering secondary education.

Apple Tree School

Apple Tree School, Busan, is the first Waldorf school outside the capital territory of the country. In 2007, two teachers who trained at Emerson College, England, and a group of people who were training at the Waldorf Teachers Training Centre, Silla University, held a public introductory day for Waldorf education. Seven families responded and the school started in 2008. One of the families offered their living room and there the class 1 and 2 were combined and begun. The school is presently in a process of transformation, looking for a new place to further Waldorf education in the area.

Seoul Free Waldorf School

The Seoul Free Waldorf School started just this past March, 2012. There are about forty students and five teachers in grades one through three. The new school is located in Bucheon, Kyunggi-do.

Waldorf School Teachers Association in Korea

In August of 2010, Waldorf teachers from around Korea

got together for the first time and initiated regular meetings. Representatives from each school met every month to share news from the various schools and discuss topics held in common to all the member schools. One such question was about professional development, so a teacher training course was established to meet twice a year for further education. Official recognition of Steiner/Waldorf education is another important question the association deals with, for none of the Waldorf schools in Korea are yet accredited by the government. This is a situation that both Japanese and Chinese Waldorf schools faced until recently. Perhaps, things will shift with the association's focus on the upcoming Asian Waldorf Teacher's Conference that will be hosted by the Korean schools in May of 2013. Perhaps, as has occurred in other Asian countries following the AWTC, the government will take notice of this small but vital educational movement on the Korean peninsula—a movement that is the largest, fastest growing non-sectarian school movement in the world. The regional Education Department has already shown an interest in providing a venue for the upcoming conference.

Cheonggye Free Waldorf School in Seoul, Korea, has a student population of more than 270.



Invitation to the Asian Waldorf Teachers Conference 2013 in Seoul

Dear Colleagues of the Waldorf Steiner Schools and Kindergartens, as planned during the Asian Waldorf Teacher Conference 2011 in India, we will continue our work together as colleagues of Waldorf institutions throughout Asia. The Asian Waldorf Teachers Conference 2013 will take place in a conference center outside of Seoul, Korea (probably in a training facility of the Education Ministry).

The dates are April 28, 2013, 9 PM until May 4, 2013, 8:30 PM. We suggest arrival on the 27th of May and departure on the 5th of May. The closest international airport is Seoul – Incheon.

The Korean friends will organize a more general anthroposophical conference before the teacher conference, which is scheduled for April 25-27, 2013. If you are interested, you are most welcome to take part in this as well.

Both conferences will work under the same motto or title: **Developing Social Healing Out of Anthroposophy.**

Christof Wiechert will give the lecture cycle on Study of Man. After the lectures in the morning, we will work in study groups on different topics, preparing either for kindergarten or grade school classes, or for specific subjects in the upper school. The afternoon workshops deal with more artistic, movement or rhythmical subjects. They will be followed either by topics to be presented or discussed in plenary, or by reports or other urgent issues.

In the evening we will have presentations by pupils of the Korean Free Waldorf schools as well as by ourselves. We would warmly welcome any prepared contribution, with which you not only bring the color of your own culture but hopefully also an example of the work you do within your Waldorf school.

The conference will be held in English. Those who need a translation from the English, please, bring your own translator. If there is absolutely no possibility for you to find a translator, please, get into contact with the organizers in Korea and they will try to arrange something.

A detailed program will be issued after final arrangements with lecturers and the conference venue have been made. You will then receive an email with a webpage address with all necessary details concerning the conference.

We look forward to building an Asian Waldorf kindergarten and school movement through such a working together.

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