

## A Festival of Encounters – the seventh Asia Waldorf Teachers Conference

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**For the seventh time, the Asia Waldorf Teachers Conference (AWTC) took place. This conference has been organized every two years by the “Friends of Waldorf Education” in collaboration with Waldorf country associations. From April 28 to May 5, the conference took place in Emei, in Sichuan Province in China, prepared with the help of kindergarten teachers and class teachers at the Chengdu Waldorf School.**



These conferences have two special characteristics: First, they last a full week, which means that both lecturers and participants can intensively connect with the themes of the lectures and workshops. Many of the participants have only been teaching in Waldorf schools for a short time, without a strong foundation as a preparation, and with very challenging children and parents. It can therefore happen that they experience a sense of failure and despair, but these can become a gateway to a new and higher level of confidence in teaching through participation in such an intensive work week.

The second special characteristic is that this conference is for both early childhood educators and teachers. Of the 900 participants from many Asian countries, one third are active in kindergartens and the rest are teaching in schools. As in earlier AWTC conferences, the participants and workshop leaders all are engaged in deepening the work in the kindergarten, in the grades, and in the upper school. Everyone experiences how meaningful this approach of

collaborating across the boundaries of child developmental phases is and values the perspectives that it can open.

The morning lectures by Christoph Wiechert addressed themes such as the study of the human being, methodological foundations of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy, and the question of how educators can continue to develop freshness, humor and creativity after years of teaching.



Christoph Wiechert in a morning lecture



Participants from the Philippines



Participants from India



Participants from Nepal

Workshops on the theme of the first seven years were offered by early childhood educators from China, Vietnam, New Zealand, India, Australia, Canada and France, on such themes as free play, festivals in kindergarten, setting borders and allowing freedom, rhythmic games and songs in the mood of the fifth, etc.

Those in the workshop on the study of the human being in the first seven years were especially inspired by the unique location of the conference at the foot of Mount Emei, a 3000 meter high mountain at the base of the Himalayas. According to a sign for tourists at the entrance to one of the hiking trails, the mountain has been dedicated for centuries to the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Jining Temple, at the peak of the mountain, is his head, the Wannian Temple in the middle of the forest halfway up the mountain is his heart, and two temples a few steps away from the conference hotel, Dafo and Baoguo, are the feet of this god.

In conversation about the soul qualities of thinking, feeling and willing, and the conditions of consciousness of waking, dreaming and sleeping, it became clear, especially in the vicinity of Dafo and Baoguo, that the most important area of education for the child in the first seven years has to do with everything that can be done with the feet – climbing, running, jumping, etc. – and everything that has to do with the will – movement, meaningful activity, etc. For, as Christoph Wiechert said in a lecture, children who move enough can educate themselves.

Participants from the western world were very impressed at the great attentiveness, engagement and willingness to learn that our Asian colleagues brought with them, together with an eagerness to connect to the methods of Waldorf education and the anthroposophical view of the human being. And those from country associations in western Europe were especially impressed with the freshness and good mood of the work of a dozen kindergarten teachers who coordinate the work of 400 Chinese Waldorf kindergartens and six training centers.

In a small group session, early childhood educators were asked whether they find international conferences of this kind meaningful. The answer was clear: the encounter with people from other cultures, who are also striving to deepen their understanding and practice of Waldorf education, is very enriching. The question now is who the people are who would like to carry the impulse for such conferences into the future. This impulse and the organization were carried by the “Friends of Waldorf Education” for 14 years and now will depend on collaborative activity within the region.



Workshop leaders from Israel, New Zealand and Canada with Thanh Cherry, one of the founders of the Waldorf movement in China



Teachers of the Chengdu Waldorf School at the opening ceremony



Li Zhang, the coordinator of the China Early Childhood Waldorf Forum, with Li Ze Wu from the Cheng Du Waldorf School



Dafo Temple