

A representation of nationhood:
The National Museum of Korea

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by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the National Museum of Korea (NMK), national repository of material culture and the state's premier exhibition facility, has shaped and been shaped by Korean nationalism, and how South Korea's post-colonial state in East Asia has secured its national identity through the national museum.

This thesis is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 examines the colonial and political background of the formation of major government-run museum institutions. Chapter 2 looks at the establishment of NMK in the contemporary political and international political setting of the construction of the South Korean state after liberation. Chapter 3 then focuses on an international political aspect of NMK's overseas exhibition in the US under the Cold War system, arguing that this exhibition contributed to promoting notions of Korean national identity both within and beyond South Korea. Chapter 4 explores Park Chung Hee and his government's strong nationalist drive to utilise the national museum as a medium of national unity and mobilisation. Chapter 5 again turns to the overseas exhibition project led by NMK from 1976 to 1981 and shows that a more systematised nationalist narrative of material culture by NMK's curators and South Korean intellectuals was constructed domestically and displayed internationally. Chapter 6 focuses on South Koreans' internalisation of the nationalist narrative during the 1980s and 1990s, discussing NMK's activities directed toward audiences and a series of reopening projects it undertook and their impacts on South Korean society.

The thesis concludes with the argument that since its inauguration in December 1945, the National Museum of Korea has undertaken activities for executing national tasks, which include constructing the discourse of ethnic national culture in support of modern nation building, national unity and internal mobilisation, and securing international recognition of the cultural sovereignty of the Republic of Korea.

For my parents,
Jang Taek-jae (1921-2004)
and
Choi Eul-jun (1925-2012)

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List of Abbreviations

AKS	Academy of Korean Science
CPKI	Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence
GGM	Government-General Museum
NMK	National Museum of Korea
USAMGIK	United States Army Military Government in Korea
YHM	The Yi Royal Household Museum (The Prince Yi Household Museum)
YHMA	The Yi Royal Household Museum of Art

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS FOR SOURCE MATERIALS

BN	<i>Bangmulgwan nyuus</i> (The Museum News), National Museum of Korea.
BS	<i>Bangmulgwan shinmun</i> (The Museum News), National Museum of Korea.
GB	<i>Gwanbo</i> (National museum gazette), National Museum of Korea.
MKA	Arimitsu Kyoichi, "My Korean Archaeology," <i>Quarterly Samcheoli</i> 41 to 44
MMWL	Kim, Chewon, <i>Museum and My Whole Life</i> (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1992).
NSGP	Kim, Chewon, <i>Nights Story at Gyeongbok-gung Palace</i> (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1991).
RECU	Ministry of Education, <i>A Report on Exhibitions of Cultural Objects in the U.S.A.</i> (Seoul: 1960).
SNMK	National Museum of Korea, <i>Sixty Years of the National Museum of Korea</i> , (Seoul: 2006).
TYCI	Ministry of Culture and Information, <i>30 Years of the Ministry of Culture and Information</i> (Seoul: 1979).
UHKN	Heo Eun, <i>The US Hegemony and Korean Ethnic Nationalism</i> (Seoul: Institute of Ethnic National Culture Research, Korea University, 2008).

Introduction

In 2005 the National Museum of Korea (hereafter NMK), which was established right after the liberation from the Japanese 35-year long colonial rule in 1945, displayed its accomplishments of the previous 60 years in building the cultural identity of Korea by opening an enormous new building located in the centre of the capital, Seoul. The then president Roh Moo-hyun (in office from 2003 to 2007) said in his congratulatory address, “Our ethnic nation has created a proud tradition of 5000 years. ... This new museum will be a symbol to show our pride as a civilised ethnic nation. ... At the very site of military posts of foreign forces such as China, Japan and the US, this new museum building will stand tall as a centre of self-respect of our ethnic nation, proving our history and culture.”¹ These words encapsulated the manner in which NMK had become the embodiment of the discourse of ethnic national culture that Koreans strived to build both at home and abroad, using material culture.

This nationalist discourse contributed to promoting national unity and constructing the South Korean state, strongly influencing the formation of national cultural institutes like NMK. Thus, the concept of the ethnic nation has almost become the only perspective with which to discover and interpret Korean material culture, discouraging an interest in other perspectives.² As a result, diversity and difference tend to be unexplored internally for the reason that they hinder the idea of national unity, while the distinct characteristics of Korean ethnic national culture tend to be overemphasised, with the goal of achieving international recognition.³ This tendency has restricted the

¹ “President Roh’s address at NMK on 28th October, 2005,” available at http://pa.go.kr/online_contents/speech/speech02/1309801_6175.html, accessed on 7th July, 2014.

² Kim argues that cultural nationalism, a powerful driving force in the colonial and post-colonial eras, helped East Asian national museums join in nation-building or nation-rebuilding and consolidate national identity. See Kim Hongnam, “Do Museums Matter?: Looking beyond Cultural Nationalism in Asia,” unpublished lecture, Victoria & Albert Museum, 7th July, 2010, available at <http://vimeo.com/22230347>, accessed on 24th July, 2014.

³ Knell argues that NMK is saying “‘this is us’, ‘we are not you’, ‘respect us and recognise us.’” See Simon Knell, “National Museum and the National Imagination,” in *National Museums*, edited by Simon Knell et al. (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), p.13.

possibility for a diverse interpretation of cultural heritage according to various criteria.

These criteria represent various identities that a categorical identification of the ethnic nation, whether intentionally or not, put aside. As Duara points out, “nationalism and its theory seek a privileged position within the representational network as the master identity that subsumes or organises other identifications.”⁴ However, Duara does not agree to unilateral victory of national identity, proposing to “view the dynamics of national identity within this fluid network of representations.” During the last decade, as South Korean society has seen new tasks in relation to growth of political freedom and improvement of human rights, some South Korean academics have agreed on the necessity of dissolving this adherence to national historical discourse, and have begun to disclose agendas or identities that this discourse has concealed, such as issues of gender, ethnicity and class.⁵ These scholars can be said to be undertaking the task of securing more balanced perspectives not least to take into consideration disadvantaged groups and minorities hidden behind the curtain of national discourse, in order to rediscover intentionally concealed identifications.

This research has been inspired by this new perspective, in which various identities or those representations in South Korean society should draw enough attention and secure their rightful position. In this regard, to examine how national identity of South Korea has been constructed by nationalist dynamics has importance in understanding the background of how other representations of identities have been marginalised or excluded, as well as in recognising the concrete historical process and context in which the ethnic national representation was built through material culture at national cultural institutions, such as the national museum.

⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.8.

⁵ Lim argues that the “dissolution of the discourse of national history means breaking up hegemonies on which to represent all the population’s unitary intention and interest in the name of a nation and by doing so conceal and suppress differences within each individual nation.” See Lim Ji-Hyun, “National History In and Out: Hegemony & the Grand Chain of National History (‘국사’의 안과 밖- 헤게모니와 ‘국사’의 대연쇄),” in *Beyond the Myth of National History* (국사의 신화를 넘어서) edited by Lim Ji-Hyun (Seoul: Humanist, 2004), p.29.

Even if Duara's argument that nationalism "marks the site where different representations of the nation contest and negotiate with each other"⁶ is very inspiring, the attempt of the South Korean Government to urge its people to stick only to ethnic national representation can be said to have been greatly successful. This success was on the one hand forced by the administrative power of authoritarian government in South Korea, and on the other by the government's effective strategy by which to draw assent from South Korean society. The essence of this strategy was to explain the appropriateness of the national unity of the ethnic national community. The famous slogan, 'If united, we survive, if dispersed, we die' by the first president Rhee Syngman (1875-1965), shows to what extent the notion of national unity was emphasised and politically utilised.

The pursuit of a firm national identity played an important role in obtaining people's consent to setting the national goal and to deciding which methods to utilise. This is because national identity could somehow explain why the people should unite under the direction of the nation-state. In this regard, it is interesting that authoritarian regimes in South Korea aspired to resort to the national identity, emphasising 'the subjectivity of the nation' as a powerful political slogan. This means that the pursuit of national identity was closely related to the process in which, or the means by which, the regime got to secure political and moral hegemony within the national community. This also explains why the regimes were keen on taking the lead in constructing national identity by inventing and imagining various national representations. It is also interesting to consider what roles academics played in this process.

The construction of national identity by the authoritarian regimes contributed to nationalising South Korean society, as well as providing the regimes with political and moral authority. During this period, national identity was deeply internalised by South Korean nationals. Even if researchers tend to focus on criticising the political or malicious intentions behind pursuing national identity, such as justification of their dictatorships, it should not be overlooked that the construction of national identity, and people's internalisation of it, has deeply influenced the birth of South Korean nationals as well as the formation of the South Korean modern nation-state. This government-led

⁶ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, p.7.

project also involved the participation of academics and intellectuals, as they also considered the construction of the South Korean state and its national identity to be their urgent mission. In this regard, it is useful to remember that their occasional resistance to the dictatorship of the regimes did not mean objecting to the project of constructing national identity. Rather, the project contributed to recovering the regimes' authority impaired by their dictatorships. This may explain why President Park Chung Hee (in office from 1963 to 1979) was more eager to push ahead with the promotion of ethnic national culture in the 1970s, when his more authoritarian rule was reaching its apex. Thus, the regimes' successful construction of national identity or its representations implies that South Korean society had historical backgrounds favourable for the project, and that the regimes were competent in utilising those advantages, successfully persuading people into believing in their nationhood.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the formation of national identity was also affected by an outer factor, which was the world order presided over by the US during the Cold War. As Smith pointed out as early as 1971, "The nation-state is the almost undisputed foundation of world order, the main object of individual loyalties, the chief definer of a man's identity. It is far more significant for the individual and for world security than any previous type of political and social organisation."⁷ It could be argued that the implication of Smith's remark is that the formation of nation would be influenced by the world order, and that in this regard the internal construction of a nation's identity would also be influenced by the world order. However, this outer factor in the formation of the modern nation state and national identity does not seem to have attracted enough attention from those researchers who have inquired into theories of nations and nationalism. This is mainly because they tend only to focus on internal processes and factors of the formation of nations and nationalism.

The South Korean government promoted itself with two large-scale overseas touring exhibitions over a long period from 1957 to 1983 in the US, West European countries and Japan. These countries were major powers under the US-led world order - especially the US, which had a decisive role in the formation of the South Korean

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company Limited, 1971), pp.2-3.

independent modern nation-state. For its own political ambition, the US encouraged South Korea to build its national identity on the basis of Korean culture and history. The South Korean government considered the exhibition to be an important chance to prove its cultural sovereignty and legitimacy as an independent nation. The US side, which was intent on the construction of the US-led world order and securement of a bastion in the Far East, was very willing to give its authorisation to Korean culture as a independent, unique and creative culture. Given its indifference to Korean culture before it participated in the Second World War, the US's drastic change of perspective on Korean culture shows that its interest reflected a new political meaning of the Korean Peninsular.

This outer factor seems to have been influential in the formation of the national identity of the South Korean modern nation-state. In the late-1940s and the 1950s South Korean academics and the public, who had experienced Japan's colonial rule, hardly had confidence in their nation's cultural independence and creativity. Their perspective was inevitably influenced by the Japanese colonial view of Korean history, which could be summarised as stagnant and heteronomous. Their academic accumulations were not yet enough to overcome this colonial perspective. In this regard, the US side's positive appraisal of the overseas exhibition in 1957-1959 was considered to mean full appreciation of the cultural sovereignty of South Korea. NMK showed nationals the very exhibition that the US had allegedly appreciated and appraised, once the overseas exhibition came back to South Korea.

Nation, nationalism and national identity

The term, 'nation' was first translated in 1866 by a Japanese scholar, Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉, 1835-1901) in East Asia. He coined a word, *Kokumin* (國民, K. *gukmin*), with two Chinese Characters, translating British scholars, William and Robert Chambers' *Political Economy, for Use in Schools, and for Private Instruction* (1852).⁸ His

⁸ Park Yang-sin, "Formation and Development of the Concepts *Gukmin* and *Minjok*: History of Reception of the Term, Nation (근대 일본에서의 '국민' '민족' 개념의 형성과 전개- nation 개념의 수용사)," *Journal of Asian History* (東洋史學研究) 104 (2008): 238-240, cited in Park Chan-seung, *Nation and Nationalism* (민족·민족주의) (Seoul: Sohwa, 2010), p.44.

translation meant ‘nation as demos,’ and seems to have reflected his hope for a nation-state based on the theory of social contract.⁹ In 1882, another Japanese scholar, Hirata Tosuke (平田東助), translated ‘nation’ into *jokumin* (族民, K. *jokmin*), translating a German scholar, J. C. Bluntschli’s *Deutsche Staatslehre für Gebildete*. This reflected ‘nation as ethnos,’ and began to be recognised as such in East Asia. One of two characters, *jok* (族) means a group of the same blood relation, while another, *min* (民), means subjects ruled by monarchs. In 1887 an anonymous Japanese contributor to *The Journal of Association of the German Studies* (獨逸學協會雜誌) used *minjoku* (民族, K. *minjok*) along with *jokumin*.¹⁰ In 1891 Inoue Tetsujiro (井上哲次郎) first used the term, *nihon minjoku* (‘Japanese nation,’ 日本民族). He wrote that “the Japanese nation has followed its lineage on the basis of the same old legend, has lived in the same territory since the establishment of the country, and has maintained blood relationship, with the same language, customs, folklore and history without being invaded by other nations.”¹¹

These new terms gradually grew more popular after 1888, when a magazine titled *Nihonjin* (日本人, The Japanese) and a newspaper titled *Nihon* (日本, Japan) were published.¹² A renowned Chinese intellectual, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), first imported the term, *minjok* (民族) into China in 1899.¹³ Liang tried to distinguish between the two terms *minjok* and *gukmin*, both of which originated from the Western term ‘nation.’ He recognised that “a *minjok* has the same language, folklore, spirits and characters, and its collective public spirit would make the foundation of a state.” He added that a *minjok* should found the state, otherwise, *minjok* just remains a *minjok* and

⁹ In his book, Fukuzawa explains the relation between state and nationals on the basis of the theory of social contract, saying that the the government as the representative of the nationals should work as they want and protect its nationals, while the nationals should respect national law and constitute the government. See Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* (文明論概略) (1875), cited in Park, *Ethnic Nation and Ethnic Nationalism*, p.44.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.45.

¹¹ Inoue Tetsujiro, *Explanation of the Imperial Rescript* (勅語衍義), (1891), cited in *ibid*, pp.45-46.

¹² *Ibid*, p.46.

¹³ Paik Yeong-seo, “Chinese Nation-State and Nation: Formation and Transformation (중국의 국민국가와 민족문제: 형성과 변용),” in *Modern Nation-State and Nation* (근대 국민국가와 민족문제), edited by the Research Association of Korean History (한국사연구회) (Seoul: Jisik saneobsa, 1995), p.86, cited in Park, *ibid*, p.47.

cannot become a *gukmin*.”¹⁴ The introduction of the term, *minjok* in Korea in this meaning was around 1904, when Liang Qichao’s book began to influence the spread of this term in Korea. In its editorial about the Japanese victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, *Hwangseong sinmun* (皇城新聞, Imperial Capital News) used an expression of “four thousand years of *minjok* (四千餘年傳守之民族).”¹⁵ Another editorial added that “if we harm ourselves like this, we do not know who is going to occupy our four thousand years of territory, and whose slave the twenty million people of same race and *minjok* is going to become.”¹⁶ After Korea (the Daehan Empire, 1897-1910) lost her diplomatic rights to the Japanese empire in 1905, the term, *minjok* got more popular through Korean newspapers.¹⁷ At the same time, the discovery of *minjok* meant the rise of *minjokjui* (ethnic nationalism, 民族主義). Likewise, both words began to grow as the most powerful words in their political and cultural influence.

In his book on the ‘genealogy’ of Korean nationalism, Shin defines nationalism in Korea as ethnic nationalism and translates *minjokjui* into ethnic nationalism, mentioning that he uses the term because it “involves emphases on descent and race, that is, on biology.”¹⁸ As Eckert points out, “one of Korea’s most striking characteristics has been its long and continuous existence as a unified country between 668 and 1910.”¹⁹ It may mean that Korea is the right place for the notion of ethnic nation to thrive. However, nationalism as collective identity arguably arose when Korea encountered unprecedented outer threats after opening her ports in 1876. As Shin argues, “in Korea nationalism arose primarily as a response to imperialism.” He continues to say that

¹⁴ Liang Qichao, “Great Scholar in Politics, Bluntschli’s Theory (政治學大家伯倫知理之學說),” in *Collected Works of Yinbingshi* (飲冰室文集) (Shanghai: Kwongchi shuju, 1905), vol.2, p.141, cited in Park, *ibid*, pp.48-49.

¹⁵ *Hwangseong sinmun* (7th October, 1904), cited in Paik Dong-hyeon, *National Consciousness and Plan for Founding State in the Period of the Daehan Empire* (대한제국기 민족인식과 국가구상), unpublished PhD thesis, Korea University, 2004, pp.100-101.

¹⁶ “A Warning to the Compatriot (警告同胞),” *Hwangseong sinmun* (24th November, 1904).

¹⁷ Park, *Ethnic Nation and Ethnic Nationalism*, p.70.

¹⁸ Shin Gi-Wook, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p.223. Shin adds that it can also be called racial nationalism.

¹⁹ Carter J. Eckert, “Authoritarianism and Protest, 1948-1990,” in *Korea, Old and New: A History*, edited by Carter J. Eckert et al. (Seoul: Ilchogak Publishers, 1990), p.368.

“enhancement of collective consciousness and internal solidarity among Koreans against the external threat was even more urgent. As a result, an organic notion of nation (that is, nation as immortal and indivisible) developed.”²⁰ In the same context, Eckert argues that “Korea’s occupation by Japan intensified nationalist sentiment to an unprecedented degree. And inequities and brutalities during the occupation also further inflamed Korean nationalism.”²¹

In short, the terms *minjokjui* and *minjok* used in Korea will be translated into ‘ethnic nationalism’ and ‘ethnic nation’ respectively in this thesis.²² These translations can be argued to be supported by the objective condition that Korea maintained the same ethnic and cultural homogeneity in the same territory for a long time.²³ Also, the fact that the historical usage of the terms in Korea has overwhelmingly been referent to descent and race, rather than civil rights, can arguably justify this translation.²⁴

As many scholars point out, it is noticeable that ethnic nationalism in Korea during Japanese colonial rule focused mainly on cultural aspects to be characterised as cultural nationalism. Actually, it was almost the only alternative that Koreans could choose, as they almost lost all means of military or political resistance to Japanese imperialism. In the limited space available to them under Japanese surveillance, Korean academics attempted to find and prove their subjectivity and national identity through studies of

²⁰ Shin, *op. cit.*, p.229.

²¹ Carter J. Eckert, “Economic Development in Historical Perspective,” in *Korea, Old and New: A History*, pp.406-407.

²² Hobsbawm briefly refers to ‘ethnic nationalism,’ saying that “‘kinship’ and ‘blood’ have obvious advantages in bonding together members of a group and excluding outsiders, and are therefore central to ethnic nationalism.” He also adds that “the crucial base of an ethnic group as a form of social organization is cultural rather than biological.” Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.63.

²³ However, this condition does not necessarily mean that this homogeneity was as politically important in the pre-modern period as in the modern period in Korea, even if Hobsbawm presents Korea as one of “the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous.” See *ibid*, p.66.

²⁴ Jang Mun-seok, a South Korean researcher on nationalism, proposes that the term *minjok* can be used as a term that has both ethnic and civil meanings. See Jang Mun-seok, *Taming Nationalism* (민족주의 길들이기) (Seoul: Jisigui pung-gyeong, 2007), p.10. His proposal, however, overlooks the fact that the term has almost always contained ethnic aspects in Korea.

language, history and folklore.²⁵ Their efforts show that “nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth,” as Gellner argues.²⁶ Smith also suggests that nations and nationalism should be understood not only “as an ideology or form of politics,” but “as cultural phenomena as well.” He adds that “nationalism, the ideology and movement must be closely related to national identity, a multidimensional concept, and extended to include a specific language, sentiments and symbolism.”²⁷

Interestingly, early pioneers of cultural nationalism in Korea were eager to find symbolic images of the nation, such as national soul and a national progenitor, Dangun.²⁸ Especial emphasis on Dangun even developed as a religion one year before Korea’s colonisation by the Japanese empire.²⁹ However, it cannot be said that Koreans

²⁵ Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), pp.83-126; Park, *Ethnic Nation and Ethnic Nationalism*, pp.140-151; Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, second edition (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1983[2006]), p.54. He adds that “well defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify.” See *ibid*.

²⁷ Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p.vii. In terms of the importance of language in nationalism, Anderson argues that “print-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, second edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p.134. He also stresses that the half-signified ideographic reading-system was efficiently utilised in Japanese official nationalism, saying that the development of mass literacy through schooling and print media was easy and uncontroversial. See *ibid*, p.96. In this regard, it is remarkable that an indigenous alphabet for the Korean people was invented and promulgated as early as 1446, and utilised for publishing. Lee Ki-baik, “The Creation of a Yangban Society,” in *Korea, Old and New: A History*, pp.124-125.

²⁸ Dangun is one of the representative inventions of tradition, as per in Hobsbawm’s argument. He asserts that “plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups – not least in nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity, enter by semi-fiction or by forgery.” See Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.7. Lee argues that modern Korean historiography invented Dangun as a forefather of the nation with no evidence to speak of. See Lee Jong-wook, *Ethnic Nation? Or State? (민족인가, 국가인가?)* (Seoul: Sonamu, 2006), pp.13-18

²⁹ Kim K. C., *Korea as Seen through Its Material Culture and Museums*, unpublished PhD thesis,

secured a firm foundation for discovering and translating their material culture for themselves during the colonial era, even if Shin argues that “the new Korean intelligentsia had nurtured the process of grafting symbols of the modern nation-state onto the existing ethnic and cultural identity and developed Korean nationalism as a political force.”³⁰ This situation may explain how Japanese monopoly of discovering and interpreting Korean material culture discouraged Koreans from paying attention to the field of material culture, even if a few Korean scholars in Korea and abroad began to research art history and archaeology as a modern discipline.

Ethnic national culture, the national museum and representation

It was after liberation that Koreans got to participate in the discovery and interpretation of their material culture through the national museum. NMK was established right after liberation under the United States Military Government in Korea. NMK launched its activities for discovering ethnic national culture from the museological legacy that the Government-General Museum left behind. The role of the US was not major, but influential. The military government realised that a national museum was meaningful for the formation of the South Korean state, which should be a model under the US-led world order. In this regard, the US was willing to be a supporter for the promotion of the national culture of South Korea, at least officially. Even though American assistance of NMK was not systematic, but occasional, the US was successful in maintaining influence over NMK. For instance, one of the major American public foundations, the Rockefeller Foundation, invited the director of NMK to the US in 1947 and kept in touch with NMK, especially through financial assistance. It can be said that the US's assistance was for securing authority as a standard of a new civilisation. However, political disorder in the late-1940s and the Korean War (1950-1953) discouraged NMK and South Korean academics from making meaningful progress in their research on material culture. Even if NMK attempted to lay the foundation of independent discovery and the interpretation of material culture for building the new Korean modern nation-state, the South Korean government's interest in the national museum was very limited.

University of Leicester, 2005, pp.23-50.

³⁰ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, p.229.

Park Chung Hee's regime (1961-1979) began to pay fully fledged interest in the political potential of material culture. As Anderson argues, "[twentieth-century] nationalist leaders are in a position consciously to deploy civil and military educational systems modelled on official nationalisms; elections, party organizations, and cultural celebrations modelled on the popular nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe." Park was one such ambitious nationalist leader. Park's regime propelled ethnic nationalism through the medium of the discourse of ethnic national culture, which could instantly arouse the basic emotion of community spirit in South Korean society.³¹ As Eckert argues, "nationalism was preached by the state authorities as an ultimate civic virtue for which no sacrifice was too much," and "nationalism and Cold War ideologies have severely constrained intellectual life in both Koreas during the past half-century."³² This discourse of ethnic national culture was one of the most important contents of national history. As Hobsbawm says, "So much of what subjectively makes up the modern nation is associated with fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse such as national history."³³

As Lee argues, "it was from the 1960s that the government adopted an institution of museum as object for political consideration."³⁴ This means that from this period NMK began to be considered as a major cultural institution that could produce the discourse of ethnic national culture. As Knell argues, national museums were to "provide the scenography and stage for the performance of myths of nationhood."³⁵ Lee contends that museum policy of the Third Republic (1963-1972), under the slogan of modernisation of the fatherland, was for securing the legitimacy of the regime and for uniting nationals of the independent country with cultural sameness. He also adds that

³¹ Oh Myeong-Seok, "Cultural Policies and Discourse on the Ethnic National Culture during the 1960s and the 1970s (1970-70년대의 문화정책과 민족문화담론)," *Comparative Study of Culture* (비교문화연구) 4 (1998): 123.

³² Carter J. Eckert, "Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts: Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Shin Gi-Wook and Michael Robinson (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Asia Centre, 1999), pp.369-370.

³³ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, p.14.

³⁴ Lee In-beom, "Origin and Characteristics of Korean Museum Institutions: From and beyond Nationalism (韓國 博物館制度의 起源과 性格)," *Art History Forum* (美術史論壇) 14 (2002): 54.

³⁵ Knell, "National Museum and the National Imagination," p.4.

these plans were related to the securement of discrimination from colonial remnants and of the unique characteristic of Korean culture as an independent country in a globalised world.³⁶ Even if his argument does not derive from detailed research based on concrete evidence, but from a broad summary about the then museum policy, his research contributes to suggesting the general characteristics of the museum policy of Park's regime. However, he does not specify or analyse the national museum policies of the government, and does not focus on the concrete activities and roles of the national museum. In this regard, a close look at the relation between historiography and art history or archaeology in this period is also important for understanding the nationalist narrative of NMK.³⁷

Jeon has tried to trace the development of Park's cultural heritage policies. Dividing Park's rule into three periods, 'reconstruction of the country (1961-1963),' 'modernisation of the fatherland (1964-1971)' and 'national mobilisation (1972-1979),' Jeon argues that from the latter part of the period of modernisation of the fatherland onwards, the Park regime strengthened its cultural policy in accord with his emphasis on the discourse on nationalism.³⁸ He also adds that Park's cultural policies were intended to show the populace his historical legitimacy and to disseminate nationalist thinking that they should unite around Park.³⁹ His research is suggestive in that he attempted to examine the evolution of Park's cultural policies, even if he tended to focus on the instrumental aspect of this cultural policy.

Some researchers argue that the state-sponsored cultural policy in South Korea was influenced by the Japanese colonial cultural policy, pointing out their similarity in political orientation. Park argues that "the South Korean government revived Japanese

³⁶ Lee, "Origin and Characteristics of Korean Museum Institutions," p.55.

³⁷ In his recent research on Korean modern historiography, Em argues that "historians imagined sovereignty to be not just a goal but an axiom, an idea that demands fidelity." See Henry H. Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), p.160.

³⁸ Jeon Jae-ho, *Nationalism of the Park Chung Hee Regime (1961~1979): A Study on Its Discourse and Policy* (박정희 체제의 민족주의 연구- 담론과 정책을 중심으로), unpublished PhD thesis, Sogang University, 1998, p.180.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

forms of cultural policy to mobilise the populace in support of state goods, thus reproducing colonial cultural experiences in postcolonial times.”⁴⁰ And Pai argues that “South Korean scholars and bureaucrats have accepted their Japanese predecessor’s criteria for evaluating Korea’s artistic, architectural, and historical traditions.”⁴¹ However, their arguments are only a part of the story. Although the South Korean government followed or adopted some Japanese colonial cultural policies, it needs to be understood that its ultimate orientation was definitely towards the formation of an independent nation-state and the establishment of national identity. In a sense, those colonial cultural policies adopted from the colonial authorities may be said to have had modern characteristics adequate for nationalising the populace.

It seems clear that negative perspectives on Park’s regime’s cultural policy consequently discouraged researchers from examining to what extent NMK’s nationalist narratives influenced the populace’s recognition of Korean material culture as well as their nationalist consciousness. A close look at social education programmes conducted in NMK, especially from the 1970s onwards, may show NMK’s role in the internalisation of the nationalist narrative towards material culture.

On the other hand, NMK’s overseas touring exhibition projects which began as early as 1957 can be said to be cultural events of the South Korean government for securing the cultural sovereignty of a fledging state. This topic is expected to show the importance of outer factors in the formation of a modern nation-state.⁴² In relation to

⁴⁰ Park Sang Mi, “The Paradox of Postcolonial Korean Nationalism: State-Sponsored Cultural Policy in South Korea, 1965-present,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 15:1 (2010): 67. Lee also agreed to her argument that museum institution in the 1960s had similarity with that of colonial period. See Lee, “Origin and Characteristics of Korean Museum Institutions,” p.55.

⁴¹ Pai Hyung Il, “The Creation of National Treasures and Monuments: The 1916 Japanese Laws on the Preservation of Korean Remains and Relics and their Colonial Legacies,” *Korean Studies* 25:1 (2001): 86.

⁴² Chung focuses on two ‘Korean art’ exhibitions in America, *Masterpieces of Korean Art* and *Contemporary Korean Paintings* in 1958. She argues that the two exhibitions showed the process of how the American perspective was transforming toward cultural exchange with Asia. She points to the *Masterpieces of Korean Art* as a concrete example of the US’s attitude to begin to emphasise mutual respect and understanding rather than political ambition. See Chung Moojeung (정무정), “Korean Art Represented in the United States in the 1950s (1950년대 미국에 소개된 한국미술),” *Korean Modern Art History Studies* (한국근대미술사학) 14 (2005): 7-41. Hahn’s recent research focuses on the first overseas

these relevant works, this thesis explores why and how Korean material culture has been discovered, interpreted and narrated in the name of ethnic nationhood, especially in terms of practice by the national museum, which has not been thoroughly examined so far.

Aim and structure of thesis

This thesis aims to understand how NMK, as a national repository of material culture and the state's premier exhibition facility, has shaped and been shaped by Korean nationalism. This research explores the processes by which the National Museum in South Korea has discovered and interpreted material culture using concepts of ethnic nationalism in the historical and political contexts of South Korean society, and attempts to understand how this nationalist interpretation has regulated the South Koreans' understanding of their material culture. In this context, this thesis investigates the historical process and context in which ethnic nationalism became a dominant discourse in South Korea, a discourse which established itself in national cultural institutes like NMK, and which resulted in the injection of ethnic nationalism into material culture.

Major contexts considered for this research are as follows. Firstly, in terms of historical context, Korea's traditional perception of China and Japan and the drastic change in this perception in the 20th century are considered. This includes changes in cultural and political relations with China in terms of Korea's identity, as well as Japanese colonial rule, cultural imperialism and its legacy. The notion of a millennium-long unified Korean dynasty has also been an important issue in building the national identity of South Korea. Secondly, the political context includes the division of Korea

Korean exhibition in America in 1957. She tries to illuminate the exhibition's role in asserting the Korean national identity through Korean artefacts. However, she does not analyse the exhibition in the context of South Korean-US relations. Also, she does not situate this exhibition as one of a series of overseas exhibitions by the NMK. This explains why she does not illuminate the limits of this exhibition in comparison with *5000 Years of Korea Art*, which toured eight American cities between 1979 and 1981. See Hahn Christine Y., "Unearthing Origins: The Use of Art, Archaeology, and exhibitions in Creating Korean National Identity, 1945-1962." *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 28:2 (2012): 138-170.

into north and south since 1945, the Korean War between 1950 and 1953 and the nation building since liberation in 1945, and several domestic political upheavals such as military coups in 1961 and in 1979. Thirdly, the diplomatic context includes issues, such as the securement of the cultural sovereignty of South Korea as a pro-American country under the Cold War order, and the South Korean government's overseas Korean culture exhibitions project for cultural diplomacy.

This thesis consists of 6 chapters, described below, and ends with a conclusion. Chapter 1, "Japanese Cultural Imperialism, Museums and Koreans," explores how Koreans began to see their material culture through the modern institution of the museum. In order to understand the development of the national museum in Korea, this chapter tries to understand the geopolitics of this part of the world at the end of the nineteenth century, and as part of this to understand how and why museums and exhibitions became forms of national expression in Korea. In this regard, the main focus is placed on the Imperial Household Museum (downgraded to and renamed as the Prince Yi Household Museum after the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910), the first museum in Korea, which was established under the influence of the Japanese Residency-general in 1908, and the Government-General Museum (1915-1945).

Chapter 2, "Liberation, the National Museum and the US," traces how NMK tried to develop an independent capability, and how it tried to define its mission and vision through interactions with the United States Military Government in Korea (1945-1948) and the Republic of Korea government (1948-1956). Of particular interest are American attempts to introduce new social, cultural and political standards to the civilisation of South Korea after the Second World War.

Chapter 3, "Overseas Exhibition and National Building," examines a series of experiences of South Korea in acquiring a cultural citizenship on the world stage through the overseas exhibition, by which NMK tried to define the cultural identity of Korea, display and internalise it. This chapter reveals that through this exhibition NMK was engaged in a dual mission both to gain cultural citizenship on the world stage and, reflexively, to internalise this for internal consumption so as to consolidate a sense of Korean identity at home.

Chapter 4, "Ethnic Nationalism and Museum Narrative," focuses on the ethnic nationalist policy of Park Chung Hee's regime (1961-1979) in terms of utilisation of the

material culture through NMK. This regime took a fully fledged interest in the potential of material culture. Park pushed forward ethnic awareness as a means to mobilise the Korean people for the so-called modernisation of the fatherland. In this context, this chapter considers how he utilised Korean material culture for the solidarity of the people, and secured support for his political ambitions.

Chapter 5, “Cultural Diplomacy and Display of National Identity Abroad,” explores how Korean national identity was externally consolidated through material culture by overseas exhibitions from 1976 to 1984, and how this national identity was meant to be recognised by and instilled into South Koreans through NMK’s activities, such as the renovation project, in this period.

Chapter 6, “National Narrative and the South Korean Society,” examines how the South Korean government tried to construct the increasingly essentialised and controlled communication of the national narrative towards South Korean society since the 1970s, focusing on the activities of NMK, which is considered to have played a major role in this process.

Research Methodology

This thesis makes a historical analysis of the process by which ethnic nationalism has taken the lead in interpreting and narrating material culture at the national museum. This research chases the evolution of the narrative of the national museum, considering the following four elements: authorship, the story, the manner of telling and the changing audience.⁴³ Official documents in the custody of the National Archives of Korea and NMK are the primary source for this research. These include documents from the Government-General of Korea (1910-1945), the US Army Military Government in Korea (1945-1948) and the Republic of Korea government (1948-present). The minutes of the National Assembly of South Korea are also especially important materials in understanding how South Koreans responded to their material culture in the 1950s. Presidential addresses from the 1950s to the present provide decisive evidences in examining the general trend of cultural policy.

⁴³ Tricia Austin, “Scales of Narrativity,” in *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibition*, edited by Suzanne MacLeod et al. (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.115-116.

Annual reports and newsletters published by NMK during the period from 1947 to the present are essential materials for investigating the activities of the museum. Memoirs, autobiographies and essay collections by directors of NMK such as Kim Chewon (in office from 1945 to 1970) and Choi Sunu (in office from 1974 to 1983) are also very important in enabling us to grasp the vision and mission that the national museum pursued in terms of the government's policies. In addition, several interviews from other former directors are also available.

Materials on exhibitions and education programmes at the national museum include exhibition catalogues, pamphlets and official documents. Furthermore, cultural objects which were displayed in the national museum will be a good source for analysing how exhibitions and education programmes functioned for the enhancement of ethnic nationalism. In addition, newspapers, magazines and government-published textbooks are examined to gain an understanding of the responses of the South Korean public to the activities of NMK in terms of the dissemination of ethnic nationalism.

Chapter 1. Japanese cultural imperialism, museums, and Koreans

The Korean encounter with exhibition and museum

The Kingdom of Joseon (1392-1897), which had maintained her policy of seclusion, was forced to open up as a response to the gunboat diplomacy of the Japanese empire in 1876. The two countries signed the treaty of amity. As Cummings argues, however, although “concluded in the name of sovereign equality and against the putative hierarchy of the Chinese order, the real effect of the treaty was to erase the centuries of essential equality between Japan and Korea.”⁴⁴ From this point, this kingdom began to encounter modern Western institutions such as exhibitions and museums. It was in this context that Kim Gi-su (金綺秀, 1832-?), who was sent as an envoy to Japan right after the opening of the kingdom, visited a Japanese museum in 1876.⁴⁵

In 1881, Park Jeong-yang (朴定陽, 1841-1904), who was a member of the Korean delegation, the Gentlemen’s Mission of Inspection (朝士視察團), to Japan, reported on modern institutions such as museums, saying that “the Bureau of Museums under the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce administers affairs related to museums and extends knowledge by collecting natural and man-made, and past and present, objects. That is why this bureau was named as ‘general knowledge (博物)’.” He explained that museums taught people through displays of everything from collections gathered from temples, shrines and government storehouses to those composed of foreign products.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bruce Cummings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, updated edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), p.102.

⁴⁵ Kim Gi-su, *Record of a Journey to Japan* (日東記遊), 1877, cited in Cha Mun-seong, *Modern Museum: Its Formation and Transition* (근대박물관, 그 형성과 변천과정) (Paju: Korean Academic Information, 2008), pp.154-161.

⁴⁶ Park Jeong-yang, *Report on the Job Description of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce at the Japanese Government* (日本國農商務省各局規則) (1881), cited in Mok Su-hyeon, “Formation of Museums under the Japanese Colonial Rule and its Meaning (일제하 박물관의 형성과 그 의미),” unpublished MA dissertation, Seoul National University, 2000, pp.8-10.

Hanseong sunbo (漢城旬報, Hanseong Ten-daily), the first modern newspaper in Korea, published three times a month, had been introduced in October 1883 by the government in the mood of reformation. It introduced both museums and exhibitions to Koreans:

Without exception, Western countries set up museums in order to collect metal, stone and jewellery, birds and beasts, insects and fishes, and antiquities and magnificent instruments. In addition, they hold exhibitions in order to display and show the public every craftsman's techniques and products, which is beneficial to each country, and install libraries in order widely to collect past and present, and domestic and foreign books so that all the public, irrespective of their status, can freely approach and utilise them and contribute to extending and widening knowledge. Their high standard can never be compared to ours.⁴⁷

The awareness of museums and the desire to see them established in Korea was, however, limited to a small reformist elite. The publication of the newspaper itself just reflected a temporary trend in the government. It seems that most conservatives were less convinced by these institutions; as one of the envoys to Japan in 1881, Min Jong-muk (閔鍾默, 1835-1916), mentioned: "I cannot understand where the objects displayed in the museum could be helpful, even if they are said to broaden knowledge."⁴⁸

A radical reformist coup in 1884 (甲申政變), which failed in just three days, gave another chance of intervention to Japan and China, and Korea now became the arena for competing political and economic interests in the region. At this time, disadvantageous trade with Japan drove Korea's pre-modern economy into crisis.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "News on Countries: Italy Is Growing Day by Day (各國近事: 이태리가 날로 盛해지다)," *Hanseong sunbo* (27th March, 1884).

⁴⁸ Min Jong-muk, "Travelog (見聞事件)" (1881), cited in Mok, "Formation of Museums under the Japanese Colonial Rule and its Meaning," p.10.

⁴⁹ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (韓國史新論) (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990), pp.367-368.

However, the Korean government failed to reform its ineffective structure and give up its dependence on world powers. Donghak-Undong, a nationwide uprising of the peasants in 1894, which advocated anti-foreign intervention, ironically brought in more fully-fledged foreign intervention, making Korea the battlefield between China and Japan. Japan, which defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, now became the strongest power in East Asia, and secured a firm base for colonising Korea. Gabo-Gyeonjang, a drastic modernisation reform by the government in 1895, was conducted under the influence of the empire of Japan, paving a smooth way for political and economic penetration by Japan.⁵⁰

In 1893, the Korean government participated in the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In 1895, the government directed the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry to be responsible for exposition-related affairs. It also participated in the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900.⁵¹ However, it appears that those participations held a diplomatic, rather than commercial or industrial, purpose.⁵² In 1897, the Joseon dynasty changed the country's name to the 'Daehan Empire' in order to proclaim its full independence from China. Even if the fledgling empire strove to make itself rich and strong, it did not have enough leadership and capital to accomplish the task. A series of modern reforms in Korea could not help being connected to foreign intervention, which also gave some excuse for those who were obsessed with feudalistic privilege to obstruct reforms for the contemporary mission of national prosperity and military power, civilisation and enlightenment.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.406-419.

⁵¹ Kim Youngna, "'Universal Exposition' as an Exhibitionary Space: Korean Exhibition at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition, Chicago ('박람회'라는 전시공간: 1893년 시카고 만국박람회와 조선관 전시)," *Journal of History of Western Art* (서양미술사학회논문집) 13 (2000): 86-96.

⁵² It shows quite a big difference from the Japanese government which pushed forward an active industrialisation policy through participation in expositions in Western cities such as Paris (1867) and Wien (1873). The Japanese government held a domestic exposition before participating in the Weltausstellung 1873 Wien. This participation was connected to the setup of museums. See Seki Hideo, *The Birth of the Museum* (博物館の誕生) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005), pp.21-42.

This new empire, however, began to understand the importance of exhibitions in terms of the development of its industry and commerce. In 1902, it set up a temporary office for exposition-related affairs under the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, making the minister its chief.⁵³ In 1903, the Korean government participated in the fifth Japanese Domestic Exposition, and opened a display room for a temporary exhibition on 1st June 1903.⁵⁴ On 3rd July, the ministry was allowed to increase the number of permanent staff for the reason of increase of works such as the protection of displayed goods, inspection of manufacturing, and affairs related to foreign expositions.⁵⁵ In July 1904, the temporary office became a regular office called the Division of Industry Encouragement. The Museum for Encouraging Industry (勸業博物館) under the ministry was also noticed in newspapers as of 1906,⁵⁶ and the Seoul Commerce Counsel (京城商業會議所) established its display room in April 1907.⁵⁷ As can be seen in these efforts, the Korean government aimed at achieving a modern standard of economic development, and understood expositions and museums in this context. The government, however, did not manage to accomplish the goal, and the museum itself could not provoke an echo from Korean society.⁵⁸

The government's efforts and tactics were not enough to maintain its independence against the Japanese intention of colonisation. The empire of Japan, which had beaten Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, succeeded in depriving Korea of her diplomatic sovereignty and making Korea its protectorate in 1905, through successful negotiation with the United States and the United Kingdom. In February 1906, the

⁵³ *Gojong sillok* (高宗實錄, Annals of King Gojong) (12th July, 1902), Imperial Order no.10: the establishment of the Temporary Office for Expositions; Ministerial Ordinance no.39: Regulation on the Temporary Office for Exposition.

⁵⁴ "Display of Products," *Hwangseong sinmun* (2nd June 1903).

⁵⁵ *Gojong sillok* (3rd July, 1903), Imperial Order no.12: Amendment for the Establishment of the Temporary Office for Expositions.

⁵⁶ "Government Budget for the Year 1907," *Hwangseong sinmun* (26th December, 1906).

⁵⁷ "Opening of the Gallery for Displaying Goods," *Hwangseong sinmun* (30th March, 1907).

⁵⁸ Park Jeong-yang, who argued for the necessity of the museum in his report as an envoy to Japan in 1881, never put the idea into practice, although he became a prime minister of the government in 1895.

Japanese empire established the Residency-General, which paved a decisive way for the colonisation of Korea.

Likewise, exhibitions and museums could draw limited attention in terms of making the country rich and powerful rather than of searching for or displaying national identity by exhibiting material culture to the public. Indeed, exhibitions and museums were not considered relevant to building national identity, although a tradition of appreciating paintings and calligraphies had been cherished as an essential refinement of the elite in pre-modern Korean society. It was not until the Japanese ‘discovered’ and looted Korean cultural objects that Koreans recognised the potential of material culture in formulating collective identity and, by doing so, building a modern nation-state.

Establishment of the Imperial Household Museum and its colonial intention

(1) Establishment of the Imperial Household Museum

In June 1907, Emperor Gojong (高宗, r.1864-1907) sent his secret envoys to the 2nd Hague Peace Conference in order to appeal to the world powers about the unlawful intervention by the empire of Japan. However, they were never allowed to participate in this conference. Retributively, Japan forced the emperor to abdicate the throne and his son Sunjong (純宗, r.1907-1910) to succeed to it. In August 1907, Japan appointed a Japanese vice minister to every ministry of the Korean government for more systematic intervention in Korea’s internal affairs. From November that year, all the laws and regulations had to be screened by the Residency-General. Furthermore, the Korean army was disbanded on August 1907, and some of them launched a guerrilla war against the Japanese army in regions of the country. It was in this period that the Ministry of the Imperial Household discussed the establishment of a museum under the ministry.

In December 1912, Komiya Sabomatsu (小宮三保松), a Japanese vice minister of the ministry, described the establishment of the museum in the preface of the museum catalogue, as follows.

In winter 1907, when the new Emperor, now King Yi, was about to move to Changdeok-gung Palace from Deogsu-gung Palace, I supervised the improvement construction of Changdeok-gung Palace. When Prime Minister Lee Wan-yong and Minister of the Imperial Household Lee Yun-yong visited the site of construction on 4th November, they sincerely asked me whether all the facilities and equipment were fully furnished so that the new emperor could pursue his hobby in his new life after the move to this palace. I agreed with their opinion and told them that I would dwell on it and set up a plan. When on 6th November I explained the outline of my plan for establishing a museum, zoo and botanical garden, the ministers were pleased and agreed with me. So, I started selecting the location and the building design and collecting objects, and then established the Bureau of Royal Garden Affairs as the office of primary concern in September 1908.⁵⁹

The Residency-General intended to get rid of the ex-emperor Gojong's political influence on the new emperor Sunjong by isolating Sunjong from Gojong. Emperor in name only, Sunjong was moved to Changdeok-gung Palace on 13th November, 1907. Although Komiya recorded that he conceived the establishment of the museum, zoo and garden for the sake of the new emperor, in Komiya's plan they were not only for the emperor.

The Residency-General was already selecting the location of the museum before the Korean ministers met Komiya. According to Inoue Masazi (井上雅二), a Japanese chief of the Bureau of General Affairs under the Ministry of the Imperial Household, Seokjo-jeon, a Western-style stone building being constructed in Deogsu-gung Palace was designated as the museum building; first, however, buildings in Changdeog-gung Palace

⁵⁹ Yi Royal Household Museum, "Preface (緒言)," *Catalogue of the Yi Royal Household Museum Collection* (李王家博物館所藏品寫真帖), (Seoul: YHM, 1912). This preface, written by Komiya, is the only record which describes how the establishment of the museum was conceived, as no description has been found in the formal archive of those days.

were finally chosen.⁶⁰ The Residency-General was actually seeking for solutions to quell the public sentiment aggravated by its de facto seizure of power. One of the solutions was to show Koreans that Korea was developing as a modern nation thanks to Japan's help, as shown in an argument that the museum, zoo and botanical garden were developed as symbolic popular institutions with which to suggest that Korea was experiencing a new stage in its civilisation.⁶¹

In the same context, the Japanese Embassy in Korea had already examined the usefulness of the museum, one of the modern public institutions in assuaging Koreans' anger when Japan made Korea her protectorate in 1905. The embassy arranged a loan to the Korean government from the Japanese government so that the former could push forward some new projects to placate aggravated public opinion. The then Japanese minister to Korea, Hayashi Gonsuke (林權助), reported to the Japanese Foreign Minister that "generous actions need to be taken in order to stabilise the Korean society," and suggested that "some projects should be conducted with the loan from the Japanese government, such as construction or repair of state-council building and minister's offices, hospital, local school and museum." Although the Japanese government did not approve the loan for the museum, this example shows what the museum, in colonial policy, meant at that time.⁶²

⁶⁰ Inoue Masazi, "On the Establishment of Museum, Zoo and Botanical Garden (博物館及動植物園の設立に就て)," *Chosen* (朝鮮) 1:4 (1908): 68.

⁶¹ Both Park So-hyeon and Park Gwang-hyeon argued that the museum, zoo and botanical garden in Changgyeong-gung Palace were presented as modern hobbies for the public, propagandised as accomplishments resulting from the modernisation of Korea by Japan. See Park So-hyeon, "Hobby of Empire: the YHM and Museum policy of the Empire of Japan (제국의 취미: 이왕가박물관과 일본의 박물관 정책에 대해)," *Art History Forum* 18 (2004): 157; Park Gwang-hyeon, "The Colony Joseon and the Politics of the Museum (식민지 조선과 박물관의 정치학)," in *Politics of Museum* (박물관의 정치학), edited by Park Gwang-hyeon (Seoul: Nonhyeong, 2009), p.194.

⁶² Telegram from Hayashi to the Japanese foreign minister: no. 505 (6th December, 1905), no.508 (9th December 1905); telegram from the Japanese foreign minister to Hayashi: no. 309 (8th December, 1905), no.312 (12nd December, 1905), Documents of the Japanese Embassy in Korea (駐韓日本公使館記録).

In this regard, the Imperial Household Museum can be said to have been planned with broader strategic intentions, not just for the welfare of the new emperor. Park argues that Korean ministers and Emperor Sunjong played autonomous roles in the establishment and opening to the public of the Imperial Household Museum, but she overlooks the Residency-General's colonial intention.⁶³ As Lee points out, the museum, zoo and botanical garden of the Imperial Household were considered by the Japanese colonial authorities as one of the important accomplishments of the Residency-General.⁶⁴ In this regard, he argues that the Residency-General took the lead in establishing these modern institutions.⁶⁵ Furthermore, although Lee does not refer to it, Shimogoriyama Seiich (下郡山誠一), one of the early staff members of the museum, also mentioned, in his memoir written in 1966, that Itō Hirobumi (伊藤博文, 1841-1909), the then Residency-General, came up with the idea of museum, and that Komiya put the project into practice.⁶⁶ In his memoir, Gondo Shirōsuke (權藤四郎介), a Japanese official in attendance on the Emperor Sunjong (called King Yi after the annexation in 1910), from 1907 to 1920, also stated that Itō ordered the minister of the Imperial Household Min Byeong-seok and the vice minister Komiya to establish the museum and the Bureau of the Royal Garden.⁶⁷

⁶³ Park Gye-ri, "Imperial Household Museum and Royal Garden (제실박물관과 어원)," in *The 100 Year History of Korean Museums* (한국박물관 100 년사), edited by the Compilation Committee (Seoul: Sahoe pyeongnon, 2009), pp.34-38.

⁶⁴ Lee Sungsi, "Symbolic Spaces of the Joseon Dynasty and Museums (조선왕조의 상징 공간과 박물관)," in *Beyond the Myth of National History*, edited by Lim Ji-Hyun (Seoul: Humanist, 2004), pp.275-276.

⁶⁵ Lee, *ibid*, p.275.

⁶⁶ Shimogoriyama Seiich, "Reminiscences of Inauguration of the Yi Royal Household Museum and Changgyeongwon Royal Garden (李王家博物館昌慶苑創設懷古談)," 19th May, 1966, Study Group for Korean Issues, cited in Park, "Hobby of Empire," p.149, footnote 22.

⁶⁷ In his memoir, Gondo also said that Itō proposed to establish the museum, zoo and botanical garden and persuaded the Korean emperor, Sunjong, that the mercy of the emperor needed to be presented to the subjects through them. See Gondo Shirōsuke, *A Secret History of the Yi Royal Household* (李王宮秘史) (Seoul: Chosen shimbunsha, 1926), pp.22-23.

In January 1908, Korean newspapers reported that the Imperial Household Museum, zoo and botanical garden would be established,⁶⁸ and in February they reported a proposed location of the museum and its aim, which was to collect and display old books, artworks and contemporary rare objects in order to enhance people's knowledge.⁶⁹ These news reports confirm that these institutions were intended 'for the public,' not for the emperor. Although Gondo recollected in his memoir that Emperor Sunjong reproached his ministers for their blindness when they objected to the opening of the Royal Garden to the public, mentioning that the emperor should enjoy them together with his subjects, the emperor was emperor in name only, and did not have any power to object to the colonial policy. Indeed, Gondo had no reason not to pay merely lip service to the ex-emperor as his 15 year long serving secretary.⁷⁰

The Residency-General, which was intervening in internal and foreign affairs of the Korean government through the so-called system of 'government by vice-ministers,' needed to publicise its contributions to the accomplishments of the Korean government. It understood Koreans' expectations, and intended to persuade them into believing that Japanese intervention or help were indispensable to the development of Korea as a modern nation. One of their actions was the establishment of modern institutions, such as the museum, zoo and botanical garden, which could easily produce a positive response from Koreans.

From March to July 1908, the Ministry of the Imperial Household appointed three Japanese and one Korean staff members to undertake the task of establishing the museum.⁷¹ On 13th August, the ministry organised an office of the Bureau of the Royal Garden. According to the office, as of May 1909 the Division of Museum under the bureau was in charge of affairs relating to the collection, display and storage of

⁶⁸ *Daehan maeilsinbo* (大韓毎日申報, Korean Daily News) (9th January, 1908); *Hwangseong sinmun* (10th January, 1908).

⁶⁹ *Daehan maeilsinbo*, (12th February, 1908); *Hwangseong sinmun* (12th February, 1908).

⁷⁰ Gondo, *A Secret History of the Yi Royal Household*, pp.22-23.

⁷¹ *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (承政院日記, Daily record of the Grand Secretariat) (7th March, 29th May, 18th June and 15th July, 1908).

historical artefacts, works of art, craftworks and natural products.⁷² However, this museum soon identified itself as a fine art museum.⁷³ From January to August 1908, the museum collected 8,600 items of artworks, and in September 1908 finished displaying them in chronological order. The following record shows how the collection was formed.

From January 1908, preparations for establishing the museum began and all the efforts for securing collections were made. Just in time, many celadon, metal and stone works, from which are enough to understand the brilliant culture of the Goryeo dynasty, have been excavated from tombs, and are actively being traded in Seoul. We tried to collect those artefacts. Besides, we have purchased many excellent Buddha statues of Three Kingdoms Period and Unified Silla Period, and paintings, craftworks, historical and folklore artefacts of the Joseon Period. The total amount was about 8,600 items.⁷⁴

When the Yi Royal Household Museum (hereafter YHM) published the catalogue of the collection in 1912, it boasted of its collection of 12,230 items, which comprised Buddha statues, metal works, stone works, wooden works, lacquer ware, embroidery,

⁷² “Regulation on the Office of the Royal Garden” (18th May, 1909), Article 1.

⁷³ This museum reflected the Japanese Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo in its transitional stage, in which the transition to a fine art and archaeology museum was not perfect yet. This is why the museum collected 350 specimens of birds from 1909 to 1917. See the YHM, *List of Specimens of Korean Birds in the Custody of the YHM* (李王家博物館所藏朝鮮産鳥類目錄) (Seoul: Office of the Yi Royal Household, 1918), pp.1-3. Besides, this museum also collected some minerals and displayed ceramics and textiles which were made at the Governmental Hanseong [Seoul] Workshop of Artworks (漢城美術品製作所). See *Daehan mailsinbo* (29th July, 1910).

⁷⁴ Yi Royal Household Museum of Art (hereafter YHMA), “History of the YHMA (李王家美術館の沿革),” *YHMA* (unpublished manuscript, 1944), in *The 100 Year History of Korean Museums*, pp.262-263; YHMA, *Bulletin of the YHMA* (李王家美術館要覽) (Seoul: YHMA, 1938), pp.1-2.

textiles, ceramics, roof tiles, glass works, paintings etc.⁷⁵ This museum reaffirmed itself as a fine art museum by publishing 677 items in its collection catalogue, focusing on Goryeo celadon, Buddha statues since the Three Kingdoms Period, metal works and paintings of the Joseon Period.

On 30th October, 1909, a day before opening of the museum to the public, a garden party was held for both Korean and Japanese officials for commemorating the opening of the museum, zoo and botanical garden. On opening, the Bureau of Royal Garden sent notice to public schools for recommending that students visit. The regulations for visitors, including entry fees, were established. Before the end of the year, a free entry policy for Japanese and Korean students, and foreigners were advertised. According to *Hwangseong sinmun*, the museum was receiving about 300 visitors a day on average by the middle of November.⁷⁶ Now, Koreans got to experience modern institutions and encounter their material culture through the new medium of museum. The Royal Garden was also not just for Koreans but for Japanese and foreign visitors. The Japanese colonialists were conscious of eyes from both Japan and other world powers. The Residency-General, for example, showed off the the royal garden to large numbers of Japanese visitors and officials,⁷⁷ and in a visit in October 1909 by Horatio H. Kitchener (1850-1916), Field Marshal of the British Army, it found a distinguished and influential visitor.⁷⁸

In short, Japanese involvement put the Korean peninsula on the world map. Koreans had to accept a new order of civilisation that Japanese colonialists offered to them. The Japanese intended to dominate this new order and take the lead in it through colonial rule. Right after the annexation in 1910, the Government-General encouraged Korean

⁷⁵ YHM, *Catalogue of the Yi Royal Household Museum Collection*.

⁷⁶ *Hwangseong sinmun* (13th November, 1909).

⁷⁷ From November to December, 1909, Japanese soldiers visited the royal garden as a group. In May, 1910, 1,500 members of the Japanese Red Cross visited the royal garden. See *Hwangseong sinmun* (12th November, 23rd November and 7th December, 1909). Remarkably, Emperor Sunjong had to stop his visit to the garden owing to these visitors. See *Hwangseong sinmun* (21st May, 1910). *Hwangseong sinmun* could manage to report this issue, but it did not make any criticism on this.

⁷⁸ *Hwangseong sinmun* (30th October, 1909).

local officials and elites to organise tourist parties and tour around Seoul, allegedly a new centre civilised by colonial rule. These tourist parties visited modern institutions such as the museum and zoo, hospitals and industrial facilities etc. In the Japanese colonial context, this tour was not just for sightseeing, but a ritual to experience the opening of their eyes to a new civilisation. It was in this context that high officials of the Government-General met these tour parties and delivered his instructions to them, recommending beginning a new life under colonial rule.⁷⁹ In a sense, the Japanese colonialists were also constructing their new identity, that of the empire of Japan, which took pride in managing colonies like the Western world powers. The Imperial Household Museum was a component of the spectacle to show off the accomplishments and prospects of colonial rule.

(2) Narrative of the Imperial Household Museum within Japanese colonial policy

Following Japan's defeat of Ching China in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894, the Japanese elite became increasingly interested in the Korean peninsula. As debates on the conquest of Korea started in earnest in Japanese politics, this elite needed to broaden its knowledge of Korea as a target of colonisation. The Japanese government pushed forward with its so-called 'investigation of old customs (舊慣調査)' of Korea, which also included Korean material culture.⁸⁰ In 1902, Tokyo Imperial University entrusted Dr. Sekino Tadashi (關野貞, 1868-1935) with a survey of Korean traditional architecture, as well as ancient tombs, ceramics and Buddhist statues. His report played a major role in constructing the Japanese discourse on Korean material culture.⁸¹ In 1909, at the

⁷⁹ "Jinwi Tourist Party and Instructions from Directors of the Bureau of Finance and the Bureau of Police Affairs (振威館光團과 部長의 訓示)," *Mail sinbo* (16th April, 1912).

⁸⁰ Park Hyun-su, "The Japanese Imperialist Perspective on Korean Culture (한국 문화에 대한 日帝의 視角)," *Comparative Study of Culture* (비교문화연구) 4 (1998): 62-72.

⁸¹ Sekino is considered the first modern historian of Korean art, even if South Korean academics are reluctant to accept this because of his preoccupation. His representative writings include *Report on Investigation of Korean Architecture* (韓國建築調査報告) (Tokyo: 1904), *Architecture and Art of China* (中國の建築と藝術) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1938), *A History of Korean Art* (朝鮮美術史) (Keijo: Chosen sigakukai, 1932) and *Architecture and Art of Korea* (朝鮮の建築と藝術) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1941).

Korean government's request, he surveyed Korean architecture with his assistants, Danii Seiichi (谷井濟一) and Kuriyama Shunichi (栗山俊一), who would become specialists in Korean material culture through the colonial period.



Figure 1. The Yi Royal Household Museum. From *Catalogue of the YHM Collection* (李王家博物館所藏品寫真帖). Seoul: YHM, 1912.

Sekino, a historian of Japanese architecture, was the first scholar to survey Korean material culture using modern research methods. He seems to have been preoccupied with the political situation at a time when Korea was considered an uncivilised nation. He paid much attention to the accomplishments of ancient Korea, such as the Buddhist culture of the Three Kingdoms Period (before the 1st century BCE-668 CE) and the Unified Silla Period (676-935 CE), and celadon of the Goryeo dynasty (936-1392 CE). However, the culture of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE), which he thought had so many evils, could not be justly evaluated because of his preoccupied view. He asserted that the Joseon dynasty saw the decline and decadence of art and craft techniques in its

later period.⁸² In this colonial view, the decline of the dynasty was directly related to the decline of its culture, justifying Japan's political and academic intervention in Korea. His argument concerning the decline of the culture of the Joseon dynasty, being largely undebated, became a firmly established theory.⁸³

Likewise, it was these Japanese scholars who began to construct the foundation of a discourse on Korean material culture, creating their own perspective on the general stream of Korean traditional culture in the 1900s. It was also in this period that the Korean Imperial Household Museum was established and managed mainly by two Japanese staff members. Simogoriyama Seiich graduated in 1904 to the Department of the Museum from a temporary training school for teachers that had been installed at Tokyo Imperial University. His superior, Suematsu Kumahiko (末松熊彦), was once a customs official and took charge of the general and financial affairs of the Office of the Royal Garden.

Suematsu got involved in museum activities, contributed an essay on Korean art to a journal, and in 1914 surveyed celadon kiln sites of the Goryeo dynasty,⁸⁴ although the staff members of the Imperial Household Museum or YHM were not in a position to construct their own perspective in the Japanese academic world. Therefore, it is natural to reason that the opinion and advice of Japanese scholars such as Dr. Sekino played a major role in the exhibits in the museum. As shown in his essay, Suematsu just followed Dr. Sekino's opinion.⁸⁵ The vice minister of the Office of the Yi Royal Household, Komiya also mentioned in the 1912 catalogue that "what the Yi Royal Household

⁸² Sekino Tadashi, "On the Transition of Korean Arts (韓國藝術の變遷に就て)," *Chosen* 4:5 (1910): 43.

⁸³ Sekino concludes in his 1932 book that Korea did not have capability to maintain its independence from China and Japan, and that it had fallen into toadyism and the persistence of the old order, with its people losing their energy. See Sekino, *A History of Korean Art*, 1932, pp.3-7.

⁸⁴ Suematsu Kumahiko, "A Private Perspective on Korean Art (朝鮮美術私觀)," *Chosen and Manshu* (朝鮮及滿洲) 52 (1912): 16-20; *Maeil sinbo*, a bulletin of the Government-General reported about his survey in 1914. See *Maeil sinbo* (毎日申報) (3rd June, 1914). However, his survey cannot be seen as more than collecting pottery shards.

⁸⁵ Suematsu even stated that the Japanese should instil the Japanese idea of art into Koreans, because they have nothing in their minds. See Suematsu, *ibid*.

Private Museum has done is just to collect once dispersed diverse artefacts in one place. We cannot help postponing a systematic research on Korean art and crafts. This catalogue is just for providing scholars with resources for research as well as for meeting antiquarians' needs."⁸⁶ This meant that those who were in charge of that museum did not consider it their mission to conduct fully-fledged research on Korean material culture, as proved from the fact that this museum never employed any professional scholars until colonial rule ended in 1945.

This point is very suggestive in giving a hint about its relation to the Government-General Museum (hereafter GGM) established in 1915. Komiya described YHM as privately established in the preface of the 1912 catalogue.⁸⁷ In his view, YHM could not be the official museum of Korea, a colony of the empire of Japan. In this context, it was natural that the GGM, not the YHM, had the initiative to discover and interpret Korean material culture. In this regard, Japanese officials who worked at the Residency-General were also reluctant to describe the museum in the royal garden as imperial.⁸⁸

The reason why YHM continued to exist throughout colonial rule can be explained in the same context that the Yi Royal Household did. Although the Yi Royal Household had no political power under colonial rule,⁸⁹ its symbolic authority remained among Koreans. As shown at the March First Independence Movement, unleashed by the death of the former Emperor Gojong in 1919, the Yi Royal Household had some potential which could affect public opinion in Korea. The colonial authorities were fully aware of this situation. They needed to utilise the Yi Royal Household as a medium to attract Koreans' cooperation for their colonial rule, rather than to irritate Koreans with

⁸⁶ YHM, *Catalogue of the YHMuseum Collection*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Korean newspapers referred to the museum as the Imperial Household Museum in January 1908. However, Japanese officials called it the museum under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Imperial Household. See *Chosen* 1:4(1908): 68 and *Chosen* 3:5(1909): 31, cited in Park Gwang-hyeon, "The Colony Joseon and the Politics of the Museum," pp.192-193.

⁸⁹ Lee Yun-sang, "The Status of the Royal-Family of Joseon and the Role of the Office of the Yi Royal-Family during Japanese Occupation (일제하 조선왕실의 지위와 이왕직의 기능)," *Korean Culture* (韓國文化) 40(2007): 315-342.

improper treatment of the household. Korea's annexation by Japan was nominally explained as being in accordance with the Korean emperor's free will, and for the co-prosperity of the two countries. Ironically, the Yi Royal Household had to be a symbol of peace and co-prosperity of the two nations in the Japanese colonial view and for its prospects. It was in this context that YHM existed throughout the colonial rule, along with GGM.

The Korean encounter with 'national' material culture

In the pre-modern era, the Korean elites, who had considered it their ultimate goal in their private and political life to achieve virtuous ideals centred on a neo-Confucianist perspective of the world, were not familiar with the new epistemological category of material culture. Paintings and calligraphy had been respected as a means of cultivating the minds of the literati class, but architecture, sculpture and craft works were not considered as anything more than practical skills or techniques for daily life.⁹⁰ It was not until the encounter with the Japanese and Western powers that Koreans began to recognise that those fields could be categorised into 'national material culture'.⁹¹

Since the opening of Korean ports to Japan in 1876, the Japanese and foreigners who came to Korea began to demand exotic 'Korean' cultural objects, such as celadon masterpieces robbed from tombs of the Gaeseong area, the former capital of the Goryeo dynasty. Some Japanese immigrants or merchants realised that the trade in celadon paid much, and began to take the lead in grave robberies.⁹² The Korean government at its ebb tide, however, could hardly eradicate grave robberies. In this circumstance, antique

⁹⁰ Clunas argues that 'Chinese art' is quite a recent invention. According to him, "although the textiles, pieces of calligraphy, paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and other works date from a period of 5,000 years, the idea of grouping this body of material together and calling it 'Chinese art' has a much shorter history. See Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.9.

⁹¹ Korea established diplomatic relations with the US in 1882, the UK and Germany in 1883, and Russia and Italy in 1884.

⁹² From 1897 to 1909, 33 cases relating to the robbery of cultural objects were reported. 27 of them were by Japanese immigrants. See Lee Sun-ja, *Investigation Projects of Historic Remains in the Japanese Colonial Period* (일제강점기 고적조사사업 연구) (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 2009), pp.22-24.

shops managed by the Japanese began to emerge from 1895 and thrived in Seoul in the 1900s.⁹³ It was in this context that Korean material culture in the modern sense got to be known at home and abroad from the late-19th century.

With the Japanese taking the lead in grave robbery and the trading of celadon and other old objects, Koreans began to recognise the value of them from a new perspective. These old objects were simply considered as rare and peculiar objects at first, and then were even being recognised to have cash value. They were also expected to act as a stimulus to revive Korea's now backward industry. More importantly, they began to be considered as national things and even treasures that the Japanese were keen to steal from Korea, in the same context as how Japanese colonialism was intervening in Korean politics. This is the point where material culture came to have national implications, and the category of old fine arts started to have political and national meaning in Korea. In April 1910, four months before the annexation, *Daehan mailsinbo* published an article titled, "If treasures of the country disappear."

Treasures of a country are a means to preserve the glory of the country and a basis for cultivating the country's spirit. ... As Korea is one of the oldest countries, there are not a few treasures concealed in golden boxes and stone chambers as well as treasures buried countryside. These treasures are worth being respected, as if held up with two hands, by the entire nation. Those Japanese who strut along with long whips in our country are not satisfied with even all the interests of ours and touch treasures of our country. ... I am afraid that all the national treasures would be goods to display in Tokyo or antique shops in Osaka in Japan. Is it not sorrowful? ... I desperately hope that our brethren will pay attention to preserving our national treasures in order to preserve the glory of the country

⁹³ Kwon Hang-ga, "Art and Market (미술과 시장)," in *Art and City that Meet with Modern Age* (근대와 만난 미술과 도시), edited by the National Institute of Korean History (Seoul: Doosan dong-a, 2008), pp.205-211.

and cultivate the country's spirit.⁹⁴

Koreans had hardly thought that “old objects concealed in golden boxes and stone chambers as well as treasures buried countryside” would be national treasures with which to “preserve the glory of the country and cultivate country's spirit” before 30 years ago at the most. This means that Korean intellectuals, even if not many, began to give the name of their nation to their material culture, considering the transfer of cultural objects to Japan in the same context as the idea that the Japanese intended to usurp the national sovereignty of Korea.⁹⁵ In this regard, a national pride in cultural objects was expected to provide Koreans with a basis of hope for the nation's prosperity and independence.⁹⁶

This newspaper reported another article, entitled, “Lost in admiration of celadon displayed at the museum; Bear up! May the brightness glow on our nation.” This article showed that a few Koreans, despite the Japanese-biased perspective on Korean culture, began to find a nationalist implication and even pride in material culture. Furthermore, Korean elites began to worry about the Japanese hegemony over the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture. *Hwangseong sinmun* reported a contribution on Sekino's lecture as follows.

It is horrible to hear that a Japanese scholar gave a lecture. According to information [we] received, he mentioned that crafts works of Korean master artisans were extremely elaborate in the past, but, now there is nothing to see because of their gradual decline. What situation on earth is this? To make matters worse, Koreans can find no objects buried in the ground, while the Japanese find, study and give lectures on them. Indeed, I don't

⁹⁴ “If Treasures of the Country Disappear (나라의 보배 없어지는 한),” *Daehan mailsinbo* (12th April, 1910).

⁹⁵ Yoon Se-jin, “Birth of Art (미술의 탄생)” in *Art and City that Meet with Modern Age*, edited by the National Institute of Korean History (Seoul: Doosan dong-a, 2008), p.25.

⁹⁶ *Daehan mailsinbo* (25th March, 1910).

know why this has happened. I am dying of my grief.⁹⁷

He lamented that the Japanese scholars were monopolising the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture. However, he could not make an adequate counter-argument against Sekino's argument. Furthermore, his frustration deepened, because the semi-colonial status of Korea was also considered to be clear evidence supporting Sekino's argument. Under this circumstance, the Japanese discourse on material culture began to carry weight, and Koreans were inevitably influenced by the Japanese perspective. Koreans' frustration caused by their degradation into a semi-colony demolished the ground on which to evaluate and respect their existing values. The decline of the Joseon dynasty could be considered to justify Korea's annexation by Japan.

Within three months of the annexation in August 1910, colonial authorities forced all the Korean nationalist newspapers to discontinue, suggesting their oppressive colonial rule by military police in the new colony.⁹⁸ No more nationalist interpretations of Korean material culture would be reported in the press. Noticeably, classes on Korean history were also abolished at public primary schools one year after the annexation, and this policy ultimately forced private schools to give up such classes until September 1913 at the latest.⁹⁹ Now, national history, under colonial rule, meant Japanese national history.

⁹⁷ "Editorial Comment," *Hwangseong sinmun* (26th November, 1909). His lecture was also submitted to a journal published by the Japanese in Korea. See Sekino, "On the Transition of Korean Arts," *Chosen* 4:4 (1909): 34-37 and *Chosen* 4:5 (1910): 40-45.

⁹⁸ Robinson describes this situation as follows: "the first decade of Japanese rule has been called the dark period because of the comprehensive repression of political and cultural life in the colony." See Michael Robinson, "The First Phase of Japanese Rule, 1910-1919," in *Korea, Old and New: A History*, p.260.

⁹⁹ Jang Shin, "The System of Textbook Publication and Historiography during the Late Period of the Daehan Empire and the Japanese Colonial Period (韓末 日帝強占期の 教科書 發行制度와 歴史教科書)," *History Education* (歷史教育) 91 (2004), pp.12-16.

Under this situation, only Korean newspapers in exile in San Francisco and Vladivostok could report what Koreans thought of investigations of their historic remains by Sekino in the early 1910s as follows,

Taken again! The Japanese scholar Dr. Sekino excavated nine treasures made of jade and took them to Japan. It is said that Koreans lament when every old relic found is taken by the Japanese.¹⁰⁰

This article criticised the transfer of cultural objects to Japan by the Japanese and argued that this criticism was shared by Koreans. Thus, the agenda of the transfer of cultural objects was considered to be an effective and persuasive means to criticise the colonial rule, because it could be understood in the same context as the pillage of national sovereignty. But most Koreans in Korea under colonial rule could not hear their voice. Rather, *Maeil sinbo* repeatedly reported Sekino's accomplishments.

Dr. Sekino, who had departed from Tokyo on 16th September 1913, made a 69-day long investigation of Korean historical remains around Gangwon Province, North Chungcheong Province, and North Gyeongsang Province. He excavated three ancient tombs ... discovered excellent ancient relics at Choongju ... discovered two wooden buildings of the Goryeo dynasty at Buseok-sa temple under Soback-san Mountain. This is a great discovery in the history of Korean architecture because it has been said that there remained no buildings from before the Joseon dynasty.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *Gwonob sinmun* (勸業新聞, Industry encouragement news) (28th September, 1913); *Shinhan minbo* (新韓民報, New Korea news) (18th December, 1911; 14th November, 1912; 9th December, 1912).

¹⁰¹ "The Oldest Treasures of Korea (朝鮮最古의 寶物)," *Maeil sinbo* (1st January 1913).

Sekino, who was described as a figure of authority with a background of modern learning, was reported as a discoverer of Korean material culture as well. The official press also reported that Korean historical remains got to be preserved by virtue of colonial rule. For example, the first Governor-General Terauchi Masatake (in office from October 1910 to October 1916), pushed forward the conservation project of representative remains such as the Seokguram grotto (石窟庵) in Gyeongju, a cave temple with a magnificent stone Buddha statue made in the 8th century.¹⁰² In short, the Japanese colonialists were eager to position themselves as the discoverers and interpreters of Korean material culture. It could not help being the Japanese constructing the discourse on Korean culture, in their colonial view. This task was also a process of enlarging their identity as the empire that now got to manage a new colony, Korea. It was in this context that GGM was established five years after the annexation.

The Government-General Museum

(1) Establishment of GGM and its function

The Government-General Museum was established on 1st December, 1915. The only permanent building built for the Products Exhibition of 1915 for commemorating the fifth year of colonial rule was converted into the museum. This exhibition, which attracted 1,160,000 visitors from 11th September to 31st October, 1915, was held for the purpose of “contributing to the development of the future by displaying the accomplishments and prospects in all fields, such as education, civil engineering and economy etc., and making Koreans aware of things that would be expected in the future.”¹⁰³ This event at Gyeongbok-gung Palace in Seoul was also for making Koreans realise new order under colonial rule. The consistent narrative in this exhibition was

¹⁰² Gang Hui-jeong, *Essence of Nation, Representation of Joseon: A Discussion on Seokguram Grotto* (나라의 精華, 조선의 表象- 일제강점기 석굴암론) (Seoul: Sogang University Press, 2012), p.97.

Although local Koreans knew of the existence of the stone cave, the Japanese described their encounter with it as a discovery.

¹⁰³ Oda, “On the Exhibits of the Products Exhibition (共進會出陳品에 대하여),” *Maeil sinbo* (12th January, 1915).

both affirmation of the future, and negation of the present and past of Korea. Namely, this exposition was persuading Koreans into believing in a bright future under colonial rule by comparing the backwardness of Korea's present with the prospects that colonial authorities proposed.¹⁰⁴

This narrative was kept persistent in the display of Korean art and culture, but this display had another device, which was to compare the past and present of Korea. Colonial authorities knew that Koreans had quite a decent tradition of art and culture. As shown above, a strategy for solving this dilemma was to separate the present from the past. The criteria for items for inclusion in the display show this strategy.

The criteria are as follows. As there is nothing of note in the present of Korea, we are afraid that the gallery of fine arts is not true to the name. Therefore, we expect an effect of encouragement of future development by displaying excellent paintings, sculpture, ceramics and lacquer ware of the past.¹⁰⁵

It was the past of Koreans as well as their future under colonial rule which was compared to their 'backward present' in the gallery of fine arts. Colonial authorities intended to persuade Koreans into admitting that Koreans' present was inferior to their past, which could make them feel a sense of incompetency and shame and accept the present colonial rule. In this context, the 'brilliant' past of Koreans was also intended to be utilised as a medium to justify the Japanese occupation.

¹⁰⁴ Mok, "Formation of Museums under the Japanese Colonial Rule and its Meaning, p.43.

¹⁰⁵ Oda, *op. cit.*



Figure 2. The Government-General Museum. From NMK Archive.

The very fact that the art gallery was established in a permanent building was to preannounce that it would be converted to GGM, as the facilities of the 5th Domestic Exposition in Tokyo in 1899 was converted to the Imperial Household Museum after the event finished. In April 1915, the Government-General made a pronouncement on the establishment of a museum or library in Seoul, commemorating a grand ceremony of the Japanese Imperial Household.¹⁰⁶ It was because the colonial authorities needed their official museum to represent the material culture of Korea under the name of the Government-General that they established the second museum in Seoul, although YHM was under their control.

In this regard, it is clear that the colonial authorities maintained a critical mind on the existence of YHM, although they considered its political usefulness. In 1923, they inquired into a merger of the two museums in terms of the Yi Royal Household's fiscal austerity, and opened this matter to the press in order to check on the trend of public

¹⁰⁶ "Projects for Commemorating the Grand Ceremony (大禮記念事業)," *Maeil sinbo* (23rd April, 1915).

opinion.¹⁰⁷ This agenda showed up again in 1926, when the last Korean emperor, Sunjong (the so called King Yi), passed away. Colonial authorities followed the same procedure as in 1923. Their repeated attempts meant that they felt discontented because the representative public facilities like the museum, zoo and botanical garden were being managed by the Office of the Yi Royal Household. *Dong-a ilbo*, a nationalist newspaper, strongly objected to the merger,¹⁰⁸ and the Government General gave up on the merger, mentioning that “it is not adequate policy to arouse the antipathy of Koreans with the planned merger of two museums.”¹⁰⁹ This development showed that, from the colonial perspective, GGM had to be the only museum to have a status as an official museum to represent the identity of Korea, a colony of the Japanese empire. This was why the museum had to exist.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Governor-General Terauchi was much interested in the utilisation of museum projects and the investigation of historic remains.¹¹¹ He entrusted Sekino with launching an investigation into the historical remains of Korea right after the annexation. The establishment of GGM in December 1915 preannounced a fully-fledged investigation of historic remains in Korea. GGM took charge of every affair related to the investigation of historic remains as well as the management of the museum. GGM’s establishment was followed by the appointment of the Museum Commission in April 1916 and the proclamation of the Regulation for the Preservation of Historic Remains

¹⁰⁷ “The Office of Yi Royal Household’s Policy of Fiscal Austerity (李王職의 財政緊縮方針),” *Dong-a ilbo* (東亞日報, The Dong-a Daily) (17th February, 1923).

¹⁰⁸ *Dong-a ilbo* (2nd July, 1926).

¹⁰⁹ *Dong-a ilbo* (7th July, 1926).

¹¹⁰ The following remark by Yi Hang-gu (李恒九), the Minister of the Office of the Yi Royal Household symbolically explains the authority that GGM enjoyed throughout the colonial rule. “In 1938, the YHM changed its name to the Yi Royal Household Museum of Art in order to follow the trend of the era and to avoid competition with the Government-General Museum.” What he meant was that the YHM should not challenge or impair the authority of GGM in any way.

¹¹¹ Fujita Ryosaku, “Investigation of Korean Historical Remains (朝鮮古蹟調査),” *Preservation and Research of Ancient Cultures* (古文化の保存と研究- 黑板博士の業績を中心に) (Tokyo: Yoshikawakobunkan, 1953), pp. 67-88. Fujita (藤田亮策) was a chief of GGM from 1925 to 1938.

and Relics and the Regulation on Historic Remains Investigation Commission, each in July 1916. This commission planned a five year long programme for extensive investigation of remains and relics.¹¹² The following official document of the Bureau of Education of April 1925 shows the function of GGM and the investigation projects.

This project of the Investigation of Historic Remains and Relics began with the purpose of understanding the history and racial mix of this country, and in doing so, of illuminating its cultural relation with neighbouring nations by studying the ancient culture of the Korean peninsula. There have been remarkable accomplishments so far, as well as a great contribution to the colonial rule of Korea. This project is noteworthy because it made it possible to preserve historic remains and introduce Korean ancient culture to the world, as well as to cultivate local patriotism by harmonising the sentiments of local people. We are so proud that this scientific investigation and perfect report cannot be found even in Japan, and can be comparable with the archaeological projects of the Bureau of Archaeology in the British Government-General in India. ... If we give publicity to these accomplishments to the world and let people, domestic and foreign, know the cultural aspects of the rule of Korea, it won't be limited only to displaying Korea.¹¹³

This document was written at a point in time when the investigation projects were shrinking in the aftermath of the fiscal austerity of the Government-General of Korea in 1923-1924. This document is thought to have been written in order to persuade high officials and the financial office of the colonial government into recognising the usefulness of their projects. In this view, this document is helpful in understanding how

¹¹² The Government-General of Chosen, *Annual Report on Administration of Chosen 1930-32* (Keijo: 1932), pp. 80-82.

¹¹³ "Outline of the Government-General Museum and Investigation Project of Historical Remains and Relics (朝鮮總督府博物館及古蹟調査事業概要)," written by the Bureau of Education, the Government-General of Chosen (April 1925).

the museum and investigation project was explained and considered by Japanese colonial authorities. It also explains both the academic and political usefulness and effectiveness expected of the projects in the rule of the colony, and how the academic research was related to the real politics on the other side.

Likewise, these projects were intended for the stable rule of the colony as well as for gaining international recognition of Japan's effective colonial rule.¹¹⁴ A remarkable point in this view is that the projects were being proposed as an effective way of getting Koreans' consent to colonial rule and stabilising the Korean public's opinion. Another interesting point in terms of the colonial authorities' attitude towards Korean culture is that they wanted to localise it under the empire of Japan and consolidate as part of East Asian culture, hopefully presided over by Japan, so that Korean culture would not arouse any ethnic national feelings among Koreans. This is why the first Governor-General, Terauchi, pushed forward with these projects as part of the assimilation policy. Colonial authorities' consideration of cultural fields was an alternative, 'soft' way of controlling hegemony in the colonial society, although the oppressive colonial rule by military police and suppression of the press were the main methods that the Government-General relied on in the 1910s.

(2) Japanese colonial view of Korean history and GGM

When the empire of Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the Japanese colonialists nominally argued that the annexation was for the sake of the prosperity and peace of East Asia, even if they utilised a very oppressive form of domination by military police, until they confronted the large-scale resistance from Koreans in 1919. They wanted to justify their invasion by arguing that it was time for Japan to rouse Korea from her deep sleep. In other words, the Japanese colonialists regarded themselves as responsible for putting in place a new order of civilisation in an uncivilised country.¹¹⁵ In this regard, the

¹¹⁴ Fujita mentions that Terauchi was keen to present the report on the investigation of historic remains to important figures in Western countries. That is why these reports were published in a de luxe edition with English summary. See Fujita, "Investigation of Korean Historical Remains," pp.70-74.

¹¹⁵ In his memoir written after the liberation, Fujita Ryosaku was proud of the accomplishments of the Government-General in terms of the investigation and preservation of Korean historical remains and relics. He ignored Koreans' criticism of the exclusion of Koreans from those projects. He made no remark

colonial authorities tried to position themselves as discoverers and interpreters of Korean material culture, as the Japanese had constructed their cultural identity in the course of building their modern nation-state by introducing the concept of the arts from the Western world.¹¹⁶

When the Government-General organised the Historic Remains Investigation Commission (古蹟調査委員會) and the Museum Commission (博物館協議會) in 1916, most members were Japanese scholars and officials, although a few Koreans were included.¹¹⁷ From the Japanese colonial perspective, there were only a few Koreans who were entitled to participate in the commission, let alone Korean scholars. From its establishment, GGM took the lead in the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture throughout the colonial period, undertaking all the affairs related to the investigation, research and exhibition of historic remains and relics. The projects of the investigation and preservation of historic remains and relics, including exhibitions in GGM, were intended to find in the history of Korea and East Asia resources for constructing the logic of effective colonial rule and, by doing so, a new identity of Japan.

The most important key word of colonial rule in Korea from the early stage was assimilation. In July 1913, Terauchi stated that the fastest way to assimilate people of the new territory [into Japan] was to train them through education.¹¹⁸ He also

about this issue. See Fujita, *ibid*, pp.67-88.

¹¹⁶ A pioneer in the modern study of Japanese art history, Okakura Tenshin (岡倉天心, 1862-1913), argued that thought inside Japanese art, which has experienced numerous changes, is in the brain of the Japanese nation (大和民族). See Okakura, *Japanese Art History* (日本美術史) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001), p.11. Satō, Dōsin argues that the ideological foundation of Japanese art history is nationalist thought directly related to the emperor system. See Satō, *The Birth of Japanese Art* (日本美術誕生) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), p.22.

¹¹⁷ Lee Sun-ja, *Investigation Projects of Historic Remains in the Japanese Colonial Period*, pp.90-97; Kim In-deok, "The Government-General Museum (조선총독부박물관)," in *The 100 Year History of Korean Museums*, pp.108-113. The Korean members were Korean officials of the Government-General or members of Jungchuwon (中樞院), the Government-General's nominal advisory body, which comprised pro-Japanese Korean groups.

¹¹⁸ "Talk with Governor General Terauchi: Educational Policy (寺内總督談: 教育方針)," *Maeil sinbo* (22nd July, 1913), cited in Lee Ji-won, *The History of Korean Modern Cultural Thought* (한국근대문화사상사연구) (Seoul: Hyeon, 2007), p.92.

mentioned at an instruction for Japanese teachers in 1916 that the purpose of colonial rule was assimilation, which would be achieved by the effects of education.¹¹⁹ Even if the Government-General consistently emphasised the policy of assimilation, however, it realised that the task was never easy. An internal report forwarded to the Governor General written by a high ranking Japanese official at the Government-General in October 1910 admitted that Koreans' national consciousness was the toughest obstacle to the policy.¹²⁰ This report also proposed that a fundamental and perpetual task should be the study of Koreans' mentality, their history and national consciousness, rather than political policies. It is evident that the colonial authorities had difficulty in dealing with Korean 'national' consciousness, which began to thrive after the opening of the country and the imperial intervention of world powers.

Furthermore, Korean nationalist intellectuals convincingly argued that the Korean nation had been one nation since Dangun built the country, emphasising the shared, collective memories between Koreans. A colonial bureaucrat, a former high-ranking Japanese official who had worked in the 1910s, recalled their difficulty in Korea as follows.

Koreans don't think their culture is inferior to that of Japanese. Rather, they think that in the past they taught the Japanese. They think fondly of the past prosperity of their learning and technology. They regret that the Western way of materialistic progress introduced by the Japanese resulted in the corruption of public morale and the destruction of folklore. This is today's reality.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Shidehara Akira, *Discourse on Education in Korea* (朝鮮教育論) (Tokyo: Rokumekan, 1919), p.56, cited in Lee, *ibid*.

¹²⁰ "A Written Opinion on Edification (教化意見書) (8th October, 1910)," cited in Lee, *ibid*, pp.98-99.

¹²¹ Mojichi Rokusaburo, "Theory of Administration of Korea (朝鮮統治論)," *Documents of Saito Makoto* (齋藤実文書) (Tokyo: Komasholin, 1975), cited in Jeong Sang-woo, *Government-General's Compilation Project of History of Korea* (조선총독부의 朝鮮史 편찬 사업), unpublished PhD thesis, Seoul National University, 2011, p.87.

These difficulties reaffirmed the necessity of studying and utilising the history and culture of the colony. The basic logic of assimilation needed to be found in them by Japanese scholars, which was one of the most important demands from the colonial officials. It is in this context that in July 1916 the colonial authorities launched a project: the compilation of the *History of the Korean Peninsula* (朝鮮半島史). The purpose of this project was to “notify the mercy of annexation to assimilate Koreans psychologically.” This project specified two basic criteria by which to abide when writing this history. One was to “establish that the Korean and Japanese people were one nation;” the other was to “elaborate on the fact that Koreans could enjoy happiness by virtue of the prosperous age at last, even if Koreans had become poor and weak experiencing the rise and fall of the heroes and dynastic revolutions from ancient times to the Joseon dynasty.”¹²²

As shown in Terauchi’s remark, the colonial authorities argued from the beginning of colonial rule that both the Korean and Japanese nations had the same ancestry, and persisted in this view throughout colonial rule. Their argument was also accompanied by another augmentation: the incompetency and decline of the Korean nation. Now, the annexation and colonial rule could be explained and justified in a way that civilised relatives (Japanese) helped to civilise the uncivilised relatives who could never enlighten themselves. As Lee points out, scholars in Japanese official academic circles created this colonial view of history and tried to instil it into Koreans, presenting the heteronomy, stagnation and factionalism of Korean society as their evidence.¹²³

They argued that Korea, which is located on a peninsula, is inevitably ‘other-directed,’ and that this is why Korea had served China. Their argument went as follows: this heteronomy resulted in stagnation: and Korea’s characteristic factionalism, which can easily be found in the political history of the Joseon dynasty, worsened the stagnation, bringing about its ultimate decline.¹²⁴ They considered it their mission to

¹²² Government-General of Korea, *Essentials and Sequences of Compilation of the History of the Korean Peninsula* (朝鮮半島史編成ノ要旨及順序) (1916), pp.1-5, cited in Jeong, *ibid*, p.28.

¹²³ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (韓國史新論) (Seoul: Ilchogak Publishers, 1990), pp.1-3.

¹²⁴ *A Guide to Korean History* (朝鮮史のしるべ), compiled in 1936 by the Government-General, shows these perspectives on Korean history by Japanese historians.

evidence their arguments and persuade Koreans into believing them. In particular, they made efforts to prove the importance of the influence of Chinese civilisation on Korea in the fields of archaeology and art history. From the beginning, their conclusion was that Korea had been dependant on the Chinese culture, and its own culture had stagnated, especially in the Joseon Period.¹²⁵

On the other hand, the Japanese scholars put efforts into investigating of a Chinese commandery, Nangnang, which had been located in a north-western part of the Korean peninsula. The culture of this commandery, which was established in 108 BCE and existed until 313 CE, was offered as firm evidence to prove Korea's heteronomy to Chinese culture. Japanese archaeologists at GGM, which excavated many tombs from this period, misunderstood them, thinking that they had found a culture typical of China proper in the remains and relics of Nangnang.¹²⁶ Their assumption that this culture had brought civilisation to the Korean peninsula became a fixed theory, suggesting that no civilisation had existed before the influx of the civilization into Korea. Their arguments had the preconception that Korea should not have its own independent prehistoric culture.

The culture of Silla dynasty from the Three Kingdoms drew special attention, because its remains produced astonishing archaeological accomplishments such as splendid golden crowns and accessories. Archaeological achievements found in Gyeongju, the capital of this dynasty, contributed to boosting the authority of the Japanese scholars as discoverers and interpreters of Korean culture. Their authority also contributed to giving credibility to their unproven arguments, such as the supposed conquest of Silla by a Japanese empress in the 3rd century and the colonisation of Gaya, one of the ancient polities, located between Silla and Baekche, by ancient Japan in the 6th century.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Sekino is a representative Japanese scholar who stuck to these arguments. See Sekino, *A History of Korean Art*, pp.3-7.

¹²⁶ Oh Yeong-chan, *A Study on Nangnang* (낙랑군연구) (Seoul: Sagyejeol chulpansa, 2006), pp.15-27.

¹²⁷ This argument, on the conquest by this Japanese empress called Empress Zingu (神功皇后), was included in school textbooks in Korea throughout the colonial rule. See Government-General of Chosen, *National History for Primary School Children* (普通學校國史: 兒童用) (1922).

Likewise, archaeological investigations were actively utilised to prove the colonial view of history, and GGM was in the centre. GGM utilised human resources from the Japanese academic world. Most researchers were graduates from Tokyo Imperial University or Kyoto Imperial University. GGM pushed forward with a series of excavation projects throughout Korea for fulfilling its academic interests and ambitions. It was by the hands of these Japanese academics that GGM published the 15 volumes of the *Catalogue of Historical Remains of Korea* (朝鮮古蹟圖譜) between 1915 and 1930, the 18 volumes of the *Report of the Research of Antiquities* (古蹟調査報告) between 1916 and 1934, the 7 volumes of the *Special Report of the Service of Antiquities* (古蹟調査特別報告) from 1919 to 1929, the 2 volumes of the *Catalogue of Historical Remains and Treasures of Korea* (朝鮮古蹟寶物圖錄) and the 17 volumes of the *Museum Exhibits Illustrated* (博物館陳列品圖鑑) between 1926 and 1943.¹²⁸

This approach to the Korean material culture by these Japanese researchers was connected to a general direction or trend in the Japanese academic world. Basically, Korean and Chinese culture was used as medium for understanding Japanese culture by them.¹²⁹ The relation between Korea and Japan was also important to them in the same context. The above official document written in 1925 explained that GGM's achievements were that "it made it possible to study the origin of Japanese art, of which artists all over the world were full of admiration now."¹³⁰

On the other hand, the Japanese scholars kept a sense of rivalry over Western scholars, and wanted to take the lead in the discovery and interpretation of the art of the East. That they were delighted to excavate the Nangnang remains was because they thought they could approach Chinese culture faster than Chinese scholars could, let alone Western scholars. As Japan aspired to strive for supremacy in the East and create

¹²⁸ Kim In-deok, "The Government-General Museum," pp.126-127.

¹²⁹ In its brief booklet for audiences, GGM explained its function as follows. "By conducting a fundamental investigation of the culture of Korea, which is located between Japan and China and has a special character, this museum is willing to study the intimate relation between Japan and Korea, promote the moral culture of Korea, and make efforts to preserve and encourage it." See Government-General of Chosen, "A Brief Introduction of the Government-General Museum (博物館略案内)," *Bulletin of the Government-General Museum of Chosen* (博物館報) 1:1(1926): 3.

¹³⁰ Government-General, *ibid*, April 1925.

its own modernity by overcoming the Western modernity from the late-1930s,¹³¹ Japanese scholars also wanted to grasp academic hegemony in the East and compete with Western scholars. In this regard, the Japanese scholars were collaborating with Japanese politicians by way of their academic accomplishments.

Koreans' response to the Japanese monopoly of the discourse on Korean material culture

To oppose Japanese scholars' control of the discourse on Korean culture, most Korean scholars focused on Korean history and language, where they thought they had competitive advantage over the Japanese. Following this tendency from the 1890s, Korean historians put stress on Dangun, and made efforts to prove its historical existence.¹³² Dangun was considered by Korean historians and journalists to be a decisive ground on which the Korean ethnic nation should maintain its independence.¹³³ It seems that the instilling of nationalist consciousness through historical studies was considered to be more effective to compete with the Japanese rather than through study of material culture, where a modern way of research and academic background was needed. This explains why only a few Korean scholars approached Korean material culture during the colonial period.

Furthermore, the Japanese perspective on Korean culture was being diversified as shown in the case of Yanagi Muneyoshi (柳宗悦, 1889-1961). This Japanese art critic

¹³¹ Hong Seon-pyo, "Modern Era and Modernity in Korean Art History (한국미술사에서의 근대와 근대성)," in *Modern Era and Modernity in East Asian Art* (동아시아 미술의 근대와 근대성), edited by Hong Seon-pyo (Seoul: Hakgoje, 2009), p. 421.

¹³² Lee Ji-won, *The History of Korean Modern Cultural Thought*, pp.64-70.

¹³³ In 1915, two Korean intellectuals, Park Eun-sik (朴殷植) and Eo Yun-jeok (魚允迪), managed to publish books on Korean history, putting emphasis on a Dangun-centered perspective of history. In particular, an exiled historian, Park, in his book published in China, *The Tragic History of Korea* (韓國痛史), argued with the Japanese scholars who emphasised the ancient relation between Japan and Korea. His book was smuggled into Korea, and the colonial authorities, who were afraid of its influence, put forward their own compilation of Korean history. See Jeong Sang-woo, *Government-General's Compilation Project of History of Korea*, pp.13-16.

also participated in the creation of another discourse on Korean material culture. Yanagi took a different stance towards the culture of the Joseon dynasty. He made a positive estimation of the culture of the Joseon Dynasty and tried to search for the period's own beauty. In 1922, contributing an essay to a Japanese journal published in Tokyo, he publicly objected to the destruction of Gwanghwa-mun Gate, the main gate of the Gyeongbok-gung Palace, and he established the Museum of Korean Ethnic National Art (朝鮮民族美術館) at one of the buildings of the palace in 1924.¹³⁴ His view showed that the Japanese discourse on Korean material culture was evolving and that Japanese intellectuals were strengthening their dominance over the entire discourse. The result was that Koreans fell behind, and were excluded from, this discussion.

Moreover, Yanagi's view on Korean culture was preoccupied with the contemporary situation in which Korea was under colonial rule. In his essay, he defined the beauty of Korean art as a beauty of pathos, and Korean history as a history of hardship.¹³⁵ His definitions and generalisations, which can be considered as forming an argument about the characteristics of a nation's art, also influenced Korean art historians such as Goh Yu-seop (1905-1944) and the first generation's art historians after liberation, who were strongly influenced by Goh.¹³⁶

Yanagi's activities in Korea were possible thanks to a drastic change of policy by the colonial authorities, who were astonished by the March First Independence Movement

¹³⁴ Yanagi Muneyoshi, "For the Sake of a Joseon Architecture Which Would Be Doomed to Disappearance (失はれんとする一朝鮮建築のために)," *Kaizo* (改造, Construction) (June 1922). This article was also contributed to *Dong-a ilbo*. See *Dong-a ilbo* (24th August to 28th August, 1922).

¹³⁵ Yanagi Muneyoshi, "Korea and Its Arts (朝鮮とその藝術)," *Sincho* (新潮, New tide) (January, 1922).

¹³⁶ The first generation includes Hwang Su-yeong (1918-2011), Jin Hong-seop (1918-2010) and Choi Sunu (1916-1984). Kim Youngna, "A Luminary of Korean Art History, Go Yu-seop: His Role and Position (한국미술사의 태두 고유섭: 그의 역할과 위치)," *Study of Art History* (미술사연구) 16(2002): 515. Yu and Lee also point out that Yanagi's view on Korean art was based on a fatalistic view of Korea. See Yu Hong-jun and Lee Tae-ho, "100 Years of Research in Art History (한국미술사연구 백년)," *Searching for New Horizons of Korean Art History* (한국미술사의 새로운 지평을 찾아서) (Seoul: Hakgojae, 1997), pp.19-22.

in 1919.¹³⁷ The Government-General adopted a kind of appeasement policy which was publicised as ‘cultural rule (文化政治)’ by the authorities themselves.¹³⁸ The representative change was to permit the creation of Korean nationalist newspapers and magazines from 1920. Under this situation, diverse voices began to come out from Koreans. A Korean journalist’s response to Yanagi’s plan of the establishment of a museum of Korean art is interesting. He mentioned that Koreans entrusted Yanagi with the task of collecting and studying Korean art works – a task which they should undertake. He added: why could they not concentrate on the task? Stating that “Koreans have more urgent tasks than art,” and for this reason they entrusted Yanagi with the task of collecting and studying art works “as it needs wealth and professional knowledge.”¹³⁹

Even positive estimates on the investigation and preservation of historic remains and relics were remarked upon by a renowned Korean intellectual and journalist, Choi Nam-seon, in 1922, who mentioned that “I am totally unsatisfied with everything related to the colonial rule, but the only thing to be praised is the investigation project.” He estimated that they were accumulating modern efforts towards the research of historical remains and the preservation of artefacts.¹⁴⁰ *Dong-a ilbo* also reported that it was noteworthy that historical facts were being made clear through discoveries and research by Japanese scholars.¹⁴¹ In Korea, however, it was not easy for the Japanese colonialists to imbue themselves with the same authority as the discoverers and interpreters of past monuments in the colony, as Western colonialists had in their colonies in Southeast Asia, where diverse ethnic groups and languages coexisted.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ According to Robinson, the Japanese reaction to this nationwide movement was arrests, beatings and even village burnings. See Robinson, “The First Phase of Japanese Rule, 1910-1919,” p.279.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.283-289.

¹³⁹ “After Viewing the Exhibition of Ceramic of the Yi Dynasty (李朝陶磁器展覽會를 보고),” *Dongmyeong* (東明, Eastern Light) 7(15th October, 1922).

¹⁴⁰ Choi Nam-seon, “Lectures on Korean History and Folklore (朝鮮歷史通俗講話開題),” *Dongmyeong* 1:3 (17th September, 1922).

¹⁴¹ “Japanese Scholars’ Study on Korean Historical Remains (朝鮮古蹟研究-日本學者間),” *Dong-a ilbo* (7th December, 1922).

¹⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*

Although Koreans were surprised at, and ashamed of, the fact that Japanese discovered and interpreted Korean material culture on Koreans' behalf, Koreans soon began to realise that those monuments were their own cultural heritage without any doubt.

On the other hand, the accomplishments derived from the investigation and excavation projects by GGM contributed to disseminating a nationalist implication of the cultural objects. Three golden crowns excavated from royal tombs of Silla dynasty in the 1920s started to grow in importance as representative cultural objects of the Korean ethnic nation, because of their uniqueness and beauty.¹⁴³ It was clear that the Japanese authorities secured their status as discoverers of Korean material culture, but cultural objects excavated in Korea also came to have the potential to stimulate Koreans' nationalist sentiments. Nationwide touring magic lantern lectures on Silla's cultural remains (新羅古蹟 幻燈寫眞 巡廻映射), which were organised for collecting donations by two private schools, Gyeonam School (啓南學校) and Nammyeong School (南明學校) in the Gyeongju area, were a good example showing this possibility. Korean newspapers contributed to imbuing this nationalist pride in Koreans through cultural remains by reporting on the lectures.¹⁴⁴ These lectures, which toured from 1923 to 1926 visiting almost every big city in Korea, such as Seoul, Daejeon, Pyongyang and Incheon, as well as some small counties, introduced the cultural remains of Gyeongju to interested Koreans. As shown in an editorial of *Dong-a ilbo*, which stated that "we, Korea, did not have Gyeongju, how could we prove and say indigenous culture?" the cultural remains

(London: Verso, 2006), pp.163-186. As shown in comment made by a colonial bureaucrat, Mojichi, on Koreans' pride in their culture (See footnote 116), the Japanese colonial authorities had difficulty in securing their authority in terms of the history issue, because Koreans, who had strong collective identity based on long history, soon began to take pride in their past monuments, which the Japanese allegedly discovered.

¹⁴³ Three Golden crowns were excavated by GGM in 1921, 1924 and 1926 respectively.

¹⁴⁴ *Dong-a ilbo* (7th July, 15th July, 16th July, 10th August, 15th October, 23rd October and 19th November, 1923, 10th July and 10th August 1924, 24th September, 2nd October, 24th October, 28th October, 28th October, 30th October and 7th December 1925, 16th January 1926) and *Chosun ilbo* (15th August, 29th October and 23th November, 1923, 5th January, 8th July and 5th August, 1924, 4th September, 1925)

of Gyeongju were emerging as a pride of Koreans.¹⁴⁵ When a robbery incident at Gyeongju branch museum of GGM took place in 1927, the stolen cultural objects were described as ‘national treasures’ even in the official newspaper of the Government-General.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, if those monuments and artefacts were not believed to be properly preserved by the colonial authorities, this could arouse nationalistic anger among Koreans. Nationalist newspapers fiercely criticised the real conditions of the preservation of cultural remains. The main point of their criticism was about the colonial administration that fell behind its own standard. The newspapers also demanded more modern facilities, such as a museum and library in Seoul.¹⁴⁷ They emphasised their argument that the poor preservation of remains and discrimination in their preservation were effective ways to attack the policy foundation of assimilation of the colonial authorities. Interestingly, they focused criticism on the preservation of Dangun-related remains, and fiercely called on the colonial authorities to account for the neglect of those remains. In December 1926, Choi Nam-seon contributed an article titled “Key Factor of the Preservation of Historical Remains (古蹟保存의 要諦).” at *Dong-a ilbo*, focusing on the preservation of those Dangun remains.¹⁴⁸

The notion of Dangun as a forefather has a most profound psychological background in Koreans’ life. ... Times have changed. Thought has opened as well. They (the Japanese) have realised that they should not ignore our national existence and traditional ethnic national religion. ... Excluding historical remains related to Dangun is a great disrespect, as well as a great stupidity.

¹⁴⁵ “On the Preservation of Historical Remains and the Related Act (古蹟保存과 法規에 대하여),” *Dong-a ilbo* (29th November, 1929).”

¹⁴⁶ “National Treasures of the Silla Period Stolen (新羅時代國寶盜失),” *Maeilsinbo* (13th December, 1927).

¹⁴⁷ “Social Service of Keijo City: Urgency in the Establishment of Cinema, Library and Museum for Students (경성부내의 사회사업: 위선 학생을 위하여. 활동사진관 박물관 도서관을 설립함이 가장 긴급한 일이라),” *Dong-a ilbo* (1st May, 1921).

¹⁴⁸ *Dong-a ilbo* (4th December, 1926, 5th December, 1926, 6th December, 1926).

Although Choi began his above article with a compliment to the Japanese efforts to preserve the remains, what he wanted to argue was that their investigation and preservation never focused on the remains which Koreans had cherished. The most important thing, in his view, was that the key factor of the preservation of the historical remains should be to arouse national consciousness from the notion of Dangun as a forefather. His point of view also applied to excavation projects at Pyeongyang, the old capital of Gojoseon, the first country in the history of Korea, and the Nangnang commandery of Han (漢) China. Han China had conquered the Gojoseon state in 108 BCE and installed the commandery. The Japanese archaeologists were excited only by the fact that they were approaching the Chinese culture and were reluctant to pay attention to its relation to the aboriginal culture of the Gojoseon state. However, Korean nationalists could not accept that the ancient remains of the Pyeongyang area were not those of Gojoseon. The Japanese scholars' biased view was also confronted by an argument made by the Korean nationalist wing.

The great historical remains around the Pyeongyang area are our treasures in which we can take pride towards the world. ... However, the Japanese claim that those remains are all from the Nangnang era, and deny that they are our ancestors' heart. I lament that no Korean is willing to, or able to, argue with them. ... Although other nations discover and take possession of treasures which our ancestors had hidden with their prudence, these idiots do not even know that they are stolen. They are called Koreans.¹⁴⁹

This article, titled "A Shameful Stigma, the Nangnang Excavation Team," pointed out that no Koreans were able to argue with the Japanese scholars, arguing that Koreans had had their history stolen because the Japanese monopolised the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture. Although Korean nationalist historians strove to compile Korean history for instilling national consciousness by emphasising the role

¹⁴⁹ *Dong-a ilbo* (16th September, 1925).

of Dangun, it was actually not possible to contradict the Japanese interpretation of Nangnang culture through archaeological investigations. Criticism by the Korean journalists actually ended in doubt about the academic truthfulness of the Japanese investigation. What they were keen to secure was the discovery and interpretation by Koreans. The following article of *Dong-a ilbo* as of 1926 shows this expectation.

To preserve even the remains of primitive men is because it is considered as indispensable task of the government in that it is one factor of the spiritual solidarity of nation and has academic values in the fields of history, archaeology and the humanities. However, the authorities cannot be thought to have the sincerity to preserve the national spirit or to give publicity to the value of Korean cultural history. We are just relieved to see a part of Gyeongju and Pyeongyang preserved by their hands. The preservation of the genuine meaning of historical remains will have to wait for Koreans' strenuous efforts and independence.¹⁵⁰

The reality was unlike his expectation. Korean intellectuals never did have competitiveness compared to the Japanese. They did not have the modern academic background for studying Korean material culture, and only a few Koreans started their careers as art historians or researchers on prehistory either in Korea or abroad from the 1930s.¹⁵¹ The objective situation of the country's ruination was making Koreans

¹⁵⁰ "About the Preservation of Historical Remains (史蹟의 保存에 對하여)," *Dong-a ilbo* (13th November, 1926).

¹⁵¹ Dou Yu-ho (都宥浩, 1905-1982?) obtained a doctoral degree in archaeology from Vienna University in 1935. He researched at the Prehistory Institute of the University until 1939. By 1940 he had joined the National Museum of Munchu Empire, a puppet state under the Japanese empire. In 1946 he chose to go to North Korea. Han Heung-su (韓興洙, 1909-1953?) also studied at Vienna University. Han obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Fribourg in 1940, and worked for the Vienna Ethnological Museum in 1941. After staying in Prague from 1943 to 1947, he also went to North Korea. See Han Chang-gyun, "Dou Yu-ho and Han Hung-soo: Their Activities and Academic Debates between 1948 and 1950 (도우호와 한흥수: 그들의 행적과 학술 논쟁, 1948-1950)," *Journal of the Korean Archaeological*

themselves undervalue their history and culture. In this circumstance, even Korean intellectuals were internalising the discourse by the Japanese on Korean material culture. Although nationalist newspapers continued to criticise the Government-General for its cultural heritage policy, such criticism tended to remain a means for pointing out the general maladministration of the colonial authorities. Furthermore, as Korean researchers' careers after obtaining academic degrees showed, there was a high barrier for entering the Japanese academic world. In this context, those criticisms did not evolve into fully-fledged and persistent interests and professional researches.¹⁵²

Colonial policy on museums and cultural objects during the war period

Ever since the empire of Japan invaded Manchuria to the north of Korea in September 1931, the empire, including its colony, Korea, was reorganised on a war footing. This political situation gradually gave this colony an importance as a logistical - human and material - base. In 1935, the colonial authorities launched the so-called *Simjeon* (literally 'a field of heart,' 心田) Cultivation Movement (心田開發運動), a public campaign to give people spiritual and practical norms on a war footing. This official campaign was intended to cultivate subjects loyal to the interests of the Japanese empire and emperor, and for attracting a more effective mobilisation for the war. On the 20th June, 1935, *Mail sinbo* published an article titled "Opening Service of the Museum as a Side Operation of *Simjeon* Cultivation Movement (心田開發 側面工作으로 博物館을 開放奉仕)," which showed their intention to politically utilise the museum and cultural objects.¹⁵³

Society (韓國考古學報) 87 (2013): 85.

¹⁵² A Korean teacher who visited the Government-General Museum expressed both ethnic national pride and a sense of shame in terms of the situation. See *Dongmyeong* (東明) 2:22 (27th May, 1923):18 and *Dongmyeong* 2:23 (3rd June, 1923): 18. Like his contribution, most essays written in the 1920s by Korean intellectuals and students after visiting the museums include both sentiments.

¹⁵³ It is also understood in the same context that, in the office of the Government-General, all the affairs relating to cultural objects and remains were transferred to the Social Affairs Division in 1932 and to the Social Education Division again in 1936.

The Museum Week (博物館週間), which had already commenced across the empire from November 1933, also shows that these actions taken by the colonial authorities were for the purpose of persuading people into recognising cultural objects and historical remains as a communal ground for the national solidarity of the empire.¹⁵⁴ The Preservation of Treasures, Historical Remains, Famous Places and Natural Monuments of Chosen Act (朝鮮寶物古蹟名勝天然紀念物保存令) was also established in August 1933.¹⁵⁵ In this Act, the criteria for classifying the most prestigious treasures were clearly stipulated. By the end of the colonial period in 1943 (the last year the registry was updated), the Government-General's registry totalled 591 items, which were divided into four categories: 340 treasures; 101 historical remains; 4 famous places; 146 natural monuments.¹⁵⁶ An interesting thing is that the colonial authorities considered the registration of treasures itself as a practice for the unity of two peoples, Japanese and Koreans. In this regard, an article published on 1st December, 1938 was titled "Reinforcement of Harmony of Japan and Korea through Treasures and Historical Remains, New Registration of 24 Items!"

On 10th September, 1935, the Government-General also established the Penchant Day for Historical Remains (古蹟愛護日). It was another attempt to utilise cultural heritage for national unity. The following article shows its purpose.

The *Simjeon* Cultivation Movement is developing into several forms, one of which is the Penchant Campaign for historical remains. Historical remains and famous historic places are precious

¹⁵⁴ According to the prospectus for the Museum Week (全國博物館週間趣意書) of the Japanese Association of Museums (日本博物館協會), which organised this annual event, museums had to make it their responsibility to play a part in overcoming national hardship and facilitating a national reconciliation and unity. See *Museum Studies* (博物館研究) 6(10), 1933. The reason why the first week of November was selected for the Museum Week was in order to commemorate the birthday of Emperor Meiji. This event included a discounted admission fee, special exhibitions, lectures and film screenings. See *Dolmen* (ドルメン) (December 1933): 61.

¹⁵⁵ Official Gazette of the Government-General (朝鮮總督府官報) (9th August, 1933), extra edition (號外).

¹⁵⁶ Pai Hyung Il, "The Creation of National Treasures and Monuments," p.79.

resources for studying history, as well as reservoirs for academic research. This campaign is for the purpose of cultivating peoples' respect for the past and aesthetic feeling as well as enhancing local patriotism and promoting Eastern culture. This is why the Government-General has been encouraging people to have respect for historical remains and famous historic places by observing the Penchant Day for Historical Remains since its establishment on 10th September, 1935.¹⁵⁷

These government-sponsored events included radio broadcasting, distribution of posters at central government level, lectures and talks by private organisations, the prevention campaign against tomb robbery and instructions for students at a local level. A series of events related to the Penchant Day for Historical Remains on a national scale was for instilling a sense of unity as subjects of the empire and pride in the Eastern culture represented by Japan. Ultimately, all of these actions were intended to appease the Korean people and instil in them the notion that Japan and Korea were one ethnic nation.

On the other hand, the colonial authorities didn't forget to utilise YHM in terms of the promotion of the notion. As discussed above, the existence of the Yi Royal Household and its collaboration with the authorities was an effective means to justify policies executed by the colonial authorities. In 1933, YHM launched permanent exhibitions of Japanese 'modern' fine arts at Seokjo-jeon in Deoksugung Palace.¹⁵⁸ This should be explained in terms of its political intention that YHM, not GGM, began to display the Japanese art under the name of the Yi Royal household. What the colonial authorities wanted to show Koreans through the exhibition of Japanese art is thought to have been an image of harmony and mutual understanding between the Japanese and the Koreans. Now, the colonial authorities were expecting that the Yi Royal household functioned as a symbol of the notion that Japan and Korea were one ethnic nation.

¹⁵⁷ *Maeil sinbo* (3rd September, 1936).

¹⁵⁸ *Maeil sinbo* (26th February, 1933).

In 1938, YHM introduced another spectacle by launching a permanent exhibition of ancient Korean art at a newly built Western style building right next to Seokjo-jeon. What was intended was harmony between Korean and Japanese art, the Korean and Japanese ethnic nations, old and new. A poem introduced on the first page of a YHM leaflet published in 1941 symbolically showed what the museum and the colonial authorities wanted through those exhibitions.¹⁵⁹ The poem, which was written by two Korean and two Japanese high ranking officials in 1909 right before the annexation, commemorated the harmonious coexistence of the two nations and actually expected the annexation. However, it was another reality that the museum had to change its name to the Yi Royal Household Museum of Art in order not to be seen to challenge the authority of GGM, as shown above.

This was the very limit and function of YHM, which was once praised as a pride of the Korean ethnic nation by *Dong-a ilbo*.¹⁶⁰ The family of the Yi Royal Household could hardly intervene in the management of YHM and the Office of the Yi Royal Household (李王職), which was nominally included in the Japanese Imperial Household and was actually supervised by the Government-General. Either the minister or vice-minister of the Office of the Yi Royal Household was always a Japanese official. The Yi Royal Household, as well as YHM, was meaningful for the Japanese colonial authorities because it maintained some authority over Koreans, and in that sense, the Yi Royal household reminded Koreans of their consent to the annexation.

The political intention of the cultural heritage policies became conspicuous with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in July 1937. Even *Dong-a ilbo*, one of the nationalist newspapers, reported that the Penchant Day for Historical Remains was for putting emphasis on the preservation of these remains, and the undeniable fact that Japan and Korea were one nation.¹⁶¹ On 10th September, 1937, Shiobara Tokisaburo (鹽原時三郎), the Japanese director of the Bureau of Education at the Government-

¹⁵⁹ *A General Survey of Yi Royal Household Museum of Art* (李王家美術館要覽) (Seoul: 1941).

¹⁶⁰ *Donga ilbo* (11th April, 1928).

¹⁶¹ *Dong-a ilbo* (26th August, 1937).

General, mentioned in his radio address commemorating the Penchant Day for Historical Remains as follows.

Today is the Penchant Day for Historical Remains, which especially emphasises the spirit of preserving precious historical remains that we, Korea, have bequeathed for thousands of years. This is why the Government-General has observed this day for a couple of years. This campaign should not end in only the preservation of materialistic remains. These historical remains prove the notion that Korea and Japan are one nation. By realising and cherishing this notion, I think we should cultivate a faith as inhabitants of this peninsula, as well as loyal subjects of the empire of Japan. By doing so, we should go one step further and complete our mission as a leading country in the East.¹⁶²

Likewise, what the campaign meant became clear in this totalitarian and militarist situation. From October 1937, right after that day, the colonial authorities began to propagate among Koreans a slogan called “Pledge of Imperial Subjects,” whose first sentence was, “we should repay the emperor’s country with loyalty as we are subjects of the empire.” Furthermore, an all-out national mobilisation movement commenced from July 1938 throughout Korea.

In terms of this situation, it is interesting that Korean audiences visiting GGM drastically increased from 1937, as shown in table 1. From 1924 to 1936, Japanese visitors’ percentage of the total visitors was higher than the Korean for all but three years. This statistic implies that Koreans were not the main audience of GGM. The drastic increase in the Korean audience from 1937 seems to have been because the colonial authorities mobilised Koreans to attend exhibitions of GGM for the purpose of urging Korean people to accept the notion that Korea and Japan were one ethnic nation.

¹⁶² Shiobara Tokisaburo, “On the Penchant Day for Historical Remains (古蹟愛護日에 對하야),” *Maeil sinbo* (12th September, 1937).

Actually, in 1938 GGM held a special exhibition titled *Relations between Korea and Japan in the Ancient Period* in order to disseminate the notion that Korea and Japan were one ethnic nation.¹⁶³ It could also be understood in the same context that YHM also saw a drastic increase in audiences from 1938. These increases demonstrate that the colonial authorities attempted to utilise the cultural heritage of Korea for their political ambitions.

¹⁶³ GGM, *A Guide to the Special Exhibition, Relations between Korea and Japan in the Ancient Period* (古代内鮮關係資料特別展覽案内) (Seoul: 1938).

Table 1. Audiences to GGM and YHM

Year	YHM	GGM (Seoul)			
		Total	Korean	Japanese	Foreigner
1916		21550			
1917		23952			
1918		36100			
1919		37635			
1920		36306			
1921		57337			
1922		64420			
1923		39004			
1924		60509	19750	38784	1775
1925		49061	27483	21182	966
1926		60125	32471	25648	2006
1927		44716	15280	28129	1307
1928		50338	18859	30308	1221
1929		46639	16349	28935	1355
1930		36640	9304	25787	1513
1931		36142	13980	27163	1399
1932		49742	11131	37966	645
1933		41371	14577	26099	695
1934		49469	19342	28523	1600
1935	34508	57165	28004	26526	1635
1936	31131	63111	28829	32392	1890
1937	29406	98687	61986	34772	1929
1938	83363	85865	50875	34140	850
1939	109483	104322	62954	39014	2354
1940		145392	104148	39607	1637
1941		145892	?	?	?

Source: Compiled from the *Annual Reports of the Government-General* (朝鮮總督府施政年報), 1916 to 1941, *A General Survey of Social Education in Chosen* (朝鮮社會教育要覽), 1941, and the “History of the Yi Royal Household Museum of Art” (1944).

In this totalitarian and militarist situation, Korean newspapers could not report their criticism at all. Although they did not actively follow the Government-General’s report guidelines, they could never try to disclose their political and colonial intentions to Koreans. Rather, they just reported that Koreans had not paid enough attention to their cultural heritage, and that the Government-General would reinforce punishment and survey their destruction. It was not possible to criticise the policies and intentions of the Government-General anymore from the late-1930s.

Nevertheless, some Koreans noticeably participated in research and collecting of the cultural objects either as a private hobby or from nationalistic motives from the 1930s on. Although it was not possible for collectors to intervene in an official interpretation of Korean material culture, some Korean collectors had a clear nationalist motivation for collecting. A Korean great land owner, Jeon Hyong-phil (1906-1962), started to collect Korean cultural objects from 1930 with the assistance of some Korean specialists such as Oh Se-chang (1864-1953), who maintained the tradition from the Joseon dynasty as a calligrapher and collector.¹⁶⁴ Jeon even established a private museum in Seoul in 1938, although it failed to open to the public before the liberation.¹⁶⁵ Since then, his Korean paintings and ceramic collection as a private collection have been estimated as second to none in quality in South Korea. Besides him, there were a dozen Korean collectors, some of whom maintained their collections and donated them to NMK after liberation.¹⁶⁶

In the academic world there were only a few Korean scholars who studied Korean material culture. Goh Yu-seop (1905-1944), who majored in aesthetics and art history at

¹⁶⁴ Kim, Sang-yeob, “Art Collectors of Modern Korea,” in Seongbuk Museum of Art, *The Great Heritage* (위대한 유산 展) (Seoul: Seongbuk Gurip Misulgwang, 2013), pp. 104-111.

¹⁶⁵ Lee Chung-ryeol, *Gansong, Jeon Hyeong-pil* (간송 전형필) (Seoul: Gimyoungsa, 2011), pp.128-129.

¹⁶⁶ Oh Bong-bin, “Collectors of Paintings and Antiquities: Upon the Disposal of the Park Chang-hun Collection (書畫骨董의 收藏家- 朴昌薰氏所藏品賣却을機로),” *Dong-a ilbo* (1st May, 1940).

Keijo Imperial University, was almost the only researcher on Korean art history.¹⁶⁷ In 1933, he became the director of the Gaeseong Prefecture Museum, and, as the only Korean museum curatorial staff in Korea, dedicated himself to the research of Korean art history. Despite his short life, he left many works, such as *Goryeo Celadon* (高麗靑瓷, 1939), *Relics in Gaeseong* (松都古蹟, 1936-1940), *A Study of Korean Pagodas* (朝鮮塔婆의 研究, 1936-1940), *Our Art and Craft Works* (우리의 美術과 工藝, 1934), *Characteristics of Three Kingdoms Period Art* (三國美術의 特徵, 1939) and *Characteristics of Korean Ancient Culture and Its Transmission* (朝鮮古美術의 特色과 그 傳承問題, 1941). He is argued to have built the modern foundation of Korean art history.¹⁶⁸ However, his limitations have also been pointed out, in that he was surely affected by Japanese scholars' view, such as their low estimation of the culture of the Joseon dynasty.¹⁶⁹ Besides art history, there were some Korean folklorists and archaeologists, some of whom studied in European universities. However, it was not easy for them to get regular jobs in the field and argue with Japanese scholars from their own perspectives, although they conducted their studies with nationalist motives.

Museological legacy of Japanese colonial rule

Even though the Japanese colonial authorities managed both GGM and YHM, it seems that they were not keen on giving a general understanding of Korean material culture, or teaching the value of each artefact to the Korean public. They abolished the teaching of Korean history at public primary school level right after the annexation, teaching only a new (Japanese) national history to Korean pupils. Rather, they tried to utilise museums

¹⁶⁷ The university, which was established in 1924, was the only university in Korea through the colonial period. Koreans were never permitted to establish a university during the colonial period, despite their efforts to do so. Keijo was the official name of Seoul during colonial rule.

¹⁶⁸ Kim Youngna, "A Luminary of Korean Art History, Goh Yu-seop: His Role and Position," *Study of Art History* 16 (2002): 507-518. Kim argues that Goh established Korean art history as a modern discipline through conducting research into material elements of Korean history and art. Kim adds that Goh criticised Sekino's research on Korean art as just a register of cultural relics.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.508-515.

to secure their authority as discoverers and protectors of Korean culture, propagandise for the harmonious coexistence of the Japanese and Koreans, and ultimately construct their identity as part of the empire of Japan.

Japanese scholars made efforts to construct the colonial view of history, presenting the heteronomy, stagnation and factionalism of Korean society as their evidence. This distortion resulted in both resentment and frustration among Koreans, and had long-lasting negative influences on the revival of the national dignity of Korea.¹⁷⁰ In addition, both assimilation and discrimination policies executed by Japanese left behind deep resentment and a victim mentality among Koreans, ironically encouraging a vague feeling of superiority over the Japanese and leading to a strong ethnic nationalism after liberation. The Japanese colonial rule in Korea also provided a ground for a widely shared belief that Japan was just a barbarian country which had to be civilised under the Chinese world order. This sense of rivalry against Japan has lasted to the present.

Meanwhile, drastic changes since the late-19th century have made it another important task for Koreans to discern differences from Chinese culture, which has been a continuous source of Korean culture. Korea has long been under the strong influence of Chinese civilisation. The civilisation and institutions of China had been cherished by Korean elites all through the Joseon dynasty, and many of them even considered themselves as merely successors of the Chinese tradition after the Chinese Ming court was overthrown by the Manchu ‘barbarians’ in the 17th century, for the reason that the Chinese civilisation had been preserved only in Korea thus far. Indeed, this pride was often converted into an ethnic nationalist sentiment from as early as the 18th century, but it was not until the early 20th century that Korea, a modern nation, should be represented through material culture, looking for differences from the culture of China.

It is also noteworthy that Koreans got to touch a modern way of recognising and representing their identity through material culture by means of a cultural institution, a museum, even if it was not what the Japanese colonialists really wanted. Koreans then began to search for their identity through material culture, although the process was

¹⁷⁰ In 1981, Choi Sunu, Director-General of the NMK mentioned that “the Korean traditional culture and cultural capability of Korean nationals have often been estimated too low in the world so far, which could be a result of Japanese criminal distortion of Korean culture. It is a very unhappy memory that we Koreans had no rights to teach or research Korean culture for ourselves under the Japanese rule.”

slow and sometimes impeded by Japanese, while the colonial authorities hoped that Koreans would simply accept a local identity as inhabitants of a province of the empire of Japan.

Chapter 2. Independence, the National Museum and the US

On 15th August, 1945, the proclamation of the termination of the war by the emperor of the Japanese empire came a day after Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered to the Allied Powers. This declaration by the summits of the US, the UK, China and the USSR on 26th July, 1945, reasserted the independence of Korea, which had been agreed by the US, the UK and China in Cairo on 27th November, 1943.¹⁷¹ The emperor's proclamation meant to Koreans liberation from Japanese colonial rule. However, it was not something *achieved* so much as *given* abruptly despite Koreans' continued efforts. This reality meant Japan's surrender to the Allied Powers did not guarantee the Koreans' prompt establishment of their independent government.

Instead, the US and the USSR armies advanced into, and occupied, Korea, south and north of the 38th Parallel of latitude respectively, according to the instrument of surrender signed between the Allied Powers and Japan on 2nd September, 1945.¹⁷² Each army then set about establishing its military government. The US Army 24th Corps, which advanced to Seoul on 9th September, accepted the surrender of the Japanese military forces in Korea and "established military control over Korea south of 38 degrees north latitude and the inhabitants thereof."¹⁷³ Appointing Major General Archibald V. Arnold as Military Governor of South Korea on 13th September, the US established the United States Army Military Government in Korea (hereafter, USAMGIK) and it lasted for three years until the establishment of the government of the Republic of Korea to the south of the 38th Parallel of latitude.

Now, South Korea, under USAMGIK, began to undergo drastic changes, strongly influenced by the US, which was emerging as one of the two super powers after the Second World War. The Americans defined Japanese militarism and colonial rule as

¹⁷¹ Cairo Communique (1st December, 1943): "The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."

¹⁷² *Maeil sinbo* (3rd September, 1945).

¹⁷³ G.H.Q. US Army Forces, "Pacific Proclamation No.1 to the people of Korea," proclaimed on 9th September, 1945 in the name of Commander-in-Chief, US Army Forces, Pacific, D. MacArthur.

vicious, and tried to convert Korea into a stable state under the American world order. They preferred imposing themselves as a pioneer of democracy and freedom to disclosing their political ambition. However, Korea's strategic value to the US was as yet somewhat vague in comparison with Japan's in the latter part of the 1940s. Furthermore, their lack of understanding of, and interest in, the current state and background of Korea often made their efforts inconsistent and even ineffective.¹⁷⁴ Throughout the 1950s American ambitions in Korea gradually became more practical and concrete, as South Korea's geo-strategic value as a bastion of the American world order increased after the Korean War.

Meanwhile, liberation gave Koreans from diverse fields many expectations in terms of building an independent state. Only now did Korea secure the political, social and cultural space within which to establish its identity. Only now did it – and particularly NMK – find a role in acts of identity-making that sought to extract Korean identity from Japanese colonial impositions. In this regard, it is noteworthy that USAMGIK established the National Museum on 3rd December, 1945, about three months after the end of the Japanese occupation of Korea.

This chapter explores how NMK tried to develop an independent capability, and how it tried to define its mission and vision through interactions with USAMGIK and the Republic of Korea Government. In this regard, main questions of this chapter are as follows. What were the intention and composition of museum policy of the US military government? What projects did NMK focus on in the beginning stage (1945-1956)? How was a cultural identity sought through material culture in South Korea? On what background did NMK establish the museum mission

right after the Korean War?

¹⁷⁴ Armstrong argues that a “‘reorientation’ in Korea was not an active U.S. policy until the Korean war.” See Charles K. Armstrong, “The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62:1 (2003): 73. His argument is based on the comparison with the cases of Germany and Japan. However, this difference does not necessarily mean that USAMGIK did not take any action of reorientation in South Korea, as will be discussed in this chapter.

Requisition of the Government-General Museum and Kim Chewon

With the unconditional surrender of the Japanese empire on 15th August, 1945, “the main concern of the Japanese authorities in Korea was with maintaining order and protecting the lives and property of Japanese citizens, until one or more of the Allied victors arrived.”¹⁷⁵ The Government-General got started to contact reliable Korean leaders. Finally, it asked Yo Un-hyung (呂運亨, 1886-1947), a moderate leftist popular political leader, to undertake an interim administrative committee to maintain law and order. Yo accepted that offer and quickly organised the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (建國準備委員會, hereafter CPKI). Yo and his CPKI set about establishing a government to replace the Japanese Government-General.¹⁷⁶

This included requisitioning GGM. This museum attracted the interest of Kim Chewon (金載元, 1909-1990), who had obtained a doctor’s degree in education from Munich University in 1934.¹⁷⁷ Afterwards, Kim had assisted Professor Karl Hentze at Gent University in Belgium, where he spent five years translating the East Asian art and archaeology literatures into German, as well as assisting Hentze in his research. This experience introduced Kim to the East Asian literature, but this was knowledge he could hardly utilise after returning to Korea in 1940.¹⁷⁸ Instead, he taught the German language as a part-time lecturer at Bosung College in Seoul until the liberation, although he published his two essays on patterns of ancient Chinese bronze objects in a Japanese academic journal in 1942.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Carter J. Eckert, “Liberation, Division, and War, 1945-1953,” in *Korea Old and New: A History*, p.329.

¹⁷⁶ However, CPKI’s limits were also evident. It could never take over administrative rights from the Government-General. Its role in the transition period before the advance of the US army in Seoul was the maintenance of public order by temporary unofficial police staffed by Korean volunteers, and the takeover of some companies and schools from the Japanese in charge of them.

¹⁷⁷ Kim Chewon, *Museum and My Whole Life* (博物館과 한평생, hereafter, MMWL) (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1992), p.50.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp.54-56.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp.73-74. His essay, whose theme was definitely influenced by Hentze, is as follows: Kim Chewon, “On Meaning of Patterns of Ancient Chinese Bronze Objects (支那古銅器文様の意義に就て),” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Nippon* (人類學雜誌) 57:4 (1942).

Kim, who was from Heungsang, a small town near Hamheung, a north-eastern city of the Korean peninsula, did not have an elite network at centre stage in Seoul.¹⁸⁰ To make matters worse, people with degrees from American and European universities hardly attracted attention from Korean scholars or Japanese ones.¹⁸¹ This background explains why Kim tried to expand his network in academic circles in Seoul after returning from Belgium. In winter 1940, Kim visited Lee Byeong-do (李丙燾, 1896-1989), who was one of the leading Korean historians in Korean history, and the editor and publisher of *Jindan hakbo* (震檀學報, Journal of Jindan Korean Studies Society), the only scholarly journal published by Korean scholars during the colonial rule.¹⁸² His visit right after returning to Korea shows that he wanted to let his name become known around the scholarly circle in Seoul.

It seems that his companionship was mainly with the faculty of Bosung College. As said above, he could get a place as a German language instructor, which was by virtue of the recommendation of Ahn Ho-sang, who was a lecturer of the college and who had acquired his doctoral degree in philosophy from Jena University in 1929. Kim Sung-su, the president of Bosung College, was a very influential Korean figure who both managed *Dong-a ilbo* and owned a big textile company.¹⁸³ In 1930, when Kim Sung-su toured European countries in order to investigate the education system, Kim Chewon had a chance to guide him in Germany with the arrangement of Ahn Ho-sang.

Meanwhile, Professor Paik Nam-un (白南雲, 1895-1974) of Yonhee College quickly set about establishing a nationwide scholarly organisation, as Yo Un-hyung and his CPKI strove to take the initiative in the political situation right after liberation. A day after the liberation, Paik organised Joseon haksulwon (朝鮮學術院, Academy of Korean Science, hereafter AKS) for the purpose of contributing to building the independent

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 1992, pp.15-16.

¹⁸¹ Woo Yong-je, "A Study on the Extent and Meaning of the Democratic Educational Thought of Oh Cheon-seok (天園의 民主教育思想의 外延과 그 性格)," *Study of History of Korean Education* (韓國教育史學) 23:2 (2001): 214.

¹⁸² Kim, *op. cit.*, p.293. On 7th May, 1934, Lee organised a scholarly society named Jindan Hakhoe (震檀學會, Jindan Korean Studies Society) with 23 Korean scholars from the fields of Korean history, language and culture. This society published its first issue of *Jindan hakbo* on 28th November, 1934.

¹⁸³ After liberation, he became a chairman of Korean advisors to USAMGIK in October 1945.

nation.¹⁸⁴ His overall plan of the academy had already been designed in 1936, and he had been quite successful in bringing together scholars from all fields irrespective of their ideology, even if Paik and his academy's leftist orientation ultimately resulted in its end around 1947. And, right after the organisation, AKS strove to take over scholarly institutions and schools from the Japanese as much as possible.¹⁸⁵ On the same day, Lee Byung-do also participated in this academy and put his name down as chief of the Department of History and Philosophy.¹⁸⁶

It is thought to have been around this time that Kim resolved to put into practice his plan to take over GGM. Behind his decisive action was Hong Jong-in (1903-1998), a senior journalist at *Maeil sinbo*.¹⁸⁷ A day after the liberation, Hong visited Kim's house and encouraged Kim to take over GGM.¹⁸⁸ His encouragement helped Kim to resolve to do that. According to Arimitsu Kyoichi (有光教一, 1907-2011), a Japanese manager of GGM and an archaeologist, on 17th August, 1945, Kim had a meeting to discuss the takeover of the museum with Arimitsu.¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, Kim told Arimitsu that "I'm here by request of CPKI, although I'm not a member of the committee."¹⁹⁰

The main issues on which Kim and Arimitsu agreed were as follows: 1. The Bureau of Education, which is in charge of GGM, should be responsible for this discussion of requisition, but no high ranking officials of the bureau wanted to. This is why Arimitsu participated in this discussion. 2. All the facilities and collections of the GGM should be

¹⁸⁴ Kim Yong-seob, *Development of Science Academies in South Korea and North Korea* (남북 학술원과 과학원의 발달) (Seoul: Jisik saneobsa, 2005), pp.27-49.

¹⁸⁵ Kim Chewon, *Nights Story at Gyeongbok-gung Palace* (景福宮夜話, hereafter NSGP) (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1991), p.7.

¹⁸⁶ *Maeil sinbo* (14th September, 1945).

¹⁸⁷ During Kim's stay in Europe, Hong utilised Kim's on-site report on the European political situation. In 1938, he also gave Kim chances to contribute Kim's essays on ancient culture to *Joseon ilbo* (朝鮮日報, The Joseon Daily), one of the Korean nationalist newspapers during the colonial period. See MMWL, p.26.

¹⁸⁸ Kim, "My Companionship with Prominent Figures (나의 名士交友)," in MMWL, p.270, originally included in *Weekly Citizen* No.523 (23rd August, 1976). Kim did not put this fact in his memoir, published in 1992.

¹⁸⁹ Arimitsu Kyoichi, "My Korean Archaeology (私の朝鮮考古學, hereafter MKA) (3)," *Quarterly Samcheoli* (季刊三千里) 42 (1985): 223-226.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*

shut down and preserved as they are, until a legitimate institution to take over them can be established, as Japan surrendered to the Allied powers. 3. Because there are no Korean curatorial members whose specialty is in art history or archaeology in GGM, Japanese staff members should report to Kim for knowhow about the management of the museum and the process of the projects of the Historic Remains Investigation of GGM. 4. All the keys to the galleries and stores will be kept by the only Korean administrative staff member, Choe Yeong-hi, who has worked for GGM for 15 years.¹⁹¹

Arimitsu, who had been afraid of drastic changes since 15th August, was quite content with Kim's rational decision and was able to trust him as one of his colleagues in the same academic circle.¹⁹² Through this mutual trust Kim strove to get as much information as possible from Arimitsu.¹⁹³ Afterwards, Kim visited Paik Nam-un, chairman of the Academy of Korean Science, and then Kim could get from him travel expenses for the requisition of two branch museums of GGM.¹⁹⁴ Thus Kim made a visit, financed by AKS, to two local museums of GGM, at Buyeo and Gyeongju, for the requisition of them. This visit was also for the inspection of the artefacts evacuated to those branch museums for safety during the war, as the proper preservation of those artefacts was a very important issue given the disorder right after liberation. Then, Kim and Arimitsu waited for the arrival of the US occupation army in Seoul, widely discussing about the management of GGM and pending problems facing Korean archaeology.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* Arimitsu also recollected that he knew Kim's background as a researcher on Chinese bronze objects, even if they were not acquainted.

¹⁹² It needs to be remembered that the vortex of this 'requisition' was unofficial in the period of transition from 15th August to the advance of American troops to Korea. The Government General maintained administrative rights, until USAMGIK took over all administrative functions and dismissed all the colonial officials.

¹⁹³ MKA (3), p.225.

¹⁹⁴ Kim did not record the exact date when he met Paik, but Kim mentioned in his memoirs that he met Paik days after he discussed with Arimitsu. See NSGP, p.7; MMWL, p.83.

American ambition and the opening of the National Museum

On 9th September 1945, the US Army 24th Corps advanced into Seoul, making the Japanese Governor-General sign the documents of surrender, and instituted USAMGIK. Right before its advance, the US occupation army had defined its mission as the demolishment of militarism, the disarmament of Japanese troops in Korea, the inspiration of democratic tendency and process, the encouragement of liberal political, economic and social institution and the creation of the grounds that could guarantee the advent of a responsible country with which the United Nations could keep peace.¹⁹⁵ It seems that the Americans were quite sure that they could secure a stable support base for their interest in the Korean peninsula through the accomplishment of the mission. Indeed, USAMGIK tried to be seen as pioneers of a new standard of civilisation, with qualities such as democracy and freedom. In the same context, on 27th October, 1945, Harry S. Truman, president of the US, issued his foreign policy, stating that “all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice without interference from any foreign source.”¹⁹⁶ This was how Americans believed they could reshape the world order in favour of their own interests.

In regard to this foreign policy, the US army had already set out its basic policy on cultural relics in occupied regions in a field manual.¹⁹⁷ On the basis of this manual, USAMGIK reasserted its policy on cultural objects and installations in Korea as follows: “Historical, cultural and religious object & installations will be carefully preserved and protected.”¹⁹⁸ According to a report forwarded to the Director of the Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Education of USAMGIK, in this context, set it as one of its

¹⁹⁵ Military Government Annex to the 24th Corps Field Order No.35, 1st September, 1945.

¹⁹⁶ Henry Steele Commager (ed.), *Documents of American History*, fifth edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc, 1949), pp.698-699. Truman also added that “it may take a long time, but it is worth waiting for, and it is worth striving to attain.”

¹⁹⁷ *Army and Navy Manual of Military Government and Civil Affairs*, 12th December, 1943 (US Army FM 27-5): “It is the policy of the United States, except where military necessity makes it impossible, to preserve all historical and cultural monuments and works, religious shrines and objects of art.”

¹⁹⁸ Military Government Annex 8 to Operations Instructions No.4, GHQ USAPP, 28th August, 1945 (National Archives, RG 332, Box 64).

“immediate needs” to “appropriate [a] budget for reopening and operating of the national museum” in terms of the field of arts and monuments.¹⁹⁹ Americans wanted to show Koreans their respect for Korean culture and, at the same time, their differences from the former Japanese colonial government under militarism. Indeed, their attempt to normalise cultural institutions can be said to have been intended to gain Koreans’ trust.

On 11st September, when USAMGIK took over the Bureau of Education of the Government-General, Captain Earl Lockard, the new director of the Bureau of Education of USAMGIK, held a conference with the former director, and set about organising the Bureau. One of the most difficult problems that USAMGIK faced then was to find the right people to fill the military government. Under this circumstance, Kim, who could speak English and had a doctor’s degree, was considered a very competent person for the post. According to Kim’s memoir, Lockard was very pleased to meet Kim, saying “good man, very good man” when he received from Kim a business card on which the doctor’s title was printed.²⁰⁰ Lockard took Kim Chewon into his confidence, employed him at the bureau on 21st September, and appointed him as the director of the National Museum on 26th September.

Indeed, Kim was gaining trust from his American bosses. His suggestion in relation to reopening and operating the former GGM attracted their attention, and some of the important issues raised by Kim were included in a report of the bureau written on 3rd October, 1945. For example, Kim suggested in his letter to the bureau that a separate government bureau for the museum be considered. The issue could be included as one of the recommendations in the above mentioned report.²⁰¹ It shows that he had grown aware of the main focus of the cultural policies of USAMGIK and could utilise it to acquire what he wanted. He could even advise the US officers to appoint directors of cultural institutions such as the National Library and the Science Museum.²⁰² Captain Eugene Knez (1916-2010), who was assigned to the bureau on 29th November and became the director of the Department of Culture afterwards, also had a high opinion of

¹⁹⁹ Subject: Arts, Monuments, and Religion: Preliminary Report, the Bureau of Education, USAMGIK, 3rd October, 1945 (National Archives, RG 332, Box 64).

²⁰⁰ NSGP, p.9.

²⁰¹ Preliminary Report, 3rd October, 1945.

²⁰² NSGP, p.13.

Kim's ability and enthusiasm for the job. Knez recollected that he was a well-qualified person of the sort who could hardly be found in South Korea at that time.²⁰³

Remarkably, USAMGIK established a post of director for the museum, although the Government-General did not place such a post in GGM, which had been annexed to the Department of Social Education under the Bureau of Education in the Government-General. Furthermore, the museum did not have any organisation. USAMGIK established three sections, taking charge of general affairs, curatorial affairs and exhibition respectively, each under the director. This creation of an office of the museum was in accordance with the cultural policy of USAMGIK. Another report by the bureau explains the background of these actions as follows.

Under the Japanese Social Education Department, it had been the policy to administer the intellectual life of the Korean people. It had been the aim of the Department of Culture, from the very beginning, to free the cultural and religious institutions from government control. ... The Japanese governmental theory of control over cultural institutions and religious organizations was discarded almost immediately and replaced by the principle of 'Independence of Action'. And slowly the idea that museums and libraries could function satisfactorily without the governmental chains was impressed upon the members of the department.²⁰⁴

In this regard, the military government diagnosed as a main obstacle to the government's cultural policy the heteronomy of Koreans influenced by Japanese colonial rule. This was why the military government wanted to open the museum under

²⁰³ *Ibid*, pp.100-107.

²⁰⁴ "History of the Department of Culture since 11th September, 1945," the Bureau of Education, USAMGIK, 27th February, 1946 (National Archives, RG 332, Box 64). NMK was under the supervision of the Department of Culture under the Bureau of Education. This name of the department was decided after 'Social Welfare' or 'Art & Religion' were temporarily used at an early stage of the military government.

the responsibility of its director as soon as possible. And this was also a way how the government would disseminate the American values of independence or freedom to Koreans. In other words, those values were intended as intrinsic to an American standard of civilisation which should be presented to Koreans. Another remarkable thing is that USAMGIK entitled the museum 'national,' even before a Korean independent government was established. This action shows that USAMGIK was trying to win the trust of Koreans by presenting them with the hope of an independent country. That is, the military government intended to wipe out the negative image of military occupation through cultural institutions, ultimately making Koreans expect their independence soon.²⁰⁵

In this context, it was exactly in accordance with the military government's policy that the Bureau of Education hastened to reopen the museum. The bureau decided that Arimitsu should remain in office and help Kim, who did not have any experienced Korean staff members to manage the museum.²⁰⁶ The above mentioned report of 3rd October, 1945 shows that the Department of Education was already planning concrete actions for its reopening. This report included very detailed plans, such as the immediate repair of buildings and walkways in the museum, and the restoration and preservation of the museum garden.²⁰⁷ On 2nd October, Lieutenant Paul Mitchell, the chief of the Department of Culture, ordered Kim and Arimitsu to reopen the museum.²⁰⁸ From 12nd to 19th October, the main exhibitions, which had been evacuated to local

²⁰⁵ Jeon paid attention to this issue. He explained that "this museum was titled 'national,' as an independent nation was being expected." See Jeon Gyeong-su, "Political Anthropology of Representation seen in Korean Museums (한국 박물관에 나타나는 표상의 정치인류학)," *Yesterday and Tomorrow of Korean Museums* (한국 박물관의 어제와 내일) (Seoul: Iljisa, 2005), pp.69-70. However, he didn't trace the political intention of the US military government in this issue. The Government-General Library was also renamed the National Library under the US military government.

²⁰⁶ MKA (3), p.229. The Department of Culture reported the removal as one of their accomplishments ("History of the Department of Culture," 27th February, 1946). In North Korea, Akio Koizumi at Pyeongyang Municipal Museum also remained in Pyeongyang. See NMK, *Gwanbo* (館報, The Museum Gazette, hereafter GB) 2 (July 1947): 9; Akio Koizumi, *Itinerancy of Ancient Remains in Korea* (朝鮮古代遺跡の遍歴) (Tokyo: Rakkoshutban 1986), pp.375-380.

²⁰⁷ Preliminary Report, 3rd October, 1945.

²⁰⁸ MKA (3), p.229.

branch museums in Gyeongju and Buyeo, were brought back to Seoul by Kim, Arimitsu and Mitchell in a US military vehicle.²⁰⁹

It was Arimitsu who took the lead in the restoration of the permanent exhibition, as he was the only person who was adept in Korean material culture.²¹⁰ According to his memoir, the US boss was very keen to open the museum, and he had to work hard from the very day after the trip to the local museums. He restored the former exhibition of GGM, teaching newly employed Korean curatorial members. It was on 3rd December, 1945 that the National Museum under USAMGIK was opened. Now, the same artefacts displayed in the very gallery of GGM got to represent a totally different meaning: the cultural identity of an independent nation, not the local culture of the Japanese empire.

The first issue of *Gwanbo* of NMK stated that “NMK made a clean sweep of things Japanese and changed the entire look of the museum,” describing the opening of NNK.²¹¹ However, it does not seem that this was more than the elimination of the Japanese language throughout the museum. Above all, the former chief of GGM took the lead in the exhibition. Even Kim might not have been capable of finding problems in the narratives that GGM had constructed. This explains why Kim’s criticism of the Japanese narrative and its problems cannot be found in his memoirs. Although GGM was criticised for its “lack of understanding of management and facilities of the museum because of colonial cultural policies based on militarism” and for “not taking care of the museum during the war,”²¹² there was not any concrete criticism of GGM’s activities and its narratives of the material culture of Korea.

Instead, interestingly, NMK gave GGM considerable credit for “mobilising the best scholars in excavation projects in centres of old cultural relics in Korea, publishing the excavation reports for the academic world through research of the excavated artefacts, and giving publicity to them even within the Western world.”²¹³ This evaluation meant that NMK could not help accepting Japanese scholars’ authority in the field of the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture. It is thought to have been in this

²⁰⁹ MKA (3), pp.229-232.

²¹⁰ MKA (3), pp.232-233.

²¹¹ “A History of the National Museum,” GB 1 (February 1947): 1.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid*

context that Kim stated in his memoirs that Japanese scholars should be given credit for publishing a series of reports on the old relics of Korea, while even Koreans did not know their old relics.²¹⁴



Figure 3. The opening ceremony of the National Museum of Korea on 3rd December, 1945. From NMK Archive.

This overall situation demonstrates that Japanese scholars had hegemony in the discovery and interpretation of Korean material culture during the colonial period, and that Korean scholars were hardly able to participate in these projects.²¹⁵ As a result, it was not easy for them to organise their own perspectives on their own material culture. This situation explains why Arimitsu took the lead in the permanent exhibition of the liberated nation's national museum. In this regard, the US military governor Major

²¹⁴ NSGP, p.161. This positive evaluation of the contributions of GGM continued until a strong nationalist perspective became prevalent in the 1970s.

²¹⁵ In an essay written in 1948, Kim criticised Japanese scholars for the Japanese exclusion of Koreans in the academic world. See Kim, "News from America (아메리카 통신)," *Hakpung* (學風) (April 1949). This essay was included in NSGP, p.267.

General Arnold's comment at the opening ceremony of NMK was very suggestive. He stated that "Koreans need to make much effort in order to preserve old art relics which would be a foundation for the creation of Korean culture, and give publicity to their genuine values."²¹⁶

NMK's first step for independent management and its limits

In his foreword of the first issue of *Gwanbo*, Kim defined its mission as stepping further in contributing to establishing an independent country in the field of culture, being based on the premise that "It has been one and half year since the liberation. However, we have a long way to independence. ... Our management of the museum has not got into its stride."²¹⁷ Until 6th April, 1946, NMK absorbed under its control two local municipal museums, Gongju Museum and Gaeseong Museum, making its branches four in total, including two former branch museums of GGM in Gyeongju and Buyeo. Now, NMK got to have a nationwide organisation, and *Gwanbo* proudly remarked that "by becoming an independent institution under the supervision of the Department of Education, NMK secured a status as a museum which represents our country," that "by securing four branch museums, NMK could intensify a function as a museum centred on history and art," and that "by establishing three sections, of general affairs, curatorial affairs and the exhibition in the main museum in Seoul, NMK has constructed a foundation for future development."²¹⁸ He did not forget to point out that all these functions could be executed only by securing "manpower with the right talent."

As for NMK, which was striving to secure an independent capacity for managing the museum, acquiring academic staff was a pending issue. However, not surprisingly, there were few Korean academics in the fields of art history and archaeology. Unlike Korean history and language, which drew much interest from promoters of the cultural independence movement, the material culture of Korea received little attention. At the time of the liberation, there were no Korean curatorial staff members at GGM, no archaeologist experienced in excavation, and no art historian educated at university

²¹⁶ *Dong-a ilbo* (4th December, 1945).

²¹⁷ NMK, "Director's foreword," GB 1 (February 1947): i.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

level. In addition, there were many posts attractive in universities, colleges and government departments after the Japanese vacated their posts. As Kim recalled, at that time any graduate of a prestigious university could have an eye on these posts. The museum was not a workplace interesting enough to attract them at that time.²¹⁹

Kim strove to find university graduates in adjacent fields or from renowned universities. As the following table shows, it took some time to appoint some university graduates to the main museum in Seoul, even if most of them did not have anything to do with Korean art history or archaeology. It was not until the latter part of 1947 that NMK secured a considerable workforce for curatorial affairs. However, in the branch museums it was best to employ the former administrative clerks who had worked for Japanese directors. These clerks were quite competent in maintaining the status quo, but they could not be expected to make any progress in managing the local museums. Jin Hong-seob, who was appointed as director of Gaeseong branch museum, was the only university graduate assigned to a local museum.

Table 2. Newly employed curatorial staff at NNK in the latter part of the 1940s*

Name	Academic Background	Date of employment	Others
KIM Chewon (1909-1990)	Munich University Education, PhD	21 st September, 1945	-1945-1970: Director of NMK
LIM Cheon (1908-1969)	Tokyo Imperial Art School (dropout), draftsman	October, 1945	
LEE Hong-jik (1909-1970)	Tokyo Imperial Univ. History of Japan, BA	20 th December, 1945	-1955-1970 Prof. of Korea Univ.
SEO Gap-rok	Yonhee College	1 st May, 1946	

²¹⁹ NSGP, pp.161.

(? – 1949)			
CHANG Uk-jin (1917-1990)	Tokyo Imperial Art School, painter	Before February, 1947	-Resignation on 3 rd Sep 1947
KIM Won-yong (1922-1993)	Keijo Imperial Univ. History of East Asia, BA	1 st February, 1947	-1970-1971: Director of NMK -1961-1987: Prof. of Seoul National Univ.
JIN Hong-seop (1918-2010)	Meiji Univ. Economics, BA	1 st April, 1947	-Resignation in March 1963 -1964-1983: Prof. of Ewha Univ.
Hwang Su-yeong (1918-2011)	Tokyo Imperial Univ. Economics, BA	1 st August, 1947	-Resignation in October 1950 -1971-1973: Director of NMK -1955-1986: Prof. of Dongguk Univ.
MIN Cheon-sik (? – 1950)	Waseda Univ, Unknown, BA	1 st October, 1947	
CHOI Sunu** (1916-1984)	Songdo Middle School	6 th April, 1946	-1974-1983: Director of NMK

* Compiled from *Gwanbo* (1947-1949); NSGP; MMWL.

** Choi was transferred to the main museum in Seoul on 21st December, 1949.

Thus, it took long time to secure curatorial staff, and they had to accumulate academic capability from the beginning. It was in this situation that USAMGIK made Arimitsu stay in Korea longer, so that he could give guidance to new Korean curatorial

staff. As for Kim, who was seeking measures to secure independent capability of investigating Korean material culture, the existence of Arimitsu was indispensable. In this regard, it seems evident that Kim persuaded his American bosses to make Arimitsu remain in Korea.²²⁰ On 28th December, 1945, Eugene Knezevich, director of the Department of Culture, explained to Arimitsu why he should remain in Korea for the time being as follows.

This is the first case to employ dismissed Japanese for the military government. Because this issue is related to the general policy of the government, a special discussion was held and a report to the Military Governor from the Bureau of Education had to be corrected five times. At last, the re-employment of Arimitsu was approved on the following grounds. Although NMK has been established, newly employed staff members in NMK are inexperienced. Training in museum management and archaeological excavation for them is indispensable for the development of this museum. Arimitsu, who has worked at GGM for tens of years and is experienced in excavation, is the only expert in archaeology in Korea now. In short, first, Arimitsu should not intervene in, or be interested in, Korean politics. Second, Arimitsu should instruct on how to conduct excavation on the spot.²²¹

Kim was aware that GGM had a strong tradition of excavation and research. In this regard, he thought that Korean curators should build on this capability so that NMK could maintain it. His scrupulous efforts led to a trip to Gyeongju in March 1946 for the selection of an ancient tomb for excavation. At this time, Arimitsu recommended a tomb which he had already recognised. Knez, a graduate of the Department of

²²⁰ In his memoirs, Arimitsu also stated that Kim must have been behind that decision. See MKA (4), *Quarterly Samcheoli* 43 (1985): 112-113.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, also endeavoured to actualise this excavation plan.²²² Consequently, USAMGIK became extremely positive to publicise the plan in *Stars and Stripes*, a bulletin of the US Armed Forces.²²³ Presumably, USAMGIK judged that the excavation could attract positive opinion from the South Korean public and contribute to stabilising the present South Korean society.

However, at General Headquarters, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (HQ/SCAP) in Tokyo reproached USAMGIK for releasing the plan without their permission in advance.²²⁴ The US Department of State believed that this excavation plan was “ill-timed and ill-advised,” and was worried that “participants of the Moscow Conference” [Soviet Union and Great Britain, including the US] might “resent the American Government in Korea sponsoring such a project.”²²⁵ In April 1946, GHQ/SCAP sent to South Korea Professor Landon Warner (1881-1955) of Fogg Museum of Oriental Art, Harvard University, who was then working at the Arts and Monuments Section of GHQ, and entrusted him with the task of deciding whether to conduct the excavation or not. Knez earnestly explained to Warner the necessity of the excavation. Ultimately, Knez was able to get the permission from him, and the first excavation of NMK began on 3rd May, 1946.

Surprisingly, this one month long excavation met with very good luck. This 15th century old, small, ancient tomb, which was named ‘Hou-chong (壺杆塚, Hou tomb)’ after the inscriptions on a vessel found there, did not produce many artefacts, but among them was included a vessel with important inscriptions suggesting a specific international relation between two major ancient kingdoms, Goguryeo and Silla, in the

²²² Eugene I. Knez, *An American Perspective: Attempts for a Korean Cultural Renaissance* (한 이방인의 한국 사랑) (Seoul: NMK, 1997), pp.27-30 & p.79.

²²³ MKA (5), *Quarterly Samcheoli* 44 (1985): 197.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* Some South Korean scholars also argued that the excavation was not a pertinent issue. For example, Professor Lee In-young at Seoul National University met Kim on 16th January, 1946 and expressed his opposition to the excavation plan. See MKA (4), pp.116-117.

²²⁵ Knez, *An American Perspective*, pp.27-28. According to Knez, the North Korean press, in terms of this excavation, severely criticised the Americans and their Korean collaborators for ‘looting’ Korean cultural objects. See Knez, “Special Contribution,” in NSGP, p.104.

6th century. This ‘first’ excavation by Koreans was literally a great success. Seo Gap-rok, a member who participated in this excavation exclaimed:

We Korean scholars hardly have opportunities to excavate our old relics. ... Although some people have not been favourable towards this excavation, we conducted this excavation with confidence and a sincere academic attitude. We dare to present for the history of mankind our first valuable materials in our national language.²²⁶



Figure 4. NMK’s first excavation in Gyeongju in 1946. From NMK Archive.

This excavation, even if guided by a Japanese archaeologist and sponsored by the American military government, was the first case in which Koreans excavated their material culture for themselves. This excavation was enough to attract the attention of academics and the press. In a contribution to *Seoul simmun* (서울신문, The Seoul Daily), Kim described this excavation as a truly nationwide project, saying that “almost all

²²⁶ GB 1 (1947), pp.5-6.

scholars related to Korean studies assembled in Gyeongju, as the centre of academic circle temporarily moved to this place.”²²⁷

The museum staff members were deeply moved by the fact that they had conducted the excavation with their own hands, produced excellent results and reported the results in the Korean language.²²⁸ They felt that they were learning how to discover evidence of their material culture through excavation. They could also be proud of overcoming the colonial situation in which discoveries of Korean material culture through archaeological investigation had been monopolised by the Japanese. Indeed, they were, through their material culture, seeking for a way to contribute to building an independent country. It was also in this context that this excavation was filmed by a film company, the Joseon Film Company (朝鮮映畫社). This 15 minute long documentary was screened at a famous cinema in Seoul for commemorating the first anniversary of the liberation.²²⁹

Another important task of the curatorial staff members of NMK was to study the concrete contents of Korean material culture. As shown above, they were not specialised in that field, even if they had quite an excellent academic background. It was in this context that a study group was organised at NMK on 3rd August, 1946. The main purpose of the group was to ‘enlighten them about archaeology.’²³⁰ Every Saturday they took courses on specific subjects from specialists, or presented what they had learned through reading on a specific field. This study group also attracted the participation of the National Museum of Anthropology and Incheon Municipal Museum.²³¹ This attempt to study material culture suggests that the curatorial staff were considering it as a pending issue to understand the meaning and value of the museum collection. In this circumstance it seems that staff members of NMK were

²²⁷ Kim Chewon, “A Report of the Excavation in Gyeongju,” *Seoul Sinmun* (7th July, 1946).

²²⁸ During colonial rule, the national language was Japanese while Korean was a local dialect. The colonial authorities officially banned the use of Korean in the latter part of the 1930s as part of a drastic assimilation policy. This action was conceived as a bitter humiliation by most Koreans.

²²⁹ GB 1 (February 1947): 5-6; “Excavations of Cultural Objects and Its Secret Story,” *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (京郷新聞, ‘The Gyeonghyang Daily’) (3rd March, 1975).

²³⁰ NMK, GB 1: 5-6.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

encouraged to join other academic societies. Kim himself took the lead in participation in academic societies. He was an organiser of both the Society of Korean Anthropologists (朝鮮人類學會) in May 1946, and the Institute of Korean Formative Arts Culture (朝鮮造形文化研究所) in March 1947.²³²

Thus, Kim was striving to lay the groundwork for the discovery of and research into Korean material culture. However, it was not possible to criticise and replace, in the short term, the colonial narrative which the Japanese had constructed for more than 40 years. Although a couple of books on Korean history were published by nationalist historians in the latter part of the 1940s, they were not familiar with Korean material culture. Furthermore, it was evident that Korean material culture could not be reorganised without the systematic accumulation and research of material evidences. Kim also realised this point. However, he does not seem to have depended on a nationalist view of history. Rather, he was close to a group of scholars who put emphasis on source criticism. It was the Jindan Korean Studies Society, as described above, which represented this perspective. In this regard, the scholars were opposed both to a blind nationalist view and to the Marxist view. The representative figure was Lee Byeong-do, who studied at Waseda University in Japan. Lee's perspective was much influenced by his Japanese supervisors, who in turn were influenced by a renowned German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). The fact that Kim was active in reviving and guiding the society after the liberation shows he agreed with them in terms of the importance of concrete evidence in history research.

In 1947, Kim published an interesting book that showed this perspective. Interestingly, he was worried that the myth of Dangun, the legendary progenitor of the Korean ethnic nation, might become considered as a historical fact.²³³ He tried to take an academic and objective approach on the Dangun issue on the basis of concrete objects such as the stone reliefs found in Sandung Province, China. He argued that these stone reliefs, which were carved in A.D. 147, included images very similar to the

²³² *Dong-a ilbo* (11th May, 1946); *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (19th March, 1947)

²³³ This myth was first recorded in *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) by a monk, Ilyon, in 1281. It stated that Dangun built a country in 2333 BCE.

storyline of the Dangun myth. He concluded that the myth did not originate from the Korean ethnic nation, but from the northern nomadic tribes in East Asia.²³⁴

His approach on the Dangun issue shows that he wanted to draw a hard and fast line between objective academic translation of the material culture and emotional imagining. Kim, however, did consider the ‘ethnic nation’ to be a main agent of building Koreans’ new country. He just did not agree to absolutise and mythify the concept without being based on historical evidence. His following contribution to *Seoul Sinmun* in July 1947 shows his understanding of the ethnic nation at that time.

A nation which has long history is entitled to have pride in its past. Actually, we have few things to show towards the world at the moment. If we had something to do so, it would be accomplishments from our past relative to overall Eastern culture. We should know that our nation’s past entitles us to a status of an independent country. We should keep in mind that our nation’s past and our cultural capability, neither the Cairo Declaration nor the Moscow Conference among foreign ministers, qualifies us for independence.²³⁵

He emphasised the cultural capacity of a nation as a qualification for its independence. In this regard, cultural accomplishments would have to be discovered, preserved and interpreted for the independence of a nation. However, what he wanted to focus on for this goal was the concrete artefacts to prove the cultural identity of Korea,

²³⁴ Kim Chewon, *A New Study on the Dangun Myth* (檀君神話의 新研究) (Seoul: Jeongumsa, 1947), p.35. In his memoirs, Kim recollected that “I could not understand why we Koreans worship Dangun as our progenitor and adopt an endemic calendar system, arguing our history is 5,000 years long.” See MMWL, p. 326. From 1948 to 1961, the South Korean government officially used its own calendar system, called Dan-gi, counting from 2333 BCE (The year 1948, when the South Korean government was established, equates to the Dan-gi year 4281). The notion of a 5,000-year-long history of Korea is directly related to this calendar, and was used as a part of the title of the second overseas special exhibition of NMK from 1976 to 1984.

²³⁵ Kim Chewon, “National Treasures in Crisis,” *Seoul sinmun* (15th July, 1947).

not the notion of an ethnic nation as vague political propaganda. He was discreet in putting forward the notion of the ethnic nation in explaining the projects of NMK.²³⁶ However, he was also wise enough not to be criticised for his attitude by the government or the public. This was partly because material culture itself attracted little attention, and because the notion of an ethnic nation, ironically, was considerably losing its political potential owing to ideological conflicts in South Korea after the liberation in 1945.²³⁷

Meanwhile, Kim had to deal with both the demands and problems of USAMGIK. It was evident that the Department of Education of USAMGIK tried to secure its image as a protector of Korean cultural heritage through a series of projects, such as the reorganisation of the Committee of the Preservation of Cultural Relics, cataloguing of the important relics, opening of the National Museum and creation of the National Museum of Anthropology (國立民族博物館, literally, National Museum of the 'ethnic nation'). Furthermore, the department also attempted to draw up the list of cultural artefacts stolen by Japanese during colonial rule. As a kind of cultural event, it even sponsored the rebuilding of a 13-storey pagoda located in a very popular park in Seoul with the assistance of the US military engineering unit. It can be said that they were trying to make Koreans positively disposed to USAMGIK and, by doing so, to contribute to stabilising the political situation of South Korean society.

USAMGIK, however, also had clear limits in the practice of its policies. First of all, the Department of Culture had no strong voice in the entire military government. Some actions of USAMGIK often made South Korean intellectuals doubt that they had a sincere respect for Korean cultural relics, or even for Koreans. In March 1946, USAMGIK was criticised for trying to build a military barracks at a palace site of the Goryeo dynasty (936-1392) in Gaeseong. This construction was stopped after an

²³⁶ For example, there was no word related to ethnic nation in the museum mission of NMK, which was established in the first part of the 1950s. This museum mission will be discussed in this chapter.

²³⁷ As Eckert says, South Korean society had already been divided in ideology during the colonial period. See Eckert, "Liberation, Division, and War," pp.327-329. USAMGIK openly declared freedom of thought in South Korea when they advanced to South Korea in 1945, but the reality was by far more difficult than they thought. Communists and leftists gradually came into conflict with USAMGIK as well as with rightist factions. Eventually, USAMGIK illegalised the Korean Communist Party in 1946.

inspection by Professor Langdon Warner. In August 1946, USAMGIK pushed ahead with another construction, this time of housing for dependants of American military staff in a vacant ground of Gyeongbok Palace, in which the National Museum was located. As underground structures of demolished buildings were found there, USAMGIK had to face criticism from South Korean newspapers. Kim Chewon and Song Seok-ha (Director of the National Museum of Anthropology and Chairman of the Committee of Preservation of Cultural Relics) also suggested reconsideration.

This issue reminded South Koreans of the destruction of the palace by Japanese during their colonial rule. And Kim had to be reprimanded by the military government for the reason that Kim assisted in publicising the construction to the press.²³⁸ More importantly, the construction made NMK close down for about 9 months, from 29th August, 1946 to 25th June, 1947, for the convenience of the construction, which also became another target of criticism of the media.²³⁹ Moreover, in spring 1946, a US army unit, without any preliminary discussion, destroyed the exhibition and storage facilities in a building of the Deogsu-gung Palace Art Gallery (former the Yi Royal Household Museum of Art) in order to secure a location for the Joint Soviet-American Commission to discuss the establishment of an interim government of Korea.²⁴⁰ This inconsistency in museum policy shows that the culture section of USAMGIK could never have a strong voice in the military government. It can be said that on this issue USAMGIK failed even to meet their own standards, which they wanted to show off to South Koreans. Although some American officers assigned to the culture section of the military government showed enthusiasm for a series of cultural projects, including the opening of NMK, USAMGIK's priority in its policies was also evident. It is in this context that Armstrong argued: "in addition, if the occupation of Korea was an afterthought of US military planners, then culture was an afterthought of an afterthought."²⁴¹

²³⁸ NSGP, pp.19-22.

²³⁹ *Jayu sinmun* (自由新聞, The Freedom Daily) (8th May, 1946).

²⁴⁰ NSGP, pp.38-39.

²⁴¹ Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945~1950," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62:1 (2003): 73.

On the other hand, response from South Korean society was also an important issue for Kim. In the latter part of the 1940s there were not actually enough rooms for consideration of material culture among most South Koreans. South Korean society was experiencing drastic political and social changes and disorder over the future of a new country. Most political elites could not afford to focus on the potential of material culture for building a new modern nation-state. NMK was struggling to secure a foundation for the management of the museum, but the response from the political or social circles was so weak. The following critical comment by one member of staff of NMK on the public's attitude toward cultural relics reveals this situation.

People are too indifferent to the cultural relics and objects, even if this might be my prejudice... I admit that politics is very important for the future generations, and people's livelihoods are essential for their welfare. However, too many relics of great importance for their historical and cultural worth are being damaged. If they are ignored for the reason that political success or people's livelihoods are more essential than any other issue, they will end up collapsing. I'm afraid that this issue is never of interest to society...²⁴²

No political leader, except for some military government officials, visited NMK,²⁴³ before the first president of the Republic of Korea, Rhee Syngman, did so in February 1949. This situation explains that South Korean political leaders in those days hardly sought to capitalise on the political value of material culture. In most cases, it was not until some cultural objects were damaged or stolen that the artefacts could draw South Koreans' attention. Although South Koreans had gradually been recognising these cultural objects as treasures of the ethnic nation since the colonial period, it can be said that most of them could not afford to have a sincere interest in those objects.

²⁴² Min Cheon-sik (閔天植). "Editor's Postscripts (編輯後記)," *GB* 5 (August 1948): 17-18.

²⁴³ Every visit by important figures was recorded in *Gwanbo* published between 1945 and 1949. No name of any political leader is found except for some government officials in this record.

Instead, it was Americans who tried to utilise the political potential of cultural objects of the occupied area. USAMGIK's pre-emptive action, such as the prompt opening of the national museum, can be said to be a typical example. Meanwhile, once President Harry S. Truman declared his doctrine to block the expansion of Communist power in Greece and Turkey in March, 1947, the struggle for power between US and USSR intensified. In this situation, the Korean peninsula, now occupied by both powers, gradually became an arena for competition over the superiority of ideologies and politics that each of them were pursuing. It was around this time that the Rockefeller Foundation sent its assistant director of the Humanities Division, Charles B. Fahs (1908-1980) to South Korea.²⁴⁴

Director Kim's visit to the US and its meaning

Director Kim and another staff member, Kim Won-yong (the future director of NMK, 1970-1971), were invited to the US to study by the Rockefeller Foundation from April 1948 for one year. The US Government was focusing on human resources exchange as an effective means to disseminate American ideas and institutions across South Korea and secure this country under the influence of the US. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the US-based private foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation were collaborating with the US government agencies in cultural activities. It was against this background that Fahs came to South Korea in spring 1947. He came to choose the fields in which American support was needed. Fahs placed priority in training young Korean journalists, and decided to show 10 journalists the present condition of the American media. Kim managed to secure the chance to explain to Fahs NMK's many difficulties, such as deficient budget, poor facilities and lack of professional manpower. This meeting led to the foundation inviting the two staff members in 1948.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ NSGP, p.56.

²⁴⁵ NSGP, p.56 & p.168. After resigning from the foundation in 1961, in 1962 Fahs was appointed Minister-Counselor of Cultural and Public Affairs at the US Embassy in Tokyo (Rockefeller Archive Center, "Biographical Sketch," *A Guide to the Charles Burton Fahs Papers*, 2010, pp.2-4). This suggests a close cooperation between the US government and the US-based foundations.

During his stay in the US, Kim visited many American museums and met key scholars related to East Asian studies, especially art and archaeology. As a result, he became a key figure of cultural exchange between South Korea and the US. Kim, who could communicate in English, was the right person for American academics as a main gateway of academic information related to Korean material culture and East Asian culture. Kim thought much of meeting with Professor Langdon Warner, who was the director of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, because he considered Warner to be the senior scholar in the field of East Asian art & archaeology in the US. Kim wanted his guidance as much as possible. At the first meeting, on May 1946, they discussed pending issues facing NMK and his plans during his stay in the US.²⁴⁶

Warner introduced Kim to several scholars at a seminar on East Asian ceramics which was held at the Fogg Museum. Kim was able to meet Warner's Harvard Alumni, John A. Pope (Vice Director of the Freer Gallery, 1906-1982), Robert Treat Paine III (Museum of Fine Art, Boston, 1900-1965) and Lawrence Sickman (Director of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, 1907-1988), who were leading scholars in the field of East Asian art & archaeology in the US. Sickman provided Kim with a chance to study at his gallery for three months, in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation. Afterwards, Paine was able to come to Korea in 1956 for the selection of objects to be displayed in the first overseas special exhibition of NMK.

Meanwhile, Professor Alfred Salmony (1890-1958), a Jewish German scholar at New York University, had been acquainted with Kim from the 1930s, and had started with Hentze *Artibus Asiae*, a journal on East Asian Culture.²⁴⁷ Salmony, the then editor-in-chief of the journal, was active in introducing Korean culture through it. Thanks to his favour, Kim could publish a report on the first excavation of NMK to *Artibus Asiae*.²⁴⁸ In June 1950, Salmony came to South Korea with five other American professors to give lectures on several fields, an event which was organised as an academic exchange

²⁴⁶ NSGP, p.223.

²⁴⁷ Salmony had worked for the Asian Art Museum of Koln, and fled to the US to avoid Nazi persecution. See NSGP, pp.64-66.

²⁴⁸ The excavation of the Hou-chong tomb in 1946 was reported in *Artibus Asia* by Kim. See Kim Chewon, "Two Old Sila Tombs," *Artibus Asiae* 10:3 (1947): 169-192.

programme sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation.²⁴⁹ Remarkably, an issue on an overseas special exhibition of Korean cultural objects in the US was also discussed during Kim's visit. Warner propounded the necessity of the exhibition to Kim.²⁵⁰ The Rockefeller Foundation also recommended that Kim discuss this project with Robert P. Griffing, Jr., the director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts (1947-1963 in office), on his return to Korea in December 1948.²⁵¹

With this visit to the US giving him an opportunity, Kim surveyed several issues related to the management of NMK, such as system cataloguing and collection storing. One of the most important things which attracted Kim's attention was about the role of museums as public educational institutions. He paid special attention to the fact that public education played a big part in American museums. He stated that he was impressed by education programmes for the public in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, and the utilisation of projectors and movies for public education in the Buffalo Science Museum.

As Kim commented in the foreword of his memoirs, he thought his visit to the US was very meaningful in his life as a museum professional.²⁵² His remark suggests that the standards of American museums and their human networks gave him good guidance and support in his own official life. Especially, he keenly realised the importance of public education, as he was trying to get the public of the fledging independent country familiar with their material culture. Through this visit, Kim was able to build a human network with American academics, and became a key figure in that network. This fact also meant that the US side could acquire a stable ground for securing academic

²⁴⁹ This programme was made possible by the Smith-Mundt Act (the US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, Public Law 80-402). See Heo Eun, *The US Hegemony and Korean Ethnic Nationalism* (미국의 헤게모니와 한국 민족주의, hereafter UHKN) (Seoul: Institute of Ethnic National Culture Research, Korea University, 2008), p.93 & p.214. Salmony was scheduled to deliver 14 lectures on East Asian art & archaeology over four months, but did just one, owing to the outbreak of the Korean War on 25th June, 1950. See NSGP, p.65.

²⁵⁰ NSGP, p.109.

²⁵¹ Griffing, who was keen to hold the exhibition in Hawaii, became a key person to revive the discussion, and made a visit to Seoul in 1954, whereupon he waited for six more years owing to the Korean War.

²⁵² NSGP, p.4.

materials related to East Asian material culture,²⁵³ and that the Korean side not only secured a key route by which to introduce Korean material culture into American academic society, but also opened a possibility of continued financial support from US-based private foundations.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, it is very suggestive that Kim's travel essay on this visit, *News from America*, was introduced into a Korean language school textbook at high school level in the early 1950s.²⁵⁵ Accordingly, it can be said that his impression of the US was influencing Korean students into making their own image of the US. It was the very thing that the US side, the government and the foundation, ultimately wanted.

An important change which Kim's visit to the US brought to NMK was the introduction of an education programme for the public in May 1949. This programme, entitled 'art lectures (美術講座)' was organised for "enlightening the public."²⁵⁶ According to *Gwanbo*, NMK defined as one of its important tasks to "diffuse related knowledge to the public in general, especially students." For this goal, NMK set teachers of primary and secondary schools as main targets of this lecture course. The first course consisted of six lectures, and each lecture was delivered by lecturers, from either inside or outside of NMK, every Saturday afternoon from 7th May to 11th June, 1949. This course covered Buddhist sculpture, Buddhist pagodas, porcelain, woodcraft and East Asian painting.²⁵⁷ Until 1950, NMK held this course three times in total, and

²⁵³ They included not only Korean artefacts but also Chinese artefacts, such as a Han China lacquerware with paintings excavated in Korea, which actually drew more attention from American academics (MMWL, pp.100-110).

²⁵⁴ Lee Hong-jik, acting director of NMK during Kim's stay in the US, stated that Director Kim's visit to the US was worthy of special mention in that he secured a way to accessing substantial financial support for NMK's future projects from the Rockefeller Foundation in the future. See GB 6 (March 1949): 19.

²⁵⁵ Lee Nan-yeong, former director of the Gyeongju National Museum, recollected that she read this essay during her high school days. See Lee Nan-yeong, *A Museum Storage Keeper* (박물관창고지기) (Seoul: Tongcheon munhwasa, 2005), p.407. Kim's essay, "News from America," was serially published in a journal, *Hakpung* (學風), from November 1948 to April 1949. The full text was reprinted in Kim's memoirs in 1991 (NSGP, pp.217-268).

²⁵⁶ GB 7 (September 1949): 5.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.6.

each course attracted 20 to 30 teachers from around the Seoul area. Noteworthy, those lecturers were aided by projectors that Kim had brought from the US.²⁵⁸

The Association of Art Research (美術研究會), which was organised in February 1949 under Kim's lead, was closely connected to the art lecture courses. This association was established for art research and for the enlightenment of the public. From the time of its establishment it organised a series of programmes, such as monthly seminars, lectures or field trips to cultural relics, with the cooperation of relevant scholars. The seminars convened by this association covered diverse fields such as Korean art, archaeology, architecture, cartography and history, East Asian art, and even European and modern paintings. According to Kim's memoirs, some seminars and lectures from those days were not necessarily satisfactory, but the association was the most active in its activities out of all of the relevant groups.²⁵⁹ These activities around NMK show that Korean academics were beginning to pay attention to specific fields of Korean material culture, and trying to approach concrete contents. Furthermore, their academic interests started to be connected to the public through the medium of the national museum. Their influence on South Korean society cannot be said to have been great; however, it was evident progress for Korean academics to get to be able to make a start in this series of activities, taking into account the colonial situation at most only five years before.

Furthermore, several measures were taken to 'enlighten' the South Korean public. In March 1949 the use of the Korean alphabet rather than Chinese characters on all the information panels and labels was completed.²⁶⁰ The gallery talks for group audiences were also attempted from September 1949.²⁶¹ Lectures by curatorial members of NMK were also delivered at some local cities.²⁶² These efforts were paying off when the NMK was approved to add a new section, the Section of Education and Public Relations, to the office of NMK on 12th December, 1949.²⁶³ This section was planned to take full charge of enlightening the public and promoting museum projects. This meant that

²⁵⁸ NSGP, pp.32-33.

²⁵⁹ NSGP, pp.34-38.

²⁶⁰ GB 7 (September 1949): 11-12.

²⁶¹ GB 8 (December 1949): 12.

²⁶² *Ibid*, p.29.

²⁶³ Republic of Korea, Presidential Decree no.234, 12th December, 1949.

NMK was trying to actualise the vision of public enlightenment that Kim had conceived during his visit to the US, and that the Government of Republic of Korea now agreed to NMK's request.

The Korean War and the setback to NMK

The outbreak of the Korean War set back the efforts made by NMK. All the collections and most of the staff members in Seoul were left under the rule of North Korea only three days after the outbreak of war on 25th June, 1950. Kim Chewon was forced into hiding inside Seoul. Kim Yong-tae, from the Committee for Material Culture of the North Korean Cabinet, took over NMK. However, the counterattack by the UN forces, led by the US forces, forced the North Koreans to give up Seoul and retreat on 28th September, 1950. Right before the retreat, Kim Yong-tae attempted to take the major collections of NMK to North Korea. After finishing packing those collections, he tried to add to his loot a renowned private collection, that of Jeon Hyeong-pil. He forced NMK staff members to pack it as soon as possible, but they tried to delay packing, risking their lives. With Seoul retaken by UN forces, Kim Yong-tae had to give up taking those collections, and escaped to the north.²⁶⁴ This situation over NMK's collection showed that both South and North Korea considered it as a symbol of cultural identity to prove the legitimacy of each nation-state.

Meanwhile, with the People's Republic of China's forces participating in the war in support of North Korea, the war situation was suddenly reversed again. Kim Chewon decided to evacuate major collections to Busan, a port city on the south eastern coast, before Seoul would be retaken by the North Korean forces on 4th January, 1951. However, it was not easy to activate the evacuation plan. Being concerned about public unrest, the South Korean government was slow in implementing the evacuation plan. Eventually, the government could not help permitting the evacuation in order not to lose 'national treasures' to North Korea. At the same time, the US side had more things to take into consideration. The US government remembered the international criticism it had to face when the US moved the collections of Berlin Museum of Art to the US after the end of the Second World War, although it was actually for protecting the

²⁶⁴ NSGP, pp.64-69.

collection.²⁶⁵ Kim made an appeal for help to Eugene Knez, managing chief of a local branch of the US Information Services (USIS) at the US Embassy in South Korea. Knez, the former chief of the Department of Culture, USAMGIK, in 1946, risked criticism both from the US government and from the Communists for helping NMK and the Deogsu-gung Art Gallery to evacuate their collections, which was basically the responsibility of the South Korean government. He sponsored transportation – trucks and trains – for the evacuation to Busan. He even provided a temporary place to keep those collections in the Busan branch of the USIS. His help was essential to the protection of major collections of NMK, and Kim got to keep an immeasurable faith in the US side.

The seesaw battles during the war made the South Korean government concerned about even the collections evacuated to Busan. In 1951, the South Korean President Rhee Syngman even directed to evacuate those collections to the US.²⁶⁶ However, the US government was reluctant to accept his request on the same diplomatic, strategic reasons stated before. Instead, Griffing, the director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, volunteered to take custody of the collections, expecting an exhibition of those collections in Hawaii. NMK even set about repacking for the evacuation to Honolulu, but negotiations for a truce made it stop. Until the signing of the truce in July 1953, NMK had to stay in Busan, and could not undertake any meaningful activity in refuge, except the preservation of the collections and the setting up of small-scale exhibitions of modern Korean painting to help painters in Busan.²⁶⁷

The return of NMK to Seoul and the Establishment of the Museum Mission

After the truce was signed on 27th July, 1953, NMK returned to Seoul along with the government, with the main collections remaining in Busan. After its return, NMK had

²⁶⁵ As seen above, even in terms of the excavation of Hou-chomg Tomb in 1946 the North Korean press had severely criticised USAMGIK and South Korea.

²⁶⁶ On 9th July, 1951, Rhee ordered the evacuation of NMK's collection to Hawaii. NMK, *60 Years of the National Museum of Korea* (국립중앙박물관 60년, hererafter SNMK) (Seoul: 2006), p.48.

²⁶⁷ *The New York Times* (24th May, 1953).

to find another building, because the President, under the guise of the preservation of the palace, directed NMK to leave the Gyeongbokgung Palace, in which its main building was located. The three-year-long war, which left about 1.3 million casualties on the South Korean side alone,²⁶⁸ did not leave any room to give museum activities priority over the recovery from immense war damage. NMK had to move to the building of the former National Museum of Anthropology, which had been absorbed as a branch museum of NMK for an administrative simplification right after the outbreak of the war. Furthermore, NMK, in the same context, lost the Exhibition Section in its office. NMK managed to open its permanent exhibition with artefacts that remained in Seoul on February 1954. However, NMK's activities could not avoid being reduced to the minimum, owing to the limited manpower and deficient budget, for the time being. In the same year, NMK had to follow another unreasonable order: to hand over the building to the military authorities, which clearly showed the priority of the decision making of the government in those days.²⁶⁹

Kim managed to meet President Yi and succeed in persuading him to allow NMK to use Seokjojeon at Deoksugung Palace, in which Japanese artworks had been displayed during the colonial period. The fact that the president himself had to decide whether to reconstruct a national museum or not, showed the miserable difficulties that South Korea experienced after the war. Kim heartily expressed his gratitude in that Yi make a resolute decision to reconstruct NMK there, stating that Yi's long exile in Western countries had made him understand the importance of the museum.²⁷⁰ In February 1955 NMK opened its permanent exhibition at Seokjojeon, concentrating on the normalisation of functions of NMK.²⁷¹ However, the majority of the major collections were yet in Busan because of the continued threat to national security.

²⁶⁸ Eckert, "Liberation, Division, and War," p.345.

²⁶⁹ In 1952, a reporter lamented that "ethnic national culture or ethnic national objects have never been preserved or discovered properly," and academics joined this appeal. In a sense, this rhetoric was indispensable in order to draw the government's attention, as such expressions were the last way to persuade the government into paying attention to material culture. See "A Red Signal on the Ethnic National Heritage? (民族遺産에 赤信號)," *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (4th February, 1952).

²⁷⁰ NSGP, pp.86-93.

²⁷¹ According to a document of NMK dated 1st July, 1955, NMK exhibited only 621 items in total, out of

During this difficult period, NMK did take a special step to revive NMK: the establishment of the Museum Mission. This mission, which comprised three articles, is thought to have been established from late-1953 to early 1955, and was first recorded as the museum's mission on a business report as of February 1955.²⁷² Even though its date of establishment is unsure, this mission is evaluated to be a milestone in NMK's history. Both criticising the management of GGM and reflecting its activities since its foundation in 1945, NMK tried to define its mission precisely and set out its vision of a national museum of the fledging state, the Republic of Korea, recognising that NMK should now contribute to the construction of nation building and reparation of the devastating damage from the war. The museum mission was as follows.

1. By pushing forward excavation and research projects which characterised NMK since its foundation, NMK should independently build a basis of development of Korean archaeology and art history, expand its collections and increase their authority.
2. By sweeping away a notion that the museum is an ivory tower for the sake of a few scholars and antiquaries, NMK should develop projects of the enlightenment for the public and students as an educational institution for the fields of history, archaeology and fine art.
3. By opening the museum as a research centre for researchers, artists and students, NMK should contribute to the development of disciplines and fine art and be conducive to the cultivation of men of talent.²⁷³

which 29 items of paintings and ceramic were borrowed from private collectors.

²⁷² NMK, "A Business Report (國立博物館現況調查報告書)," February 1955. Two business reports of NMK, of June 1952 (政府樹立後四個年間事業報告) and August 1953 (政府樹立後五個年間事業報告), already had similar sentences to these final museum **mottos**, as shown on a status report of NMK from February 1955. Those sentences were presumed to have been polished up to be the final version of the museum mission.

²⁷³ NMK, "A Business Report as of February 1955."

This mission, which can be broken down into independent management, the enlightenment of the public and the development of knowledge and art, can be said to have been intended to propose concrete ways for finding a cultural identity of an independent nation as main agents of the discourse on material culture. These ways were to break through the authoritarian management of GGM, to enlighten the Korean public, and to develop knowledge and art. This establishment of the museum's mission is thought to have given concrete method and shape at the time to the revival of NMK after the war, and to NMK's mission as proposed by Kim in 1947: of laying a foundation of the independent nation promptly in the field of culture.²⁷⁴ In short, this beginning stage of NMK was a period in which NMK organised its operational system as a cultural institution, and searched for a direction and method of development. The war and its damage delayed NMK's development, and restricted the activities of NMK. However, its mission and vision for the future were germinating and taking concrete shapes. It was around this time that a discussion on the overseas special exhibition of Korean art in Korea resumed between Korea and the US.

²⁷⁴ GB 1 (July 1947): p.i.

Chapter 3. Overseas exhibition and nation building

The chance to draw the attention of South Korean leaders to Korean material culture came from diplomatic need in the latter part of the 1950s. The United States' assistance to the South Korean government was essential for national security and reconstruction following the damage resulting from the Korean War. Furthermore, South Korea, which stood at the forefront of the Cold War on behalf of the US, attempted to attract as much aid as it could from the US, causing occasional diplomatic tensions between South Korea and the US. It was in this context that NMK's first overseas special exhibition of Korean culture toured eight cities in the US between 1957 and 1959. This exhibition showed how material culture could play a practical role in securing the political and diplomatic position of a country impoverished by colonial rule and war on the world stage. The political leaders and government officials of South Korea were shown through this exhibition the usefulness and value of representing Korean cultural identity via material culture.

The attention paid by NMK to overseas special exhibitions can be traced to a 1948 proposal by Professor Langdon Warner at Harvard University to Kim Chewon for an exhibition of Korean art in the US while he was staying in the US in 1948. Dr Kim agreed on the necessity of the exhibition and even obtained a favourable response from the then President Rhee Syngman, the first president of the Republic of Korea.²⁷⁵ However, this plan was forestalled by the outbreak of the Korean War, and the National Assembly of Korea did not approve the South Korean government's plan to send cultural objects to the US for an exhibition until 1955. The first overseas touring exhibition in the US took place between 1957 and 1959. This touring exhibition also led to exhibitions in five Western European countries between 1961 and 1962.

By focusing on this overseas exhibition project, *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, between 1957 and 1961, this chapter aims to consider how a national cultural identity in a postcolonial country started to be formed through material culture under the Cold War

²⁷⁵ Ministry of Education, *A Report on Exhibitions of Cultural Objects in the U.S.A.*

(문화재미국전시보고서, hereafter RECU) (Seoul: 1960), p.1.

world system. This chapter examines the experiences of South Korea in its attempt to acquire cultural citizenship on the world stage through an overseas exhibition in which NMK tried to define, display and internalise the cultural identity of Korea. Specifically, this chapter concentrates on the process by which, through the overseas display of cultural objects, South Korea's cultural identity as a modern nation was recognised in South Korea, presented to other nations and reproduced on an increasing scale.

Questions to be discussed in this chapter include the following: what were the background and meaning of overseas touring exhibition projects, both in the US (1957-1959) and Western Europe (1961-1962), during the Cold War? What did the South Korean government and the hosting countries intend to achieve through the project, and what did they get from it? What did the US government want to achieve by holding overseas exhibitions from the Japanese, Taiwanese and South Korean governments in the 1950s? How were overseas exhibitions in Western European country different from the one in the US in purpose and background? How did the project influence the status of NMK, and how did it regulate its activities in terms of the discourse on ethnic national culture?

The South Korea and US relationship at the front lines of the Cold War

Under the Cold War system, the United States actively utilised the dissemination of American culture as well as military alliances and economic aid. In this context, the US government strove to spread American institutions and values throughout South Korea in the long term. American public information officers dispatched to South Korea in the 1950s considered themselves as those who were embodying the frontier spirit for civilisation and pioneers of a new world order controlled by American hegemony.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, the US considered East Asia as an outpost of the Cold War and intervened in that area very actively.²⁷⁷ In 1950, the US intervened in Korea to push back a North

²⁷⁶ In June 1955, the United States Information Agency (USIA) had staff of 7,817 members including local staff. See American Assembly, *The Representation of the United States Abroad* (New York: Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, 1956), p.14, cited in UHKN, pp.19-29.

²⁷⁷ Cha Sang-cheol, "Rhee Syngman and the Korea-US Alliance in the 1950s (이승만과 1950년대의 한미동맹)," in *New Understanding of the History around the Liberation* (해방전후사의 재인식), vol.2,

Korean invasion. After this, the US signed a mutual defence treaty with South Korea in 1953, and “maintained tens of thousands of American troops and even tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula, while pouring vast sums of money into the development of South Korea’s own military forces.”²⁷⁸ In the first half of the 1950s, the US constructed an international order in opposition to the USSR.²⁷⁹ In order to maintain a stable, pro-American regime in South Korea, the US started to change direction from purely military aid to political and economic assistance, which resulted in the necessity of the internal health of this pro-American and anti-communist regime.²⁸⁰

The US ambition was for South Korea to be not only a bastion of military security in East Asia, but also a symbol of the superiority of the American system. However, as far as an American diplomat in Seoul thought in the 1950s, South Korea was “a nation adrift whose people are disillusioned and uninspired.” He continued as follows in his report to the US Department of State: “The Communist danger, it is pointed out, remains as a potential danger which increases day by day as President Rhee and his Government fail to offer believable nation goals.”²⁸¹ Even though these national goals the US diplomats bore in mind were focused on economic and political aspects such as meaningful economic development and the growth of the democratic process,²⁸² their consideration for constructing a stable regime in South Korea included cultural aspects, such as helping it to affirm its national identity through material culture. As Heo points out, the US was willing to characterise itself as the nation that supported other nations’

edited by Park Ji-Hyang et al. (Seoul: Chagsaesang, 2006), pp.258-261.

²⁷⁸ Eckert, “Economic Development in Historical Perspective,” p.395.

²⁷⁹ UHKN, p.326.

²⁸⁰ Lee Cheol-Sun, “The US Policy toward South Korea in the Second Half of the 1950s (1950년대 후반 미국의 대한정책),” in *New Understanding of the History around the Liberation*, vol.2, p.551.

²⁸¹ “Memorandum from the Officer in Charge of Korean Affairs (Nes) to the Deputy Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Parsons), Washington,” 12th July, 1956, in the Department of State, *Foreign Relation of the United States 1955-57*, vol.23, Part 2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1993), p.291.

²⁸² In the first half of the 1950s, the US constructed an international order in the course of its strong confrontation with the USSR and had to absorb the aspirations for change and development of East Asian nations in the course of this competition. See UHKN, p.326.

aspirations for national freedom in the course of its competition with the USSR, even if the US thought that extreme nationalism should be excluded, for the reason of hindering the alliance between members of the free world in the Asian region.²⁸³ It was in this context that the US pushed forward with a series of cultural projects aimed towards South Korea under the name of cultural exchange.

Even though the US government tried to glamorise its projects with the term ‘cultural exchange,’ the projects basically constituted a one-sided transmission towards South Korea of American values, institutions and knowledge, namely American civilisation. During the 1950s, the United States Information Service in South Korea was eager to publicise the superiority of American civilisation through several activities, such as showing films to local Koreans, managing libraries and airing radio broadcasts. The US government also strove to invite South Korean leaders to the US to familiarise them with American values, and offered South Korean students a chance to study at US universities. Moreover, as shown above, the US government dispatched American scholars to South Korea to deliver lectures to South Koreans under the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act in 1950.²⁸⁴

Actually, almost everything was being transmitted from the US to South Korea. Under these circumstances, the exhibition of Korean culture in the US can be seen as a reasonable cultural item that had the potential to equalise the one-sided trend of cultural exchange between South Korea and the US. Not surprisingly, the American side also took the initiative in that discussion. It was the American side, rather than the Korean, which raised the necessity of the exhibition; this exhibition was possible because the American side, rather than the Korean, wanted it.

²⁸³ Memo, From P-Walter K. Schwinn, 14th August, 1951, Subject: U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Programmes in the Present Situation, p.2, cited from UHKN, p.328.

²⁸⁴ UHKN, pp.30-31.

Progress of the overseas Korean exhibition and the American side's intentions

It was as early as April 1946 that NMK was visited by an American specialist in Asian art, Professor Langdon Warner of Harvard University, who was assigned to GHQ/SCAP in Tokyo. He spent two days enthusiastically inspecting the museum.²⁸⁵ Following this, in November 1946, Sherman Lee, who was from 1946 to 1948 a civilian adviser to the staff of GHQ/SCAP on the cataloguing, preserving and protection of Japanese artworks, also visited and inspected NMK.²⁸⁶ In April 1947, loaning some NMK artefacts to the US was even considered, but this was not carried out.²⁸⁷

In 1948, Warner explained the need for a Korean art exhibition in the US to director Kim Chewon, who visited the US by invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation.²⁸⁸ As shown above in chapter 2, Warner introduced Kim to the Oriental ceramic research group in Boston, which was a chance to gauge the interest of American academics about a possible Korean art exhibition. Also, the Rockefeller Foundation arranged a meeting to discuss a planned exhibition with Robert P. Griffing, Jr, the director of the Hawaiian Academy of Art in Hawaii on director Kim's return to Korea.²⁸⁹ They agreed to hold the exhibition in the US as soon as possible. But it could not be carried out because of the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. The following letter forwarded to GHQ/SCAP by Griffing shows how the exhibition was proposed and prepared.

Our concern with the Korean museums is a matter of several years' standing, dating back to 1947 when we made tentative plans for an international circulating exhibition of Korean arts. In 1948 the Rockefeller Foundation sent Dr. Kim to Honolulu to discuss this matter with us here, and as a result of these and other factors,

²⁸⁵ GB 1 (February 1947): 3.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²⁸⁷ GB 2 (July 1947): 4-5. Which American institution had contact with NMK on this issue was not specified in *Gwanbo*.

²⁸⁸ NSGP, pp.56-59.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

the United States Department of State sent one of America's leading authorities in the field of oriental art, Dr Alfred Salmony, to Korea in 1950 to lecture there and to begin the process of selection for such an exhibition. Meanwhile, we had gained the support and interest of a number of American museums to make wide circulation of the exhibition possible.²⁹⁰

Remarkably, the United States Department of State had already embarked on the exhibition project in 1950, by sending Professor Salmony to Korea for the selection of artefacts. This implies that the US administration had placed the exhibition under its farsighted foreign policy; and that it was, at the same time, meeting the expectations of American academics and public. After the Second World War, the US government began making efforts to secure pro-American regimes all over the world by positioning the US as a friendly country that was accepting of the national cultural sovereignties of each country.²⁹¹ In the same context, "defeated Germany, Japan, and Italy had to be transformed into viable democratic systems and had to be integrated into the emergent anti-Soviet coalition," as Berghahn suggests.²⁹²

Several overseas exhibitions hosted by the National Gallery of Art under the US government after the Second World War clearly show this direction of US foreign policy. For example, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC held a series of exhibitions, such as *Paintings from the Berlin Museums* (March to April 1948), *Art Treasures from the Vienna Collections* (November 1940 to January 1950) and *Japanese Painting and Sculpture from the Sixth Century A.D. to the Nineteenth Century* (January to February 1953).²⁹³ One exhibition in particular, *Art Treasures from Japan*, a special

²⁹⁰ "Offer by Honolulu Academy of Arts to Accept Korean National Museums' Collections for Safekeeping," 16th March, 1951 (National Archives, RG 59).

²⁹¹ UHKN, p.123.

²⁹² Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepherd Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xiii.

²⁹³ Out of these exhibitions, Japan's overseas tour exhibition in America in 1953 was enough to draw special attention from Korean political leaders. As will be shown in this chapter, the South Korean

loan exhibition in commemoration of the signing of the Peace Treaty in San Francisco in 1951, was also a cultural event for showing off the new friendly relations between the US and Japan.²⁹⁴ As *The Manchester Guardian* put it, “this must surely have been the first occasion on which a defeated nation celebrated peace by an exhibition of its arts to its conquerors.”²⁹⁵ Although it was “intended as a sign of Japan’s appreciation of the great care which American authorities took immediately after the occupation to preserve her art treasures,”²⁹⁶ this exhibition in the US was a representative example of a cultural event being utilised for political purposes. Japan actually achieved such great success in this peace treaty that it “could become a fully sovereign nation with authority to rearm or develop its economy as it pleases and become eligible for U.N. membership.”²⁹⁷

Although America did not publicly state that the purpose of these exhibitions was anything more than generating mutual understanding, these cultural events were definitely for assisting in the building of nation states in which pro-American regimes could survive. John Walker (1906-1995), Director of the National Gallery of Art (1956-1969 in office), which held the first exhibition during the Korean overseas touring exhibition, remarked in the exhibition catalogue, “It is by such an international artistic undertaking as this that the mutual understanding of the peoples of our two republics

government utilised this exhibition to persuade the National Assembly into consenting to the first project of an overseas Korean exhibition in America.

²⁹⁴ “This exhibition, held jointly by the Cultural Properties Protection Commission of Japan and the M.H.de Young Memorial Museum of San Francisco, was brought over at very short notice by the renowned Dr Harada Jiro and a staff of experts from the National Museum in Tokyo. In spite of its hasty assembly it contains objects on loan from 22 Buddhist temples, ten museums, five Shinto shrines, and 43 private collectors, in all some 178 objects covering a wide range of Japanese art.” See “Japanese Art, Peace Exhibition at San Francisco,” *The Manchester Guardian* (24th October, 1951).

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ “International: Terms of Peace,” *Time* (23rd July, 1951).

will be significantly furthered”.²⁹⁸ However, it can be argued that to host an exhibition of traditional Korean art was on a par with the US government’s policy to secure a pro-American regime in South Korea during the Cold War. Promoting a national identity for South Korea was a means of helping South Korea build its modern nation state, which ultimately accorded with the national interests of the US, politically as well as culturally.

Nevertheless, the US government was reluctant to reveal its political purposes in cultural events. This was done partly by encouraging American academics and civilians in cultural circles to participate in those cultural projects. In other words, the US government made efforts to make the cultural events it hosted appear to be genuine cultural exchanges among civilians. This American approach can be thought to reflect a learning effect from those political troubles that the US government had faced after holding the paintings from the Berlin exhibition in 1948 at the National Gallery of Art. This exhibition was decried by the USSR as a an exhibition of artefacts that the US army looted from Germany during the Second World War.²⁹⁹

During the Korean War, the US government had also been harassed by Communist propaganda that accused the US army of stealing all the art treasures of the South Korean national museums. After reoccupying Seoul in January 1951, the Communist began, as a means of propaganda, to utilise several photographs of the empty galleries of the National Museum after its evacuation by museum staff in December 1950.³⁰⁰ This background explains why the US government was reluctant to accept the South Korean government’s request to keep its collection in the US during the war. In this situation, Griffing, director of the Hawaiian Academy of Art, who had discussed the Korean art exhibition with Kim Chewon, volunteered to accept the request in the capacity of status of a civilian institution. His favour further gave him a chance to arrange the exhibition with NMK after the Korean War.

²⁹⁸ Foreword by John Walker, See National Gallery of Art et al., *Masterpieces of Korean Art: An Exhibition under the Auspices of the Government of the Republic of Korea* (Boston: T.O.Metcalf Co., 1957), pp.13-14.

²⁹⁹ “Paintings from Berlin Museums; March 17th-April 25th, 1948,” available at <http://www.nga.gov/past/data/exh80.shtm>

³⁰⁰ NSGP, p.76.

In spring 1954, Griffing paid a courtesy visit to President Rhee Syngman to request cooperation in establishing a touring exhibition of Korean art in America.³⁰¹ Actually, he had the full support of the US government. He could meet President Rhee thanks to arrangements made by Ellis O. Briggs (1899-1976), the US ambassador in Seoul, and he was able to utilise a US military flight when he travelled to Korea.³⁰² Thus, it could be argued that he was acting on behalf of the US government. It seems that President Rhee also considered Griffing's proposal as coming from the US government. It should be understood that it was because of President Rhee's political calculation that an American museum director could confirm the cooperation of the South Korean president in a touring exhibition of Korean treasures in the US. In this approach, the US government differed markedly from that of South Korea and Japan, who wanted to push forward with those events at the government level.

An American public foundation also contributed to the effort to emphasise the non-political character of the exhibition project. The Rockefeller Foundation invited two key figures of NMK, such as its director, Kim Chewon, from 1948 to 1949 and had arranged a direct possibility for discussing the touring exhibition of Korean art in the US. As shown in the compliments in the exhibition catalogue by Walker, the director of the National Gallery of Art, the foundation also granted \$10,000 for the preparation of an exhibition of Korean national treasures in cooperation with other museums.³⁰³

The South Korean government's strategy of cultural diplomacy

(1) Purpose of the overseas exhibition project of the South Korean government and National Assembly

Although the US took the initiative from the beginning of the project, the South Korean government was by far the more active in expressing its expectations through this

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp.110-111.

³⁰² *Ibid*.

³⁰³ "Rockefeller Aid Put at 2 Million: Research Grants made in 3rd Quarter of 1956." *New York Times* (23rd November, 1956). It added that the "National Gallery of Art in Washington received \$10,000 for the preparation of an exhibition of Korean national treasures in cooperation with other museums."

touring exhibition. South Korean officials and politicians expected to accrue both practical and cultural profits from the event. In terms of the cultural aspect, South Korea aspired to improve its image through cultural objects, and by doing so to maximise aid from the US in practical aspects. A further outcome expected from the US exhibition was to recover national dignity following the disgrace experienced during Japanese colonial rule. The US, which had control of the contemporary world order, was the right country to guarantee Korea's national dignity and respect its national identity. South Korean leaders thought that appealing to the US would be recognised as an appeal to the world.

In September 1952, during the Korea War, the Ministry of Education of the South Korean government submitted to the National Assembly a motion for consent to a plan for the evacuation of NMK collections to the US for their safety, including a plan for an exhibition of some masterpieces. As shown above, the government was planning the evacuation to the US of 18,883 items from both NMK and the Deoksugung Museum of Art, which were temporarily being kept in Busan. Those collections evacuated from Seoul included almost all the essential artefacts of the two museums; thus, this was why the government requested the consent of the National Assembly. The core of the motion was for the evacuation of the collection, not for the exhibition. This first motion was rejected, as the majority opposition parties did not agree.³⁰⁴ A member of the National Assembly contended that such national treasures should not be evacuated, because Koreans would lose an element of their national spirit without those spiritual essences and 4000 years of heritage.³⁰⁵ Another political issue decisively influenced members of opposition parties, who were enraged by the antidemocratic constitutional amendment for the re-election of President Rhee Syngman and the ruling party in July 1952.

This motion was submitted once again, and it finally gained consent from the National Assembly on 25th April, 1955 after a fierce debate. Kim Beob-Lin (金法麟, 1899-1964, the then president of the Committee of Education), the National Assembly

³⁰⁴ 81 out of 152 members who were present voted against this motion. See the National Assembly, *The Minutes of the National Assembly* 15:77 (國會定期會議速記錄 第15會 77次) (30th May, 1952).

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

and the former Minister of Education explained the necessity of the touring exhibition in the US before the full membership of the Assembly as follows.

Foreigners have a very low level of understanding of Korea. To our surprise, they never know that Korea, as an independent nation for thousands of years, has created *its* own unique culture and has an *indigenous language and culture*. Very surprising is this reality that we can recognise once we go abroad. ... After liberation, the name of Korea was noticed all over the world only by the Korean War, but Korea as a cultural nation is never known. This is because the Japanese publicised only negative aspects of Korea during colonial rule, and did not show foreigners our magnificent culture when they visited Korea. Hundreds of thousands of US and foreign soldiers who fought in the Korean War remember only destroyed land and wandering Koreans. That is why they cannot have a good impression of our Koreans, nor a sound understanding of our culture. As soon as possible, we should push forward with this overseas project of publicising our culture so that foreigners can understand us. Furthermore, at this time, we should let the free allied nations know the historical status of our culture, so that we can expect both material and spiritual guidance from them for our national unification and economic revival. We should show them what South Korea can do for the free world through this opportunity.

Members of the Liberal Party, which had a majority as the governing party, gave consent to the motion for the first overseas exhibition, insisting that the exhibition was indispensable in order to give publicity to Korean culture, which was rarely known on the world stage, and arguing that it would contribute to securing a national identity and dignity as well as maximising aid from the US.

On the contrary, members of opposition parties objected to the plan because, they argued, of its inappropriate timing, carelessness and humiliating capitulation to the

powerful. They also pointed out that NMK had not even opened its permanent gallery at the very time of the discussion, even though the government returned to Seoul after the start of armistice in July 1953. Even Park Yeong-Jong, a member of the ruling party, lamented that no powerful nation would send out its national treasures, considering the exhibition project as a flattering action to the US government. He also added that this project had only a diplomatic cause. His comment shows that not a few Koreans felt that this cultural exchange had strong implications for practical profits as well as cultural expectations, as shown in Kim Beob-Lin's explanation.³⁰⁶

In the preface of the catalogue of the overseas exhibition in the US, Choi Kyu-Nam (1898-1992), Minister of Education of the South Korean government, clearly expressed the political and diplomatic intention and meaning behind the exhibition.

By sending this exhibition the Korean people express their gratitude to the American nation, especially to all those known and unknown American friends who fought with us against the communist invasion in our common cause: the dignity and freedom of mankind. ... In the present struggle for the peace of the world, no nations are working together more closely than Korea and the United States. It is our hope that this exhibition may contribute to further understanding and lasting friendship between our two nations.³⁰⁷

As he asserted in this preface, the South Korean government wanted to tell the American government that this exhibition was in return for US assistance in the Korean War. The South Korean government was also eager to emphasise that South Korea was the most co-operative country with the US in confronting the Communist bloc. In other words, this exhibition can be said to have been intended as an extension of *realpolitik* between South Korea and the US.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid* (22nd April, 1955).

³⁰⁷ National Gallery of Art et al., *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, pp.11-12.

Finally, on 25th April, 1955, the National Assembly passed the motion with the absolute consent of the Liberal Party, which agreed to the government's plan.³⁰⁸ Although members of opposition parties raised some reasonable points for objecting to the touring exhibition, their vote was greatly influenced by a politically hot issue. They were enraged by another anti-democratic constitutional amendment on 29th November, 1954 making possible President Rhee's third presidential term. Actually, both the governing party and the opposition party shared almost the same understanding of cultural objects as symbol and soul of the Korean nation, at least in their remarks.³⁰⁹ Collections of NMK were to them considered the nation itself, so to speak. Their respect for cultural objects was almost absolute.

On the other hand, the tone of a popular newspaper regarding this exhibition project shows that public opinion was being influenced by the current political atmosphere. *Donga ilbo*, which fiercely criticised the then constitutional amendment, also objected to the government's exhibition plan, arguing that the exhibition would be expensive and would expose national treasures to unnecessary risk of damage and robbery even if it had the effect of publicising Korea's traditional culture in the US.³¹⁰ Interestingly, this newspaper changed its position as practical procedures for the overseas exhibition began to be taken. It even expressed a sense of frustration, saying this exhibition should have had more artefacts to display.³¹¹

(2) Strategy of Director Kim Chewon

In one of his memoirs, Kim considered the overseas exhibition projects to be the largest accomplishment out of all the activities of NMK.³¹² For him, this project was actually

³⁰⁸ All members of the ruling party who spoke before the vote consented to the motion, and vice versa. 79 of the 144 members present voted for this motion; 33 were against it. See National Assembly, *op. cit.*, 20:35 (25th April, 1955).

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20: 35 (25th April, 1955).

³¹⁰ "Do Not Carry out the National Treasures (國寶를 海外에 搬出말라)." *Dong-a ilbo* (4th December, 1954).

³¹¹ "National Essences to be Displayed in Foreign Country (외국에 자랑되는 민족정화)," *Dong-a ilbo* (20th May, 1957).

³¹² NSGP, p.3.

very important in terms of both his private and public life. In 1954, when the discussion about the exhibition began again, NMK did not have its own building, as President Rhee ordered the evacuation of all the institutions of Gyeongbok-gung Palace, the main institution of which was NMK, in order to preserve the palace. Furthermore, NMK had to move from a building that had been occupied by the National Anthropology Museum (included as a branch of NMK from 1950).³¹³ After the turmoil of three years of war, even the representative cultural institutions were not guaranteed any authority inside the government.

In this situation, the discussion on the overseas exhibition in the US was a golden opportunity for the museum to gain the attention of President Rhee. As shown above, all affairs with the US were so important that they were all reported directly to the president. Director Kim realised that President Rhee placed considerable expectations in the exhibition, put much effort into the exhibition project and managed to get what he wanted a step at a time – for example, a building for NMK in spring 1955, even if it was a renovated building in another palace in Seoul.³¹⁴ As he recollected in his memoirs, he took charge of all working-level operations such as planning, negotiation and exhibition,³¹⁵ this was because he had such high expectations of this exhibition.

Kim remarked that the exhibition had to be held in order to correct the prejudices of Americans, who had only seen, during the Korean War, bombed streets, destroyed roads and poor Koreans, not the nation's cultural heritage. He was eager to put this project into effect after the end of the war.³¹⁶ The first venue of the exhibition had to be the US, the centre of the world to him and most South Koreans. He was one of important figures of the pro-American line, as he had experienced and admired the high standard of culture and national power and wealth during his stay in the US in the late-1940s.³¹⁷ It could be said that he was willing to cooperate with the US side in any academic project.

He understood what the US wanted, and he knew what he could get from the US in

³¹³ MMWL, p.131.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.132.

³¹⁵ NSGP, p.141.

³¹⁶ MMWL, p.138.

³¹⁷ He described the US as like a dreamland when he visited there in the late-1940s. He lamented how the US could enjoy prosperity as all the world was struggling in poverty. See NSGP, p.58.

return.³¹⁸ Very important was the financial assistance from US public foundations for managing NMK during his term in office, because the budget granted by the government was sadly too meagre.³¹⁹ Kim thus believed that this overseas exhibition project was a good opportunity to secure the international status of Korean culture and, by doing so, to secure the status of the national museum inside the South Korean government. Increasing interest in Korean culture in the US would be further expected to result in more fund raising from American public foundations.

The exhibition committee and selection of artefacts to be displayed

Taking into consideration the critical opinions on the exhibition in the National Assembly, the South Korean government in 1954 organised the Overseas Exhibition Committee which consisted of 16 members, whose mission was to advise on general affairs, including the selection of artefacts for the exhibition. The most important mission of that committee was to give advice on the selection of artefacts to be sent to America. Director Kim held such a strong influence in selecting members of the committee that most figures recommended by him became appointed as members. They included two Korean-style painters, Goh Hui-dong (1886-1965) and Bae Ryum (1911-1968), two collectors, Jeon Hyeong-pil (1906-1962) and Sohn Jae-hyeong (1903-1981), and a journalist, Hong Jong-in (1903-1998).³²⁰ Kim was expecting the support of artistic eyes, especially from Jeon, Sohn and Goh. Kim placed full confidence in Jeon as the most important collector in South Korea, and in Sohn and Goh as both calligraphers and painters. Furthermore, Jeon and Sohn were also very important figures who would send their own private artefacts to the exhibition.³²¹ The committee selection can be said to have reflected Kim's intention to promote the collectors' participation in the

³¹⁸ The Rockefeller Foundation provided director Kim with \$2,000 without any conditions for three years during the Korean War. See NSGP, p.169.

³¹⁹ Lee Nan-yeong, former director of Gyeongju branch museum of NMK recollected that director Kim was always writing to foreign foundations for funds. See Lee Nan-yeong, *A Museum Storage Keeper*, p.56.

³²⁰ MMWL, p.139.

³²¹ Jeon and Sohn sent 26 items from their private collections to this overseas exhibition in the US. See RECU, p.1.

exhibition.

Before the assent of the National Assembly, NMK had begun to select cultural objects to be sent to the US. As noted above, most collections were temporarily being kept in Busan, because NMK did not have a permanent exhibition after its relocation to a building of the Deoksu-gung palace in Seoul in spring 1954. However, NMK was very determined to prepare a good exhibition that would show Korean culture to the US. Kim made efforts to select as many masterpieces as possible to represent Korean culture. In short, the total capability of NMK, even if limited, was being invested in the success of the exhibition. In September 1954 the committee finished the preliminary selection of 306 items before American members of the selection committee.³²² In September 1956 the two American members, Alan Priest (1898-1969) of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Robert T. Paine, Jr. (1900-1965) of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, arrived in Korea for the final selection.

They met with a cordial reception from the South Korean government, which did its utmost to make their stay more convenient. President Rhee even ordered the provision of a special electric service to a local hotel where they were staying during their visit to Busan, when it was general practice only to supply the service in a specific time band, and dispatched a cook to Busan for them from a deluxe hotel in Seoul. As director Kim recollected in his memoir, the South Korean government officials who accompanied the Americans during their local visit might have had difficulty in providing them with decent dinners every evening.³²³ This hospitality can be said to reflect to what extent the South Korean government aspired to gain practical diplomatic profit from the US through the overseas exhibition, and show that the Korean side never held the initiative in organising this cultural exchange project.

The more important point here is what artefacts the two American curators considered as suitable for the exhibition, and what the Korean committee members thought about their preference. The American curators' selection sometimes not only surprised the South Korean members, but also disappointed them, especially in terms of paintings. Kim recollected the then situation as follows.

³²² *Ibid*, p.1.

³²³ NSGP, pp.112-115.

The selection committee could not help considering how American audiences would accept Korean artefacts, so to speak, and how they would respond to ours, when being compared to Chinese and Japanese ones which American museums had in large numbers. However, many Korean members of the committee did not have any knowledge in that field. As a result, Priest's and Paine's opinions were unilaterally adopted, while the Korean side's opinions were never accepted.³²⁴

The two American curators can be said to have had some preoccupation with what Korean art should be. It is natural to think that Priest and Paine, who were curators of prominent American museums, wanted to find something different in Korean art compared to Chinese and Japanese art. They would have liked to show their audiences something new and magnificent. As director Kim said, they who were specialised in Chinese and Japanese art did not always have the same opinion as their Korean counterparts, even on Korean painters such as Shin Yun-bok (申潤福, 1758-?) and Kim Hong-do (金弘道), whom Koreans considered great masters in that field.³²⁵

For example, Gunseondo (群仙圖, *Taoist hermits*) by Kim Hong-do (1745-?), which is a magnificent, large-scale painting, was unanimously recommended by the Korean members, but their American counterparts disagreed.³²⁶ They argued that this painting could give American audiences the wrong impression of Korean painting when it was introduced as a work of the country's most famous painter.³²⁷ Their concern was that this painting exactly followed the Chinese style, and that the figures in the painting looked Chinese. As shown in this example, they preferred artefacts which could show differences from Chinese culture and therefore demonstrate the independence of Korean culture. The American curators placed priority on the response of American audiences,

³²⁴ MMWL, p.139.

³²⁵ NSGP, p.112.

³²⁶ This painting was newly designated as national treasure no. 139 by the government on 21st December, 1971.

³²⁷ MMWL, p.139.

and are thought to have preferred artefacts which could effectively explain the independence of Korean culture from the universality of East Asian culture. The following comment by Kim at that time clearly shows their preference.

Because of the limited number of paintings and a desire to choose Korean works free from Chinese influence, the Selection Committee was restricted to paintings of the Yi dynasty.³²⁸

An interesting point is that the American curators were more active and determined to find things genuinely Korean than the Korean committee members were. However, they were overlooking the fact that the Koreans had considered Chinese civilisation as their important standard, even if they had transformed it and created things in Korean ways. In this context, the American curators were actually losing some objective perspective on East Asian art in terms of the influence and exchange of culture in East Asia. Their preoccupation that Korean culture should have only Korean things can be argued to have been influenced partly by the political situation. The US government wanted to build a healthy modern nation-state in South Korea. Moreover, this state also needed to be a culturally independent country in terms of its political independence. The existence of China in the Communist bloc must also have been a considerable factor in this political and cultural context, even if the thinking of the two curators was not directly related to the then concrete political situation.

Noticeably, the curators played a considerable role in deciding what the presented Korean culture should look like. As shown above, what to be displayed in the overseas exhibition was up to the American side. Goh Hui-dong, one of the committee members, was sufficiently angry at their ‘self-righteousness’ and ‘arrogation’ to complain about these things to Kim. However, Kim had “no way and nowhere to convey those complaints,” as he recollected.³²⁹ This process of selection has quite an important implication. Irrespective of whether they intended to or not, America can be said to have intervened in the formation of the cultural identity of a fledgling modern nation

³²⁸ Kim Chewon, “Masterpieces of Korean Art in America,” *Artibus Asiae* 20:4 (1957): 296.

³²⁹ MMWL, p.140.

state, South Korea, because it had deeply influenced the process in which Korean identity was being formed through material culture in the early stage of the South Korean modern nation-state.³³⁰ This influence was significant in that Koreans would get to recognise their own cultural identity filtered through American intellectuals, while the US itself was yet in the course of making an image of national identity for South Korea that the US considered as adequate in the new order.

Thus, South Koreans as well as American audiences got to approach Korean material culture through the filtering of the American curators. Before those 193 items that the American curators finally selected were sent to the US, NMK provided South Koreans with a chance to view the American-selected Korean national treasures by holding a special exhibition entitled *National Treasures Which Will Be Exhibited in the US* (海外展示古美術展覽會).³³¹ In a sense, the South Korean public as well as intellectuals got to see them through the filter of the US intellectuals.³³²

³³⁰ In 1960, many artefacts displayed in this exhibition were designated as ‘national treasures’ by the government after returning from the touring exhibition in 1960.

³³¹ This exhibition, which attracted an audience of 51,092 from 10th May to 21st May, was demanded by members of the National Assembly in the course of the examination of the motion by the government in May 1955. They contended that South Koreans should view the exhibition before it went to America, criticising the fact that NMK had not yet opened permanent galleries before that time. See NMK, *National Treasures Which Will Be Exhibited in the US* (海外展示古美術展覽會目錄) (Seoul: 1957).

³³² In terms of this overseas exhibition, NMK published two kinds of exhibition catalogues in 1957. The first one, a 110-page-long booklet that was the first catalogue since the establishment of NMK, was entitled *National Treasures Which Will Be Exhibited in the US*. The second one, a deluxe edition, was entitled *An Illustrated Guide to National Treasures* (國寶圖鑑), which included figures and notes of the 193 artworks which would be exhibited in the US in December 1957.



Figure 5. President Rhee Syngman at the special exhibition *Korean National Treasures which will be Exhibited in the US* in May 1957. From NMK Archive.

The exhibition agreement was signed on 25th February, 1957 by the South Korean minister to the US and eight participating museums. A draft of this agreement was based on the exhibition agreement between Japan and the US on 7th October, 1952. As shown above, the Japanese government had an overseas touring exhibition titled *Japanese Painting and Sculpture from the Sixth Century A.D. to the Nineteenth Century* at five American museums, including the National Gallery of Art, in 1953.³³³ The overall format and each article of the agreement between Japan and the US were again copied into the South Korean-American exhibition agreement.³³⁴ The US utilised the previous agreement as a kind of standard, and Korea, which would have its first overseas exhibition, accepted the draft. In fact, Korea accepted several unfavourable conditions in comparison with the Japanese precedent.

Minister Han Pyo-wook presumably knew the unfavourable conditions; however, he could not change the situation because it was actually in accordance with the exact

³³³ Those museums were as follows: the National Gallery of Art, Washington; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

³³⁴ RECU, pp.11-16.

extent of interest of those American museums in Korean art, as well as the strategic value of South Korea for the US. The Japanese art exhibition was enough to draw the interest of the American public.³³⁵ In this context, it is noticeable that the Korean-American agreement excluded an article about the expense of the curators who would stay with the artefacts during the exhibition. The Japanese-American agreement had an article guaranteeing that expense.³³⁶ This meant that the museums were reluctant to pay expenses for the Korean art exhibition, even if it was agreed that only two Korean curators would accompany it.³³⁷ This was why the US Department of State paid this expense on behalf of the participating museums, although the department was also reluctant to pay the expense. Actually, the department reduced the expense to a minimum, and director Kim had to request some financial assistance from the South Korean government.³³⁸

In other words, the difference between both exhibitions shows that the political need of the US government was the more important factor in organising the Korean art exhibition. As shown in the preface by John Walker in the catalogue to the Korean art exhibition, “the United States Army was of great assistance in preparing the exhibition for shipment and it was transported to this country by the United States Navy.” This support from the US government at that time means that this cultural exchange was intended to contribute to the American Far Eastern policy.

On the other hand, the participating museums paid \$16,000, which was about 53% of the insurance fee, and the South Korean government paid the rest, \$14,000.³³⁹ It was

³³⁵ The exhibition *Japanese Painting and Sculpture* in 1953 attracted 187,460 attendants over 32 days at the National Gallery of Art, while the Korean art exhibition in 1957 attracted 43,393 in 27 days. Available at <http://www.nga.gov/past/data/exh80.shtm>

³³⁶ The Japanese-American agreement (signed on October 7th, 1952) Article 13: Each of the participating museums shall contribute under Article 16 its equal pro rata share of a sum to be determined, which shall cover travel and living expenses of the Japanese personnel while they are on duty with the exhibition in the United States or on board ship if this proves necessary. In the case of this Japanese art exhibition, the participating museums paid the expenses of five Japanese curators during their stay in the US.

³³⁷ The South Korean-American agreement (signed on February 25th, 1957), Article 1 Paragraph 4: The exhibition shall be accompanied by a party of Korean personnel, not to exceed three.

³³⁸ MMWL, p.140.

³³⁹ RECU, pp.13-17.

customary that the participating countries should pay all of the insurance fees. However, Kim understood that he had succeeded in persuading the American side into sharing the expenses because Korea, which was devastated by war, could not pay all the expenses.³⁴⁰

Masterpieces of Korean Art in the US

(1) Opening of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art

The first venue of the touring exhibition, *Masterpieces of Korean Art: An Exhibition under the Auspices of the Government of the Republic of Korea*, was the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. The National Gallery of Art had representativeness as a national cultural institution, and was always a starting point of overseas touring exhibitions coming to the US in the 1950s, as shown by the preceding exhibitions in 1948 and 1953. The political implication of this gallery, which is located in the US capital, can also be found in an exhibition entitled *Asian Artists in Crystal from Steuben Glass*, which it held in January 1956. This exhibition displayed 36 decorative glass objects engraved with designs by artists from 16 countries in the Far and Near East.³⁴¹ This project was an example of the fully fledged cultural diplomacy of the US government, and exactly reflected the US's intention to include those countries into its new world order. It was in this context that this exhibition was sent to those countries whose artists participated in this project for a two-year tour, and its first country was South Korea.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ MMWL, pp.140-141. In his two memoirs, Kim mentioned that each of the American participating museums paid \$5,000 (NSGP, p.116; MMWL, p.141). However, the government report on the exhibition shows that each of the museums paid \$2,000, and the South Korean government paid \$14,000 out of the \$30,000 total insurance fee.

³⁴¹ <http://www.nga.gov/past/data/exh156.shtm> (*Asian Artists in Crystal from Steuben Glass*). This archive recorded that President Dwight Eisenhower, accompanied by his appointments secretary, spent 35 minutes viewing the exhibition.

³⁴² The South Korean government also held this touring exhibition at NMK from 23rd June to 15th July, 1956. See *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (6th June, 1956). The United States Information Service in Seoul published and distributed a Korean version catalogue in 1956. See *Asian Artists in Crystal from Steuben*

The opening ceremony of the exhibition was held on 14th December, 1957 and attracted 1,845 guests, including Walter S. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of the State for Far Eastern Affairs (1953-1959 in office), Earl Warren (1891-1974), Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Garrison Norton, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Yang Yu-Chan (1897-1975), the South Korean Ambassador to the US, and diplomatic delegates in Washington DC.³⁴³ The presidents and their wives of the two countries gave their names as the honorary patrons of the exhibition, with ambassadors to each country as honorary officers.³⁴⁴



Figure 6. *Masterpieces of Korean Art* at the National Gallery of Art in December 1957. From NMK Archive.

The speaker of the Korean National Assembly and ministers of education, foreign

Glass (스튜벤 글라스 유리 水晶에 彫刻된 東方繪畫) (USIA, 1956).

³⁴³ NSGP, p.124.

³⁴⁴ National Gallery of Art et al., *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, p.7. The Honourable Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America and Mrs. Eisenhower; His Excellency Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea and Mrs. Rhee.

affairs and finance became patrons of the exhibition from the Korean side, while high officials related to Korean affairs on the American side, such as the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, became patrons of the US side.³⁴⁵ This perfunctory designation of high ranking government officials as honorary patrons shows that this exhibition had deep diplomatic and political implications for the two countries' governments.

It is also noticeable that the United States Information Agency (USIA) filmed the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art so that it could show this film to the South Korean public.³⁴⁶ As said above, USIA functioned as an essential institution in the transmission of American values and knowledge to South Korea; showing films was a very useful means to that end. It was actually a very effective way to let the Korean public know that the American public appreciated and respected Korean traditional culture.³⁴⁷ The purpose of this film was not only to instil pride in their culture into South Koreans, but also to raise respect for the US, which was willing to respect the culture of Korea, a war-torn country.

It seems that many Koreans who attended the banquet in connection with the opening ceremony of the touring exhibition in New York on 18th January, 1958 shared this emotion. Seeing Korean costumes, music and dancing by Korean students at the banquet, Kim felt that it seemed like a Korean evening.³⁴⁸ Korean participants who were or would become leaders in South Korean society not only got to take pride in their cultural heritage, but also felt grateful to the US for allowing them to realise that pride. At this overwhelming moment, they were really beginning to recognise that cultural objects could be symbols of national identity. At the same time, the US was being imprinted on the minds of Koreans as a protector of the national identity of a pro-American state through this touring exhibition.

In this vein, Yang Yu-Chan, the ambassador to the US, reported the result of the opening of the exhibition to President Rhee, mentioning, "I can frankly say that it seems

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ RECU, p.22.

³⁴⁷ In a similar context, the exhibition *Asian Artists in Crystal from Steuben Glass* was also filmed by USIA and shown to the Korean public.

³⁴⁸ MMWL, p.169.

there is a great deal of interest and publicity in this country. They have never seen or realised that such beautiful things existed in Korea.”³⁴⁹ Yang’s comment shows that he was satisfied with the exhibition’s diplomatic effect of publicising Korean culture and Korea itself. In this way, Korea was achieving recognition of its national identity through material culture in the centre of the new world order presided over by the US. Korean satisfaction with this recognition would lead to the US’s firm position in the Korean peninsula, culturally and politically.

(2) Narrative of the exhibition: its meaning and limits

Unlike both governments, which were pursuing the diplomatic meaning of the exhibition, the American museums and press seemingly focused on the exhibition itself. John Walker (in office from 1956 to 1969), the director of the National Gallery, emphasised that “it was a rare opportunity to introduce to the American public the art of Korea with which they have been too little familiar.”³⁵⁰ He added his impression on Korean culture which was being introduced at the National Gallery of Art as follows.

The art of Korea, although that of one of the oldest and finest cultures of the world, has rarely been seen in the West... Through this important exhibition the American public will be able to discover the diversity and originality that have marked the arts of Korea.³⁵¹

His remarks about the exhibition were reflected in almost all the reports of the American newspapers during the 18-month tour of the exhibition. Not surprisingly, the American press focused on individual and distinctive characteristics that distinguished Korean material culture from that of neighbouring cultures, especially Chinese culture. Clearly, American intellectuals and journalists were eager to find unique and distinctive

³⁴⁹ A letter by the ambassador Yang to the president Rhee, 19th December, 1957 (MOFAS Diplomatic Archives 773.1US, O-0010, 59).

³⁵⁰ National Gallery of Art et al., *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, p.13.

³⁵¹ John Walker III (1906-1995) was an American art specialist. He graduated from Harvard University in 1930 and formed the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art.

characteristics of Korean culture, even if they were able to point out Chinese influences in Korean culture as much as they could. However, more importantly, it seems that in the contemporary political and cultural context they did not want to. The following report by *The New York Times* shows this tendency.

What remains is sufficient to reveal that the art stubbornly maintained individual characteristics. These characteristics distinguish it from the more familiar Chinese and Japanese work with which the Occident has become increasingly acquainted since the end of World War Two... The paintings, while relating to Chinese art in the bird and animal themes and such calligraphic examples as the traditional bamboo spray, nevertheless depart in organization and in various characteristics of drawing from any slavish eclecticism.³⁵²

Actually, this tone of the press on a culture of the Far East was not unfamiliar to Americans, because they had already experienced the same when they had seen the exhibition from Japan in 1953. The same art critic reported on the Japanese exhibition for *The New York Times*: “While debts to the art of China and to Buddhism are acknowledged, the art of Japan was nevertheless very much its own long before the later wood block prints captured the fancies of the Impressionists and their successors. This art has an amazing personality of its own.”³⁵³ Thus, the American press sought some new perspectives on cultures of the Far East.³⁵⁴ This trend had to do with the then international situation. Clearly, the US was trying to cultivate friendly countries in the

³⁵² Howard Devree, “Art: 200 Korean Works, Sculpture, Painting, Ceramics and Gold Objects Shown at the Metropolitan,” *The New York Times* (7th February, 1958).

³⁵³ Howard Devree, “Treasures of Japan, Sheer Beauty Dominates Metropolitan Show,” *The New York Times* (29th March, 1953).

³⁵⁴ A report by a British newspaper summarised this point as follows, “Time is now ripe for a more comprehensive view of the whole range of Japanese art – to fit it into the complicated pattern of Far Eastern culture, to accept its borrowings as influences rather than slavish imitation, and to recognise its individual contribution.” *The Manchester Guardian* (24th Oct, 1951).

Far East. In this scheme, the US's recognition of each country's national identity through material culture can be said to have been essential and effective

In the same context, this touring exhibition became a chance to reassure the 'national treasure' status of several characteristic artefacts, as so-called international evaluation was thought to have been made of them in the US. Those artefacts included the golden crowns made in the 5th centuries, two bronze, seated Maitreya statues made in the 6th to 7th century,³⁵⁵ and several porcelains made between the 12th to 13th centuries. These items were considered to show the originality and distinctiveness of Korean culture by the US press. This situation gave Korean curators and Koreans considerable pride in their artefacts.³⁵⁶ Thus, these artefacts truly emerged as part of the distinctive and dignified heritage of an independent nation state, not the local artefacts of a colony of the empire of Japan, as they were considered to be when they were found for the first time. This drastic change occurred just over a decade under the new world order.

On the other hand, this change did not mean that both Korean and American scholars accumulated specified knowledge on Korean material culture. It is the exhibition catalogue of this exhibition, *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, which showed the fundamental limits of both sides' intellectuals. Both sides lacked professional curators and researchers who were trained in specific fields of Korean material culture. This was why Geoffrey St. George Montague Gompertz (1904-1992), a British collector of celadon of the Goryeo dynasty, delivered a lecture on Korean culture in commemoration of the opening of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. Gregory Henderson, who wrote the historical introduction to the catalogue, was a diplomat of the Department of the State, even if Kim helped him to write it. The catalogue notes were written by Harold P. Stern, who specialised in Japanese painting as curator of the Freer Gallery of Art, with the cooperation of Choi Sunu (1916-1984), a curator of NMK.

The initiative for the writing was taken by the Americans, and they did not take the option of translating into English what the Korean side wrote. This means that the US

³⁵⁵ Three golden crowns of the Silla dynasty, which were displayed in the US, were each designated as national treasures on 20th February, 1960, on their return from the touring exhibition.

³⁵⁶ The American press reported: "The early gold work in the elaborate three crowns is unique." See *The New York Times* (7th February, 1958); "Probably the most spectacular among the exhibition is the display of three jewelled gold crowns of the 5th to 6th centuries." See *The Evening Star* (15th December, 1957).

side wanted to reflect their perspective onto the understanding of Korean art, even if they did not have enough knowledge of it. Political relations between the two countries encouraged this situation, and Korean intellectuals themselves did not have systematic knowledge of their own material culture.

For example, although the members of the National Assembly uniformly appreciated Korean culture, their evaluation of their cultural objects cannot be said to have been based on systematic understanding. Instead, this evaluation was no more than an emotional shout for the recovery of national dignity. Most South Koreans, as well as members of National Assembly, were hardly educated in their material culture, and so did not have a good understanding of it. During Japanese colonial rule, almost all research and teaching of the material culture of Korea was controlled and done by the Japanese. Few were specialised in art history or archaeology. It was at the very beginning stage of independent research into Korean art history and archaeology that the first overseas exhibition in the US was prepared. Now this exhibition became a concrete opportunity to recover national dignity by seeking a national identity through material culture.

In short, nationalism was naturally adopted in the creation and translation of material culture in Korea, which was building its own modern nation state after experiencing colonial rule by other people, but there was no systematic grammar, nor any concrete narratives of nationalism for interpretation of material culture. This situation demanded academic systemisation and enlightenment for the public in terms of nationalism. Most Koreans were not familiar with the modern way in which the identity of a nation is represented; it was at this point that the first overseas exhibition began.

Table 3. *Masterpieces of Korean Art* in the US, 1957 to 1959

Venue	Period	Audiences		
		Charged	Free	Total
National Gallery of Art, Washington	14 th December, 1957 to 12 th January, 1958 (30 days)	-	43,843	43,843
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York	6 th February to 3 rd April, 1958 (57 days)	23,840	15,000	38,840
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston	6 th May to 15 th June, 1958 (41 days)	7,250	3,750	11,000
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle	16 th July to 17 th August, 1958 (30 days)	7,891	2,645	10,536
The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis	19 th September to 19 th October, 1958 (30 days)	2,200	1,100	3,300
California Palace of the Legion of Honour, San Francisco	20 th November, 1958 to 4 th January, 1959 (47 days)	-	41,552	41,551
Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles	27 th January to 1 st March, 1959 (33 days)	6,960	2,100	9,096
Honolulu Academy of Arts, Honolulu	15 th April to 7 th June, 1959 (54 days)	8,300	1,300	9,600
Total		56,441	111,290	167,731

Source: RECU, pp.21-31.

Outcome and influence of the overseas exhibition

As shown in table 3, *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, the first large scale exhibition of Korean cultural objects, attracted 167,731 visitors in eight American cities over 18 months. Choi Sunu, the future director of NMK from 1974 to 1983, who was a courier for this exhibition, defined it as “the most grand overseas ‘sacred festival’ executed under the name of our nation,” and said that NMK tried to “demonstrate our continuous achievements in art history that couldn’t be second to any other nation and explain the unusual characteristics of our fine art.” He further asserted that “the outcome of this

project couldn't be achieved even by 200 diplomats and has a very important meaning both domestically and internationally.”³⁵⁷

This overseas exhibition in the US was designed to secure South Korea's cultural identity on the world stage by explaining to US citizens that Korean culture has a particular characteristic and independence from Chinese or Japanese culture. It was in the same context that the fledgling South Korean government was trying to secure a place within the world order controlled by the US. The US government knew very well the strategic value of South Korea, and needed to maintain a pro-American regime in South Korea. So, it was also important that the Republic of Korea learnt the cultural norm of the US-led world order and become settled in that. It was in this context that the US helped Korea establish its cultural identity.

This project was a significant success for the South Korean government, as well as for NMK. This was because they both believed they had a great opportunity to let Americans know about the existence of a nation, the Republic of Korea. Another important aspect was that politicians and museum curators in Korea got to know that the overseas exhibition could be a very useful means to give publicity to the identity of Korea. Specifically, it was through this overseas exhibition in the US that they realised that cultural objects could be utilised for national interests if they would be willing to give some 'national' meanings and values to them.

Nevertheless, there were few American experts on Korean art or Korean history at that time. In most cases, curators of Chinese or Japanese art took charge of the overseas tour exhibition. Director Kim even complained about using Japanese terms on Korean ceramics.³⁵⁸ Likewise, Korea had only a few academics in art history and archaeology. During Japanese colonial rule, the Japanese entirely monopolised those fields, and museums did not employ Koreans, with only a few exceptions. NMK pushed forward several research projects, but it was not possible to construct a systematic understanding of material culture of Korea with such a short academic experience of it. South Korean curators thus sought interpretation of cultural objects only in terms of a nationalist perspective. However, these efforts were also a part of the process of searching for a

³⁵⁷ Choi Sunu, "Treasures Exhibition in Washington," *Seoul sinmun* (13th December, 1957).

³⁵⁸ Kim, "Masterpieces of Korean Art in America," p.302.

cultural identity of a nation. It was at this beginning stage that overseas exhibitions in the US were organised.

The systematic description of the cultural history of Korea was not attempted at the exhibition, although the exhibition focused on the nation of Korea. Likewise, the catalogue simply listed the masterpieces on show and failed to present the stream of Korean art in the context of Korean history. NMK failed to put their outcomes of research in that exhibition after all, and their American counterparts were also satisfied with just the descriptions of each artefact. This was a limit imposed by South Korean academics themselves, as well as by American academics. However, this overseas exhibition contributed to giving publicity to Korean material culture, providing Korean society with a chance to recognise museums as cultural institutions for interpreting material culture, and allowing the South Korean elite to realise the usefulness of cultural objects in the nation building process.

The touring exhibition in the US offered a good chance for the South Korean government's diplomatic line to realise the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy. It found that cultural objects could contribute to fortifying diplomatic capacity by securing national prestige. Furthermore, this exhibition drew some attention from several Western European countries, such as the UK and West Germany. These interests in Korean art are thought to have been motivated mainly by intellectual and public needs or curiosity, although diplomatic authorities of each country participated in negotiations with the South Korean government. Not so great was the diplomatic importance of South Korea to most Western countries, while the South Korean government as a fledgling country needed diplomatic support from those countries for confronting North Korea and even Japan, as well as on the wider international diplomatic stage such as with the United Nations.³⁵⁹ It was in this context that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was involved much more in this touring exhibition in Europe.³⁶⁰ Since opening in

³⁵⁹ To join the United Nations was one of urgent issues of the South Korean government, even if the Communist bloc was objecting to it. It was not until 1965 that diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan were revived. Rhee Syngman's regime maintained an anti-Japanese policy throughout his term of office.

³⁶⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs published two volumes of Korean arts in English version in 1956 and 1961 respectively, and the Ministry of Public Information published the third volume in 1963. These

London on 23rd March, 1961, this exhibition toured four more Western European cities: The Hague, Paris, Frankfurt and Vienna until 1st July, 1962, attracting 53,246 people in total.

Table 4. *Masterpieces of Korean Art* in Western Europe, 1961-1962

Venue	Period	Audiences
Victoria & Albert Museum, London	23 rd March to 7 th May, 1961	15,180
The Municipal Museum of the City of the Hague	15 th June to 13 th August, 1961	7,099
Musee Cernuschi, Paris	24 th November, 1961 to 29 th January, 1962	14,377
Museum fur Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt	1 st March to 15 th April, 1962	9,717
Museum fur Volkerkunde, Vienna	18 th May to 1 st July, 1962	6,873

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Report on Exhibitions of Cultural Objects in Europe* (Seoul: 1962), pp.17~22.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the South Korean government, in its report on this touring exhibition in Europe, concluded that “this exhibition in Europe, with the one in the US, achieved many results for introducing our culture and for enhancing national prestige in terms of culture. ... But this project should continue over a long-term period, as foreigners have little understanding of us yet. Endless efforts need to be made in this field.”³⁶¹

Likewise, the first overseas special exhibition from 1957 to 1962 was organised in a period in which South Koreans were seeking a direction for their ethnic nationalism. At this time, experts on Korean art history and archaeology were rare, and therefore more time and effort were needed for the active creation and interpretation of cultural objects, based on an ethnic, nationalist perspective. At that time, efforts were made to secure an independent foundation for recovering national dignity and seeking a new national

volumes were “dedicated to the friends of Korea,” as shown in the foreword by acting Foreign Minister Cho Chung-whan (曹正煥). See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Korean Arts*, vol.1, Paintings and Sculptures (Seoul: 1956), pp.3-5.

³⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Report on Exhibitions of Cultural Objects in Europe*, p.24.

identity through material culture. These overseas exhibition projects contributed to achieving recognition of the national identity of Korea in European countries as well as the US. It was in this way that South Koreans began to learn a modern way of understanding and securing their cultural identity through material culture.

After cultural objects sent to Europe were returned to Korea, NMK hosted a homecoming exhibition displaying the same artefacts from November to December 1962. The purpose of this exhibition was to notify South Koreans of the return of the national treasures that NMK had proudly introduced to the US and Western European countries, mentioning that “these are our national treasures.” In another sense, South Koreans were learning how to represent Korean identity through material culture.

Its success also encouraged NMK to resume the discovery of material culture with its own hands. NMK conducted archaeological excavations once a year from 1957, even if they were short term and small scale. Its excavations included shell mounds, ancient tombs and a renowned temple site. Korean academic circles also began to respond to this trend. Before 1955 there was no excavation conducted by any other organisation than NMK. However, some adventurous researchers of fledgling Korean universities began to try archaeological investigations on a small scale from 1956. Their interests were not narrow, and covered even prehistoric dwelling sites, including shell mounds and ancient tombs, even though their investigations sometimes would fall under the supervision of members of NMK. In fact, NMK took the lead in the early stages of research on material culture in Korean academic circles in the late-1950s. Evidently, the success of the first overseas exhibition in the US gave NMK some confidence in its activities for discovering and understanding material culture.³⁶² However, it was also a vivid reality that NMK had little practical budget for academic investigations.³⁶³

³⁶² Increase in academic interest in Korean material culture resulted in the establishment of related academic societies and the publication of academic papers. In 1960, NMK took the lead in organising the Society for Archaeology and Art History, and began to publish its academic journal, *Gogomisul* (考古美術, Archaeology and Art History). In 1961 Seoul National University established a department for archaeology and anthropology for the first time in South Korea.

³⁶³ For publishing most excavation reports of NMK Kim Chewon would resort to the funds from American public foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation, the Harvard-Yenching Institute and the Asia Foundation. See NSGP, pp.167-187.

Chapter 4. Ethnic Nationalism and the Museum Narrative

After the Korean War, anti-communist sentiment permeated South Korean society. The resulting division of the peninsula even challenged the notion of a single ethnic nation, because this could imply compromise or collaboration with the communist North. Scholars point out that President Rhee Syngman (in office from 1948 to 1960) took the lead in spreading this sentiment, and wanted fully to utilise it for his long-term seizure of power.³⁶⁴ Identifying the communist regime as a traitor against the Korean ethnic nation, Rhee Syngman emphasised that its overthrow and the unification of the country were the ultimate goals of the country. For him, positioning himself as protector of the strong anti-communist regime was an effective tactic for securing support both from South Koreans and the US. This context explains why scholars such as Suh, who is a strong supporter of unification, argue that the ethnic nationalism of South Korea has even been betrayed by the anti-communists from the 1950s.³⁶⁵ In this view, ethnic nationalism in South Korea was never dynamic in the late-1950s, although Rhee partly utilised his career and fame as a fighter for independence.³⁶⁶

However, student demonstrations against his dictatorship and his ruling party's rigged election in March 1960 made him resign in April 1960. Chang Myeon's (張勉, 1899-1966) regime that followed, which had to meet South Koreans' expectations for democracy and economic development, was not competent in dealing with the outpouring of expectations that since the April 1960 revolutionary struggle.³⁶⁷ It was

³⁶⁴ Cho Hui-yeon, *Mobilised Modernisation* (동원된 근대화) (Seoul: Humanitas, 2010), pp.228-236. Cho argues that Rhee sought to expand the basis of consent to his rule only through the anti-communism of the 1950s.

³⁶⁵ Suh Jung-seok, *Betrayed Korean Ethnic Nationalism* (배반당한 한국민족주의) (Seoul: SungKyunKwan University Press, 2004), pp. 58-75. Park also agrees with Suh's argument. See Park Chan-seung, *Ethnic Nation and Ethnic Nationalism*, pp.232-235.

³⁶⁶ Lee Yeong-hun, *The History of the Republic of Korea* (대한민국 역사) (Seoul: Giparang, 2013), p.233. Lee claims that Rhee Syngman, as a veteran of the independence movement and founder of the republic of Korea, had charisma that the South Korean people voluntarily acknowledged.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 274-284; Cho Hui-yeon, *Park Chung Hee and His Era of Developmental Dictatorship* (박정희와 개발독재시대) (Seoul: Yeoksa bipeongsa, 2007), pp.31-32 & p.39.

Park Chung Hee's regime that took an interest in the potential of the notion of an ethnic nation. Park, who seized power after a military coup on 16th May, 1961, pushed forward ethnic awareness as another means to mobilise South Koreans for the 'reconstruction of the country,' although he continued to resort to anti-communism as before.³⁶⁸ Convincing them that 'ethnic community' was synonymous with 'country,' and asking the people for sacrifice made for the good of the ethnic community, Park began to extract the potential to develop the economy of the country and secure his political interests. This regime, which would hold power for 18 years until Park was assassinated by his right-hand man in October 1979, cherished the notion of an ethnic nation for contributing to the solidarity of the people, and thus supporting his political ambitions.³⁶⁹ It was in this context that this regime started to take interest in the discovery and display of the Korean ethnic culture, including material culture.³⁷⁰

In this respect, this chapter aims to explain the background, process, content and result of this series of museum policies adopted by the South Korean government after the 1960s, when the government-driven discourse on ethnic nationalism and ethnic national culture were boosted, focusing on NMK, one of the principal agents of those activities. For promoting this understanding, the interaction between the government and NMK is going to be examined, along with the position of academics in those interactions. The important factors which influenced the discourse on ethnic nationalism and ethnic national culture in South Korea will also be discussed, such as the criticism

³⁶⁸ Cho, *Mobilised Modernisation*, p.297. Cho argues that Park utilised both anti-communism and ethnic nationalism as representative ideological justifications for his dictatorship. However, Cho describes Park's ethnic nationalism as a pseudo-ethnic nationalism for the reason that his ethnic nationalism was in essence confronting the ethnic nation.

³⁶⁹ Jeon, *Nationalism of the Park Chung Hee Regime*, pp.1-3; Suh, *Betrayed Ethnic Nationalism*, p.65; Cho, *op. cit.*, pp.130-132, Cho, *ibid*, pp.62-63, p.265 and pp.296-301; Lee, *The History of the Republic of Korea*, p.301.

³⁷⁰ Oh Myeong-seok, "Cultural Policies and Discourse on the Ethnic National Culture during the 1960s and the 1970s," pp.124-131; Jeon, *ibid*, pp.178-183; Lee In-beom, "Origin and character of museum in Korea," pp.54-57; Cho, *Mobilised Modernisation*, p.265; Park Sang Mi, "The Paradox of Postcolonial Korean Nationalism," p.70; Kim Haeng-seon, *Cultural Policy and Control of Park's Regime in the 1970s* (1970년대 박정희정권의 문화정책과 문화통제) (Seoul: Seon-in, 2012), pp.110-115.

of the Japanese interpretation of Korean material culture during colonial rule, and an assertion of cultural originality different from Chinese culture.

This chapter sets out to answer the following questions. What were the background, processes, content and results of the policies of the South Korean government, which strove to make ethnic nationalism the only lens through which to view Korean material culture during the 1960s and 1970s? How was the archaeological and art historical material in the National Museum affected by the nationalist dynamic of President Park's regime? How did NMK contribute to the promotion of the government's nationalist discourse? What role did Korea's historical relationship with Japan and China play in developing nationalist approaches to material culture?

Park Chung Hee and the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism

Calling his military coup a revolution, Park Chung Hee (1917-1979) focused on the opposition to communism, the construction of an independent national economy, and the recovery of the righteous spirit of the ethnic nation. In his revolutionary pledges, Park identified three enemies of the state: poverty, corruption and communism. The coup was followed by the prohibition of all political activities and the replacement of the National Assembly with an ultra-constitutional Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (國家再建最高會議), which Park soon chaired and the military managed. The military also took over the civil service, with officers becoming ministers.

On 26th May, 1961, 10 days after Park's coup, the minister of the Department of Education announced an outline of the education policies of the revolutionary government, which can be summarised as a "reform both in humanity and culture as groundwork for the defeat of the indirect Communist invasion."³⁷¹ In this sense, it seems that the revolutionary government considered culture as a norm for success of the revolution. On 7th July, the minister issued directions for the fulfilment of the culture and education policy of the new government to officials of the local governments. This policy had four main goals: the defeat of communist intervention or invasion, reform in

³⁷¹ "Expecting Innovation of Education and Culture Policy (文教政策의 革新을 기대한다),"

Gyeonghyang sinmun (27th May, 1961).

humanity, eradication of poverty and innovation in culture. By criticising the “cultural phenomenon of idleness and decadence,” the government showed it understood education and culture as a medium for “cultivating people who could find their life purpose in the service for the ethnic nation and the country.” Interestingly, the ultimate goal of the innovation of culture was addressed as “the construction of ethnic national culture.”³⁷²

This rhetoric of an ethnic nation that was inserted in the revolutionary pledges came to have more political meaning in Park’s military regime. On 1st January, 1962, in a New Year address, Park requested that all the efforts and sincerity of the entire nation be fully mobilised for achieving the goals of the first year of the first five-year plan for economic development, emphasising that an ethnic nation is an eternal creature.³⁷³ Through his speeches and policies in this early phase and after, Park repeatedly reminded South Koreans of their common destiny, using the evocative vocabulary “brethren,” “forefather” and “fatherland.” Indeed, the first word in his inaugural address as the 5th president of the Republic of Korea in December 1963 was “Dangun,” the sacred progenitor.³⁷⁴ He also added that “the solidarity of the ethnic nation without the non-cooperation or factional strife is the only way to the modernization of the fatherland.” It can be said that the notion of an ethnic nation was intended as a magical idea under which all Koreans should unite, irrespective of whether they agreed with Park’s policy or not. This address revealed Park’s attempt to unite the South Korean people with the concept of the ethnic nation and, in doing so, facilitate his political ambition.

On the other hand, Park and his military government strove to produce a vision of economic development, and introduced a series of reforms. As Cho points out, the government’s strong point was its dynamic drive, as shown in its military operations. However, the government’s emphasis was on the achievement of goals rather than democratic debate.³⁷⁵ The new government was no less diligent in the reform of

³⁷² *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (7th July, 1961).

³⁷³ “Acting President Park’s New Year’s Address (朴議長 新年辭),” *Dong-a ilbo* (1st January, 1962).

³⁷⁴ Park Chung Hee, “Inaugural Address,” 17th December, 1963. Available at http://www.pa.go.kr/online_contents/speech/speech05/search_search.html.

³⁷⁵ Cho, *Park Chung Hee and his Era of Developmental Dictatorship*, pp.44-45.

cultural heritage policy, establishing the Office of Cultural Properties (文化財管理局) in October 1961 and enacting the Cultural Properties Preservation Act (文化財保護法) in January 1962.³⁷⁶ It also repaired two key national treasures, the Great South Gate (南大門) in Seoul and Seokguram Grotto in Gyeongju between July and October 1961 respectively. The reformatory actions by the government would lead to some positive responses from the media, and at the same time, the press re-emphasised the responsibility of the government to preserve cultural objects.³⁷⁷

These activities demonstrated the regime's reconstructive drive very well; however, it was built upon preparatory work undertaken by the previous civilian government in response to the issues raised by the five specialists of *Dong-a ilbo* in June 1960.³⁷⁸ The Rhee government made minimal effort, such as a discussion on the legislation of Cultural Properties Preservation Act from 1953 and the establishment of a "Campaign Week of Cultural Objects Protection" from 1955. However, the regime never set as its priority the field of material culture, as shown by the fact that the law was never enacted. The Chang Myeon regime noticed that two representative national treasures, the Great South Gate and the Seokguram grotto should be repaired, and took some measures, such as allocating budgets for them and asking foreign advice from UNESCO for the preservation of the Seokguram grotto. This regime recognised criticisms by academics

³⁷⁶ This act replaced the Treasures, Ancient Sites, Famous Places and Natural Monuments Act promulgated by the Government-General in 1933. In February 1958, a draft of the new Act had been made by the Ministry of Education. See *Dong-a ilbo* (8th February, 1956); however, it was not until 1958 that the draft was reviewed by legislative officers. In an interview with one of the officers, Kim Hyun-ik showed that the draft was full of problems. See *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (5th April, 1958). It was never enacted by Rhee's regime.

³⁷⁷ "Let Us Cherish Heritage of the Ethnic National Culture (民族文化의 遺産을 소중히 保存하자)," *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (2nd November, 1961); "Urgency of Enactment of Cultural Objects Preservation Act (文化財保護法 制定의 時急性)," *Dong-a ilbo* (29th December, 1961). Both newspapers appealed for the preservation of cultural objects.

³⁷⁸ "Urgent Preservation of Cultural Objects (緊急한 文化財의 保護)," *Dong-a ilbo* (7th September, 1960). This article reported on the results of a survey on how to preserve cultural relics at risk, especially the Seokguram grotto. Hwang Su-yeong and Lee Hong-jik were former staff members of NMK; Kim Won-yong was working for NMK. Jeon Hyeong-pil was a collector.

and the press, but did not have enough motivation to put their ideas into effect. Furthermore, this short-lived regime did not have enough time.

Park's regime set about improving the infrastructure of the ethnic national culture as a matter of urgency for the sake of cultural innovation. However, the regime was more interested in the instrumental function of culture than in culture itself. It was also in this context that the military government began to pay attention to a medium of the discourse on ethnic national culture for propelling ethnic nationalism.³⁷⁹ Park began to realise the political implications of ethnic culture during the interim period before he was elected as the president in December 1963. In April 1962 Park's speech at a local festival, the "Silla Cultural Festival," held at Gyeongju, which was the capital of the Silla dynasty, showed how Park's nationalism coated communal sensibility with national heritage. Park, as the chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, made a speech as follows.

If we would find pride of a global scale in our ethnic nation's history, it would be in various cultural objects which here Gyeongju has kept, as well as in the cultural sensibility and intelligence with which the Silla people created them. We should not just preserve them as relics covered with lichens, but, through this festival, gather all the efforts with which we could heighten the standards of ethnic national restoration for reforming our present and future.³⁸⁰

From Park's viewpoint, the cultural heritage artefacts were enough concrete evidence to show the possibilities of reconstruction, innovation in and creation of the Korean ethnic nation. Furthermore, he found that culture could be a means to mobilise the nationwide cooperation of the populace, as the above mentioned education policy of the government considered it to be a kind of code of conduct. Thus, Park and his

³⁷⁹ Oh, "Cultural Policies and Discourse on the Ethnic National Culture during the 1960s and the 1970s," p.123.

³⁸⁰ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (21st April, 1962).

government were adding to the expression of ethnic national culture another meaning: a norm of solidarity which the entire nation should observe. This explains why he repeatedly emphasised the creation and innovation of ethnic national culture from his early days in power.

‘Ethnic national culture’ arrives in the museum

This discourse on ethnic national culture began to influence NMK in the form of a concrete guideline from the government. Status reports written up by NMK for annual audits showed these influences. A status report from the year 1962 did not include the expression “ethnic national culture.” Instead, it specified detailed tasks, along with the budget allocated to those tasks. It also adopted a yearly planner in order to show that each task of the year would be executed in due course.³⁸¹ This change reflected the fact that the military government put emphasis on administrative effectiveness. Indeed, those military personnel who were trained in military administration during the 1950s comprised one of few groups with modern sensibilities in South Korea.³⁸² The military government demanded an effective administration throughout government by reinforcing performance management. This demand of NMK for effectiveness was described as being for its ultimate goal: the inheritance and development of ethnic national culture.

The status report of the year 1963 of NMK stated a policy goal of the Ministry of Education, cultural innovation, and it continued to define two further objectives of the museum with designated detailed tasks. One objective was to inherit and develop ethnic national culture, and by doing so to promote public education through the effective management of cultural institutions. The other was to promote the creation of a new

³⁸¹ NMK, *Status Report* (July 1962), pp.47-52. In comparison, this systemised definition of the tasks of NMK was not seen in status reports before 1962.

³⁸² Cho, *Park Chung Hee and his Era of Developmental Dictatorship*, pp. 44-45; Lee, *The History of the Republic of Korea*, p.285. Han, Yong-Sup, “The May Sixteenth Military Coup,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, edited by Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p.41. Cho argues that in contemporary South Korean society there was no group with a modern, rational approach except the military and students. Park also emphasised the importance of administrative effectiveness in his first inaugural address in August 1963.

ethnic national culture by discovering and displaying that ethnic national culture.³⁸³ Like the precedent of 1962, each task and its detailed project were specified along with a budget allocation. All these changes meant that all the expenditure by national cultural institutions should be clarified and explained under the name of ethnic national culture. Thus, all the activities of NMK came to be intended for the discovery and understanding of ethnic national culture.

This government-led nationalist drive ultimately intended that museum collections be considered ‘ethnic national cultural objects.’³⁸⁴ This drive led to a gradual increase in the budget of NMK. However, the increase between 1962 and 1963 was mainly due to the rise in wages of the staff right after the coup.³⁸⁵ Even if the government were seeking for political utilisation of the discourse on ethnic national culture, it could never afford to invest enough in the culture field at the beginning stage of industrialisation. Before 1972 there was no practical increase in the number of the staff, either. The government focused on the construction and spread of the discourse, rather than practical investment in institutions related to ethnic national culture.

³⁸³ NMK, *Status Report* (October 1963), pp.14-16.

³⁸⁴ A brief guide published in 1969 explained that the collection of NMK consisted of both ethnic national cultural objects and foreign cultural objects. See NMK, *Guide to the National Museum of Korea*, 1969.

³⁸⁵ After the coup, the military government raised the wages of government officials, which was considered as a means of winning support from them. Interestingly, from 1962 to 1963 one of the tasks of NMK was to pay staff wages on time (NMK, *Status Report*, 1963, pp.14-16).

Table 5. Manpower and budget of NMK, 1958 to 1973

Year	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Manpower	35	?	45	46	44	44	44	?
Budget (unit: 1,000 won)	2,268	3,445	4,835	6,846	7,244	8,450	8,304	9,662
GNP per capita of South Korea (USD)	80	81	79	82	87	100	103	105
Year	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Manpower	?	?	?	51	51	51	72	115
Budget (unit: 1,000 won)	12,004	18,429	23,776	81,103	120,458	116,134	348,836	348,863
GNP per capita of South Korea (USD)	125	142	169	210	253	289	319	396

*Compiled from Ministry of Culture and Information, *30 Years of Culture and Information* (文化公報 30 年, hereafter, TYCI) (Seoul: 1979); *Status Report*, NMK, 1958 to 1973.

It was from 1967 that the government began to raise the budget of the national museum.³⁸⁶ The success of the first five-year long economy development plan (1962 to

³⁸⁶ Increases in budget and manpower in 1969 resulted from the annexation of the Deoksu-gung Museum of Art by NMK.

1966) gave the government a chance to try drastic investment in the cultural sector.³⁸⁷ Park was willing to utilise the ethnic national culture agenda in order to win his second presidential election in May 1967. He also grew confident that this utilisation of ethnic national culture could play a practical role in mobilising the people for the economic development and industrialisation of Korea. In this context, the government began to pay fully fledged attention to the cultural objects. Its focus was on both the restoration of popular cultural relics and expansion of the museum facilities. Both actions were expected to realise the government's will to promote ethnic national culture. At the ground-breaking ceremonial opening of a new building for NMK at Gyeongbok palace in Seoul in November 1966, President Park remarked on his expectations of the national museum as follows.

The national museum should not end up in a museum which just collects and displays the cultural objects of the forefathers. I request that this national museum becomes a genuine centre for the study of ethnic national cultural history by discovering and collecting various, dispersed or buried cultural objects, so that these efforts could create a new ethnic national culture to support the modernization of the fatherland, and could enhance the ethnic national sense of subjectivity and independence.³⁸⁸

He finished his address by stating, "I hope the General Cultural Centre project, including this museum, will make a substantial contribution to the construction of the rich and powerful fatherland and this rich ethnic nation."³⁸⁹ His address showed that he considered the national museum as a concrete medium to persuade the entire nation that

³⁸⁷ It was also in 1966 that director Kim Chewon visited the president's palace in order to give lectures on archaeology and art history to the president's first lady once a week. See Kim Chewon, *Museum and My Whole Life* (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1992), p.220.

³⁸⁸ Park Chung Hee, "Congratulatory Speech," 22nd November, 1966. Available at http://www.pa.go.kr/online_contents/speech/speech05/search_search.html

³⁸⁹ In 1965 the government planned to construct a series of national cultural institutions such as an art museum and theatre. It called these plans the General Cultural Centre project. The new NMK building was also constructed as one part of this project.

all of them were members of one ethnic nation. Furthermore, he asked the people to do their best for the development of the country. At the inaugural ceremony of the national museum, his emphasis was on the development of the nation rather than the culture itself. This meant that ethnic national culture was a medium for his ambition. His speech at another ground-breaking ceremony at the General Cultural Centre in April 1967 also reaffirmed this point more clearly.

Internally, we are doing our best for the modernisation work for the self-reliance of the ethnic nation, and externally we are taking the lead in the construction of the Asian Pacific communal society. For fulfilling these goals, it is essential that we establish a sense of subjectivity of the ethnic nation as a code of conduct and thinking. The establishment of this sense should be accomplished in the course of inheriting the excellence of our indigenous culture and tradition, and, on the basis of it, creating the new ethnic national culture and constructing a cultural Korea. We have a brilliant ethnic culture to be proud of, and this has all been accomplished on the basis of the firm ethnic national sense of subjectivity and independence.³⁹⁰

The cultivation of this so-called ‘ethnic national’ sense of subjectivity was argued as essential for solving the pending issues of Korea. The inheritance of the ethnic national culture and the creation of a new culture were considered as mandatory requirements for achieving the goal. On 24th July, 1968, the government established the Ministry of Culture and Information in order to integrate its public information function with affairs related to culture, which had formerly been under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.³⁹¹ As Kim Seong-jin, its from 1974 to 1979, mentioned, this reorganisation was in order that “both the policy of culture and government PR could improve mutually in the context of enhancement of national independence and play a role as the

³⁹⁰ Park Chung Hee, “Congratulatory speech,” 25th April, 1967.

³⁹¹ TYCI, p.224.

spiritual mainstay for the development of the country.”³⁹² It was from this point on that NMK and the Office of Cultural Properties under the ministry gradually began to expand.

The government pushed forward a series of construction projects of new buildings of local branch museums in Buyeo, Gongju and Gyeongju in succession from 1966 to 1975. These projects made it possible for NMK to refurbish all the facilities that it inherited from GGM during colonial rule. This series of constructions of new museum buildings was intended for the visualisation of governmental policy for enhancing community spirit through ethnic national culture. As a result, the NMK museum got to have its new building in 1972, and branch museums in Buyeo and Gyeongju museums got to have their own new buildings in 1973 and 1975 respectively. The Gongju branch museum secured its new building in 1973 thanks to a monumental discovery of a royal tomb in 1971, which produced a large quantity of artefacts.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that local branch museums were also instrumental in developing Gyeongju and Buyeo, capitals of ancient kingdoms, as tourist attractions. In this context, the expense of the construction of local museums in Gyeongju and Buyeo was paid for from the special account for economic development, not the general accounts of the government. This context explains that the investment in museum structures was closely related to the political and economic utilisation of the discourse on ethnic culture.

Discourse on ethnic national culture and the evolving narrative of NMK

This discourse on ethnic national culture as a political slogan began to influence the interpretation and narratives of Korean material culture. Park’s following remark at the ground-breaking ceremony of NMK in 1966 is noteworthy in that the president mentioned how Korean material culture should be interpreted within his discourse.

We inherited the excellent, brilliant and indigenous cultural heritage from our forefathers throughout its 5000-year long history. This cultural heritage is the fruit of the spirit and soul of our ethnic

³⁹² TYCI, pp.3-4.

nation. The proper preservation and transmission of the heritage is our obligation that the entire nation should take on any ordeal and disorder.³⁹³

His remark was an announcement that Korean cultural heritage was excellent and creative. It was as good as a guideline that NMK should follow in understanding Korean culture. It also meant that NMK should consider it a supreme task to find the excellence and indigenouness of ethnic national culture through material culture. Actually, this recognition had already germinated within the independence movement from the colonial rule period, and was related to a new wave of independent interpretation of Korean history after liberation. However, his remark was meaningful in that South Korea's paramount leader considered ethnic national culture as a power for the development of the country, and in that he argued as fact the excellence and creativity of the culture, which had not been fully proved.

Interestingly, Park's remark had the same resonance with Korean academics, who were striving to criticise and overcome the colonial view of Korean history set out by Japanese scholars during colonial rule. Japanese scholars aspired to justify colonial rule through their research. They generally argued that Korean society had been stagnant throughout all ages, and had been dependent on Chinese culture. For example, Japanese archaeologists did not admit that Korea experienced the universal development process of mankind in prehistoric ages, arguing that there had been no Bronze Age in Korea.³⁹⁴ As shown above, they focused on Korea's political and economic incompetence, and the cultural regression of the Joseon dynasty. In the preface to his *History of Korean Art*, Sekino, a representative Japanese art historian, wrote as follows.

Korea has benefited from Chinese culture in the past and been subjugated by China whenever invaded. Korea was also often attacked by Japan. Her territory and population being small, Korea has had no capacity to maintain her independency, so Korea fell

³⁹³ Park Chung Hee, "Congratulatory speech," 22nd November, 1966.

³⁹⁴ Kim Won-yong, *Introduction to the Korean Archaeology* (Seoul: Iljisa, 1985), pp. 61-62.

into toadyism and retrogression, and her people's energy was also gradually undermined. ... From the Three Kingdoms Period to the Goryeo Dynasty, her art made an unusual development, and in the early phase of the Yi dynasty continued to shed a brilliant light. However, it decayed slowly from about the middle of the time of the dynasty and failed to resurge. It is a pity that it lost the light of the past, owing to the relaxation of its institutions and the bad luck of the times. It is a mercy that the Japanese rule gave order in politics to Korea, which has groaned under tyranny; and Koreans are facing a remarkable change in various fields, thanks to the dispensation of the [Japanese] civilization.³⁹⁵

His argument that Korean history was riddled with toadyism and retrogression deeply influenced the Korean public, and even its intellectuals. In his book published in 1963, even Park remarked that “retreat, crudity and stagnation have marked out our 5,000 years of history – beginning from pre-historic Ancient Joseon and continuing through the era of the Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla and the 500 years of the Yi Dynasty.”³⁹⁶ Even if his rhetoric, in a sense, reflected his political ambition to be considered as a leader who could get rid of all the evils inherited from the past, it was also clear that he was influenced by the Japanese view of Korean history.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, his understanding also reflected the Korean public's prevalent view. The criticism of this view started within the academic circles of Korean history in the beginning of the 1960s. Defining the Japanese view as colonial view of history, Lee Ki-baik (1924-2004) set out to challenge the Japanese discourse on Korean society's toadyism, stagnation and factionalism.³⁹⁸ In this regard, Korean academics strove to

³⁹⁵ Sekino, *A History of Korean Art*, pp.3-7.

³⁹⁶ Park Chung Hee, *The Country, the Revolution and I* (국가와 혁명과 나) (Seoul: Hyangmunsa, 1963), pp.165-167.

³⁹⁷ Choi Gwang-seung, “Park Chung Hee's Project on Developing the Ancient City (박정희의 경주고도 개발사업)” *The Review of Korean Studies* 35:1 (2012): 187. Choi briefly remarked that Park's view reflected his political ambition and the colonial view of Korean history.

³⁹⁸ Lee, Ki-baik, *A New National History* (Seoul: Taesungsa, 1961), pp.1-10.

prove the self-sustainable development of Korean culture, and to find the creativity of the Korean culture and its differences from Chinese culture.

They recognised that the prehistoric age and Joseon Period were the main targets of distortion by the Japanese view. First, the culture of the Joseon dynasty was severely derided, and the main reason was explained as because of its stagnation and lack of creativity caused by toadyism toward China. This alleged cultural decline was so serious that the Japanese could even justify annexation of Korea. Accordingly, Korean academics could not help setting it up as an urgent issue to criticise this distorted view of the dynasty. The Japanese scholars put little emphasis on the prehistoric age of Korea. They tended to argue that Korean history actually started from the establishment of a Chinese commandery, called Nangnang, in 108 BCE. In this regard, they denied the universal prehistoric development process in the Korean peninsula before the establishment of the commandery. These arguments were a main target of Korean academics' criticism.

Since its establishment, NMK, almost the only centre for studying Korean material culture, strove to conduct research and set up exhibition projects for criticising the Japanese arguments. The increase in budget in NMK in the late-1960s made this attempt possible. The archaeological projects of NMK focused on proving the universal development process of civilisation in the prehistoric age of Korea. While the excavations during the 1950s were for training archaeological skills, and lacked a systematic academic purpose, these projects had the clear objectives of critiquing the argument that Korea had always benefited from the Chinese culture from the prehistoric age onwards, and that there had been no distinct development of the Bronze Age found in the Korean peninsula.³⁹⁹

In this regard, NMK investigated many dolmen relics throughout the country from 1962 to 1967, and excavated dwelling relics of the Bronze Age from 1967 to 1969 for proving the existence of the Bronze Age in Korea.⁴⁰⁰ As an extension of this effort, NMK published a collection catalogue in 1968 that specified the bronze artefacts

³⁹⁹ Kim, *Introduction to the Korean Archaeology*, pp.61-62.

⁴⁰⁰ SNMK, pp.109-118.

collected since the liberation.⁴⁰¹ A shell mound on the coast of Busan was also investigated from 1969 to 1971 for the study of the Neolithic Age. In addition, investigation of the shell mounds around the southern coast of Korea from 1965 to 1970 was intended to find out the cultural and historical aspects of the early state-formation stage in Korean history. Indeed, NMK's excavations of relics of the prehistoric age were, literally, for studying the origin of Korean ethnic national culture, as shown in the definition of the tasks of NMK of the year 1970. These activities of NMK were described as for establishing ethnic national subjectivity (民族主體性).⁴⁰²

On the other hand, exhibitions of NMK in the 1960s concentrated on shedding new light on the culture of the Joseon dynasty (1392~1910), especially on the latter part (17th-19th centuries) of the dynasty.⁴⁰³ This meant that NMK was trying to rehabilitate the cultural status of the dynasty. The exhibitions in this period covered various fields like porcelain, furniture, ornaments, lanterns and costumes of the Joseon dynasty, and especially paintings, giving a separate introduction to each detailed genre of painting such as portraits, genre paintings and landscapes.⁴⁰⁴ These exhibitions were clearly for critiquing the arguments of the Japanese scholars, and for affirming the meaning and worth of the culture of the Joseon dynasty. In another sense, these exhibitions argued

⁴⁰¹ NMK, *Selected Bronze Objects of the Early Metal Period in Korea 1945-1968*, (青銅遺物圖錄: 八·一五後 蒐集) (Seoul: 1968). Prior to this publication in 1965, NMK had published a catalogue titled *Selected Museum Exhibits 1945-1965* (陳列品圖鑑: 八·一五後 蒐集), which was for displaying a new collection of NMK to domestic and foreign academic circles, even if its format followed the former version of the Government-General museum. These publications were intended to organise NMK's academic achievements since the liberation.

⁴⁰² NMK, "Status Report of the Year 1970," p.9. This definition of tasks well reflected the nationalist wave of the South Korean government. It seems that NMK's academic staff members were not repulsed by it, and they were willing to utilise the nationalist rhetoric for securing budgets for their academic activities.

⁴⁰³ Ahn Hwi-jun, a renowned Korean art historian, argued that the field of Korean paintings was much damaged by the colonial view of Korean history. He added that this was why many foreign scholars kept some prejudices about Korean paintings. See Ahn Hwi-jun, *A History of Korean Paintings* (韓國繪畫史) (Seoul: Iljisa, 1980), pp.1-4.

⁴⁰⁴ SNMK, pp.78-81.

that Korea, even during the Joseon dynasty, had enough cultural capacity to maintain its independence, and should have not been colonised by Japan.

Likewise, NMK took the lead in the study of Korean material culture, and also played an essential role in organising the Korean Archaeological Society (韓國考古學會) in 1967 and the Art History Association of Korea (韓國美術史學會) in 1968. These organisations would play an important role in securing a concrete platform for an independent discourse of Korean material culture, as well as in cultivating new academics in those fields.

The October Revitalising Reform and promotion of ethnic national culture

Park, who managed to amend the constitution in order to make his third term possible, succeeded in being elected again in April 1971, but the election was a tight race, and corrupt. He was worried that he was closely followed by the opposition party's candidate, and found that the people were agitated owing to the economic crisis resulting from the first oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s. To make matters worse, Park felt that the security crisis owing to the North Korean special army's adventurous surprise attacks in 1968 and the US President Richard M. Nixon's (in office from 1969 to 1974) policy of partial withdrawal of the US troops from South Korea under the detente mood with the communist world. He fully utilised this internal and external situation for strengthening his power. In the name of national defence he established the reserve army in April 1968, and started military training for students at high school and university level from 1969.⁴⁰⁵

On 6th December, 1971 he declared a state of national emergency. Again, he dissolved the National Assembly on 17th October, 1972 and replaced it with the Emergency Council for National Affairs, which meant that he wanted to incapacitate the legislative body. Park pushed forward with the amendment of the Constitution in the name of construction of strong government for unification. Through the national referendum under emergency martial law, the so-called Revitalisation Constitution

⁴⁰⁵ Cho, *Park Chung Hee and his Era of Developmental Dictatorship*, pp.102-112, and pp.124-132.

(維新憲法, Yushin Heonbeob) was approved and promulgated on 27th December, 1972, portending the most systematic dictatorship in the modern political history of Korea.⁴⁰⁶ The National Council for Unification organised by this constitution had the right to elect the president and one third of the National Assembly members of the candidates recommended by the president.⁴⁰⁷ The president automatically became the chairman of the council and effectively controlled the council. On 23rd December, 1972 Park was again elected as the president with an indirect election by the council. Indeed, this constitution paved the way for Park's life-long seizure of power and dictatorship, incapacitating the National Assembly.⁴⁰⁸

The term 'Yushin,' or revitalisation, was imitated from the Meiji Restoration (1868) of the empire of Japan. This concept was intended as synonymous with the thorough reform for so-called ethnic national restoration (民族中興), suggesting that he would strongly push forward ethnic nationalist policies for his political ambition. This slogan of ethnic national restoration had already appeared in the early 1960s and secured its firm place in the 1970s. The representative example was the announcement of the Charter of National Education on 5th December, 1968, which was inscribed on the first page of every textbook for students after then.

We have been born into this land, charged with the historic mission of restoring the ethnic nation. ... Realising that the nation develops through the creative and co-operative activities and that the national prosperity is the ground for individual growth, we will do our best to fulfil the responsibilities and obligations attendant upon our freedom and rights, and encourage the willingness of the

⁴⁰⁶ Kim Yeong-myeong, *Newly Written Version of History of Korean Contemporary Politics* (새로 고쳐 쓴 한국현대사) (Seoul: Eulyu munhwasa, 1999), p.234.

⁴⁰⁷ This council was defined as an institution of the entire nation with the sacred mission of unification of the fatherland ("The Constitution of the Republic of Korea," 27th December, 1972, Chapter 3, article 35). Available at

http://likms.assembly.go.kr/law/jsp/law/Law.jsp?WORK_TYPE=LAW_BON&LAW_ID=A0001&PRO_M_DT=19721227&PROM_NO=00008).

⁴⁰⁸ Cho, *Park Chung Hee and his Era of Developmental Dictatorship*, pp.142-150.

people to participate and serve in building the nation.⁴⁰⁹

He was striving to decorate his political ambition with the name of ethnic nation. The notion of ethnic nation became increasingly important as an absolute cause for which the entire nation should serve. Under this strong wave of ethnic nationalism, the government increased investment in the ethnic national culture and art sectors. It was in this context that Park remarked, “Being certain that the talent of this wise ethnic nation develops, I will inherit and develop the brilliant tradition and culture [inherited] from our forebears, and have special interest in the restoration of the ethnic national culture and make full support of it by promoting art, culture and scholarship” at his inaugural address for his third term in July 1971.⁴¹⁰ In this regard, the government promulgated the Culture and Art Promotion Act in August 1972 and, in the same year, set up a comprehensive plan for the development of Gyeongju as an ancient capital over a 10-year period, according to Park’s direction.

His emphasis on art and culture also resulted from the socio-economic changes in South Korea. Economic growth since the 1960s had created a new demand for cultural consumption from the early 1970s.⁴¹¹ Park needed to absorb and control this demand. The government’s solution was the creation of new ethnic national culture. This notion of ethnic cultural culture was basically based on the notion of the ethnic nation. Accordingly, the government’s concept of culture had to be necessarily connected to the ethnic nation or the country, not to the individual or civilian society. This meant that ethnic culture as described by the government was intended to be not only the culture itself, but also a code of conduct which the government expected from the nation. In other words, it can be said that culture had to be for the country and the ethnic nation. In this context, it was natural to put an emphasis on cultural objects or material culture, which could easily arouse the notion of community.

At his 4th inaugural address, in December 1972, Park reasserted his will to “employ policy for revitalising culture and art by developing our genuine traditional culture more

⁴⁰⁹ Every student was recommended to learn this charter by heart at that time.

⁴¹⁰ Park Chung Hee, “Inaugural Address,” 1st July, 1971.

⁴¹¹ TYCI, p.226.

creatively, so that the flower of ethnic national culture could be in full bloom.” He continued to mention, “Again I urge people. We should dedicate more sweat and more passion to our fatherland. By doing so, we should open up an age of national harmony and advancement for prosperity and unification of the fatherland.”⁴¹² In this regard, the government promulgated the Five Year Long Plan for Revitalising Culture and Art (1973-1978). On 20th October, 1973, representative Korean artists and writers adopted the Declaration for Revitalising Culture and Art, emphasising that “we keenly realise the mission of creating a new culture at a turning point in revitalising the ethnic nation.”⁴¹³

For these 5 years, the government invested 485 billion *won* in total for the plan. More than 70% of the budget was spent on the cultural heritage sector, as shown in table 6.⁴¹⁴ This cultural heritage sector, which was described as for the “establishment of the nationalist view of history,” was categorised into detailed fields, such as cultural objects, national (Korean) studies and traditional arts and crafts. Out of these three fields, the cultural objects field had been allocated an overwhelming proportion of the budget, as the following table shows.

⁴¹² Park Chung Hee, “Inaugural Address,” 27th December, 1972.

⁴¹³ “Declaration for Revitalising Culture and Art,” *Dong-a ilbo* (22nd November, 1972).

⁴¹⁴ TYCI, pp.228-229.

Table 6. Budget invested in each field during the 5 year plan period (Unit: 1 million won)

	Total	Proportion	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Total	48,452	100.0%	4,239.0	4,757.9	5,464.2	12,322.0	21,759.3
1.Construction of basic foundation	2,881	6.0%	173.4	455.2	744.3	1,009.8	499.1
2.Cultural heritage	34,079	70.2%	2,206.6	2,719.8	3001.0	8,818.0	17,334.3
-National studies	1,603	3.3%	632.0	137.4	119.6	366.3	348.0
-Traditional arts	1,844	3.8%	187.8	94.3	158.3	311.8	1,092.3
-Cultural objects	30,631	63.1%	1,386.8	2,488.1	2,723.1	8,139.9	15,894.0
3.Arts	5,929	12.2%	1,200.1	825.1	858.4	1,347.4	1,698.8
4.Pop culture	4,300	8.9%	544.1	535.3	637.4	1,103.3	1,480.6
5.Others	1,350	2.7%	114.8	222.5	223.1	43.5	746.5

Source: TYCI, p.228.

In terms of Park's utilisation of cultural heritage for his politics, it is very suggestive that President Park visited NMK and viewed a special exhibition entitled *Masterpieces of 500 Years of Korean Painting* on 22nd November, 1972, when the Revitalisation Constitution was passed by national referendum. A day later, a photograph of Park viewing the exhibition was published on the first page of a major newspaper.⁴¹⁵ He was doing the right thing for the ethnic nation from his perspective.

⁴¹⁵ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (23rd November, 1972). The caption of the photograph reads, 'President Park viewed famous paintings of the Yi dynasty.' The articles on the first page included a plan for search campaigns for families separated during the Korean War, which reflected a temporary mood of reconciliation with North Korea.

Reopening of NMK in 1972

As mentioned above, Park's interest in the cultural heritage sector was realised through museums' physical elements: the new buildings of NMK in Seoul and local branch museums. NMK museum secured its new building in 1972, with branch museums in Buyeo, Gongju and Gyeongju in 1973, 1973 and 1975 respectively. Prior to the reopening of the national museum in a new building, in 1969 NMK absorbed the Deoksu-gung Museum of Art, which represented a decisive opportunity to upgrade its collection. NMK had consistently requested from the government the merger of the two institutions from the late-1950s.⁴¹⁶ It seems that this persistence led to success given the strength of the government's expectation that NMK prepare for the reopening of a new building and the government's stress on its administrative effectiveness. This merger gave NMK a landmark chance to secure 12,481 artefacts in total, including art works of a high standard. Now, the collection of the Deoksu-gung Museum of Art got the chance to appear on the stage of ethnic national culture.

After six years of construction, NMK was reopened in the new building situated at Gyeongbok Palace, Seoul on 25th August, 1972, with President Park and his wife attending the opening ceremony. The then director and art historian Hwang Su-yeong remarked on this reopening, "it goes without saying that this building is the fruit of our government's effort to advance ethnic national culture and art, and it could not be accomplished without the related authorities' hard work and people's support and expectations."⁴¹⁷ As seen in Table 7, this expansion of the museum led to a greater

⁴¹⁶ NMK, "Overview of the National Museum (國立博物館概覽)," October 1958, p.36. In this report, NMK pointed out the inefficiency of the separate management of two museums that covered the same field. NMK was located just beside the building of the Deoksu-gung Museum of Art, which was under the supervision of the Office of Cultural Properties after NMK had moved to the palace in November 1954.

⁴¹⁷ NMK, *The Museum News* (박물관신문, The Bakmulkwan Shinmun, hereafter BS) 24 (1st November, 1972): 1.

budget and more manpower, as well as an amendment of the office of NMK for its effective management.⁴¹⁸

Table 7. Budget of NMK, 1972 to 1979

Year	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Budget (unit:1,000 won)	348,836	348,883	448,757	203,181	?	1,045,639	2,383,317	1,292,169
GNP per capita of South Korea (unit:USD)	319	396	541	594	802	1,011	1,400	1,647

*Compiled from SNMK, pp.672-673.

This new building of NMK, whose galleries were twice the size of those of the former, was equipped with 10 galleries, which chronologically displayed the material culture of each dynasty, like the Three Kingdoms, the Goryeo and the Joseon, as well as prehistoric period.⁴¹⁹ New permanent exhibitions showed a couple of remarkable changes, which reflected the accumulation of both NMK and South Korean academics since 1945. Also, these changes were closely related to the ultimate goal to discover the independence and uniqueness of Korean culture since the prehistoric age. This drive was triggered not only by the government, but also by the scholars themselves, even if they were intent on pursuing academic objectivity. Overcoming the colonial view of

⁴¹⁸ The drastic increase in the NMK budget from 1977 mainly resulted from expenditure on the construction of the new local branch museums at Gwangju and Jinju, even though budgets for curatorial projects were also gradually increasing.

⁴¹⁹ The theme of the ten galleries were as follows: Prehistory period; Goguryeo & Paekche Dynasties (Three Kingdoms period); Silla dynasty (Three Kingdoms period); The Unified Silla Dynasty; Ceramics of the Goryeo Dynasty; Ceramics of the Yi (Joseon) Dynasty; Painting & Calligraphy; Buddhist sculpture; Buddhist Metal Arts; and Metal Craft. See NMK, *The National Museum of Korea* (國立中央博物館陳列品圖錄) (Seoul: 1972), p.154.

Korean history, which was allegedly a distorted view of Korean history, was the almost common task of South Korean academics.



Figure 7. Posters in commemoration of the reopening of the National Museum of Korea in Gyeongbok-gung Palace in August 1972. From NMK Archive.

In this regard, the gallery for the prehistoric age was greatly strengthened in comparison with its former building, and its exhibits tried to explain to visitors that Korea had experienced a universal development process of civilisation through periods such as the Neolithic Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age.⁴²⁰ The argument that there had been no Bronze Age in the Korean peninsula was considered a colonial view, and could be denied through the material evidence. This was why NMK published a catalogue entitled ‘Selected Bronze Objects of the Early Metal Period’ as early as 1968. However, the concept of the early metal period supposed the co-existence of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, which was not much different from the Japanese argument. It meant that

⁴²⁰ NMK, *Bangmulgwan sinmun* (The Museum News, hereafter, BS) 24 (November 1972): 3, “Introduction to the galleries,” written by Kim Jong-cheol. Kim introduced the gallery for the prehistoric age, mentioning that prehistoric artefacts were displayed according to developmental stage so that the developmental progress of culture from the Neolithic Age, through the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age could be easily understood.

NMK was hesitating to use the term of Bronze Age. However, when opening new galleries in 1972, NMK started to use the term ‘Bronze Age’ in its catalogue for the permanent galleries.⁴²¹ In this regard, it is very suggestive that NMK, in October 1973, held a special exhibition, *Korean Bronze Artefacts in Prehistoric Age* to introduce the bronze artefacts excavated in Korea.⁴²²

The above-mentioned Japanese argument about the prehistoric age was actually supported by the existence of Nangnang on the grounds that it was this Nangnang culture, a part of Chinese culture, which first transmitted civilisation to the Korean peninsula.⁴²³ This argument was effective in explaining that Korean culture was, from the start, subordinate to Chinese culture. Yet Korean scholars were reluctant to accept this argument, and strove to find evidence against it. It was in this context that NMK excluded the display of Nangnang culture from this new building. NMK gave Chinese culture the status of an age in Korean history no longer. Even if some space for displaying the culture was secured in 1973, it was considered to be the introduction of a foreign culture into Korea. Indeed, it was a drastic change in comparison with GGM and even NMK in the beginning stage.

It was at this time that the first catalogue guide for domestic visitors was published.⁴²⁴ This 154-page book included photos of artefacts in chronological order, an introduction to Korean history and art and a floor map of the galleries. It had

⁴²¹ NMK, *The National Museum of Korea*, 1972, pp.11-12.

⁴²² BS 33 (November 1973): 1-2; NMK, “Status Report,” (January 1974), p.9; This exhibition was based on the archaeological accumulation of the 1960s, such as a catalogue entitled *Selected Bronze Objects of the Early Metal Period* published in 1968.

⁴²³ Nangnang (Lolang in Chinese) was located in the north-western part of the Korean peninsula from 108 BC to 313 AD. Most South Korean historians believe that its centre was in the Pyeongyang area, the capital of North Korea.

⁴²⁴ NMK, *The National Museum of Korea*, 1972. Interestingly, the English version of the catalogue had already been published in 1964. This means that the first NMK catalogue was published in English. In addition, another catalogue, entitled *A Hundred Treasures of the National Museum of Korea* (韓國國立中央博物館名品圖鑑), was published in a full colour version in commemoration of the reopening in 1972. This catalogue also had explanations written in three languages: Korean, English and Japanese. Interestingly, this catalogue, which introduced the essence of “ethnic national culture,” included two Nangnang artefacts, a gold buckle and a bronze censer.

explanations written in three languages: Korean, English and Japanese. Interestingly, this book introduced photos of artefacts from Nangnang between the prehistoric age and the Three Kingdoms Period, despite the exclusion of Nangnang's artefacts from the permanent gallery. This discrepancy showed both NMK's attitude to Nangnang culture and its dilemma, namely its difficulty in dealing with the culture in a way which could support the colonial view of Korean history. Above all, the description in the catalogue still maintained a negative view of the culture of the Joseon Dynasty, stating that "worldly oriented Confucianism dominated intellectual society, leaving little room for free thinking creative artists," even though it emphasised two exceptions, painting and ceramics.⁴²⁵ Actually, this expression derived from the same remark written in the English version of the catalogue published in 1964, and did not reflect the new understanding of Korean academics, including NMK, since the 1960s. It can be said that this delay also reflected lack of confidence in the dynasty's cultural capacity, despite continuous efforts so far.⁴²⁶

In April 1973 NMK held a large-scale, special exhibition entitled *2000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術二千年). For this ambitious exhibition, designed to make a comprehensive survey of Korean cultural objects, NMK displayed more than 600 items, 60% of which were loaned from private collectors, public and private museums and Buddhist temples. This two-month long exhibition, which attracted 235,242 people – including 40,000 foreigners – was a great success, and contributed to demonstrating that the existence of an ethnic nation could be proved through its material culture, sublimating artefacts into symbols of the ethnic nation. The then director Hwang's remark on this exhibition showed how South Korean academics wanted to evaluate their ethnic national culture.

Our ethnic nation has been innately exceptionally talented in
arts. ... The Three Kingdoms, Goguryo, Baekche and Silla, made

⁴²⁵ NMK, *The National Museum of Korea*, 1972, p.138.

⁴²⁶ This recognition also followed the former director Kim Chewon's thinking. After retirement, Kim published a book entitled *Arts of Korea*. In its introduction, he wrote that "the Yi (dynasty's) system provided but little allowance for free thinking, creative artistry." See Kim Chewon and Lee Kim Lena, *Arts of Korea* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), p.19.

efforts to lay the foundations for each tradition, and to absorb foreign cultures. It goes without saying that they developed their own characteristics. At the same time, they carried out cultural exchanges for a long time. Furthermore, facing a new era of unification by Silla, those cultures were integrated and at last succeeded in reaching the golden age of the ethnic nation and enjoyed glory for ages long. This tradition of artistic culture was passed on to the Goryeo dynasty, which showed the characteristics of an ethnic nation more and more, and was connected to the Joseon dynasty. The arts and crafts of the Three Kingdoms, the ceramics of Goryeo and the paintings of Joseon show their own differences, but they are all the essence of the ethnic nation.⁴²⁷

This exhibition was considered to “have a historical and national significance as a pan-national exhibition” as Jeong Yeong-ho, an art historian, recalled.⁴²⁸ In its status report of 1974 NMK reported that this exhibition enhanced the genuine value of ethnic national culture at home and abroad.⁴²⁹ In this regard, it reminded government officials and museum curators that the exhibition would be effective in educating the value of the ethnic nation or the ethnic national cultural objects, and in internalising their value in the public consciousness. Now it can be said that this exhibition convinced curators themselves of the meaning and usefulness of ethnic nationalist interpretation of material culture.

The permanent exhibition in the new building in 1972 and the special exhibition were the outcome of the efforts for independent authorship that had, in part, been impelled by Park’s ethnic nationalist policies. These exhibitions were also for critiquing the colonial view of Korean history and reconstructing the cultural identity of the Korean ethnic nation. It was in this context that a curatorial staff member set out his mission as follows.

⁴²⁷ NMK, *2000 Years of Korean Art* (Seoul: 1973), p.1.

⁴²⁸ BS 27 (May 1973): 2.

⁴²⁹ NMK, “Status Report,” (January 1974), p.9.

The crime for which the Japanese can never be forgiven is to try to obliterate Koreans' past ethnic culture. They attempted to make Korean nationals the subjects of their empire by demolishing and distorting our history, culture and tradition. We have to clean up the remnants that they left behind, correct their distorted history and revive our forgotten traditional culture. For the last 30 years we have been able to newly acquire numerous cultural heritage objects and secure vivid materials of ancient history by excavating ancient relics, including prehistoric ones. On the basis of these resources, we should reconstruct our distorted ancient history and find Korean traditional beauty. We need to do our best to make our Korean nationals understand our traditional culture, which has been isolated so far.⁴³⁰

Choi Sunu, the fourth director of NMK, was at the centre of this nationalist orientation. Indeed, Choi had searched for the independent value of Korean culture since he joined NMK in 1946. In his firm nationalist orientation, he was confident that the Japanese rule had demolished and distorted Korean culture. Ever since Choi, who was from Gaeseong, met Goh Yu-seop, the first Korean art historian and director of the Gaeseong Municipal Museum, he was an admirer of him. After Goh's death, Choi managed to join the museum in 1945. With the museum annexed to NMK in 1946, he became a member of the national museum. Choi, even though he did not acquire any academic degree, managed to contribute his short essays on ceramics to newspapers from the early 1950s, and his earnest research and participation in the excavation of ceramic kilns in the 1960s made him an unrivalled specialist in that field.⁴³¹

However, he was not satisfied to remain a specialist on Korean ceramics. He pursued a comprehensive understanding of Korean beauty and Korean culture. His ambition was influenced by Goh, who wanted to build the edifice of Korean art history

⁴³⁰ BS 45 (January 1975): 1.

⁴³¹ Ahn Hwi-jun, "Art Historical Contributions by Dr. Kim Chewon and Professor Kim Won-yong (金載元 박사와 金元龍 교수의 美術史的 기여)," *Art History Forum* 13 (2000): 291-304.

as the first Korean art historian.⁴³² Goh's ethnic nationalist orientation also influenced Choi. In an interview with a magazine, Choi recollected that Goh had recommended that he study Korean art history, mentioning that "Korean youths under the Dark Age have various ways of contributing to the ethnic nation. The ancient art of Korea is an extraordinary existence and will be necessarily re-evaluated. It is very important to build the edifice of Korean art and make the ethnic nation recognise their pride properly."⁴³³ About 50 years later, this youth became the director of NMK, and he asserted, in the preface of a catalogue published in 1978, that the "Korean people have built an independent culture and foundation of history as a genuine ethnic nation, and have firmly preserved our beautiful land and language."⁴³⁴ His remark clearly shows his firm orientation toward ethnic nationalism as a basis of interpretation of cultural objects.

His ethnic nationalist orientation was indeed meaningful in contemporary South Korean society, in which westernisation brought on by fast industrialisation was being considered as another obstacle in discovering, interpreting and appreciating Korean material culture. He was a person of literary talent. His numerous contributions on various genres of Korean arts to newspapers and magazines were so eloquent that they played an important role in arousing the ethnic national sensitivity of the populace. In a sense, his thinking was also well in accordance with the ethnic nationalist policy of the government. A narrative by a high ranking government official in 1973 showed this accordance.

The large scale of the investment of the government budget is not
simply for administering the collection of NMK. Its real meaning is

⁴³² Yu Hong-jun and Lee Tae-ho, "100 Years of Research in Art History," *Searching for New Horizons of Korean Art History* (Seoul: Hakgojae, 1997), pp.25-27. Even though Goh died at the age of 39, he left many writings on various fields, such as paintings, ceramics, architecture and the Buddhist pagodas of Korea. Especially, he focused on themes such as characteristics of Korean art culture and the essence of Korean beauty.

⁴³³ "Interview with Choi Sunu: Tradition is One's Own Self (전통이란 자기 자신)," *Saemteo* (샘터) (November, 1981).

⁴³⁴ Choi Sunu, *5000 Years of Korean Arts* (韓國美術五千年) (Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 1978), p.1.

in giving Korean nationals pride as a civilised, ethnic nation by helping them appreciate our ancestors' great accomplishments and understanding our history and tradition through the exhibition of cultural heritage, which contains the hearts of our ethnic nation in this magnificent building.⁴³⁵

The ultimate intention of this narrative, national unity, is well explained by a remark in 1974 by Yoon Ju-young, the minister of the Ministry of Culture and Information. In the preface of the catalogue of Korean art works published by the Office of Cultural Properties he emphasised that “to inherit traditional culture and art and to create new culture and art is for building a sound social ethos and cultivating cooperative national character by familiarising people’s everyday life with art, the essence of national emotion.” He added that “here the introduced essences of 5000 years of ethnic national culture would arouse a sense of duty in revitalising culture and art, and in displaying our proud ethnic national art all over the world.”⁴³⁶ Indeed, NMK made it one of its major missions of the year 1974 to display ethnic national culture abroad through the international exchange exhibition. Government authorities and NMK gained confidence from positive responses to the exhibition of *Two Thousand Years of Korean Art*. It led to another large-scale overseas special exhibition in Japan in 1976.

In search of ethnic national identity: exhibitions and investigations of NMK in the 1970s

The mission of the year 1970 for NMK was defined as “contributing to the establishment of the ethnic national subjectivity by collecting, keeping, displaying and researching our cultural heritage.”⁴³⁷ This definition properly reflected the government’s ethnic, nationalist drive, and it also suggested the direction and purpose of

⁴³⁵ BS 25 (January 1973): 4.

⁴³⁶ Office of Cultural Properties, *Korean Ancient Art* (韓國古美術) (Seoul: Gwangmyeong chulpansa, 1974), p.1.

⁴³⁷ NMK, “Status Report,” (January 1970), p.9.

the detailed tasks of NMK. First of all, special exhibitions since their reopening in 1972 were intended for the search for national identity through each genre of art. In the 1970s, NMK organised a series of special exhibitions whose title began with the word ‘Korean,’ such as *Masterpieces of 500 Years of Korean Painting* (韓國繪畫: 韓國名畫近五百年展, 1972), *2000 Years of Korean Arts* (韓國美術二千年, 1973), *Korean Prehistoric Bronze Artefacts* (韓國先史時代青銅器, 1973), *Korean Folk Art* (韓國民藝美術, 1975), *Korean Classical Embroidery* (韓國古典刺繡, 1978), *Korean Portraits* (한국의 초상화, 1979) and *Korean Calligraphy* (韓國書藝, 1980).⁴³⁸

This tendency from 1972 clearly showed that NMK was striving to forge the cultural identity of Korea, translating the material culture into ethnic nationalism and making the ethnic nation a synonym for the country, and that it was trying to make people recognise the material culture as concrete evidence of the reality of the ethnic nation. In this sense, the following remark in the preface of the catalogue of the exhibition entitled *Korean Portraits* is memorable: “we ask ourselves who we are in order to restore the righteous spirit of our ethnic nation and ethnic national culture.”⁴³⁹

Shedding new light on the material culture of the Joseon dynasty also continued in order to overcome the colonial view of Korean history. NMK focused on authentic genres such as painting and porcelain for the reinstatement of that dynasty. NMK held a series of special exhibitions related to such genres during the 1960s, and actively pursued the discovery and introduction of detailed themes of those genres. In this respect, NMK held a series of special exhibitions related to Korean paintings such as *Masterpieces of 500 Years of Korean Painting* (1972), *Undisclosed Paintings in the Custody of the National Museum of Korea* (1977) and *Korean Portraits* (1979) in order to demonstrate the cultural capacity of the Joseon dynasty. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the catalogue of all the special exhibitions began to be published after the catalogue of the *Masterpieces of 500 Years of Korean Painting* was first published in 1972.

⁴³⁸ SNMK, p.143.

⁴³⁹ SNKK, p.144.



Figure 8. President Park Chung Hee at the reopening ceremony of the National Museum of Korea in Gyeongbok-gung Palace in August 1972. From NMK Archive.

The academic investigations of NMK during the 1970s focused on relics of prehistoric ages such as the Neolithic, the Bronze and Early Iron ages,⁴⁴⁰ while the Office of Cultural Properties concentrated on the relics of the Three Kingdoms period, especially on ancient royal relics such as tombs and palaces at the Gyeongju. It can be said that both of them under the Ministry of Culture and Information were trying to draw ethnic national pride from the investigations. It could be said that NMK pursued a long history of the ethnic nation from the prehistoric ages, while the Office of Cultural Properties searched for evidence of the golden ages from the royal relics of ancient kingdoms, especially in Gyeongju. From 1971 to 1975 NMK's excavation of dwelling sites of the Neolithic Age at Amsa-dong in Seoul and Sinam-ri in Ulsan city greatly contributed to understanding the Neolithic Age. NMK's investigation of dwelling sites of the Bronze Age in Songguk-ri in Buyeo from 1975 to 1978, also played an important role in establishing cultural aspects of the age in Korea. Furthermore, a discovery of

⁴⁴⁰ SNMK, pp. 170-182.

typical hand-axes at a Palaeolithic site at Jeongok-ri in Yeoncheon, north of Seoul, meant the complete establishment of total images of the prehistoric age in the Korean peninsula.⁴⁴¹

On the other hand, these relics of the Three Kingdoms Period excavated by the Office of Cultural Properties yielded far more artefacts than was expected. NMK contributed to drawing ethnic national pride from newly excavated artefacts by holding four special exhibitions: *Muryeong-Wangnung* (武寧王陵, royal tomb of the Baekche dynasty, 1971), *Renowned Treasures of the Silla Dynasty* (新羅名寶, 1974), *Silla Ssangbun* (新羅雙墳, the twin tombs of the Silla dynasty, 1975) and *Anapchi* (雁鴨池, Royal pond of Silla dynasty, 1980).⁴⁴² In the same context, from 1964 to 1984 NMK excavated kiln sites of Goryeo celadon for a systematic understanding of Goryeo celadon, which was considered one of finest examples of cultural heritage at home and abroad. The investigation of a kiln site by NMK especially only focused on sites of Goryeo celadon kiln during the 1970s.

As shown above, NMK contributed to the dissemination of the discourse on ethnic national culture in two directions. One was to critique and overcome the colonial view of Korean history promoted by Japanese scholars during colonial rule; the other was to search for the indigeneness and excellence of Korean culture, focusing on the material culture of Korea. In this context, NMK during the 1970s focused on investigating the prehistoric relics of the Neolithic, Bronze and Early Iron ages, and strove to trace a long history of the ethnic nation from the prehistoric ages. On the other hand, NMK tried to shed new light on the material culture of the Joseon dynasty in order to overcome the colonial view of Korean history. And during the 1960s and 1970s NMK also strove to prove the self-sustainable development of Korean culture, and to discover the creativity of Korean culture and its differences from the Chinese culture. In short, the activities of NMK show how NMK was influenced by the discourse on ethnic national culture driven by the government, and how the national museum reacted to this political drive.

⁴⁴¹ SNMK, pp. 170-171.

⁴⁴² SNMK, pp.143.

Chapter 5. Cultural diplomacy and display of national identity abroad

The special exhibition *2000 Years of Korean Art* in 1973 was intended to inspire South Koreans with the cultural identity of the ethnic nation state, reflecting the confidence of the government, NMK and South Korean academics in building a national identity through Korean material culture. This exhibition was also enough to draw the attention of the Japanese academic circle. Their interest in Korean culture resulted from close relations between Japanese and Korean ancient culture. They realised that they should review Korean ancient culture in order to understand their own ancient culture, because cultural influences from the Korean peninsula became clearer by a series of new archaeological discoveries in both Japan and Korea from the early 1970s. Their ultimate interests were also connected to Chinese culture, as this culture had always functioned as a reservoir of East Asian culture. This interest resulted in a loan exhibition from the People's Republic of China that was held by the Tokyo National Museum in June 1973.⁴⁴³

This cultural exchange, however, was not made possible simply by academic interest. In the background, this exhibition, sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture of the Japanese government, marked a detente between Japan and China. The Japanese government had already accumulated experience in utilising cultural events such as overseas exhibitions in the US for diplomatic means. In this case, with the communist Chinese government, the National Museums of Japan hosted the loan exhibition, meeting expectations from academic circles and reminding the Japanese populace about the new relation with China. The loan exhibition from the South Korean government was also triggered by the diplomatic background. Since the normalisation of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan in 1965, South Korea and Japan came to have close relations as anti-communist bastions in the Far East, and Japanese economic aid was essential to the development of the South Korean economy.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ “2000 Years of Chinese Artefacts at a Glance,” *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (23rd May, 1973).

⁴⁴⁴ Kimiya Tadashi, “Park Chung Hee’s Regime and South Korean-Japanese Relations: between Sympathy and Disjunction around the Recognition of the Cold War (박정희정권과 한일관계: 냉전인식을

Two diplomatically sensitive incidents that took place between the two countries in 1973 and 1974 respectively, delayed its realisation, so that those incidents made both governments find more practical diplomatic uses of the exhibition. It seems that the overseas exhibition of Korean cultural objects in Japan was chosen as one of diplomatic efforts. Even though this exhibition in Japan met a realistic barrier owing to South Koreans' collective memory of colonial rule by Japanese imperialism, this exhibition, triggered by diplomatic demands, contributed to fulfilling its diplomatic purpose as well as displaying Korean cultural identity to Japan, ultimately alleviating South Korean intellectuals' cultural complex towards Japan. An exhibition of the same title and format was also introduced to eight US cities from 1979 to 1981, and to three Western European cities, London, Hamburg and Koln, helping South Korean intellectuals gain confidence in their national identity recognised by Westerners' evaluation.

This chapter explores how Korean national identity created through material culture was externally consolidated by overseas exhibitions from 1976 to 1984, and how this national identity was meant to be recognised by and to be instilled into South Koreans. Major questions in this chapter will be as follows. What was the background and outcome of overseas touring exhibition projects in Japan (1976) and the US (1979 to 1981) in international circumstances since the detente mood in the early 1970s? How did NMK utilise these second overseas travelling exhibitions for forging and displaying the Korean national identity with a nationalist narrative?

South Korea and Japan

Despite the revival of diplomatic relations with Japan and their importance in obtaining capital for economic development, the South Korean government did not consider overseas exhibitions in Japan before 1973. Rather, mentioning that cultural objects could never be restored once they were broken, President Park directed that the Ministry of Culture and Information refrain from exhibiting cultural objects in foreign

둘러싼 공감과 괴리사이에서),” *Review of South Korean-Japanese Relation in Park Chunghee's Era* (박정희시대 한일관계의 재조명), edited by the Research Institute of Japanese Studies, Kookmin University (Seoul: Seon-in, 2011), pp.18-19.

countries when he visited the ministry on 17th January, 1971.⁴⁴⁵ In fact, NMK did not participate in any overseas exhibitions of its collection until 1976, after it had sent some artefacts to the Tokyo National Museum in 1970.⁴⁴⁶ In comparison, Japanese academics' interest in Korean ancient culture gradually increased after the discovery of an ancient tomb, the Takamatsu tomb (高松塚), in Nara Prefecture in Japan in March 1973, in which diverse colourful mural paintings were found for the first time in Japan. Surprisingly, those paintings showed the strong influence of ancient kingdoms from the Korean peninsula: Goguryeo and Baekche. This excavation aroused a big response in Japanese academic circles, and resulted in a new interest in Korean ancient culture. It meant that Japanese academics realised they needed knowledge of Korean culture in order to construct a cultural history of Japan.

A special exhibition of Korean paintings held by the museum of Yamato Bunkakan in Kyoto in March 1973 showed that their interest in Korean culture was not limited to the ancient culture of Korea. This exhibition assembled masterpieces of Korean paintings owned by Japanese collectors, museums and academic institutions. Remarkably, this exhibition introduced some Buddhist paintings of the Goryeo dynasty which had been misinterpreted as Chinese paintings.⁴⁴⁷ A Korean newspaper reported that this exhibition took place as the excavation of Takamatsu tomb gradually changed Japanese understanding of Korean culture, and that this exhibition made a big contribution to correcting the Japanese distorted view of Korea, as well as illuminating the history of the exchange of arts between Korea and Japan since the era of Goguryeo.⁴⁴⁸

Another news report, in February 1974, suggests that Japanese academic circles began to resume research on Korean material culture.⁴⁴⁹ 200 sets of the 15 volume

⁴⁴⁵ "Dispersion Custody of Cultural Objects (文化財 分散保管)," *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (18th January, 1972); Park's direction was also introduced in the Museum News of NMK. See BS 20 (February 1972): 1.

⁴⁴⁶ NMK did not send any artefacts to overseas exhibitions after 1970. See SNMK, pp.145-146.

⁴⁴⁷ Gari Ledyard, "Cartography in Korea," in *History of Cartography*, vol 2, book 2 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p.256, note 69.

⁴⁴⁸ "Brilliant Essence, Recognition of Korean Culture, Exhibition of Korean Paintings in Nara, Japan (찬연한 정수 韓國 再認識, 日 나라의 朝鮮회화展)," *Dong-a ilbo* (23 May, 1973).

⁴⁴⁹ "Export to Japan of *Complete Series of Korea Art*, 30,000 Books (韓國美術全集 3만권 對日輸出),"

Complete Series of Korean Art (韓國美術全集), published by a leading Korean publishing company, the Dongwha Publishing Company (同和出版公社), were exported to Japan. As the newspaper reported, it was the first time that South Korean books related to art were exported. The fact that these catalogues written in Korean drew the attention of Japanese academics shows that their interest was high enough to need an exhibition of Korean cultural objects in Japan.⁴⁵⁰ Other news articles in November 1974 also reported a boom in publications related to Korean traditional arts in Japan.

The Ministry of Culture and Information was satisfied with the outcome of the special exhibition *2000 Years of Korean Art* of NMK in 1973. Yoon Ju-young, the minister of the Ministry of Culture and Information, mentioned that “the exhibition was attracting attention from abroad,” and that he was “considering overseas exhibition of Korean art for enhancing national prestige and promoting exports.”⁴⁵¹ Even though he did not specify which country was being considered as a venue to show Korean cultural objects, it is clear that the director of the Kyoto National Museum presented his interest in hosting the exhibition to his museum.⁴⁵² Indeed, it seems that Yoon was considering the exhibition in Japan, but he was also worried about a negative response from the South Korean populace. Presumably, this was why he was reluctant to open to the public the Japanese interest in hosting the exhibition.

This was mainly because most South Koreans had a collective memory of exploitation from Japan during colonial rule. This memory aroused more special antipathy towards Japan in terms of cultural objects. To most Koreans, the outflow of Korean cultural objects by Japanese was conceived as a crime, even if it was done by normal business transactions. This is why certain segments of the public demanded an exhibition of Korean cultural objects in South Korea which was owned by Japanese collectors and museums when the plan of the overseas exhibition in Japan was

Gyeonghyang sinmun (16th February, 1974).

⁴⁵⁰ “Books on Korean Traditional Art are Popular in Japan (韓國古美術圖書 日서 人氣),” *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (28th November, 1974).

⁴⁵¹ “The Ministry of Culture and Information, Planning the Overseas Exhibition of *2000 Years of Korean Art* (문공부, 한국미술이천년전의 해외전시를 계획),” *Chosun ilbo* (1st May, 1973).

⁴⁵² “Minute of the Committee for the Selection of Artefacts for the Exhibition,” 11th August, 1975.

pronounced by the government in October 1975. This response meant that this cultural ‘exchange’ should literally be a real exchange. However, exchange of equivalence in a literal sense was not possible under the circumstances of those days. Given the strong anti-Japanese sentiments at a general level and the government’s restriction on accepting Japanese popular culture since the liberation, it seems there was almost no room for appreciating Japanese arts in South Korean society.

The South Korean government focused on the diplomatic and economic usefulness of the exhibition rather than equality of cultural exchange. As Yoon said, those cultural events were also for diplomacy and economic reasons. Although he added that his emphasis on the contribution of cultural events to exports and tourism should not be misunderstood as ruining the purity of the arts, his remark definitely showed the government’s orientation towards the utilisation of the cultural sector for more practical tasks. This is why the then director of NMK, Choi Sunu, who clearly realised this imbalance, mentioned in the preface of the catalogue of this overseas exhibition that a Japanese art exhibition in South Korea would be expected in the future.

Two political incidents in 1973 and 1974, which brought diplomatic relations between both countries to crisis point, delayed the realisation of the exhibition, but those incidents gave both governments firm reason to make the exhibition essential for good relations between both countries. On 8th August, 1973 the former presidential candidate in the 1971 election, Kim Dae-jung (1924-2009, President of Republic of Korea from 1998 to 2003), was kidnapped in Tokyo, allegedly by the South Korean intelligence agency. He was staging an anti-Park regime movement in the US and Japan, became a removal object of the regime. However, he survived thanks to the US government’s pressure on the South Korean government.⁴⁵³ Both the South Korean and Japanese governments, which needed close relations for cooperation in economics, did not want this incident to become a diplomatic issue, but the Japanese press and civilian society criticised both governments, arguing that Japanese sovereignty was infringed by the South Korean government.

⁴⁵³ Kim Yeong-mi, “Kidnapping of Kim Dae-jung and Two Types of South Korean-Japanese Solidarity as Seen from the Diplomatic Documents (외교문서를 통해서 본 김대중 납치사건과 한·일 연대의 두 유형),” *Review of South Korean-Japanese Relations in Park Chunghee’s Era*, edited by the Research Institute of Japanese Studies, Kookmin University (Seoul: Seon-in, 2011), pp.64-71.

For settlement of this incident, Kim Jong-pil, the then prime minister of the South Korean government, had to go to Japan and apologise; the Japanese government accepted the apology. Likewise, this incident was covered up by both governments, with the real facts of the case remaining concealed. However, the Japanese government had to put up with protests from the Japanese press and civilian society. And this burden was also shared by the South Korean government, as it had ultimate responsibility for this incident. And a South Korean diplomat's intervention in this incident remained a controversial issue before it was settled by agreement between both governments in July 1975.

Another incident was the assassination of the South Korean first lady, Yuk Yeong-soo (1925-1947), by a Korean resident in Japan on 15th August, 1974. This incident resulted in fierce antipathy towards the Japanese government because the assassin utilised a forged Japanese passport when entering South Korea, and used a gun which he had stolen from the Japanese police. The Japanese press's suspicion that investigation results by the South Korean government were fabricated extremely aggravated South Korean-Japanese relations. The South Korean government even suggested the severance of diplomatic relations.⁴⁵⁴ Even if the Japanese government had nothing to do with the assassin, it was thought that it should take some ethical responsibility. The Japanese prime minister attended her funeral ceremony, and the vice president of the Japanese ruling party was sent to South Korea as a special emissary. These two incidents blocked the normal supply of the development loan which the South Korean government was keen to get from Japan for economic development.

In this regard, it seems clear that, even though these incidents delayed the realisation of the overseas exhibition in Japan for the time being, they made the South Korean government recall the exhibition as one of the solutions for the normalisation of diplomatic relations by alleviating negative sentiments toward the South Korean government in Japanese civil society. On the other hand, this background might explain why Japan was chosen as the first venue for the overseas exhibition of *5000 Years of Korean Art*, rather than the US. According to director Choi Sunu, the then Japanese ambassador to Korea Ushiroku Torao (in office from March 1972 to February 1975)

⁴⁵⁴ Kimiya, "Park Chung Hee's Regime and South Korean-Japanese Relations," p.45.

was active in the realisation of the exhibition from the end of the year 1974.⁴⁵⁵ It means that he was also trying to find solutions to the diplomatic deadlock. Ultimately, President Park approved the overseas exhibition project in January 1975, and the working level negotiations began between both countries. The visit to Seoul of the minister Japanese Foreign Affairs, Miyajawa Kiichi, on 23rd July, 1975, eliminated those long-standing obstacles related to above two incidents, normalising the diplomatic relations between two countries. It seems that this diplomatic settlement eliminated the last barrier to the exhibition, and at the same time provided strong stimulus to the promotion of this project. Indeed, events for establishing friendship between both countries were needed, and one of them was the very exhibition itself.

‘5000’ Years of Korean Art

On 28th July, the Japanese side submitted to South Korea a draft of the exhibition agreement, and from 4th to 9th August Japanese representatives visited Seoul to review the preliminary list of artefacts for the exhibition. NMK organised the committee of selection for the exhibition and held the first meeting on 11th August, 1976. This 6-man committee consisted of former staff members of NMK who had moved to universities, except for the director of the Office of Cultural Properties and Professor Lee Ki-baik of Sogang University, who specialised in Korean history. Out of them, Kim Won-yong (Seoul National University) and Hwang Su-yeong (Dongguk University) were also former directors of NMK. Besides selecting artefacts, this committee discussed the title of the overseas exhibition.⁴⁵⁶

According to the minute, director Choi had already got a favourable response about the title *5000 Years of Korean Art* from the director of the Kyoto National Museum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Japanese government during his visit to Japan in May. Lee Won-gyeong, the then minister of Culture and Information, was worried about Choi’s proposed title, because NMK had entitled the exhibition of the year 1973 ‘2000 Years of Korean Art.’⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, there was a gap of 3000 years between the dates of

⁴⁵⁵ “Minute of the Committee for the Selection of Artefacts for the Exhibition,” 11th August, 1975.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Lee Chung-ryeol, *Hyegok Choi Sunu: A Pilgrim of Korean Beauty* (혜곡 최순우: 한국미의 순례자)

those titles. In 1973 Choi, as a chief curator of NMK, had explained this title as follows.

The title “2000 Years of Korean Art” implies that this exhibition intends to show the stream of ethnic national arts for about 2000 years since Three Kingdoms Period. However, it was from the early 4th century that the histories and artistic activities of those kingdoms can be traced in the concrete artworks of those days. Accordingly, this special exhibition deals with artworks for 1600 to 1700 years.⁴⁵⁸

In comparison with the above remark, his proposed title *5000 years of Korean Art* seems quite shocking and baseless. However, the rhetoric of there being 5000 years of history of the Korean ethnic nation was very popular and natural to most Koreans whether they believed it as a fact or not. This rhetoric was based on the myth of Dangun, the legendary progenitor of the Korean ethnic nation. *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事, the memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms which a monk called Ilyeon published in the 13th century, recorded that Dangun built a state in 2333 BCE. This myth was accepted by some Confucian historians of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910).⁴⁵⁹ The Joseon government built and managed shrines for Dangun.⁴⁶⁰ Even though this myth played some role in the Joseon state under the Chinese world order, it was from the colonial period that Dangun was recalled as a symbol of the Korean ethnic nation. It was also in this period that the rhetoric of 5000 years of history became widespread.

This rhetoric came to have more importance owing to Park’s nationalist drive, as shown in Park’s first and second inaugural address, in both of which Dangun was the first word.⁴⁶¹ This rhetoric implied that the Korean ethnic nation has greatness,

(Seoul: Gimyoungsa, 2012), p.365.

⁴⁵⁸ Choi Sunu, “Looking Back the Exhibition *2000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術 2천년을 돌아본다),” *Seoul sinmun* (24th April, 1973).

⁴⁵⁹ Lee Ki-baik, “Culture of Korea (韓國の文化),” in Tokyo National Museum et al., *5000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術五千年展) (Tokyo: Asahi Simbunsha, 1976).

⁴⁶⁰ Park Chan-seung, *ibid*, 2010, pp.73-74.

⁴⁶¹ Park Chung Hee, “Inaugural Address,” 1963 and 1968.

superiority and dignity as an ethnic nation with a long history. Choi, who was striving to find the excellence and creativity of Korean art, did not fail to take notice of this point. A news article tells an interesting episode about this title.⁴⁶² At the reception of the homecoming exhibition held at NMK, after the overseas exhibition in Japan had finished, Hong Jong-in, the chairman of the Friends of the National Museum of Korea (博物館會), said to the then Prime Minister, Choi, Gyu-ha, “This overseas exhibition was wonderfully titled, indeed. Above all, the Japanese should totally be dispirited by the title itself.” The prime minister replied to Hong that “5000 years of history is a solemn historical truth in which nothing needed to be adjusted.” This episode implies what attitude the South Korean side took towards the overseas exhibition in Japan.

Indeed, Choi Sunu was proud to title the exhibition *5000 Years of Korean Art*, as he remarked in one of his essays that “even on second thoughts, the title of the exhibition was wonderfully named. ... It is a very rare occurrence that an ethnic nation has constructed a very characteristic cultural tradition, keeping blood ties in the same territory for 5000 years.”⁴⁶³ By inserting the earthenware of the Neolithic Age on the list of the exhibition, he could rationalise the title. It seems that a series of artefacts of the Bronze Age which were introduced in a special exhibition of NMK in 1973 gave him more confidence in his belief. It means that he did not have any doubt that all the cultural objects of the prehistoric age found in the Korean peninsula should be understood to belong to the Korean ethnic nation. Likewise, his argument became a historical fact under the popular rhetoric of 5000 years of history and the nationalist drive of those days. The selection committee did not raise any doubt about director Choi’s proposal, as far as the minute was concerned.⁴⁶⁴

Overseas exhibition *5000 Years of Korean Art* in Japan

On 4th October, 1975 the minister of Culture and Information submitted the bill for the

⁴⁶² “A Historical fact.” *Dong-a ilbo* (10th August, 1976).

⁴⁶³ Choi Sunu, “American Perspectives on Korea have been Widened: Finishing *5000 Years of Korean Art* in America (미국인의 한국視野를 넓혔다: 美術5千年展 美國展示를 마치고),” *Hanguk ilbo* (한국일보, The Hanguk Daily) (2nd October, 1981).

⁴⁶⁴ “Minute of the Committee for the Selection of Artefacts for the Exhibition” (11th August, 1975).

overseas exhibition to the cabinet council of the South Korean government.⁴⁶⁵ Pointing out two reasons, this bill explained why this exhibition was needed. One was the active request from Japan, and the other was that this exhibition was for promoting the right understanding and recognition between both nations by displaying the superiority of Korean culture and its influence on Japanese culture. The cabinet council passed it on 7th October, 1975. The title of the exhibition was also approved and formulated by the council. On 15th October, 1975 NMK, three Japanese participating institutions and the Asahi Shimbun Company (a major Japanese newspaper) signed the exhibition agreement in Seoul.⁴⁶⁶

The three participating institutions consisted of the Kyoto National Museum, the Fukuoka Prefecture Culture Centre and the Tokyo National Museum. The Kyoto National Museum, whose director had been most active in hosting this exhibition since 1973, became the first venue of the exhibition. According to the Japanese practice in which major media organisations became sponsors of international cultural events, the Asahi Shimbun Company offered to pay all the expenses related to the exhibition, like transport, display and promotion. This exhibition project, which was discussed in secret, was announced to the press on this day. This exhibition would exhibit 343 artefacts in total, including 44 national treasures, and was the biggest in scale in the history of overseas exhibitions. These artefacts were collected from 15 institutions, such as national museums, university museums and temples, as well as from 13 private collectors.⁴⁶⁷

This overseas exhibition in Japan had a very special meaning to South Koreans, who had kept a vivid memory of Japanese colonial rule in mind. An article of *The Museum News* of NMK right after the signing ceremony of the exhibition agreement showed NMK's view on the purpose of this exhibition.

This project aims to contribute to arousing in the Japanese a right

⁴⁶⁵ Ministry of Culture and Information, "Bill of the Overseas Exhibition to the Cabinet Council (Bill no. 1015)," 4th October, 1975.

⁴⁶⁶ BS 53 (November 1975): 1.

⁴⁶⁷ "5000 Years of Korean Art (한국미술 5 천년전)," BS 55 (January 1976), p.2.

understanding and recognition of Korea by illuminating Korean culture's leading superiority and contribution to Japanese culture, and seeks to contribute to friendship between both nations by raising the national pride of the 600,000 Korean residents in Japan. As a kind of cultural diplomacy, this exhibition will create an echo among Japanese intellectuals and make the Japanese public gain a new recognition of Korea and Koreans.⁴⁶⁸

NMK was conscious that this cultural event was for diplomacy, but at the same time this national museum implied that the exhibition was intended for correcting the Japanese negative view of Korean culture. Interestingly, this tone had already been shown in the above mentioned bill submitted by the minister of Culture and Information. Even if the South Korean government was definitely conscious of practical diplomatic outcomes, one of the most important aims of this exhibition was to gain recognition of the cultural dignity of the Korean ethnic nation and the Korean nation state from the Japanese side. This recognition was quite important in securing ethnic national pride which the South Korean government strove to offer its populace, because many South Koreans felt a sense of inferiority towards the Japanese resulting from past colonial experience and the present huge economic gap.

In this context, the South Korean government wanted to utilise this overseas exhibition, *5000 Years of Korean Art*, as much as it could. Its domestic propaganda on the exhibition was quite appealing and successful. The government's explanation that this exhibition would give ethnic national pride to the Korean residents in Japan also had appeal. Choi Sunu was the right person to complete this mission. Now in his late 50s, he had spent his adolescence under Japanese colonial rule, and had grown to become an art historian with the most representative ethnic nationalist perspective. He conveyed the emotion he felt when he attended the opening ceremony at the Kyoto National Museum as follows.

⁴⁶⁸ “5000 Years of Korean Art which will be held in Japan (日本에서 열리는 韓國美術五千年展),” BS 53 (November 1975), p.1.

I have not thought of this *5000 Years of Korean Art* only for the ostentation of our culture, or as a simple international event for friendship. I wanted to make the Japanese people realise that our ethnic nation has had a creative position and role in Asian art by explaining its cultural achievements, especially a stream of the formative arts which our ethnic nation has made during its long, 5000-year history from prehistory to the Joseon dynasty. This exhibition is essential because it represents the most basic and adequate effort to shake the roots of Japanese prejudice, and the preoccupation of Koreans with the history between Korea and Japan.⁴⁶⁹

Although NMK defined the purpose of exhibition in Japan as “contributing to friendship between both nations,” it is clear that Choi Sunu’s emphasis on the superiority of Korean culture was directly related to a sense of rivalry with Japanese culture and his strong will to recover ethnic national pride by displaying Korean national identity through its material culture. As shown in the permanent exhibition in 1972 and the special exhibition *2000 Years of Korean Art* in 1973, NMK and South Korean academics managed to construct a concrete shape of the ethnic national culture thanks to a series of ethnic nationalist government policies and their own efforts. This circumstance was quite different from when the first overseas exhibition had taken place.

Now, ethnic nationalism became a systematic ideology strongly sponsored by the government. In this regard, all the cultural artefacts were being put in order under the name of the ethnic nation. This overseas exhibition, especially in Japan, which had colonised Korea, offered a special and strong chance for the ethnic nationalist interpretation of cultural objects to reach its peak. The catalogue of this exhibition reveals this situation very well. Seven South Korean academics contributed to this catalogue, with each contributor writing on an overview of Korean history and each writing introductions to the six art genres, unlike the catalogue of the first overseas

⁴⁶⁹ Sunu Choi, “After Opening *the 5000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術五千年展을 열어놓고),” BS 57 (1st April, 1976), p.1.

Korean exhibition in the US in 1957, to which no Korean scholar contributed. This change meant that South Korean scholars had assimilated the academic outcomes of their material culture since the liberation, and had asserted their own voices on their own ‘ethnic national’ culture.

Table 8. *5000 Years of Korean Art* Exhibition in Japan

Venue	Period	Audiences
Kyoto National Museum, Kyoto	24 th Feb to 18 th Apr, 1976 (48 days)	241,989
Fukuoka Prefecture Culture Centre, Fukuoka	27 th Apr to 30 May, 1976 (34 days)	68,856
Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo	8 th June to 25 th July, 1976 (42 days)	262,356
Total		573,201

Source: BS 58 (May 1976), p.1.

This overseas exhibition, which opened on 23rd February, 1976 at the Kyoto National Museum, toured two more cities, Fukuoka and Tokyo, until 25th July, 1976, attracting 573,201 people in total. In the complementary comment in the exhibition catalogue, Miki Takeo, the prime minister of the Japanese government, mentioned: “it is needless to say that Korea is the nearest neighbouring country to Japan, and that Korea has kept the closest connection with Japan from the ancient era. This geographical and historical connection also helped us to learn many things in the cultural field, indeed. ... We are quite pleased to expect that these precious Korean historical cultural properties to be first introduced in Japan will promote our understanding of ethnic national culture.”⁴⁷⁰ His comment represented the basic tone of the Japanese press towards the exhibition.

The Asahi Shimbun Company, as one of the host bodies, was the most active in conveying this message. An article that Komekura Mamoru, a culture reporter of this company, contributed to a newspaper clearly shows this.

⁴⁷⁰ Miki Takeo, “Congratulatory message (祝辭),” in Tokyo National Museum et al., *5000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術五千年展).

Certainly, this exhibition will mordantly point out errors of the Japanese academic circle, which has misunderstood the artistic cultures from Korea as being those from the Chinese continent, as well as exposing the faults of our Japan, which have persisted in the view on the arts that Chinese influences just came to Japan through Korea. This exhibition will demonstrate that the Korean peninsula is not just a bridge between China and Japan, but has a huge amount of independent art cultures which were born and grew in this country, and influenced Japan.⁴⁷¹

In this context, Mikasanomiya, a brother of the Japanese emperor, also remarked that the history of Japanese art should be rewritten, while attending the opening ceremony of the exhibition in Kyoto as a representative of the Japanese royal family.⁴⁷² These responses reflected that Japanese society had come to recognise the culture of Korea, which had been a colony of the Japanese empire, and now was eager to get economic aid from Japan. Indeed, the cultural influence from Korea to Japan during the ancient era, especially before the 9th century, was clear and well evidenced by the artefacts displayed in the exhibition. As Matsushita Takaaki, the director of the Kyoto National Museum, mentioned, the gilt bronze statue of a pensive Maitreya Bodhisattva gained tremendous popularity, as it had high artistic completeness and closely resembled a Japanese wooden statue of the Koryuji temple in Kyoto, which was designated a national treasure.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ "Origin of Japanese Culture," BS 57 (1st April, 1976).

⁴⁷² "South Korean-Japanese Relations Are Like a Well Which Does Not Run Dry," *Dong-a ilbo* (3rd July, 1976).

⁴⁷³ "Interview with Director Matsushita," *Tong-il ilbo* (統一日報) (20th April, 1976).



Figure 9. *5000 Years of Korean Art* in Kyoto in 1976. From NMK Archive.

Artefacts excavated in South Korea since the mid-1960s were also enough to remind Japanese scholars of cultural influences from the Korean peninsula. From slender bronze daggers and bronze mirrors from the Bronze Age to a gilt bronze plate Buddha of the 8th century, many artefacts displayed were recognised to have influenced the ancient culture of Japan, as Matsushita mentioned in an interview with a newspaper managed by Korean residents in Japan.⁴⁷⁴ Indeed, there were frequent cultural exchanges between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, and there was a clear cultural stream from the peninsula to the islands from the prehistoric era to the 8th century. Interestingly, both sides were doubtlessly interpreting these cultural phenomena with the eyes of the ethnic nation, arguing that its origin could allegedly be traced to the prehistoric age. From the South Korean perspective, the main narrative was that South Koreans, whose ancient culture was excellent enough to be transmitted to Japan, should feel pride over the Japanese, while the Japanese should appreciate and respect Korean culture. The Japanese counterparts tried to show that they were willing to accept this. Behind this situation existed the view of ethnic nationalism which was shared by both nation states.

On the other hand, another issue needs to be discussed in order to understand what

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

made this situation possible and natural: the South Korean-Japanese relation on the international political stage. The Japanese government thought much of South Korea as an anti-communist bastion. The South Korean and Japanese governments who were worried about the communisation and unification of Vietnam in 1975 came to need closer cooperation owing to the presidential election pledge of withdrawal of the US forces in Korea by Jimmy Carter, the then US president candidate, in 1976. As Kimiya argues, during the 1970s the South Korean and Japanese governments had the potential for more direct relations in which the US government was not necessarily the mediator between the two countries.⁴⁷⁵ It was in this context that South Korea should and could be considered as a partner of Japan. It seems natural that the partner should have a decent history and culture which the Japanese side could appreciate and respect. In this sense, South Korea was the right country to meet these conditions because the proof was clearly shown in the exhibition.

After the exhibition finished in Kyoto, *Asahi simbun* (朝日新聞, The Asahi Daily) reported that this exhibition made a bridge both to the closest and the furthest country. It also conveyed director Matsushita's comment that "this exhibition helped the Japanese realise that Japan and Korea were relatives and friends that have shared the same culture, constructing a new origin of exchange and understanding between both countries."⁴⁷⁶ It is not clear whether he suggested that this exhibition contributed to the confirmation that relations between the two countries meant cooperation between nation states under the new world order. However, the reception hosted by the South Korean government at a hotel in Tokyo on 2nd July to commemorate the successful exhibition in Japan was remarkable in this regard. This event, attended by 1,200 people from both sides, was for politicians and businessmen.⁴⁷⁷ Both sides were utilising ancient culture and history for their present ambitions, sharing a view of the ethnic nation. In this regard, a substantial political revaluation of Korean culture was reflecting a drastic change of status of the South Korean nation just 30 years since the liberation.

⁴⁷⁵ Kimiya, "Park Chung Hee's regime and South Korean-Japanese relations," pp.45-50.

⁴⁷⁶ "Friendship: Distinct Touch (親善, 確しなかな手ごたえ)," *Asahi simbun* (19th April, 1976).

⁴⁷⁷ "Korean-Japanese Relations Are Like a Well which Does Not Run Dry: Congratulatory Reception for 5000 Years of Korean Art (한일관계는 마르지 않는 샘같다고: 동경에서 열리는 오천년전 관련 행사)," *Dong-a ilbo* (3rd July, 1976).

The South Korean press was satisfied with the Japanese favourable responses and conveyed them to the South Korean public. And public opinion was encouraged. In an article entitled “Prejudice on Korean Culture Was Washed Away,” *Chosun ilbo* commented that this exhibition gave to the Japanese archaeologists and historians a chance to correct and show regret for their wrong prejudice which they had kept on the history of Korea.⁴⁷⁸ After the touring exhibition in Japan, which was visited by 570,000 people, had finished and come back to Korea, NMK held the homecoming exhibition, displayed the ‘national’ cultural artefacts that the Japanese people had ‘admired,’ and promoted the internalisation of them by the Korean public. NMK also published a Korean edition of *5000 years of Korean Art*, which was originally published in Japanese, and demonstrated the outcomes of the creation of and research into national cultural objects.⁴⁷⁹ The preface of this catalogue by director Choi Sunu clearly showed a firm orientation toward a nationalist interpretation of cultural objects.

Koreans have built an independent culture and foundation of history as a genuine ethnic nation, and have firmly preserved our beautiful land and language.⁴⁸⁰

The South Korean-US relationship in the late-1970s

The success of this Korean art exhibition in Japan led to the touring exhibition in the US from May 1979 to September 1981. As mentioned above, the South Korean government was already considering an overseas exhibition abroad for enhancing national prestige and increasing exports from May 1973, as it considered *2000 Years of Korean Art* as successful. According to the government report, from 1974 the government contacted several museums in the US as succeeding venues of the overseas exhibition after the exhibition in Japan. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Chicago Institute of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art were the American institutions which paid

⁴⁷⁸ *Chosun ilbo* (20th April, 1976).

⁴⁷⁹ NMK, *5000 Years of Korean Art* (韓國美術五千年) (Seoul: Gwangmyeong chulpansa, 1976).

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.2.

attention to the proposal from the South Korean government.⁴⁸¹ Subsequently the Cleveland Museum of Art and the French ambassador to Korea expressed their interest in hosting the exhibition.

In the late-1970s, the US was the most suitable country for conducting cultural diplomacy with the South Korean government. As with the Japanese case, diplomatic tensions between the two countries made both need some cultural events to alleviate those tensions, while delaying the discussion and influencing the process of the exhibition. The tensions between both countries were more practical and critical than the ones between South Korea and Japan. On 24th October, 1976, *The Washington Post* reported that a South Korean lobbyist, Park Dong-sun, and the South Korean Intelligence Agency, with the direction of President Park, offered bribes worth from half to one million dollars to US congresspersons.⁴⁸² Called 'Koreagate,' this incident threw the relations between both countries into the vortex of tension for some two years, even though the South Korean government absolutely denied intervention in Park Dong-sun's lobbying.

Behind this lobbying or corruption lay the diplomatic needs of the South Korean government, which wanted to secure as much national security from the US as possible. However, the US, especially the US parliament, was never the subject of the South Korean government, although South Korea was strategically important to the US's interests. With the US political circles beginning to consider the issue as essential in keeping the US's allied countries safe, the issues of human rights in South Korea became another obstacle in getting the aid which the government needed from the US. Although in 1981 the US government ultimately admitted that it should put the security of allied nations before human rights issues, the Carter government and the US parliament urged considering the issues as a prerequisite of US aid. Jimmy Carter's policy of withdrawing the US ground forces from South Korea was also a threat to the South Korean government, although it did not happen. This background made the South Korean government feel it essential to make good connections with the US parliament,

⁴⁸¹ "Report of the Business Trip to Japan," NMK, November 1975.

⁴⁸² Cited in Moon Chang-Keuk, *Anatomy of Korea-US Conflicts* (한미갈등의 해부) (Seoul: Nanam chulpansa, 1994), p.247.

resulting in Koreagate.

Koreagate led to conflicts between the South Korean and US governments, especially the US parliament, over the issue of attendance at the hearings of the parliament of Park Dong-seon and Kim Dong-jo, the then South Korean diplomat to Washington allegedly implicated in the incident. The South Korean government was reluctant to send them to the hearing and, to this end, refused to send Kim, who had diplomatic immunity as a diplomat. By rejecting a series of military and economic aid demands to South Korea, the US parliament put pressure on the South Korean government. However, the government withstood the pressure. Also, in the background lay the fact that the US intelligence agency had secured evidence of Koreagate by wiretapping the South Korean presidential residence. On 19th August, 1978, Koreagate was settled according to an agreement between both sides that Kim Dong-jo might just submit a written answer to the hearing.⁴⁸³

5000 Years of Korean Art in the US

It was in April 1977 that Rene-Yvon Lefebvre d'Argence, the director of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, proposed an arrangement for the US touring exhibition.⁴⁸⁴ It meant that this touring exhibition project resumed amid the vortex of diplomatic tensions between South Korea and the US. It seems that the South Korean government approached this issue just as it had the precedent with Japan in 1976. Although this discussion was not considered to have had a prompt diplomatic effect, given the tensions, it could be seen as one of the diverse diplomatic ways for settling those tensions. As the director of the Kyoto National Museum was active in the discussion for the exhibition in Japan, d'Argence made efforts to realise this project. His role could be compared to that of Robert P. Griffing, Jr, the director of the Hawaiian Academy of Art in Hawaii, who arranged the first overseas exhibition in the US in 1957. The first

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*, pp.247-300.

⁴⁸⁴ "News Release," The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (19th February, 1979).

meeting of the committee for selecting artefacts to be displayed was held at NMK on 17th November, 1977.⁴⁸⁵

A Vietnam-born American of French descent, he was striving to secure the status of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco as the only special museum in the US which specialised in Asian arts. According to its news release in February 1979, this museum was proud that this Korean exhibition would be “the first international exhibition to originate in San Francisco.”⁴⁸⁶ This museum did not even conceal the belief that its “attendance is expected to rival that for the 1975 Chinese archaeological exhibition.”⁴⁸⁷ In an interview with a South Korean newspaper, the director himself mentioned that this touring exhibition should begin from his museum, specialising in Asian art.⁴⁸⁸ While the news release showed that “his intent was to broaden the understanding and awareness of the American public to the rich cultural heritage of Korea, which has been further revealed by the new archaeological excavations,” it was natural that the intent of South Korean government was far more than that.

Choi Sunu and d’Argence signed the exhibition agreement in December 1978, after the settlement of Koreagate.⁴⁸⁹ It goes without saying that the US had to be the absolute ally of South Korea, despite the diplomatic tensions of those days. It can be said to be in this context that the South Korean government set out the overseas exhibition project right after the settlement of the Koreagate. Not only national security but also exports to the US were essential to South Korea, which pushed forward with an export-centred economic development strategy. The feeling of the American public towards South Korea, which was aggravated by Koreagate, and a series of human rights issues was also understood in terms of the aspect of exports to the US. The US was the biggest

⁴⁸⁵ “Minute of the Committee for the Selection of Artefacts,” NMK, November 1977.

⁴⁸⁶ “News Release” (19th February, 1979).

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ “Interview with Dr d’Argence (인터뷰: 5千年展 산파역 다르장세氏),” *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (9th May, 1979).

⁴⁸⁹ On 2nd March, 1979, the cabinet council passed the bill for the exhibition.

market for South Korea.⁴⁹⁰ In 1970, 48.2% of South Korea's exports were to the US. In 1975 exports to the US increased 382% in comparison with 1975. In 1980 South Korea exported merchandise worth 46 billion dollars to the US.⁴⁹¹

It was in this context that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea reported on measures linking *5000 Years of Korean Art* with an increase in exports to the US at the third Export Promotion Conference in April 1979.⁴⁹² In terms of this conference, a newspaper editorial remarked that this exhibition was intended for showing moral culture, on which the culture of products was based, to Americans who were saying that Koreans were coming.⁴⁹³ In fact, fifteen South Korean companies financially sponsored the touring exhibition. These South Korean sponsors included major companies such as the Samsung Group, the Hyundai Business Group and the Ssangyong Group, which were growing dramatically thanks to the export-led growth strategy of the South Korean government.⁴⁹⁴

When this touring exhibition opened in San Francisco, the scheduled venues for this touring exhibition did not include Washington, D.C., unlike the first overseas Korean exhibition in 1957 and the US's usual practice when hosting foreign exhibitions for diplomacy. Actually, the National Gallery of Art next hosted a series of special exhibitions from the communist bloc during the detente period, such as *The Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China* in 1974, *Master Paintings from the Hermitage and the State Russian Museum, Leningrad* in 1975 and *The Splendor of Dresden: Five Centuries of Art Collecting, an Exhibition from the German Democratic Republic* in 1978.⁴⁹⁵ Even though the vice president of the US government

⁴⁹⁰ Carter J. Eckert, "Economic Development in Historical Perspective," pp.395-399.

⁴⁹¹ "Statistics of the Korean Foreign Trade Association," cited in Moon, *ibid*, 1994, p.207.

⁴⁹² "About *5000 Years of Korean Art* in the US (한국미술오천년전 미국전에 붙여서)," *Chosun ilbo* (1st May, 1979).

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹⁴ Korean Overseas Information Service, *Collection of the Press Articles Related to 5000 Years of Korean Art in San Francisco*, 1979, p.177.

⁴⁹⁵ From the early 1970s, the US President Richard Nixon took the lead in relaxing the tension between two blocs. His visit to Beijing in February 1972 heralded an end of the Cold War in East Asia. See Bruce

was selected as honorary sponsor of *5000 Years of Korean Art*, and the prime minister of the South Korean government and the Secretary of State of the US contributed congratulatory messages to the exhibition catalogue, it seems that the South Korean government may have been disappointed at the opening ceremony in San Francisco, where only a few American politicians attended except for President Carter's son, who came on behalf of the vice president. It was during the tour that one more venue (the National Museum of Natural History/National Museum of Man of the Smithsonian Institute) in Washington, D.C. was added. This addition can be said to have implied a subtle improvement in the diplomatic communication between both governments.



Figure 10. *5000 Years of Korean Art* in San Francisco Asian Art Museum in 1979. From NMK Archive.

The exhibition *5000 Years of Korean Art* was the largest in the number of exhibits in the history of the South Korean government's overseas exhibitions. The government

Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, p.363. In May 1972 he also visited the Soviet Union to meet with Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party. This resulted in Brezhnev's return visit to the US in June 1973. It can be argued that these special exhibitions from the Communist bloc were put on in this diplomatic context.

sent 354 items, including 46 national treasures, out of which 31% were from 17 private collectors.⁴⁹⁶ The selection of artefacts was very discreet, and demand for participants was even forceful. According to the minute of the selection committee, whose members were the same scholars as in the exhibition in Japan in 1976, the committee asked that the government should force participation even by administrative rights if private collectors or institutions were reluctant to contribute to the exhibition.⁴⁹⁷ This atmosphere showed how the committee was eager to select the best masterpieces. It meant that the members of the committee were highly conscious of American scholars' response, and intended to evaluate outcomes which the Korean academic circle had accumulated since the liberation. At the same time, it can be said that they gained some confidence in both their material culture and their interpretation of it. On the other hand, this situation was possible as they believed the US was the centre of the world, which entitled them to judge the value of Korean culture or national identity on the world stage.

The catalogue of this exhibition is a good source to explain how actively South Korean academics were engaged in this exhibition. As the acknowledgements in this catalogue showed, this well organised catalogue "required the unselfish participation of an unusually large number of Korean, American and Canadian scholars."⁴⁹⁸ These South Korean scholars consisted of two groups. One was the members of the selection committee, who began their research with self-study after the liberation; and the other was young scholars who earned doctoral degrees in art history from American universities. The former group included Kim Won-yong, Choi Sunu, Hwang Su-yeong, Jin Hong-seob and Yoon Moo-byeong.⁴⁹⁹ The latter group included Ahn Hwi-jun (PhD, Princeton University), Kim Lena (PhD, Harvard University), Lee Sung-mi (doctoral

⁴⁹⁶ "Exhibit items of *Five Thousand Years of Korean Art*," NMK, 1979; Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *5000 Years of Korean Art*, (San Francisco; 1979).

⁴⁹⁷ "Minute of the Committee for the Selection of Artefacts," NMK, 31st March, 1978.

⁴⁹⁸ Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *op. cit.*, p.10.

⁴⁹⁹ Exceptionally, in 1959 Kim Won-yong obtained a PhD degree from New York University. His supervisor was Professor Alfred Salmony.

candidate, Princeton University) and Kim Kumja (doctoral candidate, Stanford University).

Likewise, the South Korean academic circle's confidence in their academic accumulation was supported by the young scholars who had absorbed the academic methodology of American scholarship.⁵⁰⁰ As seen in the exhibition catalogue, this exhibition deepened the chronological approach on Korean material culture which had already been attempted in the exhibition in Japan, with each art genre organised by dynasty. As could be expected, any word related to toadyism and retrogression which had been argued by the Japanese scholars did not appear in the narrative of the catalogue. In the introduction to the catalogue, the Nangnang commandery of Han China, which had been considered as the de-facto origin of Korean culture by Japanese scholars in the colonial period, was described as just giving "Chinese political, economic, religious and artistic concepts" to Koguryo Kingdom, one of three kingdoms in the ancient era.⁵⁰¹ In this regard, the authors of this catalogue were very discreet in comparison with Gregory Henderson, who wrote in the historical introduction of the catalogue of the first overseas exhibition in 1957 that "Chinese civilisation expanded into neighbouring Korea soon after 400 B.C., bringing with it a high-developed metal culture. ... Further Chinese penetration culminated in the establishment of a Chinese administration under the Han Dynasty."⁵⁰² It is also interesting that influences from those kingdoms of the Korean peninsula on Japan were pointed out. For instance, the introduction of the styles of the Baekche Kingdom into Japan in the 6th century was

⁵⁰⁰ Jo points out that a young generation of South Korea art historians from the mid-1970s began to take a strict empirical attitude to analysis of historical materials, focusing on stylistic analysis. See Jo In-su, "Research of Korean Art History in the 1960s to the 1970s (한국 전통미술의 재발견)," in *Tradition: Another Power which the Modern Era Created* (전통, 근대가 만들어낸 또 하나의 권력) (Seoul: Inmulgwa sasangsa, 2010), p.145.

⁵⁰¹ Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *op. cit.*, p.50. The introduction to the catalogue was co-authored by Kim Won-yong (former director of NMK, one of the members of the selection committee), Kim Lena and Richard Pearson (Professor of Anthropology, University of British Columbia). See Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *ibid*, p.11.

⁵⁰² National Gallery of Art, *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, p.19.

described as “one of the major elements in the development of the early schools of Japanese sculpture.”⁵⁰³

On the other hand, three international symposiums which took place during the tour of the exhibition were remarkable in that this touring exhibition contributed to arousing academic interest among American scholars, as well as in that those conferences tended to find the indigenous character of Korean material culture and its influence on other neighbouring cultures. As shown in table 9, these symposiums covered a wide range of subjects of Korean art history and archaeology.

⁵⁰³ Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *op. cit.*, p.50.

Table 9. International symposiums in the US related to *5000 Years of Korean Art*

Venue	Title	Date	Speaker and Subject
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco	The International Scholarly Symposium on Korean Art	12 th -13 th May, 1979	<p>*Kim Won-yong: Transition of Silla royal tombs in Gyeongju</p> <p>*Chin Hong-seob: Early style of Korean Buddhist statue</p> <p>*Kim Lena: The lost Buddhist statue at Hwangryong temple</p> <p>*Chung Yang-mo: Kilns from Goryeo</p> <p>*Park Young-sook: About Buddhist painting, eight Bodhisattva</p> <p>*Ahn Hwi-jun: Characteristics of landscape paintings in the late Joseon dynasty</p> <p>*Choi Sunu: About landscape paintings of the Gyeongjae school</p> <p>*Nishitani Tadasu (Univ. of Kyushu): Some problems on polished stone implements in Korea and Japan in the prehistoric age</p> <p>*Higuchi Takayasu (Univ. of Kyoto): Some problems of the Bronze Age in Korea</p> <p>*Kurata Bunsaku (Nara Nat'l Museum): Korean sculptures in Japan</p> <p>*Evelyn McCune: Goryeo celadon and its sponsors</p> <p>*Godfrey St. G.M. Gompertz: Characteristics of ceramics in the Yi period</p>
Seattle Art Museum	International Symposium on Korean Art	19 th -20 th Nov., 1979	<p>* Kim Won-yong: The evolution of Silla pottery</p> <p>* Choi Sunu: The excavation of a Toma-ri kiln site – the origin of early Chosun dynasty blue and white porcelain</p> <p>* Han Byong-sam: Some problems of the unified Silla potteries</p> <p>* Kim Lena: Two representative types of standing</p>

			<p>Buddha images of the unified Silla dynasty</p> <p>* Richard Pearson (Prof. of Anthropology, Univ. of British Columbia): Prehistoric Korean culture and society</p> <p>* Slarence F. Shangraw (Senior curator of Asian Art Museum of SF): Paekche ceramics</p> <p>* Tsugio Mikami (Idemitsu Art gallery): Koryo ceramics and their relation to Chinese and Japanese wares</p> <p>* Hiroko Nishida (Keio Univ.): Iron-painted celadon wares</p>
<p>Museum of Fine arts, Boston</p>	<p>Symposium</p>	<p>7th -8th Nov., 1980</p>	<p>* Kim Won-yong: Recent archaeology at Kyongju</p> <p>* Kang Woo Bang: Transitional style of Buddhist sculpture in ancient Silla</p> <p>* Choi Sunu: Landscape painting of the Yi period</p> <p>* Richard Pearson: Earliest Korea and the emergence of Korean civilisation</p> <p>* Gari Ledyard: The formation of early Korean states</p> <p>* Godfrey St. G.M. Gompertz (Joint honorary president of the Anglo-Korean Society)</p> <p>* Michael Kalton (Prof. Department of Religion, Wichita State Univ.): The neo-Confucian vision: spontaneity and structure</p> <p>* Daniel Boucher (Charge de Fecherche, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique France): The use of vernacular in Korean literary works</p>

Source: Compiled from brochures of each symposium.

As shown in a news article conveying a Japanese scholar's argument at the symposium held at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco - that many renowned Buddhist sculptures in Japan were from Korea or influenced by Korea -⁵⁰⁴ the South Korean reporter considered it very meaningful that those arguments were presented in front of American audiences. It implies that South Koreans wanted to overcome the complex inherited from colonial rule through evaluation by international academic circles, especially American academics. It was in this context that director Choi Sunu replied about the outcome of the symposiums that a "wide range of scholars from the US, Europe, China, Japan and South Korea attended the symposium. The erudite scholars and specialists numerously emphasised the characteristics and strong points of Korean art, and its leading and constructive role in the history of Asian art. At these symposiums, Korean cultural objects were so praised not by our voices but by foreign scholars' ones so that those arguments could be considered to be more persuasive by Americans."⁵⁰⁵

Two and half years of overseas touring exhibitions: outcome and appraisal

The news release of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. said that *5,000 Years of Korean Art* could be presented to US audiences as "one of the most comprehensive assemblages of a nation's cultural treasures ever seen in the United States." The news release added that the exhibition "revealed the richness and diversity of one of the most important artistic traditions of the Orient through 350 objects of sculpture, metalwork, painting and ceramics."⁵⁰⁶ The exhibition, which toured 8 cities in the US from May 1979 to September 1981, attracted 2,262,138 visitors, as shown in table 10.

⁵⁰⁴ "New Evaluation on Korean Art," *Seoul sinmun* (21st May, 1979).

⁵⁰⁵ Choi Sunu, "Our National Treasures Come Back from Abroad with a Big Success (우리 국보 해외서 큰일하고 돌아옵니다)," *Chosun ilbo* (4th October, 1981).

⁵⁰⁶ "News release (Korean Art Exhibit Opens July 15)," Smithsonian Institution, 1981.

Table 10. *5000 Years of Korean Art* in the US, 1979 to 1981

Venue	Period	Audiences
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco	1 st May to 30 th September, 1979 (153 days)	547,159
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle	1 st November, 1979 to 13 th January, 1980 (74 days)	57,874
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago	16 th February to 27 th April, 1980 (72 days)	107,339
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland	10 th June to 10 th August, 1980 (62 days)	44,430
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston	16 th September to 30 th November, 1980 (76 days)	90,195
The Metropolitan Museum of Art	5 th January to 15 th March, 1981 (70 days)	137,641
William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas city	17 th April to 14 th June, 1981 (61 days)	67,500
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, Washington D.C.	15 th July to 15 th September, 1981 (63 days)	1,210,000
Total		2,262,138

Source: Compiled from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *5,000 Years of Korean Art*, and BS 123 (November 1981).

The total audience increased 13.5 times in comparison with the first overseas exhibition in 1957, which attracted only 167,731 visitors. Several participating museums did not even recall the first overseas Korean art exhibition in 1957, calling their exhibition the first Korean art exhibition in the US. Interestingly, the US press in general tried to be objective in introducing this exhibition, refraining from blind praise of Korean art, while the participating museums tended to attract the attention of the

American public. This is why Han Cheol-mo, who analysed American press reports as the public relations man of NMK, complained that the US press were just introducing displayed artefacts, the preparation process of the exhibition and the history of Korea etc.⁵⁰⁷ Although he said that their attitude was because the American press hardly had an understanding of Korean culture, his comments imply that he had difficulty in finding an assessment which he and NMK wanted to receive from the American press.

In the same context, the South Korean press strove to find favourable comments on the exhibition and persistently introduced them to the South Korean public.⁵⁰⁸ When the exhibition began in San Francisco, *Gyeonghyang sinmun* reported that this event would renew the view on South Korea of Americans by displaying the essence of Korean traditional culture, conveying that the American press commended highly Korean's enjoyment of diverse arts.⁵⁰⁹ This attitude of the South Korean press is exemplified by the title of news articles such as "Wonderful! Wonderful! Towards brilliant golden crowns and Buddhist statues"⁵¹⁰ and "Echo of extolment wherever the exhibition goes."⁵¹¹ Indeed, this response from the US was what the South Korean government wanted to get from this exhibition. When it finished, Lee Gwang-pyo, the minister of Culture and Information, issued the following statement in order to celebrate its success.

I report to our nation that the exhibition *5000 Years of Korean Art* was widely welcomed by the US government and the public and produced satisfactory results. This exhibition made Americans recognise that Koreans have a distinctive and creative art, different from Chinese or Japanese art. Furthermore, in the international symposiums held during the tour, American intellectuals and art

⁵⁰⁷ BS 94 (June 1979), "Korean Art as the American Press Sees It."

⁵⁰⁸ For example, *Gyeonghyang sinmun* reported on an article in the *Los Angeles Times* of 13th May, 1979 (*Gyeonghyang sinmun*, 26th May, 1979).

⁵⁰⁹ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (9th May, 1979).

⁵¹⁰ "Wonderful! Wonderful! Towards Brilliant Golden Crowns and Buddhist Statues (눈부신 金冠 佛像에 윈더풀 또 윈더풀)." *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (9th May, 1979).

⁵¹¹ "Echo of Extolment Wherever the Exhibition Goes," *Seoul sinmun* (22nd August, 1980).

specialists got to find a new world of beauty which they had not been aware of. In addition, this exhibition gave a chance for major American museums to establish or enlarge permanent galleries for Korean art. Now scholars who are willing to research Korean culture are increasing.⁵¹²

This statement also explains which message the government wanted to convey to South Koreans. The government was reaffirming that South Korea was recognised by the US as an ethnic nation state with a clear cultural identity. On returning from the US, the national treasures were again displayed in a homecoming exhibition at NMK from 9th November to 6th December.⁵¹³ It meant that a cultural identity clearly different from neighbouring nations was intended to be internalised as values which should be pursued by South Koreans. In this regard, Americans' evaluation that "Korean culture has an excellent culture with independency, creativity and diversity and is not is not just the imitator of Chinese culture" was essential.⁵¹⁴

This second overseas exhibition, *5000 Years of Korean Art*, was organised in a period of strong ethnic nationalist policies under President Park's regime. Now, ethnic nationalism became a systematic ideology, and all the cultural artefacts were systematically being put in order under the name of ethnic nation. NMK and South Korean scholars were keen on securing a positive evaluation from American academics and public on the exhibition and the academic capital that they had accumulated. As director Choi Sunu said, the second overseas exhibition was an effort to achieve recognition from independent perspectives and the research of Korean academics, and to display the cultural identity of Korea.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² "A Statement by the Minister," Ministry of Culture and Information, October 1981.

⁵¹³ BS 124 (December 1981).

⁵¹⁴ *Chosun ilbo* (1st October, 1981).

⁵¹⁵ "Interview with Choi Sunu: Widened Perspective on Korea," *Hanguk ilbo* (2nd October, 1981).

Chapter 6. National narrative and South Korean society

The South Korean government tried to construct the increasingly essentialised and controlled communication of the national narrative directed towards South Korean society, especially since the 1970s. In this drive, NMK played an important role in this process. In 1980 South Korean society saw another new authoritarian government, whose leader, Chun Doo-hwan, had grasped power through a military coup in December 1979. Under this regime, NMK continued to put forth a pro-nationalist policy through its exhibitions and education programmes. It was in this context that NMK was reinvented in 1986, in the former Governor-General's building, where it displayed its 40-year-long accomplishments in constructing Korean cultural identity using material culture. The demolition of this building and temporary relocation of NMK in 1995, and the reopening of NMK in 2005 in the Yongsan area, which is in the centre of the capital, Seoul, showed how the ethnic national sensitivity could have a tremendous influence on South Korean society, especially when the issue related to Japanese colonial rule.

This chapter aims to examine the process of how South Koreans had access to their material culture and internalised it after the 1970s. This period could be characterised as NMK's emphasis on so-called social education. In this period, South Korean society experienced drastic changes. It also saw people's resistance to the authoritarian government and then to democratisation in succession. In this vortex of political and social change, how South Koreans absorbed and internalised a set of material culture given to them by NMK is important in terms of the relation between the government and the public over ethnic nationalism and material culture. In addition, the demolition of the museum building of NMK in 1995 shows how ethnic nationalism in South Korea operated in relation to real politics.

This chapter set out to answer the following questions. How did NMK develop its narratives with which to describe national identity in terms of external and internal motivations? What were the background and outcome of President Chun's government's relocation project of NMK in the first half of the 1980s? How did South Korean society respond to its material culture, and how did society internalise it in terms of an ethnic nationalist interpretation of material culture? Finally, what did the

demolition of the NMK building and the NMK's reopening in 1995, and then the relocation and grand opening of NMK in 2005, imply in terms of South Koreans' ethnic nationalist sensitivity?

The 1970s, the beginning of museum education

A few documents on museum education of NMK have survived from the 1960s, which may show that museum education hardly drew any fully-fledged attention from either the museum or the government, despite the government's nationalist intention of utilising the museum. After the establishment of NMK, gallery guidance for groups had been a basic means for the museum education of visitors. However, it was not until the late-1960s that it was regularised. The second director, Kim Won-yong (in office from 1970 to 1971), took a meaningful step forward, publishing the first issue of a monthly newsletter, *The Museum News* (박물관뉴스, hereafter BN), in October 1970, for introducing museum activities geared towards academics and the public. The opinion box installed at the museum right after the appointment of director Kim was also a symbolic action, which suggested an intention of communicating with visitors.⁵¹⁶

Along with these actions, museum staff began to raise questions about descriptive labels, which showed they were pondering the effective methods of conveying their discourse on ethnic culture.⁵¹⁷ In his inauguration address in October 1971, the third director, Hwang Su-yeong, expressed his intention of attracting the participation of the public in activities at the museum, promising to diminish the distance from nationals. His remarks anticipated the expansion of the education programme. In this regard, the following comment by a staff member of NMK in 1972 shows that the curators became aware of the need to expand the education programme.

I feel that viewing a museum should be more concrete and richer in content because it has a meaning as on-the-spot learning rather than as a touristic curiosity. It is needless to say that the museum

⁵¹⁶ BN 2 (1st August, 1970): 4.

⁵¹⁷ BN 5 (1st November, 1970):1; BN 12 (1st June, 1971): 1.

should have an adequate system and scale as a social education institution. Holding seminars for professionals, providing academic resources and giving gallery talks to the public can be proposed, but lectures and guidance for children should be provided more rapidly than any other thing.⁵¹⁸

The drastic increase in manpower and budget in 1972 made these ideas realised. As Hwang said, “it is not until 20 years ago that the development of and change [in NMK] began, and that the expansion of national strength became conducive to the expansion of the roles of NMK.”⁵¹⁹ As shown in chapter 4, for the first time a catalogue for permanent galleries was published in Korean for the reopening of NMK in 1972.⁵²⁰ Furthermore, from 1971 every special exhibition got to have its own published catalogue, whereas before only leaflets had been provided to audiences giving titles of exhibits.

In June 1973, Museum Special Lectures (박물관특별강좌) for teachers began with a new scheme,⁵²¹ and the Cultural Objects Drawing Contest for Children (어린이 문화재 미술 실기대회) made a start in October 1974.⁵²² Both projects were for instilling a sense of the superiority of Korean ethnic national culture and infusing national pride in students. In this context, education programmes began to be designed for other targets than students. For example, lectures for wives of diplomats to be dispatched to overseas embassies, and foreigners living in the Seoul area were prepared to make them understand Korean material culture.⁵²³ In this regard, the library for staff members in NMK was also opened for audiences on June 1973.⁵²⁴

⁵¹⁸ BS 22 (1st May, 1972): 1.

⁵¹⁹ BS 34 (1st December, 1973): 1.

⁵²⁰ Interestingly, NMK’s first catalogue for permanent galleries in 1964 was written in English. See NMK, *National Museum of Korea* (Seoul, 1964). This catalogue was revised twice in 1968 and 1970 respectively. However, those revised versions continued to be published in English.

⁵²¹ BS 28 (1st June, 1973): 3.

⁵²² BS 44 (1st November, 1974): 4.

⁵²³ BS 42 (1st August, 1974): 1; BS 37 (1st March, 1974): 2.

⁵²⁴ BS 28 (1st June, 1973): 1.

As the participation of the public in the museum activities became an important issue, a civilian organisation entitled Friends of the National Museum of Korea was established on 9th September, 1974. This organisation, in which museum enthusiasts and benefactors participated, aimed to be “an aid, tangible or intangible, to NMK by promoting the participation of civilians in museum activities, and by assisting with fields that a governmental institution like NMK cannot intervene directly”.⁵²⁵ The establishment of this organisation showed that the opinion makers in the field of culture began to take the lead in supporting the discourse on ethnic national culture on the basis of pride in their material culture, and by attracting the voluntary participation of the public.

Experiencing a drastic increase in audiences with the success of the opening of permanent galleries in Seoul in 1972 and the exhibition *Two Thousand Years of Korean Art* in 1973, as shown in table 11, Choi Sunu concluded that this success resulted from “the increase in interest of the public in our ancestors’ cultural heritage.” He added that “NMK reached a standard of famous world class museums thanks to the rapid increase in audiences, and this success is very meaningful in that the nation’s attention was directed to NMK in accordance with the development of the museum and the increase of our national strength.”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ BS 43 (1st September, 1974): 3.

⁵²⁶ Choi Sunu, “The Development of the Museum (博物館의 發展),” BS 37 (1st March, 1974): 1.

Table 11. Audiences to NMK in 1961-1979

Year	Seoul	Gyeongju	Buyeo	Gongju	Gwangju	Total
1961	55,231	116,407	20,313	1,570		193,521
1962	64,797	101,224	23,421	2,250		191,692
1967	103,558	211,781	40,219	4,273		359,831
1968	89,659	211,677	31,717	4,882		337,935
1969	79,969	209,789	42,689	4,969		337,416
1970	98,205	285,213	77,797	12,028		473,243
1971	186,349	402,239	138,360	29,479		756,427
1972	339,423	429,271	147,284	3,930		919,908
1973	619,187	611,172	199,515	36,220		1,466,094
1974	346,668	546,695	197,102	65,075		1,155,440
1975	387,442	528,800	218,043	67,936		1,202,221
1976	571,330	957,569	230,214	69,133		1,828,246
1977	537,707	993,502	259,840	86,461		1,877,510
1978	552,152	1,086,807	283,844	82,308	29,200	2,034,311
1979 (Jan to Aug)	412,490	793,427	191,760	65,433	202,983	1,666,099

Source: TYCI, p.326.

Indeed, the increase in audiences in this period came from the heightened interests in the traditional culture from the public as a consequence of the influence of the diffusion of the discourse of ethnic national culture and the success of economic development. It is no less important that the government encouraged almost all students to visit the museum through school excursions. Another factor was the increase in the number of tourists in local cities such as Gyeongju, Buyeo and Gongju, all of which had local branch museums. This promotion of tourism also resulted from the government's strong drive to develop the ancient historic cities as centres of tourism from 1974. In terms of these changes, Choi Sunu mentioned that "researchers or applicants for art history or archaeology courses unprecedentedly increased. Especially the number of people who have knowledge of traditional art, or who claim to have it, has increased a lot. This is

why we cannot help being criticised for our activities.”⁵²⁷ His remark shows that the 1970s meet the criteria for the creation of a layer of both specialists and appreciators. Furthermore, private collecting of antiquities began to draw the upper classes’ attention from this period.

However, internal and external criticism also followed: that the effectiveness of message and its contents could not reach nationals’ expectations despite the expansion of education programmes. In the mid-1970s, curatorial staff members of NMK pointed out several problems in telling audiences their stories, as follows.

It is clear that we have not yet devoted enough strength to the education activities, which is one of the major functions of the museum. ... We should appeal to the public’s interests through the publication of guides without jargon, the diversification of the exhibitions’ contents and the utilisation of the audio and visual materials.⁵²⁸

On the other hand, these interests, remarkably, reflected South Koreans’ hope for overcoming their negative consciousness of their material culture which had resulted from the experiences of colonial rule and the rapid industrialisation in the 1970s. The following remark by an intellectual shows that even intellectuals were not exempt from this negative consciousness.

It is often said that the beauty of Korea is characterised as simplicity. I have recognised this definition positively, but I often feel that such a definition shows a sort of inferiority complex. Sometimes, I hear that even academics agree to that definition as well as general civilians. Most Koreans feel our culture is trivial in comparison with the European culture we encounter when

⁵²⁷ BS 34 (1st September 1973): 1.

⁵²⁸ BS 47 (1st March, 1975): 1. See also BS 56 (1st March, 1976): 4.

travelling in Europe.⁵²⁹

To wipe out this negative consciousness was one of the most important missions of NMK. The following comment on the missions of NMK by director Choi Sunu shows how his museum was engaged in changing the negative consciousness into a positive one.

For the last 30 years we have newly acquired numerous cultural heritage artefacts and secured vivid materials of ancient history by excavating ancient relics, including prehistoric ones. On the basis of these resources, we should reconstruct ancient history, which has been distorted, and find Korean traditional beauty. And we need to do our best in order to make our Korean nationals understand our traditional culture, which has been isolated so far.⁵³⁰

Choi thought that NMK's mission should be to reconstruct the history of Korea and discover the traditional beauty of Korea by correcting its history and traditional culture distorted by Japanese colonialists. He also emphasised the importance of teaching this traditional culture to the public. His definition of the mission was accurately in accordance with the policies of the government. As shown in chapter 4, in 1973, a high ranking government official also mentioned that "large scale investment of the government budget in the national museum was for giving Korean nationals pride as a civilised ethnic nation."⁵³¹

In the same context, another government official in the field of cultural administration pointed out the fundamental purpose of the cultural policies under Park's regime by stating that "culture has a meaning of voluntary social unity. It contributes to national unity as the energy of the development of the country."⁵³² Thus, how to

⁵²⁹ BS 55 (January 1976): 4.

⁵³⁰ BS 45 (1st January, 1975): 1.

⁵³¹ BS 25 (1st January, 1973): 4.

⁵³² BS 93 (1st May, 1979): 4.

convey the museum's narrative effectively to the public after the reopening in 1972, was considered one of the most important tasks of NMK.

Chun Doo-hwan's regime and the 'promotion of culture'

On 26th October, 1979, 5 days before the overseas exhibition 5000 Years of Korean Art would be held at the second venue in the US, Park Chung Hee was assassinated by his right-hand man, Kim Jae-gyu, the head of the South Korean Central Intelligence Agency.⁵³³ Park's death gave South Koreans some expectation of more political freedom. As Eckert mentions, "hundreds of people in prison, on parole, or under arrest were freed in December 1979, including Kim Dae-jung, who had been under house arrest since the end of 1978."⁵³⁴ A referendum on a new constitution within a year was also promised by the new president, Choi Gyu-ha, who had been the former prime minister in Park's government. Major General Chun Doo-hwan and his new junta of army officers grasped power through a military coup in December 1979 and the military suppression of a demonstration for democracy in a major local city, Gwangju, in May 1980. As Eckert mentions, Chun's coup and transition to civilian rule in 1979-1981 followed a pattern established earlier by Park Chung Hee in 1961-1963.⁵³⁵ One of them was to continue to emphasise ethnic national culture, faithfully following Park's ethnic nationalist policies in the cultural sector.

Although Chun's regime, whose core force had been the elite guard for Park Chung Hee, was actually the continuation of Park's regime,⁵³⁶ it tried to show its differences from that Park's regime by taking some political measures, such as an amendment of the constitution in October 1980. One of the important revisions was the single-term system for the presidency. As Eckert points, a number of minor but highly visible social changes, which included the abolition of curfew and the relaxation of the dress code for

⁵³³ Eckert, "*Authoritarianism and Protest*," p.365. As Eckert also points out, "Park Chung Hee announced a series of 'revitalising' reforms [*Yusin* in Korean]] in 1972. The new Yusin Constitution, formally approved through public referendum in 1972, transformed the presidency into a legal dictatorship."

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*, p.372.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.376-377.

⁵³⁶ Kim, *Newly Written Version of History of Korean Contemporary Politics*, pp.232-234.

students, conveyed the impression of greater liberalisation.⁵³⁷

The new constitution added a clause that the government should make efforts for ensuring the inheritance and development of traditional culture and the promotion of ethnic national culture. It was clear that this clause was strongly influenced by the cultural policy of the former government. This new government, however, strove to differentiate itself from Park's government by adding the issue to the constitution.⁵³⁸ This action meant that the new government, which lacked political legitimacy, put forward the value of ethnic culture as a symbol of national integration. Moreover, it presented "educational renovation and promotion of culture" as one of its four catchphrases, which also included "nativisation of democracy," "construction of a welfare society" and "realisation of a just society." Chun's regime intended to utilise this rhetoric to cope with the demand from South Korean society for more political freedom and greater equality. Chun actually offered neither to any substantial degree. Rather, his regime needed "the security forces, such as tens of thousands of young conscripts who were trained as riot troops," as Eckert argues.⁵³⁹

It could be understood against this background that more visible cultural projects were needed. On 23rd June, 1981 the government announced its cultural policy which consisted of five major policy stances: the establishment of cultural subjectivity, the distribution of cultural benefit for social welfare; the enhancement of creative cultural capability; the strengthening of the support system for development of culture; and the enhancement of the cultural role of social education.⁵⁴⁰ The agenda of the establishment of subjectivity was inherited from Park's policy. In detail, the government planned some museum projects for enlarging "national consciousness towards the ethnic national culture." These projects included the establishment of the local branch museums of NMK in Jinju and Cheongju, as well as the construction of a new building for the

⁵³⁷ Eckert, *op. cit.*, pp.376-377.

⁵³⁸ Furthermore, the new constitution added a phrase - the "promotion of ethnic national culture" - to the swearing-in of the new president.

⁵³⁹ Eckert, *op. cit.*, p.378.

⁵⁴⁰ Park Seok-heung, "The Significance and Direction of the Cultural Policy of the Fifth Republic: Laying the Foundation for the Ethnic National Cultrue (제5공화국 문화정책의 방향과 의의: 민족문화 기반을 다진다)." *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (23rd June, 1981): 3.

National Museum of Modern Art in a southern area of Seoul. Those local museums were also intended for a distribution of cultural benefit. This cultural policy faithfully followed Park's ethnic national policy in demanding national unity through emphasis on ethnic national culture. It was also clear that Chun was reluctant to allow South Koreans more political freedom, because it could threaten his regime. However, his government moved further steps forward, at least in rhetoric, in foregrounding concepts of welfare, distribution and social education.

On the other hand, the attraction of two major international sports tournaments in September and November 1981 - the Asian Games in 1986 and the Olympic Games in 1988 in Seoul - also provided the government with a strong motivation to expand the cultural infrastructure of South Korea. One of the major projects was the relocation of NMK into the former Government-General's building, which had been utilised as the Capital building of the South Korean government since liberation. On 16th March, 1982, Lee Jin-hee, the minister of Culture and Information, issued the following statement on the relocation of NMK.

Keeping in mind bitter memories related to this building, the government is considering a plan to expand and develop NMK by adding another function of displaying the subjectivity of the ethnic nation, including the history of the striving for independence, to its existing function. Accordingly, NMK in the future should collect, arrange and display processes of our ethnic nation's formation and development, especially its creative historical development and process of overcoming national crisis and struggle for independence. Secondly, NMK should display the creativity and subjectivity of our culture, and our ethnic nation's authenticity, on the basis of comparison with the Western and Eastern cultures, especially following the new recognition of the surrounding cultures in terms of our traditional culture. Thirdly, NMK should expand its function in order to be a place for social education, for giving correct recognition of our traditional culture to South Korean nationals, as well as to foreigners who would visit our

country.⁵⁴¹

He added that this museum would make South Korean nationals eager to create a new history and heighten their ethnic national pride and confidence. He also articulated the government's expectation that there would be a new recognition of 'cultural [civilised] Korea' from foreigners who would visit South Korea for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games. And it was in the same context that another government official interviewed by *The Dong-a ilbo* mentioned those international sports events made the government strive to expand the cultural infrastructure.⁵⁴² The relocation and renovation of NMK was also explained in a way that the project was for eliminating remnants of Japanese colonial rule.

This explanation reflected a criticism that the former building of the Government General, which symbolised the colonial rule, should not be used for the government of the independent country. The South Korean government actively utilised this cause for explaining the relocation of NMK into the building. A newspaper reported that this project was for cleaning up the remnants of the 36-year-long Japanese colonial rule and instilling a sense of the sovereignty of the ethnic nation.⁵⁴³ It added that this action stemmed from President Chun's deep consideration for making the stronghold of colonial rule into a space of education in which to arouse ethnic national pride and subjectivity. It seems that this decision-making was hardly criticised at that time, when the authoritarian regime controlled South Korean society. It was glamorised as a mature approach by which to overcome the memory of colonial rule. However, this issue would prove to be controversial within at most 10 years, as shown in the demolition of the building in 1996 which was being used as the national museum.

⁵⁴¹ "The Statement of the Relocation and Expansion Plan of the National Museum of Korea (國立中央博物館移轉擴張計劃發表)," BS 128 (1st April, 1982): 1.

⁵⁴² "The Relocation of Several Government Ministries, Such as the Ministry of Law, into the Gwacheon : (法務·農産·建設·保社·科技處, 果川廳舍로 이전: 中央廳 民族博物館으로)," *Dong-a ilbo* (16th March, 1982).

⁵⁴³ "From the Site of Shame and Glory into the Eternal Lesson of the Ethnic Nation (榮辱의 現場을 영원한 民族의 敎訓으로)," *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (16th March, 1982).

South Korean society and museum education

Although South Korean society was under the Chun regime's authoritarian control in the first half of the 1980s, this society was changing, demanding more political freedom and economic equality. Even the regime could not help accepting those changes anyhow, as shown in its rhetoric, such as extending democracy and welfare towards South Korean nationals. However, those benefits were to be given from the government, rather than gained by nationals. Here was the ultimate gap between the regime and the people. Eckert described South Korea in the 1980s as follows: "a 1980s economic powerhouse - a factory to the world for everything from clothes, shoes, and electronic goods to steel, ships, and now even automobiles and semiconductors."⁵⁴⁴ A per capita GNP of \$87 in 1962 drastically increased to \$1,546 in 1979. It was against this background that a reporter at the *Gyeonghyang Daily*, referring to the plan for the construction of a new building for the National Museum of Modern Art, wrote, "the time has come to decorate with culture and art we who have been eager to seek bread and meat and have busied ourselves filling our stomachs with them."⁵⁴⁵

In 1981, 1,800 applicants rushed to NMK for a one-year-long Museum Special Lectures (박물관특설강좌) programme, as *The Korea Economic Daily* (한국경제신문) reported. This even caused the museum to increase the capacity of the course from 300 to 500 people.⁵⁴⁶ Press' interest continued in this interesting social phenomenon. *The Dong-a ilbo* reported that about 80% of the attendees were house wives, and presented the course as one of the diverse examples of making good use of leisure.⁵⁴⁷ Mentioning that the course had opened and been met with tremendous popularity, *Gyeonghyang sinmun* also reported that 99 attendees were awarded for perfect attendance at the completion ceremony of the course, and that this fact reflected the high interest in and zeal for traditional culture.⁵⁴⁸ Interestingly, the completion ceremony of this lecture course resulted in an unusual scene of a queue of deluxe cars. This report shows that

⁵⁴⁴ Eckert, "Economic Development in Historical Perspective," p.388.

⁵⁴⁵ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (27th May, 1981).

⁵⁴⁶ *The Korea Economic Daily* (28th February, 1981).

⁵⁴⁷ *Dong-a ilbo* (30th March, 1981).

⁵⁴⁸ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (12th December, 1981).

these lecture courses successfully began to attract the upper class and the middle class who had a university education.

This Museum Special Lectures programme, organised by NMK from 1977, was the beginning of the in-depth education of the public in Korean culture. At first, this programme was prepared for museum staff and related field employees in South Korea. According to *The Museum News*, this special lecture series was intended for “securing manpower that could research, collect and preserve traditional cultural objects, and upgrading qualities of the existing curatorial staff members.”⁵⁴⁹ The curriculum of this one-year-long programme included 41 lectures in the fields of archaeology, anthropology, art history, museum studies etc. Remarkably, this programme was also open to the public from the start, even if applications were only possible from university graduates. This programme enjoyed popularity from the start. 502 people applied for this course and NMK had to increase the capacity from 40 to 220 people.⁵⁵⁰ NMK organised two classes, for museum staff and the general public respectively.

From this year on, many applicants had to wait to be admitted into the course. NMK adopted some admission screening procedures like those used by universities, and this course began to be subtitled “Museum College (박물관대학)” from the second year. This trend shows that the public’s interest in their material culture was clearly aroused around this period. It seems that this change resulted from several factors. First of all, Korea’s economic stability, even if not enjoyed by all South Koreans, encouraged them to find some meaningful ways of utilising their leisure time. Secondly, the middle classes began to worry about the side effects of rapid economic development, such as materialism and the blind pursuit of a Western-centric perspective. Indeed, they felt that they were losing something of their own for the sake of economic wealth. An editorial writer of *Seoul sinmun* described this West-oriented attitude as hunger for culture, especially for Western culture.⁵⁵¹ A contribution to *The Museum News* from a government official who worked for the Ministry of Culture and Information

⁵⁴⁹ BS 68 (1st March, 1977): 1.

⁵⁵⁰ BS 69 (1st April, 1977): 1.

⁵⁵¹ Song Jeong-suk, “Hunger for Culture,” BS 119 (1st July, 1981): 4.

summarised what the South Korean public thought the problem was in terms of foreign cultures.

We have lived without knowing about ourselves and have despised our culture by ourselves. We have created a great culture in history. However, recent ordeals and the convulsion of the political situation which our ethnic nation has faced, has made us accept foreign cultures without any criticism, and take pride in talking about foreign cultures, separating ourselves from our traditional culture.⁵⁵²

This kind of establishment of a relation between Korean culture and foreign culture reflected both a reality and the government's propaganda; since the Park regime's emergence, all evils in the society came from unquestioning acceptance of foreign cultures, including remnants of colonial rule, and so South Koreans should unite, with their own culture as the centre. This rhetoric was basically for political propaganda. However, its influence was also powerful in arousing the ethnic national sensitivity of the South Korean public in the field of culture.

In this context, the following remarks clearly show what response the government and NMK wanted to get from the public. *The Museum News* introduced the following comments of attendees at the Culture Lecture for Teenagers, which was launched by NMK in August 1984, and clearly showed how and why NMK approached the public.

I feel proud as a Korean anew; I fully realised that we should succeed to and develop our traditional culture; I feel proud to understand our [culture] and have got to attain self-sovereignty; I feel liberated from our inferiority complex, and I am thankful to my ancestors.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵² Choi Jin-yong, "Expectation towards Museum Activities," BS 93 (1st May, 1979): 4.

⁵⁵³ BS 157 (September 1984): 1.

I feel strongly proud that I am a Korean after I have learnt about our culture, which I had been ignorant of. This has contributed to the cultivation of my character. ... Now, I can say that Korea is a proud, honourable, and great ethnic nation wherever I go. ... I have found enough reason why I studied hard, because I found myself ignorant of my nation's cultural, ideological and historical tradition.⁵⁵⁴

It can be said that the above mentioned comments were the “correct answers” that the government wanted from the public. In other words, education programmes at NMK were intended to unite Korean nationals by cultivating in them a strong consciousness of ethnic nationalism.

Reopening of NMK in the former building of the Government-General

The reopening of NMK in the former building of the Government General on 21st August, 1986 gave NMK a good chance to renovate its galleries and expand its educational function. The total area of the galleries doubled, from 4,890 m² to 9,871 m². Furthermore, the number of exhibits more than tripled, from 2,300 to 7,500 items. In March 1986, NMK summarised main purpose of its permanent exhibition as “providing the South Korean nationals and foreigners with an understanding of Korean ethnic national culture's legitimacy and its developmental system from a cultural historical perspective, and helping them view the characteristics and superiority of Korean plastic arts, as well as contributing to comparative research on the surrounding culture.”⁵⁵⁵

According to this purpose, NMK professed itself to be both art museum and history museum as shown through new permanent galleries, emphasising that NMK should be worthy of its name: literally the national central museum (國立中央博物館). This objective was to be accomplished by putting importance on national education, whose

⁵⁵⁴ BS 168 (August 1985): 4.

⁵⁵⁵ “Notice of the Relocation and Reopening of NMK (國立中央博物館移轉開館案內),” BS 175 (31st March, 1986): 1.

main task was to make nationals take pride in their ethnic national culture.⁵⁵⁶ In this regard, NMK tried to compile in the new permanent galleries all the academic accomplishments since the liberation. First of all, the ‘developmental system’ of Korean ethnic national culture was reconstructed according to period. The first floor of the museum covered periods from prehistory to Unified Silla, exhibiting archaeological artefacts. Especially, all the phases of prehistoric age were reorganised from the Palaeolithic Age to the Early Iron Age, suggesting the Korean ethnic nation’s long history.

A gallery for the Proto-Three Kingdom period was newly established in order to prove the independent formation of early states whose cultural basis had been on early ironware culture in the Korean peninsula.⁵⁵⁷ This reorganisation of Korean ancient history was for denying the Japanese colonial perspective on Korean history. In terms of the Three Kingdom period, the Gaya confederation (the fourth political entity, whose history was not clear in the historical document) got to have its own gallery in the new building. Reconstructing the history of Gaya, which was located in the southern area of the peninsula, between the Baekche Kingdom and the Silla Kingdom, had a special meaning for denying the argument made during the colonial period that Japanese had occupied the territory of Gaya in the 6th century.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ “Introducing Galleries: Proto Three Kingdom (진열실 안내: 원삼국실),” BS 184 (31st December, 1986): 2.

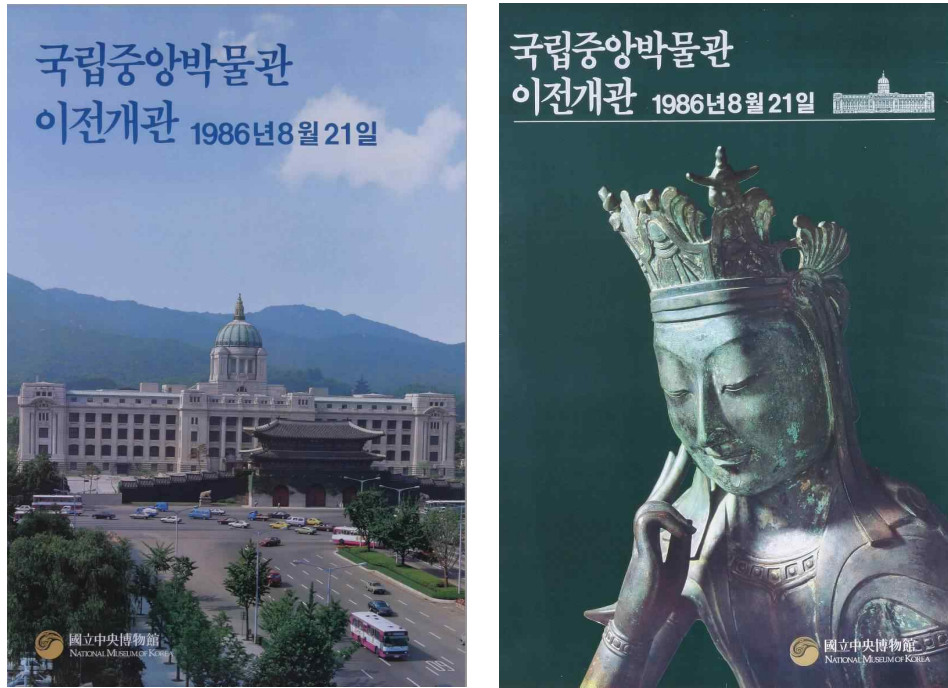


Figure 11. Posters in commemoration of the reopening of the National Museum of Korea in the former Government-General building in 1986. From NMK Archive.

The second floor included galleries of ceramics and metal craft from the Goryeo period to the Joseon period, and galleries for donated artefacts. A remarkable thing on this floor was the opening of a scholar's studio or *sarangbang* (사랑방). It can be said that this studio, a reproduction of an equivalent building in the late Joseon period, symbolised the reinstatement of the culture of the period, which had been ignored as stagnant and dependent by the Japanese colonial view. Just as the Japanese traditional tea room was branded and introduced to the West as a typical image of Japanese culture, so this *sarangbang* would play the same role from this time forward.⁵⁵⁸ This *sarangbang* was intended for displaying an elegant and graceful aspect of the literati of the Joseon dynasty.⁵⁵⁹

The third floor included newly established galleries for foreign cultures, such as

⁵⁵⁸ The British Museum included this studio in its permanent gallery of Korean culture in 1990. See Kim, *Korea As Seen through Its Material Culture and Museums*, pp.269-271. For the role of tea in making Japanese identity, see Kirstin Surak, *Making Tea, Making Japan: Cultural Nationalism in Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁵⁹ BS 193 (1st September, 1987): 3-4.

Chinese culture and Japanese culture. In these galleries NMK secured space for its special collections: a Central Asian collection (the so-called Ottani collection); a Sin-an shipwreck collection excavated off the south western shore of Korea in the 1970s; and the Nangnang collection, which was excavated by Japanese scholars during the colonial period. Indeed, the culture of the Nangnang commandery from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd century CE was intended to be considered as a foreign culture transplanted from the Chinese proper, and not the origin of Korean ancient culture. It is noteworthy that on this floor NMK newly established a gallery for Korean Buddhist paintings, which, from the late-1960s, began to draw attention as being among the great accomplishments of Korean painting. This new permanent exhibition reflected the outcomes that the South Korean academics had accumulated since liberation, and also meant the completion of the ethnic nationalist narrative through material culture. At his address on the reopening, Director Han Byeong-sam (in office from 1984 to 1993) commented that “NMK came to have an appearance as place for social education in which to view and feel our five thousand year long culture more systematically and tridimensionally.”⁵⁶⁰

It seems that the concept of social education had double meanings in the contemporary context. In the Law of Social Education enacted on 31st December, 1982, social education was defined as all forms of organisational education activities for lifelong education for the nationals except regular schooling, and the museum and library were included as such organisations for social education.⁵⁶¹ This law provided that the purpose of social education was to improve the calibre of nationals and, by doing so, to make them contribute to the development of their country and society. Under pressure for the democratisation of the South Korean society, the government adopted the concept of lifelong education as a dispensation towards nationals even in the constitution revised in 1981. However, its ultimate orientation was for encouraging the people to contribute to the country by following the government’s leadership.

This point gets clearer in President Chun’s message in 1986.⁵⁶² He put emphasis on

⁵⁶⁰ “A Turning Point of Development of Our Culture,” BS 180 (21st August, 1986): 1.

⁵⁶¹ Available at

<http://www.law.go.kr/lsSc.do?menuId=0&subMenu=2&p=&query=%EC%82%AC%ED%9A%8C%EA%B5%90%EC%9C%A1%EB%B2%95#liBgcolor3>

⁵⁶² BS 174 (28th February, 1986): 1.

avoiding the split in national opinion and maintaining national unity. His remark was one of his solutions to people's antipathy towards his regime. As Eckert says, the Gwangju incident continued to haunt Chun through his term. He urged people to continue President Park's repressive policies, with only some superficial changes. In this regard, demand for political freedom and economic equity continued to increase, and the regime would ultimately resort to the national police force.⁵⁶³ It was in this context that Lee Won-hong, the minister of Culture and Information reported to Chun on the projects of the year 1986 that the ministry should strengthen public communication so that the government could lead the way in correcting the consciousness, logic and attitude of nationals, thereby laying the foundation of national harmony and participating in the formation of public opinion.⁵⁶⁴ Lee continued to report that the ministry would strengthen the social educational function of museums for broadening the foundation on which to cultivate 'independent culture'.

Likewise, as ever, the rhetoric of the cultivation of independent culture was intended as a medium of national unity by the government. However, South Korean society was changing somewhat. Contributions to *The Museum News* for commemorating the reopening of NMK in 1986 showed that South Korean intellectuals were conscious of such changes, even if they were also thought to hold quite a firm ethnic nationalist stance. Lee Gu-yeol, a journalist who specialised in the cultural sector, mentioned that the museum should be opened wide to the public so that anybody could be familiar with it without feeling pressured. He added that the museum should be a pleasant and free space where people of all social strata could visit and be impressed.⁵⁶⁵ Kim Byeong-mo, professor of Hanyang University, argued that the museum should thoughtfully consider every detail, from explanatory labels to chairs for visitors, so that every level of visitor could enjoy the museum, whoever visited it.⁵⁶⁶ Lee Gyeong-seong, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, also emphasised the importance of educational outcomes, insisting that the museum should be a space for education through cultural objects, not the grave of them. As a concrete method, he recommended expansion of lecture

⁵⁶³ Eckert, "*Authoritarianism and Protest*," p.378.

⁵⁶⁴ BS 174 (28th February, 1986): 1.

⁵⁶⁵ BS 180 (31st August, 1986): 5.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

programmes and educational facilities, such as video rooms.⁵⁶⁷

Social education after reopening in 1986

As suggested in director Han's address and the expectations it had of contributors, NMK focused on the museum education programmes after the reopening. In accordance with the reopening in the former Capital building, NMK newly secured an annex building for social education which was 4,922m² of the total floor space. Furthermore, the Section for Cultural Education was established in order to take full charge of the related business. In addition to the ongoing programmes, NMK began to add new education programmes for several targets. The first one was the Saturday Open Lectures which started from 6th September, right after the reopening.⁵⁶⁸ This programme was intended for employees who were finding it difficult to make time for their learning. Its contents covered art history, archaeology, history, folklore and anthropology.

In *The Museum News* of December 1986, NMK published its education programmes for the following year, listing them one by one.⁵⁶⁹ On the basis of the facility's infrastructure and organisation, NMK began to push forward various education programmes from 1987. NMK explained the purpose and vision of the programmes as follows.

NMK is working on diverse social education programmes in order to provide nationals in general with changes in lifelong education, and to instil cultural consciousness into them through correct understandings of our indigenous tradition and history. These programmes are in accordance with the needs of the times that the museum should not remain a store of artefacts, but become a guide for the development of national and local culture. In the future, NMK will continue to develop more diverse social education programmes which will be adequate for people of all walks of

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ SNMK, p.261; BS 182 (31st October, 1986): 1.

⁵⁶⁹ BS 184 (31st December, 1986): 1.

life.⁵⁷⁰

In this year, NMK launched two more new education programmes, for the elderly and children respectively. The former, which was titled Museum School for the Elderly, was intended for the elderly, who “have lived their life during turbulent eras, such as colonial rule and the Korean War.” NMK explained the purpose of this programme as “for making the elderly recognise the superiority of our traditional culture and gain a correct understanding of Korean history, and by doing so, for correcting their distorted values and perspective on history.” The latter, entitled Museum Class for Children was run during the childrens’ summer and winter vacations, just like the Museum Class for Teenagers, which made a start in 1984.

The year 1987 was a turning point in the democratisation of South Korea for most South Koreans. As Eckert says, President Chun had to accept quite reformatory proposals from his fellow conspirator of the 1979 coup, Roh Tae-woo, who would be a candidate for the next presidency from 1988.⁵⁷¹ The proposals included a direct presidential election and restoration of civil rights for Kim Dae-jung, a strong opposition leader. This stream of democratisation in the 1980s allowed the public to have more chance of access to the national museum.

The ambiguous expression ‘cultural consciousness’ in the above quotation is quite interesting, especially along with the rhetoric used about the Museum School for the Elderly. It is thought to have meant a high level of consciousness which could only be achieved by national pride in the cultural accomplishments of the Korean ethnic nation. This expression could be said to imply that NMK had no difficulty in continuing to utilise this ethnic nationalist rhetoric for national unity in order to explain the purpose of its activities, despite the aversion of society to state violence in this period. Rather, it seems that democratisation helped the South Korean public to voluntarily absorb an ethnic nationalist consciousness through widened opportunities to access their material culture. It means that the South Korean public could internalise the ethnic nationalist consciousness through their material culture more voluntarily. Indeed, the ethnic

⁵⁷⁰ BS 187 (31st March, 1987): 1.

⁵⁷¹ Eckert, “*Authoritarianism and Protest*,” p.382.

nationalist rhetoric developed by the government since Park Chung Hee's regime can be said to have become a firm foundation of such internalisation.

In this regard, there is a very suggestive remark in the commemorative speech by the minister of Culture and Information at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of Jeonju National Museum, a new branch museum of NMK: "the construction of this museum means that both the government and nationals have the same willingness to correctly inherit and develop the ethnic cultural heritage in accordance with the mood in which recognition of our cultural creative capability and its autonomy is increasingly improving."⁵⁷² His remark clearly reflects a mood of democratisation, and also shows that he was confident in maintaining the discourse of ethnic national culture in changing South Korean society. In the same context, one of the staff members, in his contribution to *The Museum News*, concluded that the Museum Special Lectures programme achieved expected outcomes, arguing that the attendees had a unanimous opinion that these lectures helped them to understand their culture and history, which they had not hitherto known, had pride in, or affection for.⁵⁷³

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that South Korean intellectuals who resisted the authoritarian leaders and their policies also had a strong ethnic nationalist orientation. Given that they criticised the leaders' dictatorships or humiliating diplomatic policies toward the US or Japan, they were clearly against these regime and foreign powers; it is also clear that they had an ethnic nationalist perspective, even if that perspective could be differentiated from official ethnic nationalism driven by the government. As Hong points out, their perspective had the high possibility of being absorbed into the government's discourse on the ethnic nationalism.⁵⁷⁴ The field of Korean history and material culture was one of the representative fields. In this regard, South Korean scholars always were in danger of falling into a trap of emphasising only the creativity and superiority of their culture.

Special exhibitions held by NMK between 1986 and 1995 showed a very

⁵⁷² BS 197 (31st January, 1988): 1.

⁵⁷³ "In-depth Analysis: Social Education of NMK (심층분석: 박물관의 社會教育)," BS 191 (31st July, 1987): 3.

⁵⁷⁴ Hong Seok-ryul, "Two Streams of Korean Ethnic Nationalism in the 1960s (1960년대 한국민족주의의 두 흐름)," *Society and History* 62 (2002): 197-198.

characteristic trend. As shown in Kang Woo-bang's (the then chief curator of art history at NMK) argument that special exhibitions should concretely present several aspects of Korean art history one by one,⁵⁷⁵ special exhibitions in this period began to have a clear sense of subject. *Masterpieces of Celadon of the Goryeo Period* (1989), *Woodcraft of the Joseon Period* (1989), *Buddhist Sculpture in the Three Kingdoms Period* (1990), *Buddhist Reliquary* (1991), *Paintings of Gyeongjae Jeong Son* (1992), *Korean Arts of the 18th Century* (1993) and *Paintings of Danwon* (1995) in the field of Korean art history were all such examples. Pressing issues relating to prehistory and ancient history were also dealt with the special exhibitions in the field of archaeology: *Culture of Gaya Kingdom* (1991), *Bronzeware Culture of Korea* (1992) and *Prehistoric and Proto-historic Earthenware* (1993).⁵⁷⁶ These exhibitions in the archaeological field can be said to have been intended to display independent cultural development in the Korean peninsula.

On the other hand, with its reopening in August 1986, NMK could expand and add various convenient facilities, such as a parking lot and dining facilities, aiming to attract more visitors. NMK attempted to provide visitors with teaching materials for each gallery from May 1988.⁵⁷⁷ From April 1989, NMK allowed free entry for children and teenagers below 18 years of age, and for the elderly above 65 years of age.⁵⁷⁸ This action began to result in significant increases in the number of visitors to NMK from 1990, as shown in table 12. These statistics show that offering the free entry explains increases in the number of visitors from 1990.

⁵⁷⁵ BS 180 (31st August, 1986): 4.

⁵⁷⁶ SNMK, p.216.

⁵⁷⁷ BS 201 (31st May, 1988): 4.

⁵⁷⁸ BS 212 (30th April, 1989): 1.

Table 12. Audiences to NMK (main museum in Seoul) in 1986-1995

Year	Charged	Free	Foreigners	Total
1986	919,360	10,989	60,805	930,619
1987	1,502,571	55,368	188,170	1,557,939
1988	1,312,787	75,862	244,824	1,388,469
1989	796,870	552,553	351,971	1,349,423
1990	726,021	943,361	384,440	1,669,382
1991	849,716	1,119,967	378,366	1,969,683
1992	841,326	1,183,507	395,584	2,024,833
1993	994,515	1,216,118	397,027	2,210,633
1994	866,998	895,058	407,654	1,762,056
1995	794,063	686,322	377,851	1,480,385

Source: SNMK, p.649.

The Ministry of Culture established in January 1990 anticipated a transition in cultural policy. Its first minister, Lee O-ryeong who had been a professor at Ewha Womans' University and a culture critic, promised to discard bureaucratic customs and centralism from the cultural administration.⁵⁷⁹ One of the major objectives of the ministry in 1990 was the expansion of nationals' right to enjoy culture and participate in it.⁵⁸⁰ In this respect, the introduction of the travelling museum by NMK in April 1990 was a very symbolic project in accordance with this policy direction.⁵⁸¹

This persistent promotion of ethnic national culture by the government, and the resulting spread of ethnic national sensitivity in South Korean society were finally proved by a cultural 'incident.' Remarkably, in 1993 this society first encountered a best seller on the cultural heritage of Korea. *My Essay on the Exploration of Cultural Heritage*, written by Yu Hong-jun (born in 1949), was recorded as the sixth-best-selling book in that year, becoming the first ever million-seller in the field of liberal arts publications in South Korea. As shown in his first expression in the book, "our

⁵⁷⁹ Park Gwang-mu, *Cultural Policy in Korea* (한국문화정책책론) (Seoul: Gimyeongsa, 2010), pp.164-166.

⁵⁸⁰ BS 222 (28th February, 1990): 1.

⁵⁸¹ BS 224 (30th April, 1990): 1.

country's territory is all a museum," Yu, an art historian and art critic, showed he was proud that he could encounter both tangible and intangible heritage wherever he went in the country. He added that "our country has a very small territory; however, our country has a very rare experience in which one ethnic nation lived that long history in the same area as a community bound together by a common destiny, maintaining the same blood, language, institutions and customs."⁵⁸²

In the preface to the book, Yu also lamented that Koreans failed to read the truth about and learn of the beauty of the artefacts from the national territory, falling instead into hopeless envy and imitation of others' cultures. He continued to explain why he authored the book: "I, as a guide of the museum, wanted to share my happiness by which to embrace the history and aesthetics of the national territory with all the people living with me in the same period."⁵⁸³ His understanding exactly followed director Choi Sunu's, although Yu had a background as an anti-government intellectual, who had fought against Park Chung Hee's dictatorship.⁵⁸⁴ This is a good example that shows that another stream of nationalism in South Korean society, an anti-thesis to official nationalism by the government, still shared almost the same ethnic national sensitivity in terms of their material culture.⁵⁸⁵

He earned his MA degree in Korean art history at Hong-ik University in Seoul. However, his career as an anti-government intellectual hindered him from getting a job in the academic world in South Korea. From 1985 he participated, as a co-chairman in the Council of Ethnic National Art (민족미술협의회), whose aim was to promote the movement *Minjung misul* [art for those who are ruled]. He became a lecturer at a private university in a local city in 1991, before taking the lead in a cultural movement

⁵⁸² Yu Hong-jun, *My Essays on the Exploration of Cultural Heritage* vol.1 (Seoul: Changjakgwa bipyeongsa, 1993), pp.5-7.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*

⁵⁸⁴ In 1967, he was admitted into the Department of Aesthetics at Seoul National University. He was suspended from the school for his participation in a protest against the revision of the constitution for president Park Chung Hee's third term. In 1974, he was involved in an infamous fabricated incident of espionage and imprisoned. He was freed in February 1975, and worked for art-related journals during the second half of the 1970s. See "Interview with Yu Hong-jun (석학에게 듣는다: 유홍준 명지대 교수)," *Weekly Korea* (週刊韓國) (16th October, 2003).

⁵⁸⁵ Hong, "Two Streams of Korean Ethnic Nationalism in the 1960s," pp.169-203.

exploring cultural remains, delivering lectures to university students on Korean art history and contributing essays on the explorations to a journal.⁵⁸⁶

Responses to the book were very enthusiastic, as the record sales show. In her contribution to the *Gyeonghyang sinmun*, Park Wan-seo (1931-2011), a famous South Korean novelist, highly praised Yu's book, mentioning: "I am so pleased to read this book and realise very much that I cannot help talking about it." She added as follows.

While reading this book, I experienced a surprise as if a blind person opened one's eyes. When I was a middle school student, I faced liberation [from the Japanese colonial rule]. It was natural to put emphasis on teaching the superiority of our ethnic national culture in order to recover our self-respect which had miserably been stamped down. So I repeatedly had to hear the expressions, 'five thousand years' long history' and 'our brilliant culture.' ... I just learned about them only through textbooks without exploring [cultural remains], and experienced the Korean War. It was not before we put all our ethnic national energy into how to earn a living and how to survive that we got into the condition to enjoy culture, and began to have an interest in cultural heritage. This change took place around the early 1970s, as my first visit to Gyeongju in that period shows. However, I was disappointed that Bulguksa temple and Seokguram grotto were not that brilliant. ... I did not know how to express to what extent I was shocked to visit the British Museum and the Louvre Museum. Seeing so many brilliant things there, I felt betrayed, and experienced a sense of inferiority in terms of ours on which I heard only blind praise. ... The shock left a long lasting hurt to me, and an attempt to soothe the hurt might arouse a motivation to appreciate ours.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ Park Wan-seo, "I Necessarily Like to Say (난 기어이 말하고 싶다)," *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (27th July, 1993).

Through her personal experiences, Park exactly described how South Korean nationals had approached and recognised their material culture for the previous 50 years, as well as why this book had been such a success as a million-seller. The South Korean public were taught to have pride in their national material culture through promotion policy by the government. However, they could not have pride before they could be in the condition to enjoy culture and appreciate their ethnic national culture by themselves. As it was, they were hurt by the gap between what they actually felt about their cultural heritage and what that cultural heritage was supposed to be.

As Park mentioned, this gap can be said to have taken place because the South Korean public were forced to have pride in their culture without having the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy it. In this circumstance, Yu's book attempted to present the public with a way to view and appreciate cultural heritages, which was a decisive factor in its great success. He effectively aroused ethnic national sensitivity from the cultural heritage about which he wrote, providing readers with abundant information with which to understand their cultural heritages. Yu has continued to publish a series of follow-ups on his exploration of the subject, achieving the record of selling three million books in 20 years since the publication of the first. In 1997, a part of his book was even inserted in a text book of Korean language-learning for middle school students. Furthermore, his book, *My Essays on the Exploration of Cultural Heritage* was chosen as the second most important book of the 1990s by a major bookstore company on the recommendation of a committee comprising 18 intellectuals.⁵⁸⁸

His success shows that South Korean society began to have a popular groundswell for appreciating material culture in the early 1990s. It should not be overlooked that this was also a product of the dissemination policy of the discourse on ethnic national culture by the government, even if Yu was against the authoritarian regimes. It is in this context that the South Korean public was also eager to understand their material culture as ethnic culture. Yu was also a faithful follower of this tendency, and this factor clearly gave him great success.

⁵⁸⁸ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (2nd December, 1999).

Demolition of the building of NMK and the 'righteous spirit of the ethnic nation'

The authoritarian decision by President Chun to reopen NMK in the former building of the Government General was followed by a persistent controversy. Within four years of the reopening, opinions on the relocation or demolition of the building of NMK were raised in a democratic mood in South Korean society after the success of the pro-democracy movement and the revision of the constitution, which had led to the revival of the system of direct election in the presidential election of December, 1987. The new president, Rho Tae-woo (in office from 1988 to 1992), could not help but accede to demands for democratisation, taking several visible actions to complement his legitimacy. One of the actions was the restoration of Gyeongbok-gung palace, the primary royal palace of the Joseon dynasty, most of whose buildings were demolished (except for the main buildings in the centre zone) during colonial rule. The demolition was symbolised by the construction of the Government General building in 1926 on the site secured by the demolition of the southern zone of the palace.

This palace restoration project, which also became one of the projects commemorating the 600 years since the founding of the capital in Seoul in 1394, accrued diverse meanings - including even democratisation - because its restoration needed the relocation of the security force compound for the Presidential residence, *Cheogwadae* (청와대).⁵⁸⁹ However, the most important cause for the project soon became the elimination of the colonial remnants.⁵⁹⁰ In this regard, the palace began to be believed to symbolise the historical legitimacy of the Korean ethnic nation. This

⁵⁸⁹ "Gyeongbok-gung Palace Regains Its Former Images (경복궁 옛 모습 되찾는다)," *Hangyeorae sinmun* (한겨레신문, The Hangyeorae Daily) (20th September, 1988).

⁵⁹⁰ On 27th October, 1989, at a symposium held by the Culture and Art Promotion Centre, a government-sponsored research institution, Professor Cho Heung-yun of Hanyang University in Seoul argued that the Gyeongbok-gung palace should be restored in order to regain the subjectivity of the ethnic nation and eliminate remnants of colonial rule. See Lee Yong-u (李龍雨), "Less Intervention from the Government Leads to Development of Civilian Culture (官 입김 줄여야 民間文化 발전)," *Dong-a ilbo* (28th October, 1989); Kim Cha-su (金次洙), "Should We Just Maintain and See the Symbol of the Colonial Remnant? (日帝 잔재의 상징 두고만 봐야 하나)," *Dong-a ilbo* (6th December, 1990).

belief gradually became prevalent in the vortex of controversy over the issue of the demolition of the Government General building. The press also contributed to the diffusion of this belief by introducing contributions from historians to general readers which mostly supported the demolition of the building,⁵⁹¹ while some newspapers tried to be neutral.⁵⁹²

On 21st January, 1991 the minister of Culture, Lee O-ryeong, reported to the president the plan to restore the palace, demolish the building and relocate NMK.⁵⁹³ In June 1991, the Ministry of Culture pronounced the result of the public opinion survey on the demolition of the building and relocation of NMK.⁵⁹⁴ According to this survey, 77% of relevant specialists and 65% of general civilians agreed to the relocation or demolition of the building, while 22% of specialists and 27% of civilians objected to it. In terms of the timing of the demolition, only 35% of civilians and 40% of specialists responded that the demolition should be preceded by the construction of a building for NMK. 15% of all respondents even wanted to demolish the building immediately, with more specialist respondents supporting this opinion.⁵⁹⁵ This survey shows how influential the ethnic nationalist sensitivity of the South Korean public and intellectuals was.⁵⁹⁶ It was in this context that *Gyeonghyang sinmun* in its editorial argued that the master plan to construct the new NMK building should have priority over the demolition of the Government General building. The controversy over the prioritisation and practical problems of relocating the national museum then became a main obstacle

⁵⁹¹ In 1990, most major South Korean newspapers included contributions from readers and academics. For example, *Dong-a ilbo* (5th August, 1990); *Gyeonghyang sinmun*; (2nd November, 1990); *Hangyeorae sinmun* (13th November, 1990).

⁵⁹² These newspapers introduced the pros and cons of the issue. See *Hangyeorae sinmun* (6th November, 1990) and *Dong-a ilbo* (4th December, 1990).

⁵⁹³ *Dong-a ilbo* (21st January, 1991 and 22nd January, 1991).

⁵⁹⁴ “Pronouncement of the Survey Result (국립중앙박물관 이전계획 관련 국민여론조사 결과 발표),” BS 239 (1st July, 1991): 1; *Dong-a ilbo* (14th June, 1991); *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (14th June, 1991).

⁵⁹⁵ *Gyeonghyang sinmun* (14th June, 1991).

⁵⁹⁶ Lee argues that most Koreans felt that the conversion of the building into NMK placed Korean artefacts in a building that represented the painful colonial past. See Lee Jung Jun, “The National Museum as Palimpsest: Postcolonial Politics and the National Museum of Korea,” in *National Museums*, p.378.

for this project, and the project could not move ahead during President Rho's term, because it was never easy to solve the problems facing the relocation of NMK.

On 1st April, 1993 President Kim Young-sam (in office from 1993 to 1997) finally decided to demolish the former building of the Government General that was being occupied by NMK. Kim, who had long been a leader of the opposition party, had become president through a coalition with the ruling party, whose main members were related to the military coup in 1979. He took pride in being the first president who did not have any military background since the coup by Park Chung Hee. However, he was criticised for entering a coalition with the former ruling clique who had staged the military coup, even though he strove to differentiate himself from them and had a strong background as a fighter for democracy. It seems that this background might be one of the reasons why he was eager to claim that he would eliminate the colonial remnants in South Korean society. In his catchphrase the 'creation of new Korea,' this task became one of his important and urgent things. In this regard, the building became a representative target as one such remnant. Within a month of assuming office, President Kim gave the order to demolish the building and consider the relocation of NMK. His decision was made only 7 years after NMK was relocated in the building in 1986.

His decision aroused immediate controversy in South Korean society. While some intellectuals objected to the decision for several reasons, *Dong-a ilbo* came down in support of his decision through its editorial.

To demolish the building of the Government General and restore Gyeongbok-gung palace is a matter of our nation's self-respect and deep resentment. Japanese imperialism intended to obliterate Koreans' pride and the royal palace's dignity, which was a symbol of resistance, by constructing the building on the site where the palace was destroyed. If they would damp our ardor with this huge, monolithic building, this building has no meaning but shame and deep resentment. ... The building must be demolished: the sooner, the better.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁷ "The Building of Government-General and the Nationals' Self-Respect (總督府건물과 국민자존심),"

This controversy reached a climax as the demolition was put into practice in August 1995. Even the ruling party was worried about the drift of public opinion and asked the president to put off the demolition, because the planned relocation of NMK was still uncertain.⁵⁹⁸ However, President Kim was adamant about demolishing the building. And it seems that the government desperately needed a symbolic event for commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation, and decided to set out demolishing the building on 15th August, 1995. The main event of the ceremony marking the anniversary was demolition of the steeple over the dome of the building. The minister of Culture and Sports made a speech on the event, mentioning that “by demolishing the building of the Government General, which obliterated our ethnic nation’s language and history and even deprived us of our rights to live, I solemnly swear to liquidate the gloomy past and revive the righteous spirit of our ethnic nation through the restoration project of Gyeongbok-gung palace.”⁵⁹⁹

The demolition project resumed on July 1996, as a temporary space for NMK had to be secured before the demolition.⁶⁰⁰ The project was not finished until the end of the year. NMK reopened at the renovated annex building, which had been utilised for social education, on 12th December, 1996. Around this reopening, NMK had to deal with another controversy: the cement toxicity of the building that had been renovated in such a short time.⁶⁰¹ This controversial issue over the demolition clearly showed how the ethnic national sensitivity could have a tremendous influence on South Korean society, especially when the issue was related to Japanese colonial rule. Despite increasing interest in cultural objects in the 1990s, it did not seem that the national museum could have its own voice in the vortex of this controversy.

Dong-a ilbo (3rd April, 1993).

⁵⁹⁸ “Please Refrain from Demolishing the Building (옛 총독부 철거 좀 참으시죠),” *Hangyeorae sinmun* (1st August, 1995).

⁵⁹⁹ BS 289 (30th September, 1995): 1.

⁶⁰⁰ “The Demolition Begins in July,” *Dong-a ilbo* (9th April, 1996).

⁶⁰¹ “Objection to Rough and Ready Relocation of NMK (국립박물관 졸속 이전 반대),” *Hangyeorae sinmun* (26th July, 1996).

'Grand' opening of NMK in 2005

On 31st October, 1997, in his address at the ground-breaking ceremony for the new building of NMK, President Kim Young-sam anticipated that the museum would be a superb cultural space to accommodate the self-respect and pride of the Korean ethnic nation. He added that this museum would contribute to firmly establishing the subjectivity of the ethnic nation in the era of globalisation and unification. Furthermore, he did not forget to comment that all these efforts were for heightening the righteous spirit of the ethnic nation and correcting history, which had been distorted.⁶⁰² Like his predecessors, he intended to fully utilise the ethnic national sentiment in South Korean society. Again, his comment shows to what extent the rhetoric of ethnic national culture took strong root in the country.

On the other hand, in the 1990s South Korean society experienced a spirit of democratisation. As shown above, Kim Young-sam, an opposition party leader with no military background, was elected as president in December 1992, despite criticism for entering the coalition with the former ruling clique who had staged the military coup. As Cummings points out, in November 1995 President Kim Young-sam displayed the progress of democracy in South Korea by jailing two former presidents, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, for the military coup in 1979 and for the bloody suppression of the civilian uprising in Gwangju in 1980 respectively.⁶⁰³ The election of Kim Dae-jung, another opposition party leader and lifelong fighter for democracy, as president in December 1997, again showed that "Korea's civil society and democracy were both strong and vibrant, and no longer threatened by the military," as Cummings argues.⁶⁰⁴ Kim Dae-jung supported Roh Moo-Hyun to succeed him in office in the next presidential election in December 2002. Roh was a lawyer who, in the 1980s, had defended many dissidents and labour activists. By his winning the election, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun achieved a thorough political transition away from the elites

⁶⁰² "Presidential Address for the Groundbreaking Ceremony by President Kim Young-sam," 31st October, 1997.

⁶⁰³ Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, p.395.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.400.

who had dominated South Korea since 1948.⁶⁰⁵

In the context of this political democratisation, the 11-year-long grand project of constructing the new museum building finally reached fruition on 28th October, 2005. As shown above, President Roh Moo-hyun's address at the opening ceremony was very suggestive. On the premise that "the Korean ethnic nation has created a proud tradition of 5000 years," he anticipated that "the new museum building will stand tall as a centre of self-respect of the Korean ethnic nation." Furthermore, he emphasised that the site of the new building was on the former military posts of foreign forces such as China, Japan and the US."⁶⁰⁶ His emphasis reflected another stream of Korean ethnic nationalism which tended to be against authoritarian regimes and foreign powers.⁶⁰⁷ From his perspective he was treading the right path of ethnic nationalism, while the former authoritarian regimes were not considered to have done so. Interestingly, however, both sides appealed to the ethnic nationalist sentiment implied by the national museum. This shows to what extent ethnic nationalism and its representation through material culture was important in South Korean society, as before it had been under the control of authoritarian regimes. In this regard, it can be also understood that material culture did become one of the essential mediums that could represent and prove nationhood.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp.400-401.

⁶⁰⁶ "President Roh's Address at NMK," 28th October, 2005.

⁶⁰⁷ Hong Seok-ryul, "Two Streams of Korean Ethnic Nationalism in the 1960s," *Society and History* 62 (2002): 197-198. That was why Cummings argued that Roh's election was "not entirely welcomed in Washington." See Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, p.401.



Figure 12. President Roh Mu-hyeon at the reopening ceremony of the National Museum of Korea in the Yongsan area in October 2005. From NMK Archive.

With the opening of the new building, the total area of the galleries increased from 9,871m² to 27,090m² in comparison with the capital building's galleries. Aiming for an audience friendly museum and a complex cultural space, this museum was proud of its newly furnished children's museum, expanded education programmes, convenient facilities and digital devices for guidance, as well as a large-scale performance hall and auditoriums. Permanent exhibitions were held under the five themes of archaeology, history, fine arts, gifts and Asian arts. Remarkably, NMK first adopted the name of Asian Art Galleries (아시아관), although the museum had already established Chinese, Japanese and Central Asian galleries in 1986. NMK newly included an Indonesian Art gallery, whose exhibits were loans from the Jakarta National Museum of Indonesia. NMK explained the establishment of the gallery as being for "giving the viewers a chance to understand the commonality and diversity of Asia and to experience characteristics of each culture." Interestingly, NMK saw the establishment of the gallery as a means to become one of Asia's most important museums.⁶⁰⁸ This implied that the

⁶⁰⁸ A brochure published by NMK for PR concerning the reopening of the museum reads as follows. "The gallery is where the viewers can also sense the rise of the National Museum of Korea as one of Asia's most important museums." See "The Spirit of History, the Power of Culture, the National Museum of

gallery was, in part, intended for a national ambition as well as for understanding its culture.

The archaeological gallery newly included a section for the Balhae kingdom (698-926), whose founder was a former general of Goguryeo, one of the Three Kingdoms. Most South Korean historians have not hesitated to see this kingdom as a part of Korean national history, since the kingdom was argued to be like that in the late-18th century;⁶⁰⁹ while the Chinese historical circle urged that the kingdom and even Goguryeo kingdom was local regimes in Chinese history.⁶¹⁰ In this vortex of controversy, NMK took an active part in presenting material evidence in support of the argument from the Korean side by the establishment of the section. This can be considered to have been an attempt to prove the discourse on national history through museum activity. Remarkable was the fact that expectations of perfection of the discourse came from the South Korean audience. The museum involved an event concerning a chronological table displayed in the archaeological gallery. Some audiences complained to the museum about the fact that the table did not include Gojoseon, the first country in the history of Korea, whose concrete origin could hardly be evidenced from archaeological proofs. This issue attracted the press's attention in no time.⁶¹¹ Finally, the museum could not help acceding to demands from the public and press. This issue shows to what extent the South Korean public and press internalised the nationalist discourse on history. In addition, it was a good example of how the national museum responded to a nationalist

Korea," NMK, October 2005.

⁶⁰⁹ In his book, Yu Deuk-gong (1749-1807) argues that the history of the kingdom should belong to Korean history. See Yu, "Balhaego (渤海考, A Research on Balhae)," (1784). In modern and contemporary historiography in South Korea, his argument has been widely accepted and included in every history text book for school students, although a few scholars, such as Lee and Kim, have objected to it. See Lee Jong-wook, *Ethnic Nation? Or State?*, pp.15-16; Kim Han-gyu, *The History of the Korean-Chinese Relations (한중관계사)*, vol.1 (Seoul: Arke, 1999), p.22. Ahn Jeong-bok, one of Yu's contemporaries, also objected to Yu's argument in his book *Dongsa Gangmok* (東史綱目, Annotated Account of Korean History) written in 1758.

⁶¹⁰ For the Chinese Northeast Asian Project (東北工程), see Kim, *Korea as Seen through Its Material Culture and Museums*, pp.300-317.

⁶¹¹ *Joseon ilbo* (8th November, 2005); *Dong-a Ilbo* (16th November, 2005); *Hangeorae sinmun* (28th November, 2005).

demand from the public.

In August 2010, NMK finished the renovation of the history gallery, which was directed by the then director Choe Gwang-sik (in office from 2008 to 2011). In his preface to an exhibition catalogue, Choe summarised the renovation as for the construction of a building with “a thread of connection in Korean history (一脈相通, 우리 歷史의 殿堂).”⁶¹² With the renovation, he established a gallery for each dynasty, such as the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. In other words, his ultimate goal was to show audiences the whole history of the nation of Korea in the national museum more chronologically and systematically. He was proud that with this renovation NMK got to have a gallery for every dynasty, from Gojoseon, the first state in Korean history, to the Joseon dynasty. In this context, the current director, Kim Youngna, asserts that the permanent exhibitions of NMK are intended to serve as extensions of the national history textbooks, and that the narrative they provide is within the bounds of official history.⁶¹³ It seems that her comment is based on the chronological setting of the history gallery, which was renovated in 2010.

Most mass media’s positive appraisal of the renovation showed to what extent South Korean society has internalised the nationalistic perspective on the translation of material culture and its history.⁶¹⁴ Although Duara argues that national identity exists only as one among other identities and is changeable, interchangeable, conflicted or harmonious with them,⁶¹⁵ there does not seem to be enough space for other identities to be secured in the arena of the national museum. In this context, it is difficult to say that issues of gender, ethnicity, class and centre-province relations are actively discussed in the exhibitions of NMK. For example, the literati class of the Joseon dynasty is focused on only as a bearer of high culture, even if it definitely had a more complex socio-economical background and context in its contemporary society. In the same context, it is not easy to find discussions of gender issues or centre-province relations in NMK’s

⁶¹² Choe Gwang-sik (최광식), “Preface,” *Joseon, the Country of Scholars, Farmers, Artisans and Tradesmen* (朝鮮, 士農工商의 나라), (Seoul: National Museum of Korea), 2010.

⁶¹³ Kim Youngna, *National Museum of Korea, the First Ten Years in Yongsan*, (Seoul: National Museum of Korea), 2015, pp.10-11.

⁶¹⁴ *Chosun ilbo* (6th August, 2010), *Munhwa ilbo* (5th August, 2010) and *Yonhap News* (26th July, 2010).

⁶¹⁵ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, p.8.

exhibitions.

On the other hand, magnificent collections from the remains of Nangnang, most of which were excavated around the Pyeongyang area during the colonial period, are controversial in terms of what should or should not be chosen to be displayed in NMK. Since its opening in 1945, NMK has secured a gallery for Nangnang. However, in October 2008 NMK closed the gallery, which had been located in the Asian Gallery. Now, most of the objects are in storage, while others are displayed relating to Han China's influence on the early Korean ancient kingdoms' culture. This situation may imply Korean intellectuals' self-conscious or sub-conscious intention to minimise the influence of Chinese culture in any way possible, even if this intention is also closely related to coping with the Chinese Northeast Asian Project.

Conclusion: National museum and representation of nationhood

Hobsbawm was optimistic about the end of nations and nationalism, concluding that “the owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling round nations and nationalism.”⁶¹⁶ However, his expectation proved to be hasty, contradicted by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting explosion of nationalism in eastern European countries.⁶¹⁷ Furthermore, nationalism in East Asian countries has persistently functioned as a major dynamic influencing the political, economic, social and cultural life in this region. The discussions that have taken place on nations and nationalism include valuations of and perspectives on their influence in the past, present and future. The reason that Smith, a former student of Gellner, who was a representative modernist in nationalism discussions, changed his view to ethno-symbolism and challenged Gellner’s modernist view of nationalism was because he could find ethno-symbolic dimensions in terms of the nature of ethnic groups and nations.⁶¹⁸

In a sense, Smith’s approach can be said to have resulted from his decision to search for a sober solution to volatile reality, rather than to pursue a vague expectation of applying the cold light of reason. Nationalism is always attractive when it is explained as a cause to compete with and confront others. In this context, ever since the concept of nationalism was introduced into East Asia it has always been perceived as a positive value, as it was not only a powerful weapon against western imperialism, but also an effective way by which to unite people under the flag of a nation-state and to compete against other nation-states in the region. In Korea, ethnic nationalism has also been a positive value ever since the term was introduced functioning as an essential ideology in its struggle for independence during the colonial period and for the nation-building and

⁶¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p.169.

⁶¹⁷ Jang Mun-seok, *Taming Nationalism*, pp.55-56.

⁶¹⁸ Ernest Gellner, “Adam’s Navel: ‘Primordialists’ Versus ‘Modernists,’” *People, Nation and State: The Meaning of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, edited by Edward Mortimer & Robert Fine (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp.31-32; Smith, Anthony D., *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.1-2.

the nationalisation of South Koreans since liberation.

With these points in mind, this research has sought to understand how NMK, as a national repository of material culture and the state's premier exhibition facility, has shaped and been shaped by Korean nationalism. As Knell points out, "the national museum as it is locally produced reflects local conditions of nationalism and wealth, international connections, identity and competition, individual and corporate interest, political and economic relationships, the ideological possibilities of culture, networks of appropriation and emulation, diplomatic efforts, and so on. No museum is an exact copy of another."⁶¹⁹ Indeed, this South Korean national museum has reflected its local conditions in the process of making national identity.

For specifying these local conditions under which the national museum was established and has been managed, this research has focused on the historical, diplomatic and political context in which South Korea is situated. As argued in the above chapters, these specific contexts influenced, and often even determined, how and why national identity has been pursued by the national museum.

Firstly, this thesis demonstrates that the construction of national identity in building the modern Korean nation state was closely related to the renewed understanding the relationship between Korean culture and Chinese culture. It was in this context that NMK has striven to find Korean culture's difference and independence from Chinese culture through its material culture. Indeed, drastic changes in Korea's historical perception of China strongly influenced Koreans' perception of Chinese culture. As Eckert argues, "to exist outside the realm of Chinese culture was, for the Korean elite, to live as a barbarian. ... This orientation toward Chinese culture took an official foreign policy called *sadae* or 'serving the great,' where 'the great' of course, meant China." He adds that, "since at least the seventh century the ruling classes in Korea had thought of themselves in cultural terms less as Koreans than as members of a larger cosmopolitan civilization centered on China."⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁹ Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," p.6.

⁶²⁰ Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press: 1991), p.227.

Remarkably, the Japanese imperialist perspective made ill use of this perception of the Korean elite: using it as evidence with which to deny Korea's autonomous capability to create its own culture. It was in this context that Japanese scholars strove to construct the colonial view of Korean history and instil it into Koreans. From the Japanese perspective, Koreans would have to follow and obey a new 'great' Japan. Furthermore, the colonial authorities pushed forward the assimilation policy through colonial rule. The Yi Royal Household Museum and the Government-General Museum were utilised in order to prove this Japanese perspective with material evidences. These museums reflected both the political and academic ambitions of the Japanese empire.

In this circumstance, Korean nationalist intellectuals realised that they should make it an essential mission to prove that their culture was 'different' from those of the Chinese and Japanese, further discovering the uniqueness and excellence of Korean ethnic culture. It was not until liberation from colonial rule that the mission secured practicable grounds in terms of the formation of the national identity of the Korean modern nation-state. After the Second World War ended, drastic changes in international politics gave a totally different meaning to the material culture of Korea.

In this regard, American curators and scholars of Asian art wanted to shed new light on the culture of Korea as the status of that culture changed to one of nation. In other words, American scholars were making an attempt to consider Korean culture as an individual, national culture. This is why the US curators for the first overseas exhibitions in the US were reluctant to include artefacts which showed strong influence from Chinese culture. That is, American scholars were also participating in shaping Korean national identity.

From the 1960s the discourse on ethnic national culture as a political slogan also encouraged the academic circle of Korean historians to challenge the Japanese colonial view of Korean history, and strongly influenced the translation of and narratives on Korean material culture. As Korean historians strove to secure evidences of the self-sustainable development of Korean history, NMK made efforts to prove the creativity of Korean culture and its differences from Chinese culture. Recognising that prehistoric ages and the Joseon period were the main targets of distortion by Japanese scholars, from the 1960s the museum focused on investigations of prehistoric relics, and on rehabilitating the cultural status of the Joseon dynasty.

In this context, Choi Sunu, the fourth director of NMK, asserted that Koreans had built an independent culture and historical foundation as a genuine ethnic nation, and had firmly preserved their beautiful land and language. For him, the museum's urgent task was to help South Korean nationals to understand and appreciate their ethnic national culture. His ambition was accomplished when NMK reopened in August 1986 in the former building both of the Government-General and of the South Korean government after liberation. The findings of this thesis show how this new National Museum of Korea came to represent the whole of Korean cultural identity through the material culture – an identity that had been constructed by NMK and South Korean academics for 40 years since 1945. Another reopening of NMK in 2005 again affirmed the independent cultural identity of the Korean nation. In sum, I believe this thesis demonstrates how and why the South Korean government has striven to display the uniqueness and independence of Korean culture through the national museum.

Secondly, it can be argued that international political and diplomatic factors have affected the process of the formation of national identity, although scholars have not paid enough attention to the issue of external factors in terms of the issue of nations and nationalism. After the Second World War ended, South Korea, occupied by the US army, would have to survive as a bastion of the US in the region, even though South Korea had good reason to build its own country. NMK, which took over the Government-General Museum right after liberation in August 1945, soon began to take a step forward in identifying itself as a 'national' museum of the South Korean state.

South Korea's construction of its own national identity through material culture was also meaningful for furthering the US ambition to secure a pro-American regime in the region. In this respect, South Korea's case provides a good example to show how international politics influenced the formation of national identity of a nation which had experienced colonial rule. Furthermore, South Korea's case is all the more interesting because Korea had enjoyed a long and continuous existence as a unified country since 668, as Eckert points out. Interestingly, however, this fact had had little importance for Americans before the Japanese empire confronted the US. The drastic change in the political situation in the region gave Americans a chance to understand Korean history and culture.

As the leading power in the so-called 'Free World,' the US was eager to teach South

Koreans its own civilisation and institutions as the norm that countries under the world order presided over by the US should follow. This American civilisation included museum practice. This is why a major American private foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, invited Kim Chewon, director of NMK, to the US. His visit gave him confidence in the American standard of museum institutions, and also established, through him, a major gateway through which to transmit Korean cultural resources to the American academic world. More importantly, American assistance to NMK was very important at its beginning stage. The US cultural agency in Korea helped NMK to evacuate its major collections from Seoul to Busan during the Korean War. The financial assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation was essential to NMK's conduct of investigation in the 1950s and the 1960s. Likewise, the US was willing to help South Korea find its national identity through material culture.

Overseas touring Korean exhibitions in the US between 1957 and 1959 were representative cultural events which exactly reflected the dynamics of relations between South Korea and the US. US assistance to the South Korean government was essential for national security and the restoration of the damage resulting from the war. South Korea, which stood at the forefront of the Cold War on behalf of the US, tried to take as much from the US as it could.

These exhibitions showed how material culture could play a practical role in securing the cultural identity and political position of South Korea, impoverished by the war, on the world diplomatic stage. The exhibition which had its first venue at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. also shows that the US was making efforts to ensure that countries under its influence could establish their firm national identity as nation-states. This exhibition also reminded the South Korean government officials of the usefulness and value of material culture and museums, leading to overseas touring exhibitions in the UK, France, West Germany, Austria and the Netherlands between 1961 and 1962.

The second overseas touring exhibition *5000 Years of Korean Art* in Japan (1976) and the US (1979 to 1981), were an outcome of both Park's regime's strong promotion of Korean ethnic culture and NMK's effort to achieve the recognition of the independent perspectives and the research of South Korean academics. That is, ethnic nationalism became a systematic ideology in South Korea, and all the cultural objects were

systematically put in systematic order under the name of the ethnic nation. In this circumstance, NMK and South Korean academics were keen on eliciting favourable responses from American academics and the public on their accomplishments, which they had accumulated for more than 40 years since liberation. Remarkably, these overseas exhibition projects were embroiled in intense diplomatic issues: between South Korea-Japan and between South Korea-the US. The overseas exhibition in Japan in 1976 was held in the course of settling diplomatic tensions between South Korea and Japan. Interestingly, the exhibitions in the US in 1979-1981 also had diplomatic tensions between the two countries in the background. In this regard, these overseas exhibition projects provide a good example of how international cultural exchanges such as exhibitions were utilised for international politics.

In sum, I believe that this thesis demonstrates the international political implications of the overseas special exhibitions in the context of South Korea's diplomatic relations, especially with the US, while scholars of the overseas exhibitions have put little emphasis on the issue. The comparison between and analysis of the two overseas exhibition projects, the first from 1957 to 1962 and the second from 1976 to 1983, is first made in terms of similarities and differences in this thesis.

Thirdly, this thesis shows that authoritarian regimes' strong drive to promote national unity drove NMK to establish national identity through material culture. To support his political vision and ambition, Park Chunghee placed a special emphasis on national unity from the beginning stage of his regime. This 18-year-long regime pushed forward strong nationalist policies, one of which was to identify Korean ethnic national culture and promote it. Indeed, he hoped that cultural objects alone were concrete enough evidence to show the possibilities for the reconstruction, innovation and creation of the Korean ethnic nation. Furthermore, he found that ethnic national culture could be a means to mobilise the nationwide cooperation of the populace. In this respect, he repeatedly used evocative vocabulary: 'brethren,' 'forefather' and 'fatherland.' Indeed, the first word in his inaugural address for his first term as president of South Korea was 'Dangun,' the sacred progenitor.

In this respect, NMK was an effective government institution by which to put into practice the discourse on ethnic national culture. The expression 'ethnic national culture' itself appeared in every corner of the museum. This government-led nationalist drive

ensured that the museum collections were considered ‘ethnic national cultural objects.’ In his address at the ground-breaking ceremony of the new museum building for the national museum in 1966, he requested that this museum create a new national culture and, by doing so, support the modernisation of the fatherland and enhance the ethnic national sense of sovereignty and independence.

The reopening of the museum in a newly built building in 1972 displayed the government’s will to promote the ethnic national culture, and by doing so to secure both the regime’s authority and national solidarity with Park’s political ambition. His desire for long-term seizure of power resulted in the most systematic dictatorship in the South Korea, through the so-called Revitalisation Constitution promulgated in December 1972. In this regard, he strove to decorate his political ambition with the name of the ethnic nation. This is why some South Korean scholars do not agree that Park was a genuine nationalist, but redefine his ethnic nationalism as pseudo-ethnic nationalism. In the same context, a South Korean historian even described nationalism in South Korea as being “betrayed” by him.⁶²¹ Nevertheless, Park’s promotion of the ethnic national culture, and the resulting dissemination of the discourse on it, culture did contribute to a revaluation of Korean material culture. Curators at NMK took the lead in uncovering the independent value of Korean culture and building their own authorship, as opposed to the colonial one.

Chun Doo-hwan’s authoritarian regime was actually the continuation of Park’s regime. He continued to emphasise ethnic national culture, faithfully following Park’s ethnic nationalist policies in the cultural sector. After reopening in the new building, NMK continued to put forth the ethnic nationalist narrative through its exhibitions and education; the function of education in NMK especially began to be emphasised much more than before. The authoritarian regimes’ rhetoric of national identity contributed to the promotion of ethnic national culture. NMK also played an essential role in creating national identity through material culture. The firm nationalist perspective directed toward Korean ethnic national culture was strongly promoted by the government, and supported by academics and national museum curators. Many South Korean academics considered it their urgent mission to construct the South Korean modern nation-state

⁶²¹ Seo, *Betrayed Ethnic Nationalism*, pp.58-75.

and its national identity, and so participated in the government-led projects. Noticeably, South Korean intellectuals who resisted the authoritarian leaders and their policies also had a strong ethnic nationalist orientation, contributing to the dissemination of the discourse on ethnic national culture, as shown in Yu Hong-jun's case. Against this background, the discourse was deeply internalised within South Koreans, increasing South Koreans' interest and pride in their material culture. This internalisation has deeply influenced the formation of South Korean nationalism, as well as of the South Korean modern nation-state.

The political democratisation of South Korean society since 1987 has introduced a more widespread appreciation of material culture, as shown in the increase in visitor numbers at NMK. Along with the more systemised nationalist narrative of the national museum, this change gave an easier and more voluntary opportunity for South Koreans to internalise the discourse on their ethnic national culture. The controversy over the demolition of the museum building again aroused a nationalist sentiment. President Kim Young-sam's political utilisation of this sentiment and the people's consent to the demolition made it possible to relocate the national museum in just 10 years. The new museum building, which was opened in 2005 in the Yongsan area of Seoul, was incubated in the vortex of controversy. At the opening ceremony, President Roh Moo-hyun announced that the museum building would stand tall as a centre of the self-respect of the Korean ethnic nation. His remark showed how the government had shaped, and would continue to shape, the museum with Korean nationalism.

This research has traced the trajectory of the National Museum of Korea, focusing on NMK's efforts to construct the national identity through material culture and represent the nationhood of the Korean ethnic nation both home and abroad. Through this research, it can be argued that NMK has undertaken activities for executing national tasks, which include constructing the discourse of ethnic national culture in support of nation building, national unity and internal mobilisation, and securing international recognition of the cultural sovereignty of this fledgling country on the world stage.

However, this thesis also requires several future tasks for making a more detailed and evidenced argument. Firstly, it needs to be understood how the development of changes of Korean ethnic nationalism from the twentieth century up to this day influenced the development of museum activities and public school education. Secondly, how ethnic

nationalism is disseminated and accepted among each social group needs to be researched in terms of awareness of material culture and the national museum's activities. Accomplishing these tasks would contribute to a more precise understanding of how the national museum could construct and represent nationhood through material culture in South Korean society in terms of the development of ethnic nationalism in South Korea.

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