

Article on a 2005 Korean visit with accompanying photographs for publication in Dehongli Cymru newsletter Summer 2006 (no longer available on web)

As we gingerly trod on the different stone surfaces of the acu-pressure track in Guri, our hosts explained the medical philosophy behind this feature of the community park and interpretive centre we were visiting. Here in South Korea, family values, cultural and environmental interpretation, health programmes and conservation issues are all treated as related topics, and thinking about these topics is strongly influenced by the Confucian values and distinctively Korean identity which people hold dear. A pro-biotic drink and supplies of ginseng tea followed, ensuring that we would learn through an unusually holistic experience. I was in South Korea as part of an international delegation organized through the ***Association for Interpretation***.

In two weeks we had a chance to explore and discuss the state of interpretation in Korea with experts from the universities, museums, heritage sites and environmental projects as well as addressing several city councils and taking a central role in the ***First International Hands On Expo*** at Kintex, Seoul's splendid convention centre. Dr. Kye jung Cho, Professor of Forestry at Suncheon University and one of the founders of the ***Korean Association for Interpretation*** was the organizer of our visit and ensured that we had the best possible introduction to the range of programs and ideas about interpretation being practiced in South Korea. The lively debates and conversations, the warmth and sincerity of our welcome and the wonderful sites that we were able to visit demonstrated very clearly to us that in South Korea interpretation is already of a very high standard with an admirable commitment to developing interpretive practice within a distinctively Korean framework. This is not only a credit to the KAI, but to the organizations and communities rising to the challenge of sharing special places and stories with a changing mixture of Korean and overseas visitors.

And "hands on, feet in" is very much the message we returned from Korea with. South Korea is a sophisticated and prosperous society and has considerable expertise in high technology as well as an abundance of interesting cultural and natural resources. The interpretive community has taken a thoughtful approach to the problem of where technology is appropriate, and where personal interpretation or other techniques may be more effective. The interpretive sites we visited were immaculately cared for, lovingly presented and obviously much valued by both South Koreans and tourists from abroad but it is interesting the philosophy of interpretation that has developed there is one of active multisensory participation with an emphasis on well planned and supported personal interpretation in conjunction with well designed signage. South Koreans value an active experience that engages all the senses, that encourages participation by groups as well as individual appreciation of sites and resources. The solutions used so successfully there are mostly low tech.

Many of the sites that we went to require special extra interpretation for non Asian visitors because of spiritual and cultural traditions and history which may be unfamiliar. The alignment and design of buildings follows conventions familiar to many Asians, but which require some explanation for greatest appreciation by visitors from other parts of the world. Attitudes towards nature and history at sites such as the **National Arboretum** offer an good introduction to Korean thought and traditional technologies as well as an imaginative approach to education. The way that the Korean visitors use these sites is also different from practices familiar in Europe and North America. For instance at one site we were told that it is considered particularly beneficial to stroll briskly through the pine groves of the site between 9 am and noon because the volatile oils from the pines are released at this time of day and are considered especially health giving. We were introduced to appropriate patterns of breathing to maximize these benefits during our own visit. At the same time we were visiting the handsome shrines and graves of important historic figures and learning about the *ondol*, a traditional Korean heating system for homes and an important conservation and stream restoration project being implemented on the site. A number of the sites that we visited also supported projects developed by **Agenda 21**, an international youth environmental initiative which South Korea has welcomed. Their focus has been on the developments of interpretive sites that use sustainable technologies. Explaining the larger goals of the program to the visitor and encouraging their full exploration on the site is an important part of the experience.

We did encounter a few examples of new technologies being used such as the state of the art systems being installed in the South Korean National Museum where visitors can now access remotely held data from locations around the museum, where high quality audio guides have been developed in several languages, but we were on a personalised tour, so did not experience the new equipment so much as hear something about it and the recent installation.

I was touched to receive an email recently from one of the Korean students who accompanied us on our visit. He told me that he had recently watched a football match on television where Wales was playing. He said that at the sight of the Welsh flag he had suddenly felt himself filled with pride and recognition- as he recalled having watched the presentations I made about interpretation in Wales while we were there and realized that he now had greater familiarity with, feeling for and curiosity about Wales as a result of our visit. I knew just how he felt and I will certainly never forget my time in Korea.

- Teri Brewer
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Visitors enjoy the scents and textures Medicinal herbs and plants on display at the Korean National Folk Museum in Seoul.

In this stream restoration project Agenda 21 volunteers have made adaptive reuse of old concrete paving to create a weir and check dam
National Association for Interpretation delegates experiment with an acu-pressure track at Guri in South Korea.

Korean interpreters learn to understanding a weaving process