

## **Ewha in Nepal/Ewha in Bangladesh/Ewha in Cambodia/Ewha in Zambia**

By Min Jin Lee

June 11, 2009

Next week, I will go to Seoul to speak at a conference at Ewha. I am not an alumna. As an immigrant, however, I wonder what my life would have been like if my family and I had remained in Korea instead of moving to America. On my last visit to Seoul, as I walked through the amazing Ewha Campus Complex designed by the French architect Dominique Perrault, I wondered, would I have been able to pass all those famously difficult college entrance exams and attend a school like Ewha?

In 1883, Mrs. Lucinda B. Baldwin, dedicated \$88 for the education of Korean women through the United Methodist Church which soon after sent its first American female missionary, Mrs. Mary F. Scranton to Korea. In 1886, Mrs. Scranton established Ewha Hakdang which has grown into the largest female educational institute in the world. Ewha has since produced Korea's first female medical doctor, Ph.D., university president, lawyer, judge, prime minister, among others in traditionally men-only professions. Ewha graduates have helped to build a finer nation alongside their brothers, uncles and fathers. Today's Ewha students receive a world-class education, and the world, more than ever, needs their thoughtful attention, vision and creativity.

The image of Ewha came to mind when I recently attended a charity benefit in Tokyo for an organization called Room to Read ([www.roomtoread.org](http://www.roomtoread.org)) which was founded by an American named John Wood. In 1998, Wood, a successful marketing executive of Microsoft, went hiking in Nepal where he discovered that the school libraries had no books for children. As a boy, Wood had devoured books from public libraries, so he collected 3,000 books for the children in Nepal. In 1999, Wood quit his job at Microsoft to build libraries and schools as well as to provide girls' education in developing nations like Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, South Africa and Zambia. On our immense planet, there are 770 million illiterate people, and two-thirds of them are women and girls—many of whom are mothers or will certainly become mothers

for the next generation. Through Room to Read, a young girl from such developing nations can attend school for an entire year for as little as 315,000 KRW. Basic literacy is the primary goal, but as Ewha graduates have demonstrated, higher education is critical for enlightened leadership and global progress.

I learned about Asian University of Women ([www.asian-university.org](http://www.asian-university.org))—the visionary institution of higher learning in Bangladesh from Kathy Matsui, Chief Japan Strategist and co-director of Pan Asian Investment Research at Goldman Sachs. Matsui, the daughter of a farmer, is a globally respected leader in finance. She has coined the term “womenomics” to express the idea that women are the underutilized resource in the economic advancement of nations. She believes that meaningful progress can occur if women receive education and participate in the workplace.

Kamal Ahmad, the president and founder of AUW, has fought bravely for the idea that “Women’s education is the most effective way to bring about social and economic change.” After years of dreaming, planning and building, 129 young women—from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Cambodia and Sri Lanka who are also Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian—will enroll in August 2009 as AUW’s first class of undergraduates. For 12,600,000 KRW, a young woman can attend university for a year, and for 50,000 KRW, she can have school supplies. One day soon, AUW hopes to have 3,000 Asian women in its student body.

At today’s currency values, Mrs. Lucinda Baldwin’s \$88 is worth about 1,500,000 KRW—what it would cost to purchase a desktop computer for an AUW undergraduate. 123 years ago, Mrs. Baldwin’s sponsored missionary, Mrs. Mary Scranton started out with one female student in an unknown country called Korea, and today, Ewha educates nearly 20,000 of this nation’s brightest women. In the 21st century, the literacy rate of South Korea is better than 98 percent. I would say that Mrs. Baldwin’s return-on-equity was excellent, and that Korean women are a terrific investment. Womenomics works.

The programs Room to Read and the Asian University for Women Support Foundation are barely a decade old. Though they are publicly recognized and honored, they struggle against the

vicissitudes of troubled governments, fundamentalist religions that violently oppose the education of girls, and a global recession which defer the needs of the poor and voiceless.

Sadly, some developing nations are where Korea was almost a hundred years ago. However, there are enough post-war Koreans who can still remember having no school fees, books or classrooms. A nation known for its love of learning, as Korea takes its rightful place as a leader in the world's stage, its citizens can affirm the educational requirements of our neighbors who are painfully in need.

Old debts won't be cancelled since we can't give back Mrs. Baldwin her \$88, but Korea can become a leading creditor of good will—planting the seeds of freedom and enlightenment. The world is a broken place, but it also gives us the opportunities to serve our developing allies, support our future trading partners, and befriend our global brothers and sisters.

Korean article: [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2009/06/11/2009061101717.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/06/11/2009061101717.html)