

What way Korea goes for century of culture?

Where are we living? We read news on internet, we plan a trip to other countries or we start our own creative businesses. Everything we do, including eating a meal, putting on a cloth, or choosing things to do, form our own style of life, and it is called Culture. Many scholars say that we are living in a century of culture which means we are making the value by acknowledge, information and culture rather than labor and resources. Culture has been a key word nowadays and it is more important competitive power of nations than at any time in world's history. Guy Sorman, an eminent French intellectual, pointed out that it was a king that controlled the destiny of one nation but it is culture that controls the whole nation and its power. Culture is directly connected to cultural identity, and it means national identity what makes it itself. In this global era, it is more important to keep its character and develop it into not only for economic power but also for better images and name recognition.

Each country has been struggling to make cultural images of its own. Some of them have succeeded and some of them were able to bring it simply from their history or past and strengthen it. For example, people prefer to have French perfumes because it is French, and Japan has put sushi up to global food. And it contributes to its national power. Countries are trying harder to make their own

style and character good than any other times which helps them strengthen their national power and attract more people interested in that countries. Korea also has been giving effort to raise its national image up. Consulting other countries' policies, it has made many policies including improvement of cultural business policy in 1998, 5 year plan for advancing cultural industry, and had set 'improvement of life by cultural power' as its culture policy slogan in 2000. But it has not applied to real life with effect and set many systems yet. It still faces many problems with developing culture into national image and attracting people from other countries although it is one of the countries which have unique history and culture. Guy Sorman once said that Korea has no cultural image that deserves global stage. Korea wants to appeal its culture and tradition to other countries but the outcome has been weak and the response from others has not been favorable. There have been a lot of critiques by people indicating the problems that have been shown in our trials. Now it is time to admit that we are missing something and point out what it is to go forward.

First, let's see how Korea has developed cities for improvement. Koreans have built a lot of skyscrapers and sculptures and the cities in Korea, especially Seoul, are getting bigger and showier with them. Seoul has been a capital city since Chosun era and it has been in the center of Korea history for more than 600 years. There are a lot of cultural properties across Seoul, but the places for them is getting fewer since the city is crowded for buildings. The cultural properties including Dongdaemoon and Changdukgyung look awkward among those buildings and the scene even makes the properties look shabby. There has been rapid urban development, following western style, putting away our own style, as if we

are struggling to emerge from backwardness. As a result, it is now very hard to see Han-oak, traditional Korean-style house, and our properties stand as if they are the symbols of lingerer in the corner of the buildings. Still it is reported that there will be built an artful building which is higher than 63 building recently and the news said that it will get attention from other countries. It worth remembering that what makes Seoul cultural and polished is not artful high buildings but well-organized Insadong and preserved Han-oaks.

The most famous cities including Roma, Paris and Prague contribute greatly to promote the national interests and this is because they choose a wise harmony of preservation and use. There needs not only a structured preservation, but also efficient use with modern value. It must be considered that Korea needs to manage its cultural properties thinking about the value it gives us. Indiscreet development plan should be cut. It is not only the old historical remains. It is what shows our national character, represents our life style which is soaked in it and points the steps we should move on.

We can also point out what way Korea is going to advance as a tourism country. It was reported that Korea has been rated as one of the worst attractive one among 8 Asia tourism countries, ranking 7th by foreign travelers and hotels in Korea are the most expensive. Furthermore, about a year ago, it was found that there were a lot of errors on English explanation for cultural properties in Korea National Central Museum. A member of National Assembly pointed it out that many videos and documentaries in the museum were missing English subtitle and many of the explanation had grammar mistakes. Thanks to his effort, it was all changed soon but it remains as a big blot on the national museum to be blamed

for that. It also tells that there can be a lot more errors on the streets, signs, information leaflets for the tourists.

It gives us a radical question. Is Korea prepared to welcome tourists? For public relations with Korea's own image and culture, there needs an effort to improve tourist industry and to make a good place for tourism. But it seems that we have been smattering it so far. Tourist industry is an important background to advance unique culture to valuable property, further, to national power, and it is also essential to make a good image of the nation. Korea should give its effort to detailed things that can make any images to tourists rather than set up showy neon signs and urban scenery. Making money with tourist industry is only a short run. It is important to set a long-term goal, to form a good picture of Korea and make it considered as high quality.

Third, we need to look over the way Korea have handled cultural properties. There have been culture preservation mistakes through century. Guk-do Theater was very valuable building in Seoul, for modern age historic reasons and architecture reasons. It had flowed through the stream of modern Seoul and it comprehended old times showing highest grossing films. When government informed that it will be authorized as modern cultural property, the owner removed the building because he would be taken the building away without any cost. Government did nothing with it, and the modern historical buildings including Guk-do Theater are now gone away. Pungnap-tosung is more recent example where a lot of relics have been being discovered. There is a plan for developing apartment complex on it and it was found that there are a lot of relics under the tosung in the process of digging ground. The construction was stopped for a while

and scholars have assumed that it might be a palace of Baekjae kingdom, which has been lost. After they take out the relics, however, the construction for apartment is going to be continued.

Management of Korea's cultural properties has been through many adversities; Damaged by Japan in colonial time, outflow to another country, Korean Civil War, and economic priority development. After making policies for it, there have been continuous management but it was always behind the economic priority policies, not different from the past as cultural properties are losing its places being exposed to apartments and skyscrapers helplessly. It is always needed to remind the old saying, it is no use crying over spilt milk. Historic remain, cultural property, is not able to be restored perfectly if it is damaged, as we saw Sung rye moon burning this year. To preserve and protect them is a very basic requirement to make the value with it, in this global era. Koreans must always remember that the development should be basically on the promise for preservation.

There is still one thing which should not be passed over. It is more than policies and development, which can be a basic and important reason. Arirang TV is a Korean channel, which broadcasts many things including big issues and Korean tradition culture and even weather news in English. It is not only for Korean students who study English, but for foreigners staying or living in Korea to let them know about Korea and its culture. But its program rating has been very low because it is not interesting. The Channel is rated that is not really about real Korea and it is very cut-and-dried. It is said that it seems like the Arirang TV is trying to tell good things about Korea and describe it very good. It doesn't seem to

be only a problem of the channel. It reflects Koreans' eager to appeal to foreigners. They like to wrap up their culture and show other countries, and want to get praise since they feel self-conscious in front of them. Some say this inclination as "national inferiority complex." It is said that that characters come from its nations' history and that nation which was once colony is easier to have that complex.

It seems that Korea got its national inferiority complex from its history. Although ancestors of Korea struggled to keep its nation from invasion of Japan and China, Japan made Korea colony in 1904 and controlled them with the force of arms. Korea has been modernized very quickly by Japan, and the quick modernization continued after their independence. To Korea, modernization meant westernization. They thought oriental things as an old style, and tried to get out of the old style, their own traditional culture. Now, Many Koreans prefer foreign-made things and think that American music and pop-songs are better than Korean's. It is easy for them to gather as it is shown in 2002 World Cup, but blaming themselves for something is also easy for them. Introducing their tradition, Koreans try to wrap it up, because they want it to be better for foreigner's eyes. This character can be a big impediment for Korea to make their culture globalize. This is because culture is directly connected to national identity. If they distort and wrap it up, people who see that get to doubt the truth and feel uninteresting and awkward. Koreans must overcome their inferiority complex. If they feel shame or sadness from their history, if they want to improve their image, or if they want to let others know their indomitable spirit and long history, they must be confident of their true face. They must not swell out their image bigger than they really are.

The harder they try to make it up, the more awkward the others feel because as long as they have their national inferiority complex, that kind of struggle looks uncomfortable.

Hee-sub Lee, a professor emeritus of Korea University, defined “tradition culture” as “cultural property from the past which is still able to be suitable to the present.” That means it is connected to the present, not cut off, as a style of life. It encourages in creating a new culture and sets an upright direction not only for the present but for the future. It is needed to think over this message and reflect on what have been done. That’s because it indicates the way Korea should walk on.

For we live in century of culture, culture does not just mean culture anymore. Now it is regarded as national competitive power and culture is important for national identity as we live in global era. We saw what have been the obstacles to make our place on global stage above. We can say that policies for cultural improvement, which is for the century of culture, must not be for the decoration. It must be efforts to make Korean culture improve with its historic value. It is important to see it in long term rather than hurry to make quick results, with an investment plan, cultural heritage preservation plan and cultural merchandising for long term. Furthermore, Koreans need more efforts to reach maturer awareness on culture and its heritage and to search better ways to improve their culture policies. So they can both raise up their national image and advance cultural level. Whenever they do something for culture policies, they must keep this on mind. “Nation’s heritages are everlasting property of the nation.”

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