

## ‘My dream is to raise global leaders who can act as bridges between Korea, China, Japan’ Tokyo Saemmul Hangeul School, hope of the 100,000 Joseon-jok (Korean Chinese) community in Japan

The only Joseon-jok Hangeul school in Japan attracts attention on the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan

“My dream is to raise global leaders who will act as a bridge between Korea, China and Japan. Saemmul School is becoming the hope of the 100,000 Korean Chinese community in Japan. I think the Hangeul school is a 21st-century version of an independence movement army at the forefront of globalizing Korean culture.”

Jeon Jeong-seon (69), the principal of Saemmul School in Tokyo, Japan, said this in a recent interview with Yonhap News Agency. The school is attracting attention as the only Korean language school for children of Joseon-jok (Chinese of ethnic Korean descent) compatriots in Japan on the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan.

As the number of Korean Chinese compatriots coming to Japan to study or do business has increased, the number of children born and raised in Japan has also increased significantly. There are approximately 100,000 Korean Chinese compatriots living in Japan.

In the case of many students at Saemmul School, their grandparents were born in Korea, and their parents were born in China. Children with this background are said to be experiencing double and triple identity confusion as they were born and raised in Japan, and educated as Japanese in Japanese schools.

“The issue of their children’s identity is one of the biggest concerns of Korean Chinese compatriots,” Jeon said. “As their children take classes in Japanese and spend time with Japanese children, if parents do not take care of their children’s Korean language education, they will not know Korean and will not be able to communicate when their grandparents from China visit them. This



Tokyo Saemmul Korean School Principal Jeon Jeong-seon said in a recent interview with Yonhap News, “My dream and goal is to raise Saemmul School students into global leaders who will act as bridges between Korea, China, and Japan.”

will lead to a vicious cycle where they will lose the opportunity to become familiar with Korean. That is why the school was established based on the parents’ earnest demand to educate their children in the Korean language.”

The Association of Korean Chinese Women in Japan, which the principal had been a leader of, was at the center of establishing Saemmul School in 2008. Although they were born in Japan, these people’s roots are ultimately Korean.

“You can change your nationality as you live, but you cannot change your origins as a Korean,” the former principal said. “The goal is to teach the children of Saemmul School to have pride in being Korean and become excellent world leaders.”

The Hangeul School Teacher Training and Next Generation Compatriots Home Country Invitational Training were a great support.

There are about 100 students attending Saemmul School, which runs every other week. In addition to the main school in Tokyo, there are branch schools in Toride, Kameido and Kanamachi. They are pushing for the establishment of another in Shin-Arai within this year. In addition to Korean, the school teaches Korean culture and Chinese, and also operates a Korean traditional culture class.

This school, which had been kept afloat by the volunteer work and donations of the Korean Chinese community in Japan, is gradually improving after it was recognized as an overseas education institution in 2015.

“Some of the operating expenses and Korean language textbooks supported by the Overseas Koreans Agency have been a great help. In particular, the Hangeul School Teacher Training and Next Generation Compatriots Home Country Invitational Training were supported by the Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center under the OKA, and the Korean language intensive camp for elementary school students is providing children with an opportunity to experience their motherland firsthand and provide a great opportunity to motivate them to learn Korean.”

### MOU with Paper Culture Foundation on globalization of K-paper folding

On March 7, at the Paper Museum in Jangchung-dong, Jung-gu, Seoul, the Paper Culture Foundation and the Global Paper Folding Association (Director Noh Young-hye) signed a business agreement (MOU) to cooperate for the globalization of K-paper folding and contribute to mutual development.

The same day, Jeon was invited to the seventh presentation hosted by the Global Korean Language School Future Forum (Co-representatives Park In-gi and Kim Bong-seop) at the Paper Museum and presented the achievements and challenges of the next-generation education of Korean Chinese in Japan under the title, “Next-generation education for overseas Koreans and the case of Tokyo Saemmul School.”

On March 16, paper folding was conducted as part of a traditional culture class held at Saemmul School. We are told that the event was successfully completed thanks to the volunteer activities of students who had visited Korea for the motherland invitational training.

### Invited to give topic presentation at Global Korean School Future Forum

“In 2014, the Saemmul School Children’s Choir participated in the



A paper folding class is held at Tokyo Saemmul School on March 16. The class was conducted using textbooks and materials provided by the Paper Culture Foundation (Director Noh Young-hye).

International Red and White Song Contest held in Tokyo for foreigners in Japan and achieved the great feat of winning the grand prize, which was the Minister of Tourism’s Award,” Jeon said in her case study presentation on March 10. “We were the only ones to sing in four languages -- Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and English -- and received a lot of attention, but we were embarrassed because we could only express ourselves in Japanese during our acceptance speech after winning the award.”

She said there are many students among the graduates of Saemmul School who have gone on to prestigious universities in Japan

and have successfully found jobs in professional fields after graduation.

However, Tokyo Saemmul School does not have a fixed classroom and faces an unfortunate situation of moving around various places, such as community centers, to conduct its classes. It is true that there are many problems because the Sejong Institute, which promotes Korean language education for foreigners, is run by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism; the Hangeul Schools are managed by the OKA; and the Korean Education Center, which aims to introduce Korean culture and promote exchanges with foreign countries, is affiliated with the Ministry of Education, and their roles are all mixed together.

There are many opinions that it is urgent to centralize the use of the Sejong Institute, the Korean Education Institute infrastructure and Hangeul schools all into one place. In particular, there is strong public opinion that the government should take an interest in allowing Hangeul schools in poor condition to utilize the spare space and infrastructure of the Sejong Institute and the Korean Education Institute.

“In my 17 years of running the school, I tried to quit several times due to financial difficulties,” Jeon said. “However, there was no one who would take charge of the operation, and my Japanese husband, a former university professor, encouraged me by saying, ‘Someone has to do it. Since you started the work, take responsibility for finishing it until the school is stably operated.’ That is why I am still doing this.”

In 2008, she founded the Association of Korean Chinese Women in Japan to protect the rights and support the social adaptation of Korean Chinese women living in Japan and to share and seek solutions to various difficulties, such as employment, business and child care, in Japan. She also served as the association’s first president. 장