

# UNIVERSITY AND HERITAGE IN KOREA \*

Hur Young-hwan\*\*

The brief history of Korea  
The cultural assets of Korea  
The Function of the University Museum in Korea

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am a representative of Korea. It is my great pleasure to have the speech on our history, culture and heritage.

The spatial distances between nations is fast shrinking owing to incredible developments in science and technology. Yet the distance in understanding between peoples must still be narrowed. Understanding other peoples must come from an understanding of their history and culture. In the final assessment, the history and culture of any people must be considered the common wealth of all mankind.

In Korea, we named this year for "The Year of Cultural Heritage."

Now let me introduce my country's brief history to you.

## The brief history of Korea

Today increasing complexity and diversity mark the international scene. This can be partly explained by the growing independence of ethnic groups which accompanies national development. These complex and diverse international situations call for deeper mutual understanding.

---

\* 이 글은 유네스코 본부에서 세계유산 보호사업의 일환으로 1997. 10. 5~10. 10 캐나다 퀘벡(Quebec) 소재 Laval대학에서 개최한 제2차 『대학과 유산에 관한 유네스코 포럼(UNESCO Forum-University and Heritage)』에 한국대표(허영환: 성신여대 박물관장, 한국대학박물관협회 부회장)로 참가하여 주제 발표한 내용임.

\*\* Vice President, The Association of University Museum of Korea

Korea is a country blessed with a history, culture and traditions dating back some 5,000 years. The Koguryo Kingdom which existed in present-day Manchuria as well as in part of the Korean peninsula one century before and after the birth of Christ, was the most advanced civilization of that time. Koreans also take pride in the highly developed civilizations of Silla and Paekje which followed that of Koguryo. Relics from these ancient cultures are extant today in the form of the many royal tombs which dot the peninsula. These relics are eloquent testimony to the greatness of the Buddhist culture which blossomed in those days.

The Koguryo Kingdom which came into being in 936 A. D. following the fall of Silla resisted the invasion of foreign armies from the north—Khitan, Liao, Mongolia, and China—to preserve and develop the unique national culture of Korea. The feudal arable land system came into being during this era. So did woodblock printing and later even movable metal type in 1234 A. D. preceded the advent of the Gutenberg type by 200 years. And ceramics created by the artisans of this kingdom are valued and loved by art connoisseurs all over the world to this date.

Toward the end of the Yi dynasty, a misjudgment of their ruler led to an isolationist policy for the country at a time when neighboring Japan was building up its national power on the strength of the Occidental civilization it had adopted following the Imperial Restoration. Before long, Japan succeeded in making Korea its colony. But it could never succeed in uprooting the national culture of Korea. Koreans preserved their own highly developed language and letters throughout the colonial years.

I am a specialist in our Korean cultural assets, therefore I will tell you the outline of cultural assets (heritage) of Korea briefly.

## The cultural assets of Korea

Cultural assets generally cover the things that have cultural value, not a natural creation but the product of human skills. They might well be called a national treasure or possession in terms of economics, yet, besides their material value, the true value must be found in the spiritual aspects under which they are fashioned and produced. Thus a cultural asset differs not only from a natural object, but from purely economic products. Cultural assets must be apprehended in the light of their intrinsic esthetic value, apart from material worth.

Cultural assets are product of human exertion along with social and historical development ; and such human products are closely related to racial tradition, which is passed on from generation to generation. Along with this tradition, there is always a desire for new development—an undercurrent of progress. It is this interplay of tradition and creation that nurses the flowering of artistic treasures.

It is clearly stipulated in the articles of the Law for Protection of Cultural Assets that things of cultural value shall be well preserved, and at the same time made best use of for the purpose of promoting the standard of cultural development of the general public.

Almost all the products of artificial culture are said to be cultural assets by and large, but one can hardly preserve all of them on an equal level ; hence, a problem of evaluation and selection of cultural assets arises.

The following is a list of cultural assets of Korea.

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
National Treasure	247
Treasure	1,239
Historical Site	388
Historical and Scenic Place	6
Scenic Place	7
Natural Monument	287
Important Intangible Cultural Property	103
Important Folklore Material	228
<b>Total :</b>	<b>2,505</b>

Summing up, cultural assets may well be said to be the *crystallization of what our forefathers created through the years of their history*. All posterity has to do is to make proper judgement of its relative values, and to preserve those that are most worthy.

## The Function of the University Museum in Korea

As you know, a museum is an organization which collects, preserves, pigeonholes, researches and exhibits cultural heritage.

And it is a research institution that studies the cultural heritage left by a nation academically, museums throw light on our ancestors' life, art, skill and the concepts of beauty.

Above all, the university museum is an organization attached to the university, which was established with a view to contributing to the students' archaeological art history education and the development of culture and art of societies.

Now, there are about one hundred forty universities, among them more than seventy universities have their own museums. Together they formed AUMK(Association of University Museum of Korea). It was founded in May, nineteen sixty one, thirty six years ago. The memberships are : regular members, associate members and honorable members.

AUMK has ordinary general meetings, scholarly lecture meetings and Union exhibitions vigorously every year. Until now, they have held these full meetings, lecture meetings, and shows about thirty times.

As well as a technical journal, <The GomunHwa : the ancient culture> has been published in fifty volumes. So it is proud of history and authority as a technical journal.

The University museum supervised by the president have curators, research workers and other staff. The curators, the professors of the universities, hold two positions concurrently. They are experts who majored in archaeology or art history.

Seventy university museums of Korea possess and display about five hundred thousand artifacts. The pavilions are various from three hundred to four thousand square meter in size. Of course, facilities and remains are in excellent condition and very greatly, the kind are various.

From three hundred thousand years ago, the Koreans who lived on the Korean peninsula take pride in their five thousand year history. Therefore even small scale university want to have university museum. So, they will foster and prosper and care for them appropriately.

The University museums of Korea cooperate with one another, interchange, particularly as follows.

First, holding general exhibitions and special exhibitions gives students and local communities access.

Second, they excavate for government and institutions and of their own accord.

Third, they hold meetings to present research papers, offer short courses, and open the museum school to educate local community.

Fourth, they publish research journals and excavation reports so as to contribute to scholarly development.

Fifth, helping students' study and practice, they try to make students experts in cultural heritages.

University museums functioning as the above assembled and established AUMK (Association of University Museum of Korea). The members exchange information, knowledge, and form friendship.

In other words, they help and support one another in order to exercise their educational, academic, social and cultural faculties.

For instance, last October, nineteen ninety six, Seoul National University Museum held the forty-fifth session general assembly of AUMK. Of about fifty member universities, one hundred people were present.

In the thirty ninth session academic lecture, there were heated presentations and discussions held under the theme, <The meeting with archaeology and natural sciences>. The next day, there was a field study of prehistorical sites nearby Seoul, Capital of Korea.

This kind of general meeting and academic lecture is supposed to be held in Chugbuk university museum this october. And this event has been opened in Seoul and districts in turn, each time hundreds of professors, experts, and students assembled, it ended in a great success.

Lastly I will introduce the activities of Sungshin Women's University Museum, of which I have been the curator for fifteen years.

First, the two thousand three hundred artifacts, we reappraise, take photograph, make slide, input to PC catalogue and published museum pictorial record twice.

Second, we have opened special exhibitions, such as map exhibitions, astronomy chart exhibitions, science machinery and tools exhibitions, dressing tables exhibitions, and calligraphy exhibitions.

Third, we have broadened the exhibit area, replaced old show cases, modernized the

display method.

Fourth, we offered the department of art history and history students an opportunity to join in research.

Fifth, we opened the door of the university museum to the community and heightened knowledge and interest in cultural heritage.

As mentioned above, for a short fifteen minutes, I explained to you the history of Korea, Korean cultural assets, the function of Korea university museum, and the results of Sungshin Women's University.

Thank you.