

The Second Royal Blessing : The British Queen's Visit to Ewha

It is so unreal to have the real person of the British queen here at Ewha campus that nobody seems to know how to react. Enthusiasm is mainly from the school authorities who are busy finding out the best way to treat this visitor of gigantic stature, the most uncommon guest they have ever had. How exciting! This is the once in a life time chance to have the privilege of starring with the real queen, neither in a historical mini-series, nor in the puppet show of "Spitting Image," but in the BBC news! On the other hand, students, who have no experience of nourishing loyalty to anybody but movie stars seem quite cool about this rare celebrity, concerned more about their midterm exam schedule. They are rather too old to cherish fairy tale of mixing with royalties. Even "May Queen", the fairy tale come true, ceased to exist in this campus long time ago not particularly because of their republican belief, but because of its potential danger of commercial exploitation, I guess. Professors, at least the professors I personally know are doing their business as usual and will probably continue to do so even when the Queen is moving around just outside the windows. They are not particularly hostile or inhospitable to the Queen, but simply find it difficult to place the Queen in their psychological map, for we have been living long enough in a society that has no king, no noble class. The Republic of Korea, I am sorry to say, is the only country where Carol Kidd's "When I dream" marked bigger hit than Elton John's "The Candle in the Wind."

It is quite nice though, to say the least, to have the British Queen in Korea on our part whatever her "real" agenda might be. The Queen's "cultural" visit to Korea may not be purely cultural for we know that the leaders of the five Korean conglomerates were specially invited to lunch on her majesty's request. Probably such image-making as a working Queen may be a routine item of the campaign for modernizing the British monarchy that has faced persistent challenges from the abolitionists. The Korean government is far from unhappy with, maybe rather relieved to find, the fact that her majesty's visit is not limited to the cultural one. Whatever real politics works behind the scene, however, I would rather prefer the Queen's "cultural" visit as such. Her majesty's presence itself is always giving legitimacy to the place visited, a royal blessing on it even though it is not within the territory of her reign.

What is blessed by this "cultural" visit is, first of all, our cultural history embodied in an old town An-dong which might be called feudalistic in its best sense. Feudalism is surely anachronistic, reactionary, and irrelevant in this globalizing, post-capitalistic, Pan-American information age, and the Queen's sympathy towards the

people of extinguishing tradition might become another item of hostile satire among some of her cynic subjects. But I still thank her majesty for such considerate choice because An-dong carries a living memory of our forefathers who lived with less affluence but surely with more decency and respectability, and the Queen's visit is a moving reminder of the cultural authority we once had but are quickly forgetting about amid this turmoil of pro-American globalization.

The Queen's visit to our campus is even more moving to us of course. Her majesty's presence in a representative woman's university of Korea may be taken natural by some, for Ewha is the rare case of a flourishing woman's only university in a country of strong patriarchal tradition. But what moves us more is not just a sort of a feminist fellowship, but more significantly it's historic significance her majesty herself may not be aware of. When Mrs Scranton, the founder of Ewha, opened the school in 1886, she was harassed by a vicious rumour spread by xenophobic people that students would get killed for the making of photograph. Her desperate efforts to get way from such unfounded infamy was not successful at all until the school was granted a new name "Ewha" in 1887 by the King Kojong, virtually the last King of Chosun. It was a royal blessing indeed.

The Queen is visiting Ewha after 112 years when the capitalist logic of competitiveness is more prevailing than the educational ideals, when the practical training of professional skills threatens to replace the ideals of humanistic education in many Korean universities. Another unexpected royal blessing on Ewha is not giving it a new name, but allowing a strong and warm-hearted recognition of its original ideal of education: Education of Woman as an equal human being. The second royal blessing Ewha is honoured to receive, I would believe, is her majesty's truly gracious acknowledgement of our job as "the rock of defense of human nature" we want to uphold and preserve even in the next century.

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