

# The Japanese Government-General of Korea: A Hermeneutic Understanding of the Effects of Historic Preservation from a Western Perspective

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.5659/AIKAR.2016.18.3.103>

**Abstract** This paper investigates the characteristics of preservation of Korean modern architecture through Western historic preservation theories and philosophies. This research focuses on the Japanese Government-General of Korea (1926–1995) which was built in 1926 and used as the chief administrative building in Seoul (Keijo in Japanese) during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). After Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, this building was used until 1995 for the South Korean National Assembly, the United States Army Military Government in Korea, and the National Museum of South Korea. Although it served a variety of roles, this building was the most controversial case of historic preservation in Korean modern architecture. To analyze the peculiarities and characteristics of Korean modern architecture and its preservation, this research applied Western historic preservation theories, not exclusively from classical historic preservation theories developed by Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin, but also from modern historic preservation theories by Theodore H. M. Prudon, Daniel Blunstone, and Frances A. Yates. This cross-cultural and comparative study of historic preservation helps identify Korean modern architecture's characteristics. It can also be a useful reference in finding the origins of Korean modern architectural identity.

*Keywords: Korean Modern Architecture, Historic Preservation, Hermeneutics, Viollet-le-Duc, John Ruskin, Japanese Government-General of Korea*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the 21st century, Asian cities are facing serious challenges. They have undergone rapid changes due to the influx of Western culture since the 19th century and have encountered many crises that have resulted from natural disasters, urbanization caused by rapid economic growth, and increases in population. Under such circumstances, these cities are losing their traditional and unique urban morphologies, their architectural and social characteristics and their sense of history. For example, Seoul, a world-renowned cultural city with a population of over ten million and 600 years of history, has mainly focused on development plans that overlook historic and regional features in favor of achieving quantity-oriented economic growth in a fast pace. In this context, the Japanese Government-General of Korea (1926-1995) was one of the most controversial cases of historic preservation in Korean

modern architecture between preservation, utilization, and demolition for a couple of decades.

This research examines Western historic preservation theories, from the classical to the modern. Based on Western historic preservation theories, this research scrutinized the Japanese Government-General of Korea, which was representative of significant modern architecture. Applying Western theories of preservation into Korean modern architecture's preservation helps reveal how cultural encounters in early architectural modernism can be sustained as a valuable part of contemporary urbanism in both Korea and the West. Moreover, historic preservation theories in Western society are helpful to find the characteristics and distinctions of Korean preservation. They provide a useful reference for identifying Korean modernity and reveal how Korean preservation of modern architecture can be a valuable part of contemporary urbanism. The concept of historic preservation originated in the West, and Eastern historic preservation movements were constructed on the foundation of Western models.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

To begin with, this research examines two representative and classical historical preservation models from 19th-century Europe: the models promoted by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc in France (1814-1879) and by John Ruskin (1819-1900) in England. These two models are considered the foundation of Western

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theories for historic preservation (Murtagh, 2005, 2-4). Secondly, this research scrutinizes modern historic preservation theories from Theodore H. M. Prudon, Daniel Blunstone, Frances A, and so on. Finally, this research discusses historic preservation of Korean modern architecture focused on the Japanese Government-General of Korea and explores its meanings and debates based on Western historic preservation theories.

Knowing these Western fundamental theories and applying these ideas helps analyze the reality and future of Korean historic preservation. In general, this research employs the hermeneutics approach for analyzing and interpreting archival materials such as writings, drawings, photos, and manuscripts about these figures and buildings. This research benefited from the Rare Books and Special Collections division of the McGill University Library in Canada, the Harvard Yenching East-Asian Library in the United States, the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies and the National Museum of Korea in Korea, and the archive at the National Museum of Korea.

### 3. HISTORIC PRESERVATION THEORIES IN WESTERN SOCIETY

#### (1) Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin

The idea of restoration and preservation has a long history. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) were two representative pioneers and advocates of Gothic Revivalism (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The Gothic Revival in France and England was later related to the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, and the primary goal in Viollet-le-Duc's theories of Gothic Revival was to seek a method of truthful construction and planning. In particular, their architectural theories and practices played a significant role in initiating historic preservation. They had, however, opposing thoughts on architectural restoration.



Figure 1. Photo of Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (Source: Archives photographique de paris)



Figure 2. Photo of John Ruskin (Source: by William Downey)

Le-Duc was an influential French architect and writer. He conducted many restoration projects on France's important architectural monuments, which had been erected in the Middle Ages (Spur, 2007, 286). In his milestone book titled *Lectures on Architecture* (1863), he described his architectural philosophies and ideas in detail: his architectural approach was a rational analysis focusing on structure. He pursued a "new" architecture based on "Gothic" structural logic because Gothic architecture depicted structure honestly, making no attempt to hide its rudimentary structure, and was the "important method" form of 19th-century architecture. Moreover, he was considered a trailblazer

for championing historic preservation as an academic discipline, making architectural restoration something of a science befitting the ideals of industrial progress.

Le-Duc conducted restoration projects and described them in detail in his book *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (Encyclopedia of French Architecture from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Centuries, 1858-65). When he conducted restoration projects in the late 19th century, he expressed Gothic principles for the interiors of buildings: he emphasized the rib vault system, flying buttress, and the pointed arch derived from Gothic architecture. He also tried to apply modern engineering techniques to compensate for the difficulty Gothic structures had with supporting the weight of huge buildings. In other words, he embodied this Gothic structural principle in order to support heavy loads with modern materials, such as brick, stone, and cast iron, which were the result of the Industrial Revolution (Fig. 3). Since he was an advocate of new scientific approaches and the Industrial Revolution, he made use of the products of these movements in his restoration projects (Spur, 2007, 291).

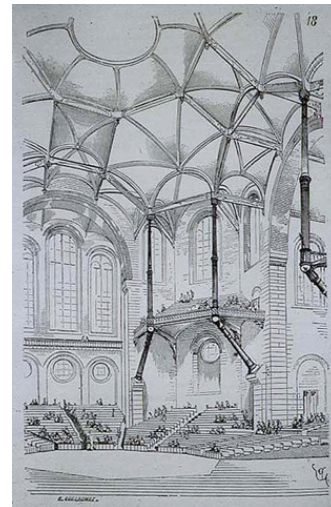


Figure 3. Viollet-le-Duc, Design for a Concert Hall. (Source: Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens Sur L'architecture*, 1864)

Le-Duc believed that architectural restoration could increase the value of French architecture. His ideas for restoration were clearly described in the *Dictionnaire Raisoné*:

The works of restoration undertaken in France ... have rescued from ruin a number of works of undisputed value ... These buildings, part of the glory of our country preserved from ruin, will remain standing for centuries as a testimony to the devotion of a few men motivated more by the perpetuation of that glory than by their private interests. (Viollet-le-Duc, 1889, 31)

He strongly believed that the value of French architecture could be increased by such restoration projects. Also, the architects of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts supported Le-Duc's ideas because his projects were seen as very meticulous and demonstrating ample expression in detail.

Le-Duc had a very radical and progressive approach to architectural restoration:

The word [“restoration”] and the thing are modern: to restore a building is not to maintain it, repair it, or rebuild it; it is to reestablish it in a complete state that might never have existed at any given moment. (Viollet-le-Duc, 1889, 14)

He thought that the restoration process was to make a new edifice that had not been constructed before, the product of which could be a new style. He also proposed more active preservation methods when he conducted restoration projects. In his view, if architects believed that a building needed something as time passed, architects (or designers) could add new things through the new project.

One good example of Le-Duc’s philosophical approach was his restoration of the Chapelle des Macchabées at the Centre d’iconographie Genevoise, Geneva, in 1875 (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). The original building of the Chapelle des Macchabées was built in 1405 by Jean de Brogny. However, Le-Duc conducted his restoration project in the late 19th century. Le-Duc proposed several new elements in the process of restoring this building that were not in the original (Spur, 2007, 292). In particular, he suggested adding rose windows to the front and side façades.<sup>1</sup> Even if his alterations differed from the original building, he believed that such alterations restored the building based on the original architect’s concept. Moreover, modifying the original building through restoration also helped the original building enhance the authenticity. In other words, the modifications helped enhance the building’s authenticity.

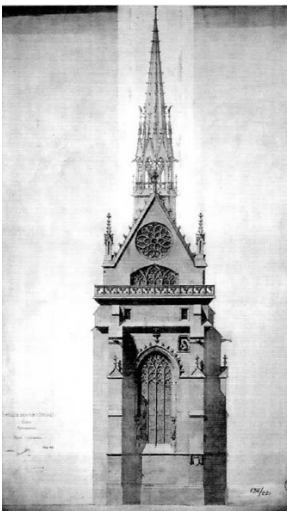


Figure 4. Viollet-le-Duc, West Facade on the Restoration Project of the Chapelle des Macchabées, Geneva, 1875. (Source: Spur, 2007, 293)



Figure 5. West facade of the Chapelle des Macchabées, Geneva, the early 20th century. (Source: by Yann, author cut the originla photo)

Representing a different approach, John Ruskin (1819-1900) was also an advocate of Gothic architecture and opposed classicism. In some ways, his attitude toward Gothic architecture was very similar to Le-Duc’s. Ruskin was not an architect but an English architectural critic and social reformer (Murtagh, 2005, 3). He was

one of the originator and creator of the Arts and Crafts movement in the late 19th century, and abhorred technological progress. Instead of practicing architecture, he expressed his architectural ideas through his writings and lectures. In particular, he published two milestones: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849 and *The Stones of Venice* in 1851.

Ruskin’s differences from Le-Duc concern his approach to architectural restoration. He attacked architectural restoration in his book *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*:

Restoration, so called, is the worst manner of Destruction. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered ... It is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. (Ruskin, 1989, 194)

For him, architectural restoration eradicates the sublime effects of authentic time (Spur, 2007, 301), and restoring a building weakens the value of its authentic aesthetic in architecture. Moreover, he believed that restoration was the process of deconstructing the building’s original fabric.

Ruskin clearly and strongly expressed his attitude toward restoration in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*:

[Restoration is] a lie from beginning to end ... You may make a model of a building as you would of a corpse, and your model may have the shell of the old walls within it as your cast might have the skeleton, with what advantage I neither see nor care. (Ruskin, 1989, 196)

He vehemently opposed the restoration of buildings, using drastic arguments in his book *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

Ruskin’s approach to architectural restoration is conservative and advocates keeping a historical building as it is. This approach does not provide judgment on whether the status quo of a building is authentic (or appropriate) or not, nor does he consider what advantages or disadvantages of preservation might be. Ruskin argued:

We have no right to touch them [the buildings]. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to the generations of mankind who are to follow us. The dead still have their right in them. (Ruskin, 1989, 197)

For Ruskin, architectural restoration was not the right way to preserve a building properly. He believed that to “let it along” (Murtagh, 2005, 3) was the best way to preserve buildings. William Morris, Ruskin’s Arts and Crafts movement fellow, shared the same voice of restoration:

These buildings do not belong to us only ... they have belonged to our forefathers and they will belong to our descendants unless we play them false. They are not ... our property, to do as we like with. We are only trustees for those that come after us. (Bridgwood and Lennie, 2009, 267)

This is very conservative and a totally different approach from Le-Duc's.

Le-Duc's radical idea of architectural restoration "to reestablish it in a complete state that might never have existed at any given moment" (Viollet-le-Duc, 1889, 14) echoes French post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida's concept of "ruin" in chapter "Force of Law" in *Acts of Religion*. In his book, Derrida wrote:

Ruin is not a negative thing. First, it is obviously not a thing. One could write, maybe with or following Benjamin, maybe against Benjamin, a short treatise on the love of ruins. What else is there to love, anyway? One cannot love a monument, a work of architecture, an institution as such except in an experience itself precarious in its fragility: it has not always been there, it will not always be there, it is finite. (Derrida, 2003, 278)

Derrida's positive but fragile image of ruin hints at the special existence which is essentially related to human memory in architecture. Philosopher Karsten Harries also analyzes the existence of "ruin" in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. For him, the development of ruin architecture in Western modernity intertwines with that of the landscape garden:

Both express a desire to rediscover in organic nature lost divinity and humanity's true home. Architectural ruins speak of a desire to return to nature, to become part of it, not to master it. (Harries, 1997, 243)

Both Derrida and Harries enlighten us that preservation of the memory of critical modern architecture is a way to return to the origin, the home, of nature and humanity.

Le-Duc had a radical attitude toward architectural restoration; Ruskin had a conservative attitude. Le-Duc's impact is on architectural modernism, which is different from Ruskin's, whose impact is on literary modernism. Le-Duc was an advocate of industrial progress while Ruskin was an advocate of Arts and Crafts ideals. Le-Duc influenced architectural modernism as an architect. Ruskin impacted literary modernism as a critic or writer (Spur, 2007, 301). For Ruskin and Le-Duc, preservation was basically a humanistic endeavor. On the other hand, the current preservation movements are not humanistic approaches, but are instead closer to economics and politics (Murtagh, 2005, 4). In other words, the current preservation movements lack the consideration of the collective memory, as emphasized by Frances A. Yates, and the poetical dwelling as the fundamental meaning of our vividly life, as described by Heidegger.

## (2) Modern philosophies on historic preservation

As eminent historic preservationist Theodore H. M. Prudon wrote:

Modern architecture defines design in the twentieth century and continues to influence that which has followed, and its preservation is as crucial as that of the architecture of any previous period deemed historically significant. (Prudon, 2008, 2)

The preservation of meaningful modern buildings is a critical way to enlighten our humanity because preservation is something more than just the physical or social context or significance of the building and space, which is related to memories, and modern architecture is closely related to our vivid experiences of life. Even if many scholars are beginning to discuss the importance of preserving modern buildings, there are several challenging issues to the preservation of modern architecture compared to earlier periods.

To begin with, Prudon mentioned several challenges, including "the anti-modern bias" (Prudon, 2008, viii). As Richard Longstreth also noted, the advocates of urban renewal had negative viewpoints regarding the preservation of modern architecture (Longstreth, 2006, 6-23), given that the preservation of modern buildings is in conflict with the issue of urban renewal. Modern architecture's increased temporariness is also a challenge. Compared to traditional practice, modern buildings were built in a short period due to the necessity of satisfying practical needs. "Functionality, obsolescence, and life span" (Prudon, 2008, 30) are distinctly challenging issues in modern architecture. As modern architecture is often related to mass production, architectural modernism produced its own side effects, such as the absence of philosophy. In this sense, many modern buildings cannot hold their significant meanings. As a result, not every modern building should be preserved or is worth preserving.

Moreover, as stated by the historic preservationist Daniel Blunstone, the preservation of modern buildings has a stronger relationship with "stakeholders' memory" (Prudon, 2008, viii) than in earlier periods. Modern buildings are at the center of our active life, which means that they have a strong recent memory because the modern building is still strongly related to the people who live and visit there. Frances A. Yates's research on architectural memory in the Medieval and Renaissance traditions has demonstrated the importance of memory and its essential interaction with a meaningfully built environment (Yates, 1992). The preservation of architecture is thus not only significant in terms of the historical and cultural identity of a modern building, but it also recalls the collective memory of its residents and visitors because it embodies their poetic lives by reflecting on the fundamental meaning of human existence.

It is more difficult to preserve modern buildings compared to old buildings which were constructed before the early 20th century. Derek Worthing and Stephen Bond have observed that:

[V]ery old places [and architecture] with multiple layers of development may still be relatively easy to analyse, whereas some more modern places may represent more complex and perhaps competing values that are challenging to measure and analyse. (Worthing and Bond, 2008, 113)

Although the preservation of resources from earlier periods bears more layers of history, their historical resources demonstrate clear values shared by the society. However, modern architecture remains obscure and contradictory from the perspective of postmodern philosophies, and this theoretical situation makes difficult to identify and interpret historical values.

The difficulty of measuring and analyzing modern architecture results from the fact that "modern places may represent more

complex and perhaps competing values that are challenging to measure and analyses” (Worthing and Bond, 2008, 113). In such a situation, “cultural significance” emerges as an important criterion for preservation judgement. The concept of “cultural significance” is now commonly used to refer to the collection of various values associated with a historical place. In this sense, the “values-based approach” is a good way to assess the preservation of modern architecture.

#### 4. JAPANESE GOVERNMENT-GENERAL OF KOREA

The most controversial case of historic preservation in Korean modern architecture was the Japanese Government-General of Korea (Fig. 6). The Japanese Government-General of Korea was built in 1926, and it was constructed in the Neo-Renaissance style, which was combination of the Renaissance and Baroque styles. Plans originally began in 1912, when the German architect Georg de Lalande (1872-1914) was commissioned to design this building. He developed a general plan from 1912 to 1914. However, Lalande suddenly passed away due to pneumonia (Saehan, 1997, 36). After that, Japanese architects Nomura Ichro (1868-1942) and Kunieda Hiroshi (1879-1943) took over the design of this building and finalized it (Kim, 2000, 208-210). However, the Japanese Government-General of Korea was not only designed by German and Japanese architects, but also by Korean architects: Gil-ryong Park and Hun-u Lee were engineers at the professional level of Gisu (the title of a middle-class official level for a technical position). Moreover, Dong-rin Park, Kyu-sang Lee, Deuk-rin Kim, and Hyeong-sun Son participated in this project as the Gowon (a lower class of public official level). Although Korean architects’ participation in this project was minimal, this building was nevertheless designed and constructed in collaboration with Korean architects and engineers.



Figure 6. Japanese Government-General of Korea, 1926, photo of 1986.  
(Source: Archive at the National Museum of Korea, Seoul)

The plan of the Japanese Government-General of Korea is rigorously symmetrical, in the form of the character of “日” with two courtyards enclosed (Fig. 7). The similarity between the plan form and the character, which can imply the country name “Japan,” indicates the memory of the colonial history. This building was made of a reinforced concrete structure and bricks, which filled spaces between columns. The outside ended in granite stones and a dome was laid on the top. The form of the buildings is very similar

to buildings constructed for the United Kingdom Government General of New Delhi in India and Singapore (Jeon, 1995, 50). The material of this building was wood and stones which came from the Korean peninsula: wood from the Amnok river, granite stones from Changsindong in Seoul, and marbles from Hwanghae Province. After Korea's liberation from Japan on August 15, 1945, this building was used for the United States Army Military Government in Korea from 1945 to 1948 (Kim, 2000, 208). The building was transferred to the Republic of Korea after the Korean government was elected in 1948. The interior of this building was burned in 1950 during the Korean War. Since November 1963, the building had been used as the congress building called the Capitol Building in Seoul for the Korean government. This building was used as the National Museum of South Korea from 1986, and it was demolished in 1995. There were the major chances of the Japanese Government-General of Korea and that the following chart lists the ways in which the building was used after 1912:

1912	Decision on the construction site of the Japanese Government-General of Korea in Gyeongbokgung Palace
July 10, 1916	A new construction ground-breaking ceremony for the Japanese Government-General of Korea
Oct. 1, 1926	A celebration of the construction completion of the Japanese Government-General of Korea
May 28, 1928	First occupancy of the building as the Japanese Government-General of Korea
Aug. 15, 1945	After Korea's liberation from Japan, the building is used for the United States Army Military Government in Korea
Nov., 1948- Oct. 1950	The establishment of the Republic of Korea, using this building as the South Korean National Assembly
June 25, 1961	Restoration of a part of this building because it was damaged during the Korean War
Nov. 22, 1962	Inaugurated as the Capital building in Seoul
1968	The restoration of the Gwanghwamun Gate
Aug. 21, 1986	Used as the National Museum of South Korea
Aug. 15, 1995	Started tearing down the (old) Japanese Government-General of Korea
Feb. 28, 1997	Completed tearing down the (old) Japanese Government-General of Korea

While the Japanese Government-General of Korea has had a variety of functions since it was built in 1928, this building has also undergone changes in its architectural form based on its different purposes and functions. For example, when this building was first constructed for the Japanese Government-General of Korea in 1926, it was composed of two huge courtyards (Fig. 7 left). It was a symmetrical plan to demonstrate the Japanese government's invasive power and authority. However, when this building was used for the National Museum of South Korea in the 1980s, there were huge changes made in space and layout, creating and changing several spaces for the purposes of education or exhibition in order to satisfy its purpose as a museum. Moreover, the National Museum of South Korea began aggressively to add more spaces to fulfill its needs as a museum: exhibit halls, storage areas, and an auditorium were installed at the location of the original courtyards (Fig. 7 right).

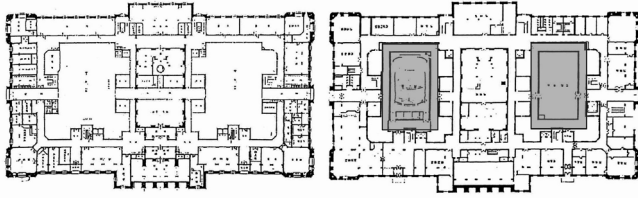


Figure 7. (Left) The Japanese Government-General of Korea in 1926, (Right) The National Museum of South Korea in the 1980s. (Source: Lee, 2011, 71)

The preservation and utilization of this building was a controversial and debating issue whenever the administration changed. The first president of the Republic of Korea, Syng-man Lee, who served from 1948-1960, wanted to tear it down. President Jeong-hui Park, who served from 1963-1979, had a different opinion; Park insisted on adding two more stories on the top of this building and he wanted to use it for other purposes. In the early 1980s, there were some heated disputes about the preservation and utilization of this building. On August 15, 1981, prominent historian Taeseop Byen and government officer Jongguk Lee had a dialogue on the preservation of this building:

How long should we use the headquarters of colonization as the Capitol Building of Seoul?  
 [The Japanese government] exterminates the Koreans' spirit;  
 [it is] the headquarters of predatory rule.  
 Having a long-term plan to tear down [this building] is desirable ..., [or] it can be used as a museum for educational purposes.<sup>2</sup>

In 1981, President Duhwan Jeon decided to preserve this building as the National Museum of Korea. In 1982, the government announced that there was no reason to tear down this building. The building will be transformed to a museum, in which the first floor and central hall are to exhibit the invasion history of Japan to demonstrate their brutalities to Koreans; and this exhibit will alert the public of Korea to know the history of Japanese colonization.<sup>3</sup> There are some positive opinions from the public regarding the proposal to use this building as a museum:

We welcome the change from the Capitol Building of Seoul to the National Museum.  
 Cleaning of the skin of shame, which I feel is rather too late,  
 Into the wisdom that encompasses the hall of fame of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

This building was finally returned to the public as a museum. However, there remained public pressures to tear down this building. On July 26, 1984, there was an article entitled "The dome of the Capitol building should be torn down. The symbol of Japanese imperialist rule should be torn down."<sup>5</sup> At the end of the 1980s, President Tae-u No argued that "the symbol of Japanese imperialist rule should be moved to another place someday, and we should provide a historical lesson to our descendants" (Jeon, 1995, 246). The debate between preservation and demolition keeps going. In the magazine *Sisa Journal* in November 1990, there was an interview for educated persons to ask about the pros and cons

of preserving the Japanese Government-General of Korea. The scholar Yong-ha Shin stated:

[Preserving the Capitol building] is a way for us to escape from a pediatric disease, chauvinism, and to show the high quality of the Korean cultural level and it is a way to demonstrate our confidence. I want to ask people who dismiss this building as a symbol of the colonial rule and argue for its removal to another place: Is there any representative Western architecture, which was built from 1800 to 1900, which was not built for the purposes of political dominance and means of governing? Why do people only seriously consider the past humiliation history in these days? We should end the sentimental preservation debates [and just preserve the building].<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the argument in favor of tearing down this building later on dominated the public.

Finally, on August 9, 1993, President Yeong-sam Kim ordered the destruction of this building in order to clear away the remnants of Japanese colonialism, recover the national spirit, and build a new National Museum as a national project.<sup>7</sup> After 1994, when the demolition was in earnest, there were several debates between "totally tearing down," "partial preservation," and "moved away and restored" (Kim, 1997, 53). In August 1995, the architectural magazine *SPACE* published opinions by architectural historians who disagreed to the demolition of this building.<sup>8</sup> But on August 15, 1995, as part of the 50-year anniversary of Korean independence, the central dome was removed in a ceremony (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. A photo of the tearing down of the Japanese Government-General of Korea. (Source: Archive at the National Museum of Korea, Seoul)

The characteristic of "location" of the Japanese Government-General of Korea was a significant factor in motivating its preservation, utilization, and demolition. This building was located in front of and to the south of Gyeongbokgung Palace. The Gyeongbokgung Palace was not only one of the five palaces and the main place of the Joseon dynasty, which had existed for 500 years, until the occupation by Japan in 1910 (Lee, 2007, 84-87). This building was a symbol of the Japanese occupation, and the Gyeongbokgung Palace was the place of Korea's national legitimacy. Therefore, these two different identities of this location came into conflict with the construction of the Japanese Government-General of Korea in the front yard of the Gyeongbokgung Palace.

In addition, the Japanese Government-General of Korea was not only located on the axis of Gyeongbokgung Palace, but also blocked the view of Geunjeongjeon Hall, which was the most formal hall in Gyeongbok Palace and the working place for the kings of the Joseon Dynasty. Moreover, in order to build the Japanese Government-General of Korea, the Gwanghwamun Gate, which was the main gate of the Gyeongbokgung Palace, was removed and demolished. For these reasons, the constructing of the Japanese Government-General of Korea created a deep conflict in Korean public understanding between embodying the Japanese colonization and sustaining Joseon's national identity.

Under these circumstances, in the 1960s, Joseon began to consider the protection and preservation of its national culture. There were discussions of how to preserve the authentic structure of the Gyeongbokgung Palace. This movement stimulated the public to argue in favor of the preserving the characteristics of this place as an embodiment of Joseon's cultural identity. This was one of the main reasons that the public had previously tried to demolish the Japanese Government-General of Korea, because this building originated in Japanese traditions and was not an authentic Korean building.

At the same time, after the Korean government decided to preserve the building, they also decided to change its function to other purposes. This building was transferred to the National Museum of South Korea in 1986 in order to make it open to the public. The public believed that this place should play a significant role in embodying its culture (Park et al., 2010, 220). Prominent architect Swoo-Geun Kim discussed the meaning of changing this building to the National Museum of South Korea, mentioning the importance of its location in the following statement:

I agree to change this building to the National Museum of South Korea. This building can be a main actor [in Korean society]. In the long-term point of view, this building will be located at the main center of Seoul, where the capital of Korea is. It is symbolic to contain the cultural meaning as a museum.<sup>9</sup>

As we see above, the meaning of "location" for this building played an important role not only in changing the functions of this building, especially to incorporate public purposes such as the National Museum of South Korea, but also in its preservation, utilization, and demolition. Therefore, location was a critical point to explore this building beyond its preservation.

## 5. HERMENEUTIC DISPUTES ON THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT-GENERAL OF KOREA

Before it was demolished in 1995, the Japanese Government-General of Korea was used as a government building sustaining its institutional origin but was later modified and renovated for other purposes. Throughout the course of historical preservation about this building, there emerged controversial issues, as demonstrated by theoretical differences between Le-Duc and Ruskin, about the degree of preservation, and whether we should preserve the authentic building as an object or reflect the historical changes of this building over time. The approach of adopting and accommodating changes to buildings as time goes by echoes Le-

Duc's preservation theories which respect new sociocultural needs and purposes. The radical changes of architectural purpose, in this case, from a government institute to a museum, also parallel Le-Duc's argument that architecture could change its functions over time.

As historic preservationist Nicholas Stanley-Price emphasizes, the significance of historical value is the essence of truth, which is beyond any superficial changes that might have been made to the building (Stanley-Price et al., 1996). It is important for us to respect the historical value of the art work, yet, at the same time, Heidegger argues in his essay "Origin of the Work of Art" that "the work of art is the artist's existence and the source of his or her life" (Heidegger, 1977, 140). The truth of the art work is the truth of our lives because artists' works reflect our lives, and the art works and the lives of the artists become a part of cultural history. According to Heidegger, truth emerges through the unconcealment of Being, and Greeks called the revealing of truth *aletheia*, namely, the shining forth of poetic light (Heidegger, 1977, 161). Like the Greek Temple in Heidegger's analysis, architecture is the comprehensive artwork, and it is important to reveal the historical origins of architectural artworks and preserve the origins in order to find the "true essence" embodied by architectural works.

Italian historic preservationist and theorist Cesare Brandi describes the meaning of architectural origins in his book *Theory of Restoration*:

From a historical point of view, an addition to a work of art is nothing more than new testimony to human activity and, thus, is part of history. In this context, an addition is not different from the original stock and has the same right to conservation. On the other hand, removal, although also the result of human action and thus also part of history, in reality destroys a document and does not document itself. (Stanley-Price et al., 1996, 234)

Preserving the authentic origins of art works is the basic theory behind art restoration. However, architecture is the one exception. Architecture should be allowed to change with time (Brandi, 2005). Therefore, in architecture it is significant to add new structures, and these new structures, as time goes on, should be respected, and these changing elements should be historically preserved.

The Japanese Government-General of Korea has changed until it was demolished in 1995, and the historic preservationists respected the changes to this building. This philosophy was reflected in its preservation. Therefore, accepting the changes in historic buildings was reflected in the process of restoring this particular building. In this sense, the Japanese Government-General of Korea is a faithful preservation project, reflecting Le-Duc, Heidegger and Brandi's theories of art origins and their historic preservation philosophies.

The preservation history of the Japanese Government-General building is a good example of modern historic preservation theories: how the value-based approach can be applied to works of Korean modern architecture. Iconic modern buildings should be preserved because these buildings bear cultural significance. These buildings not only have strong architectural, historical, and symbolic values, which are related to representative buildings by modern architects, but they are also associated with social and cultural values, especially in their ability to explore a cross-cultural

approach in Korean early modernity. The cross-cultural values embodied by these buildings are different from monocentric architectural approaches and exemplify the memorable transition from tradition to modernity in Korea and East Asia. Therefore, the preservation of the Japanese Government-General of Korea reinforces the argument of the modern historic preservationist Prudon, who states that the preservation of meaningful buildings is a critical way to enhance our humanity (Prudon, 2008, 2).

For a long time, the Japanese Government-General of Korea building has been the center of debate among the views of preservation, re-utilization and demolition. It was also the center of political discussions. Italian architectural theorist Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani does not agree with the idea that a building should be torn down simply because the public does not like it. For example, even if we remove the Nazi buildings in Europe, we cannot clear up the mnemonic shadows of those buildings (Lampugnani, 1994, 171). Similarly, it does not necessarily mean that, by removing the colonial buildings in Korea, we will forget the history that promoted these buildings in the first place. The relationship between architecture and politics remain far more complicated than mere building objects and their functions. Lampugnani's preservation theory echoes historic preservationist Daniel Blunstone's argument, which emphasized the "stakeholders' memory."

## 6. CONCLUSION

This research seeks a deeper understanding of Korean early modernism and its historical preservation by focusing on the Japanese Government-General of Korea building from a comparative study perspective including Western preservation theories and phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophies. Based on Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin's pioneering approaches, modern historic preservation has moved into the age which concerns more the fundamental issues of humanity, meanings, cultural identity, and memory of the built environment. The globalized concerns on these fundamental issues of human conditions motivate the comparative and cross-cultural studies, which can help analyze and enhance Korean historic preservation in modernity.

In particular, the preservation of the Japanese Government-General of Korea has provoked extensive controversies and disputes in Korean society. The debates about this building echo the philosophical models of historic preservation, such as Viollet-le-Duc's radical approach which preserves buildings like an object in a glass box, or modern preservation movements which focus more on cultural identity and architectural memory. Although the Japanese Government-General of Korea was finally torn down in 1995 by a radical preservationist movement and its politics, it remains as a historical building and a symbol of modern Korean architecture.

The historical preservation of the Japanese Government-General of Korea, as the process of representation and interpretation of history, demonstrates an interweaving of Korean modern history and modern architecture. This dynamic interwoven unity thus embodies the consistent hermeneutic return to the origins of Korean modernity. This building is a significant case for

interpreting Korean early modern architecture and its complicated preservation context. Philosopher Karsten Harries has argued for the importance of preserving modern buildings in order to trace the origins of our modern life and its embodied public memory (Harries, 1997, 267). Preservation of Korean modern architecture retrieves and returns us to such origins; it is through this process that architectural creativity and the present life are circumscribed by the horizon of historicity. In this sense, preserving the historical buildings of the Korean early modern age opens up and maintains a continuous dialogue among the traditional, modern and postmodern. It is a path by which one can approach the truth of history in Korean modernity.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Hui Zou for his discussions and review of a draft of this paper. I received invaluable feedback on this essay from anonymous peer reviewers of *Architectural Research*.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The Neoclassical facade of the Chapelle des Macchabées was added in 1750.
- <sup>2</sup> "Tae-seop Byen and Jong-guk Lee's Talk," *The Chosun Ilbo* (August 15, 1981).
- <sup>3</sup> "Change the Capitol Building in Seoul to a national museum," *The Dong-A Ilbo* (East Asia Daily) (September 16, 1982): 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Byeong-ig Go "The Opinions of Byeong-ig Go," *The Chosun Ilbo* (Korea Daily) (March 17, 1982).
- <sup>5</sup> Yuneun Lee, "The Capitol building, the dome should be removed" *The JoongAng Ilbo* (Central Daily) (July 26, 1984).
- <sup>6</sup> Yong-ha Shin, "Relocation of the Japanese Government-General of Korea," *Sisa Journal* (November 1990).
- <sup>7</sup> President Kim, "Disassemble instructions of Old Chosun Governor-General Building," *Yonhap News Agency* (August 9, 1993).
- <sup>8</sup> *SPACE* (August 1995).
- <sup>9</sup> Swoo-Geun Kim, "Making the core of Korea's capital to cultural place," *The Dong-A Ilbo* (East Asia Daily) (March 17, 1982).

(Received Apr. 25, 2016/Revised May. 31, 2016/Accepted Jun. 15, 2016)