

## A Postcard from Korea: World's First Organic Agriculture Museum

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The Namyangju Organic Museum is a surprise - and for several reasons. Firstly, it is surprisingly good. And secondly, it is surely surprising that the world's first organic agriculture museum appears in Korea?



Plate 1: The Namyangju Organic Museum is housed in a striking modernistic building.

The museum is housed in a boldly modern building (Plate 1). It is desirably positioned on the shores of the River Han, and looks over the water to a view of picturesque tree-covered Gyeonggi-do mountains. Namyangju is a city to the west of Seoul. It is in the province of Gyeonggi-do which is a donut shaped province of Korea that encircles the vast urban sprawl of the mega-city of

Seoul which itself accounts for the 'hole' in the Gyeonggi-do 'donut'. The closest international airport, Incheon, is to the east of Seoul.

Visitors enter the exhibition space of the Namyangju Organic Museum via a mock-subterranean tunnel. Here we see the world's oldest rice seeds, dating back 13,000 years and which were excavated at Soro-ri, Korea. The somewhat claustrophobic entrance quickly opens out into a wonderfully spacious bright high-ceilinged



Plate 2: Dioramas provide insights into Korean traditional farming.

exhibition chamber. Here, visitors can view displays of traditional Korean farming implements and dioramas of Korean traditional farming practices (Plate 2).



Plate 3. Children enjoy the museum's screen-based interactive technology.

We learn that Korean farmers tune their farming to a cycle of 24 seasonal divisions of the year - "divided according to the location of the sun on the equinoxes and solstices". Exhibits include early Korean farming texts. Captions are in Korean as well as impeccably well-crafted English, which is helpful and which thereby broadens the accessibility of this fine museum to beyond a Korean audience.

The Namyangju Organic Museum caters for a variety of ages, from youngsters to oldsters, and for a variety of interests, from casual, to practical, to scholarly. Screen-based techno-interactive exhibits are an obvious hit with children - and offer free self-serve photo and sticker mementoes which can be personalized and printed (Plate 3).

The organic timeline, occupying its own wall, acknowledges the seminal role of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) and his 1924 agriculture lectures at Kobierzyce (Koberwitz) (Plate 4). It was this lecture series which led to the founding of an agriculture differentiated by being grounded as a biological enterprise rather than as a chemical enterprise (Paull, 2011a) - and which is ultimately the *raison d'être* of the Namyangju Organic Museum.



Plate 4: The timeline-of-organics acknowledges Rudolf Steiner's 1924 agriculture lectures.

Before completing their visit to the Namyangju Organic Museum visitors pass through an aspirational display kitchen which is reminiscent of anthroposophic

design principles and practices (Plate 5). It is easy to imagine that the colours, shapes, materials and asymmetries of this kitchen would bring a smile to the face of Rudolf Steiner were he to stroll through.



Plate 5. The display kitchen manifests anthroposophic design elements.

The most recent triennial Organic World Congress (OWC) was held in Namyangju in September and October 2011, and the launch of the Namyangju Organic Museum coincided with this event. The OWC in Korea was the first such event to be held in Asia and it thus marks a milestone for the worldwide proliferation of organic agriculture.

Right now Korea is a minnow in the world of organic agriculture, with South Korea reporting most recently a mere 13,343 certified organic hectares (Australia has 12,001,724 certified organic hectares) (Willer & Kilcher, 2011). But, there is a sophisticated food and health awareness in Korea and, looking to the future, it is clear that Korea has bold and ambitious organic aspirations.

In charting its organics future, Korea has neighbours China and India that are already global leaders in organic agriculture in terms of both hectares achieved and their rate of uptake (Paull, 2011c).

It was a century ago, that US professor Franklin Hiram King visited Korea and wrote with enthusiasm of the agricultural practices that he then witnessed. He wrote that: “China, Korea and Japan long ago struck the keynote of permanent agriculture, but the time has now come when they can and will make great improvements, and it remains for us and other nations to profit by their experience, to adopt and adapt what is good in their practice and help in a world movement for the introduction of new and improved methods” (King, 1911, p.274). And, in 2011, the world movement, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), came to Korea to learn, to listen, to see, and to share at the OWC.

King’s book *Farmers of Forty Centuries or Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan* has become a classic reference for organic scholars and advocates (Paull, 2011b). The museum has a first edition of King’s book donated by the present author (Plate 6).

Korea has trumped the world in creating the world's first organic agriculture museum. It is a specialist museum of which Namyangju can be justly proud. This museum can serve as a focus for the uptake and proliferation of organic food and agriculture in Korea. Perhaps future exhibits can show the spectacular growth of the organics sector that advocates hope will be soon forthcoming for Korea - and not only Korea, but the world.



Plate 6. First edition of F H King's 1911 classic *Farmers of Forty Centuries or Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan*.

### References

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