

# Reviewing the Preservation History of Pulguksa and Sökpulsa

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## Introduction

Korea is rich with Buddhist monuments, indicating that Buddhism has played a crucial role in the formation of Korean society, its social values, and its way of life. When we examine the preservation history of these monuments, we should connect the historical and sociological circumstances surrounding the time when any reconstruction was done. This paper examines the preservation history of two of the most well-known Buddhist monasteries of Korea, Pulguksa and Sökpulsa. After giving a brief account of the monasteries, I will focus on the quality of the restoration work done on both of these national treasures in a chronological order using both textual criticism and field research. Since the study has a close relationship with the historical background of all restoration works, I will try to put some emphasis on the aspects of this background and their influence on both of the sites and will try to connect these aspects with the quality of their current and future preservation.

In the long history of Korean Buddhism, Korean society has undergone a few tremendous changes due to the significant strength of Confucianism during the Chosŏn dynasty, the colonization of Korea by Japan, and the continuous westernization and modernization after the separation of South and North Korea (Shim 1999:161). My purpose in this paper will be to raise consciousness about the quality of future preservation work after a thorough examination of the effects of previous restoration projects at Pulguksa and Sökpulsa. Thus the main sections of the paper will discuss in detail the quality and the political and social environment of major restoration works that took place. I will also include a brief introduction/history to the monasteries for a better understanding of their preservation. Last, I will discuss in detail the advantages and disadvantages of these monasteries being included on the UNESCO<sup>1</sup> World Heritage list in 1995<sup>2</sup> as this event is closely related with their preservation and with the above mentioned globalization and modernization imposed on the peninsula during the second half of the last century.

## I. Overview

### 1. Pulguksa

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

<sup>2</sup> There are seven Korean sites classified as UNESCO World Heritage: Pulguksa (Buddha Land Monastery) and Sökpulsa (Stone Buddha Monastery), Changgyönggak (Depositories for the *Tripitaka Koreana*), Chongmyo (Royal Ancestral Shrine), Ch'angdökkung (Palace of Illustrious Virtue), Dolmen Sites, and Hwasöng Fortress, and Kyöngju Historic Areas. One entry is made on the natural heritage list, the Cheju Volcanic Island and Lava Tube. The four entries on the list of Memory of the World are: *Chikchi* (A Buddhist Sön text), *Hunmin chöngüm* (Correct Sounds to Instruct the People: the Korean Alphabet), *Chosön wangjo sillok* (The Royal Protocols of the Chosön Dynasty), *Süngjöngwön ilgi* (Royal Secretariat of the Chosön Dynasty). There are also three entries on the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage: *Chongmyo Cheryak* (Ritual Music at the Royal Ancestral Shrine), *P'ansori* (musical story-telling genre), and *Tanoje* (Tano Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month). For further details, refer to <http://english.cha.go.kr/>.

Pulguksa was built at the end of the Golden Age of Silla<sup>3</sup> (514-765). It is situated at the western slope of Mt. T'oham on the southeastern side of Kyōngju.<sup>4</sup> According to *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (Ilyōn 1972:380-2), Prime Minister Kim Taesōng (700-774; Prime Minister: 751-774) initiated the erection of Pulguksa to commemorate his present parents. Since he died before the completion of the monastery, it is said that the Silla government finalized the construction (Kim 2006:2). Although it was never one of the most important temples in Korea, as time passed, it became a very large complex. The name, Temple of Buddha Land, indicates that it was designed as a realization of the delightful land of the Buddha where mortal beings are released from the sufferings of life by the teachings of Buddha. The structure of the complex consists of wooden buildings over a stone basis. The stone structure is marvelously composed of long and short stones that are loosely fitted together without any mortar. The technique used for its foundation still amazes modern architects with its perfection and ability to withstand earthquakes and other natural disasters.

## 2. Sōkpulsa<sup>5</sup>

The temple is located some distance up the mountain, not far from Pulguksa. Like Pulguksa, the erection of Sōkpulsa was initiated in 751 by Prime Minister Kim Taesōng and completed in 774. Sōkpulsa is an artificial stone Buddhist temple that holds one of the most impressive statues of Buddha not only on the peninsula, but in East Asia. Kim initiated the construction in memory of his previous parents according to *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (Ilyōn 1972:380-2). While art historians are unsure of the identity of the Buddha-image, the predominant theory is that it is Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, surrounded by his disciples who are depicted on wall friezes (McBride 1997:38-9). The artificial cave consists of a rectangular antechamber, a short corridor, and a circular main chamber topped with a dome. Hundreds of granite pieces of various shapes and sizes were assembled to form the cave. No mortar was used; the pieces are held together by stone rivets. Natural ventilation controlled the temperature and humidity inside the cave, though the wisdom of ancient architects failed to be conveyed in the process of its preservation in modern times ([www.ocp.go.kr](http://www.ocp.go.kr)).

## II. Preservation during the Chosōn dynasty (1392-1910)

### 1. Pulguksa

Back in 1593 during the Hideyoshi (1536-1598) invasions,<sup>6</sup> a group of Japanese pirates set the temple on fire upon discovering weapons hidden in one of its shrines. All the wooden structures were burned to the ground during this attack. After the war with the Japanese, over a period of 150 years beginning in 1604, the monastery was rebuilt. The wooden structures were built all over again following the late Koryō (918-1392) and early Chosōn styles. This should be taken into consideration when we view Pulguksa merely as a monastic structure from the Unified Silla period.

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<sup>3</sup> The Golden Age of Silla (AD 514-765) covers a time period from the Old Silla (1C BC–AD 668) period and the Unified Silla (668 – 935) period.

<sup>4</sup> Kyōngju was the capital of both Old Silla and Unified Silla, but only after the unification the city became the center of Korean political and cultural life.

<sup>5</sup> What is now referred to as Sōkkuram grotto was originally called Sōkpulsa. The name Sōkkuram first appears in the seventeenth century and during the Japanese colonial period this name gained popularity to the present day. However, as obviously the original name was changed much later than the erection of the temple, in this paper I will refer to it with its supposedly original name, Sōkpulsa, as this is also the name referred to in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (Ilyōn 1972: 380-2).

<sup>6</sup> Toyotomi Hideyoshi launched two invasions (1593 and 1597) of the Korean Peninsula. Pulguksa suffered damage during the first invasion.

Undoubtedly, when a reconstruction takes place, it is highly influenced by the social and political currencies of the time. Thus when speaking of Pulguksa, we must avoid claims such as the monastery was built according to the original structures it had had. Just as when we try to analyze a politician's work or a writer's work, we should always try to place them in the historical period when they did their works. Especially when we discuss a reconstruction of a monastery that was supposedly done by the state, it is impossible to extract the reconstruction from the currencies of the time of reconstruction. Thus, I claim that in the rebuilt Pulguksa, Confucian influence was undoubtedly forced on the overall look of the buildings.

During the Chosŏn dynasty, Buddhism was replaced by Confucianism as the state religion. The suppression of Buddhism started with the reduction of the numbers of temples, and restrictions on the membership in the *sangha* and, eventually, Buddhist monks and nuns were forced to withdraw from towns, and their social ranks became no higher than those of the eight low classes like prostitutes, butchers, and shamanistic sorcerers. To this day, Korean Buddhism has not recovered from the low social status endowed upon it in the Chosŏn times. Korean Buddhist monks today attach the honorific suffix *-nim* to the title *sŭng*, which was a word of the low class without the suffix (Shim 1999:164-7). The Chosŏn rulers continued to whittle down the Buddhist establishment until there were only thirty-six monasteries remaining.<sup>7</sup> With the above mentioned restrictions, monks and nuns were finally prohibited from entering cities.

Since Confucianism was more influential than Buddhism, we cannot say that Pulguksa was rebuilt to its original glorious structure. This Confucian influence can be seen firstly in the fact that not all the buildings in the complex were rebuilt. During the 1969 excavations, several buildings and cloisters were reconstructed based on the excavation of their foundations. This fact also points out that during the Chosŏn period not all the structures were rebuilt. This point is usually neglected by scholars. During my visit to Pulguksa, I also witnessed that in most of the explanatory signs this crucial fact is often left unmentioned and the visitor gets the impression that Pulguksa has always had the structure it has now.

Furthermore, if we take a closer look at the rooftops, for example, the Virochana Hall located at the back of the complex, we can easily recognize features of Chosŏn dynasty royal architectural style. It closely resembles the rooftops of palaces, such as Ch'angdŏkkung (Palace of Illustrious Virtue), built in the same period. This observation leads us again to the conclusion that the rebuilt Pulguksa was highly influenced by the then-fashionable Confucian thinking and Chosŏn architectural style. What's more, the wall paintings in all of the complex buildings contain very bright colors, again a feature of Chosŏn architectural style. If we take into consideration the above mentioned facts on the reconstruction that took place in the seventeenth century, we are not surprised to find that the process was highly influenced by the historical circumstances, i.e., Buddhism was the subordinate religion in the Chosŏn period.

## 2. Sŏkpulsa

Based on the above-mentioned historical overview, the fact that Sŏkpulsa had been left in a poor state of preservation should astonish neither scholars nor common visitors. The grotto was virtually forgotten by the cultural elite in this period of severe persecution of Buddhism. Although the location of Sokkuram may have been known to some locals, during the colonial period the Japanese learned of its existence from their postal authorities. The amazing story of its "rediscovery" is as follows. "In 1909, a weary postman, traveling alone over the mountain ridges of Mt. T'oham, suddenly had to seek shelter when he was engulfed in a thunderstorm. Seeing what appeared to be an opening to a small cave, he crept inside away from the violent winds and lightning. As his eyes gradually grew accustomed to the

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<sup>7</sup> At the end of Koryŏ there had been several hundred monasteries.

dark recess of the cave, he was startled to find himself standing before the stone image of a colossal Buddha. The serene expression of the image emitted a feeling of peace and tranquility that calmed his initial fright. Stern guards stood watch and attending disciples and bodhisattvas gazed in admiration at the great image in stone. Happenstance had brought to light this singular creation of the devoted hearts and skillful hands of the gifted artisans of Silla (McBride 1997:38-9).”

This story, together with the fact that Sökpulsa was found in a deteriorated condition of conservation speaks for itself and it is beyond question that the state of a temple cannot be extracted from the historical background of the given time, in this case the Chosŏn period.

### III. Preservation during the Japanese Occupation

#### 1. Pulguksa

In the early twentieth century Pulguksa was subjected to a wholesale renovation initiated by the Japanese colonial government. During this renovation one of the two pagodas<sup>8</sup> in front of the Hall of the Great Hero, Tabot’ap (Pagoda of Bountiful Treasures), was dismantled and, unfortunately, now there is no extant record of any relics found in it. If we take into consideration the fact that when the other pagoda (Sökkat’ap) was dismantled in 1966 and a gilt sarira casket which contained *Great Dharani Sutra of Pure and Clean Light* was found inside (Kim 2006:6), we can easily suppose that Tabot’ap undoubtedly had some relics. Sadly, since there is no record on the matter, scholars accept that there was nothing in the pagoda when it was dismantled.

Tabot’ap is a very complicated structure. It consists of several differing elements joined to form a monument unique in East Asia. The tall base is flanked by stairways on four sides leading to an open platform, upon which sits a guardian lion. Scholars believe there were once four of them. Supposedly during the renovation done by the Japanese, three of the four lions situated respectfully on four sides of the pagoda disappeared. One of them is now located in the British Museum in London and the location of the other two is unknown.

The above mentioned suppositions lead to the conclusion that the Japanese administration in charge of reconstruction took advantage of the process. Currently these issues stay unconfirmed, but one can make certain conclusions based on these suppositions as well as based on thorough examination of the pagodas and their function in the Buddhist sanctuary. Here, as well as during the Chosŏn period, after the Korean War, and even now, it has always been the people with power who decide how a reconstruction should proceed. Particularly in the case of Tabot’ap, those with power were the Japanese administration. Maybe we should not find it any wonder that there are no extant records on the reconstruction.

#### 2. Sökpulsa

Sökpulsa, unlike Pulguksa which underwent only one reconstruction during the Japanese occupation, was subjected to a number of restorations during the thirty-five years of Japanese presence. The first project lasted two years, from 1913 to 1915. The colonial government spent two years renovating the grotto without any study of the structure beforehand. After restoration had begun they discovered the complex infrastructure of stones underneath the visible carvings. The design of the dome was made of hundreds of different sized stones shaped together in a dome-like architecture without mortar. Just like in the case of Pulguksa and its foundations, this technique again proves the technical genius of the Silla

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<sup>8</sup> Two granite pagodas are located in front of Taeungjŏn (Hall of the Great Hero): Tabo’tap (Pagoda of Bountiful treasures), which is 10.4m high and symbolizes Prabhutaratna Buddha, and Sökkat’ap (Pagoda of Sakyamuni), which is 8.2m high and symbolizes Sakyamuni Buddha.

people.<sup>9</sup> The original structure allowed natural ventilation through air circulation, thus also regulating the temperature within the inner chamber. Appropriate ventilation and temperature happen to be crucial for preservation of the wall carvings as well as the granite statue of the main Buddha since it prevents the formation of mildew. The structure was of very high complexity; hence it is surprising that the reconstruction was undertaken without any sufficient research.

Not only did the then-responsible people for the project understudy the structure before reconstruction began, but they also tried to apply some modern elements to strengthen the dome. A lack of appreciation and understanding for the reasons for the specific design led to the decision to repair the chamber using cement, a material trendy at the time since it had recently been discovered. As a result, air circulation was blocked, and the stones began to sweat, leading to a serious water leakage problem that seriously threatened the integrity of the sculptures by causing erosion of the stones (<http://bulguksa.or.kr/>). This interference caused irreparable damage to the structure. When the reason for the leaks and formation of mildew on the surface of the stones in the chamber was finally realized, an application of a layer of lime mortar, clay, and earth on the surface of the concrete dome was required in order to prevent the water leakage. This follow-up to the restoration work took place in 1917. It included the setting of drainage pipes which were buried above the dome to channel rain water out of the artificial cave. However, neither this addition nor the layer of lime mortar, clay, and earth managed to stop the leaks and the situation, instead of getting better, in fact worsened. In the twenties another restoration work was undertaken and an asphalt addition was added. It also caused moss and mold to grow on the surface of the stone structures. Drastic measures were needed and in 1927 the Japanese hot-steam sprayed the sculptures to clean them of the moss and mold (<http://www.ocp.go.kr/>). If we examine this act done by the management team of Sōkpulsa from our time, it should be severely judged, with no regard to the urgency.

Another structural problem occurred due to the restoration work undertaken by the Japanese administration. Scholars argue that there had been a five-story pagoda situated between the statue of Buddha and the eleven-headed bodhisattva.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Hwang Su-yōng<sup>11</sup> argued that during the repair work the pagoda was taken to Japan by colonial officials. His main proof is based on the fact that there is a square stone base with a square hole for sarira between the main Buddha statue and the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. The presence of these squares could be indisputable proof of the existence of a pagoda situated in the main hall. Furthermore, if there had been such a five-story pagoda, this would have been the second pagoda<sup>12</sup> in the temple, thus creating a two-pagoda layout as can be observed at Pulguksa (Yi 1988:31-2).

A third rather peculiar event took place during the first reconstruction in 1913-15. In the main chamber, the upper level of the walls is designed with niches that keep images of

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<sup>9</sup> There are very detailed replicas of the dome structure, all the carvings, and the main Buddha statue in the Silla Art and Science Museum in Kyōngju.

<sup>10</sup> In the middle of the wall of the main chamber behind the main Buddha statue there is an exquisite wall carving of an eleven-faced Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It stands 2.18 meters in height and is the only figure carved on the walls that faces forward (all the other bas-relief figures carved on the walls of the rotunda face a side). The Bodhisattva of Compassion wears a crown, is dressed in robes and jewelry, and holds a bottle containing lotus blossoms. This particular Bodhisattva is the most popular among Koreans.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Hwang Su-yōng was in charge of the 1961-66 restoration initiated by the Government of Park Chung Hee.

<sup>12</sup> A small stone pagoda considered to be the “Pagoda of Thousand-Buddha of the Past” (*Ch’ōnbul tabot’ap*) was discovered during the Japanese restoration. It is now housed in the Kyōngju National Museum.

Bodhisattvas.<sup>13</sup> It has been proven that before the restoration began all of the images were present in the niches but after the work was completed two of the niches remained empty. This leads to the supposition that two of the Bodhisattvas statues were taken to Japan by the officials responsible for the reconstruction.

The above mentioned events surrounding the renovation work conducted by the Japanese colonial administration raises issues discussed over the last century. However, without sufficient evidence in the form of records or without the whereabouts of the allegedly stolen statues we cannot definitively conclude that the Japanese administration took the objects. One thing is for sure; the reconstruction process was carried out without sufficient study of the grotto and its complex structure. What strikes researchers of the reconstruction process is also the lack of sufficient written documents about the process. But there is no doubt that at the beginning of the twentieth century Sōkpulsa was in a very poor state of preservation. The dome had partially collapsed and it will remain a mystery whether the renovation saved or damaged the temple to a greater extent.

The process of renovation that took place under the Japanese proves again that the preservation of such state-worthy monuments has always been dependent on the decision makers of the given time. Just as the pro-Confucian governors were the people holding state power during the Chosŏn dynasty, so too did the Japanese cultural administration during Japanese colonialism. As we will continue to see in the following sections, the fate of the existence of national treasures is with no exception under the power of the leaders of the given time period.

The last item about the restoration work done during Japanese occupation will be the position of the Eight Guardian Deities<sup>14</sup> in the antechamber of the grotto. At present, two of the engravings stand in a single line with the other six while a recently discovered picture<sup>15</sup> shows that those two deities used to stand at a right angle to the others. In this picture the Vajrapanis Guardian and some of the eight stand on the right side according to the main Buddha statue in the main chamber. But only three of the eight are seen standing in a straight line, in contrast to the present day, and another statue apparently stands at a right angle to them judging from the shadow it casts on another statue right in front of it. The Japanese engineers set two deity statues on both side walls of the antechamber at a right angle to the rest. But in 1961-64, when the grotto was restored again, the Cultural Properties Administration, precursor of the Cultural Heritage Administration, put them in line with the others (Choson Ilbo Sept.18, 2007). Here the argument is on the side of the Japanese engineers because the existence of this picture proves that the correct location of the Deities was made during the 1913-15 restoration.

To place a bright side to the Japanese interference in the preservation of Sōkpulsa, I would like to briefly mention that it was a Japanese scholar whose measurements were crucial for the remarkable discovery on the symmetry of the temple. Although the discovery is not related to the currently investigated period, I feel obliged to place it in this section for the sake of an objective judgment on the Japanese management of the monument. Yoneda

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<sup>13</sup> Following Shumeru cosmology, the layout of the walls is separated into three sub layers. The upper one is reserved for the sculptures belonging to the realm of Buddha; hence the images are closest to Buddha among all the deities carved in the temple. For detailed information on Shumeru cosmology, refer to Kim 2006:8-12.

<sup>14</sup> The Eight Guardian Deities are located in the antechamber and ideologically belong to the realm of desire. According to Shumeru cosmology, the highest realm is the realm of Buddha, below it is the realm of form, corresponding to the class of Bodhisattvas, and last comes the realm of desire.

<sup>15</sup> A picture taken in 1910 was brought to the public's attention in September 2007 by the Sungkyunkwan University Museum.

Miyoji<sup>16</sup> investigated ancient Korean architecture and his measurements led to his conclusion that the fundamental techniques imported in the plans of Sōkpulsa were based on plain geometry. His work proved that the basic measurement of exactly one *ch'ok*<sup>17</sup> was applied to the construction of Sōkpulsa and that squares and their diagonals were used in the construction of the grotto. Furthermore, Yoneda found that the same geometrical figures and the same proportions were also basic to the construction of Pulguksa as well. He showed that the composition of the grotto and the arrangement of the planes on the pedestal of the main Buddha were created by taking one side of a square as the basic unit and creating octagonal and circular forms from extensions of its diagonal lines. This subtle and elaborate method of design was applied throughout the grotto. To Yoneda, the discovery that the component beauty of a structure depends on the combination and selection of such geometrical techniques was of paramount importance (Kang 1996:2-3).

Taking into consideration the sophisticated and complex study of a Japanese scholar on Sōkpulsa we can only be startled at the fact that the reconstruction at the beginning of the occupation period was performed with virtually no studies beforehand. Obviously there was not a lack of sufficient studies on the temple structure; the only drawback of Yoneda's work was that it came too late to be of any help to the reconstruction in 1913-15.

#### IV. Preservation in the Post-war Period (1953-1980)

##### 1. Pulguksa

In 1969 the Pulguksa Temple Restoration Committee was formed under the government of then South Korean president Park Chung Hee (1917-1979, r. 1963-1979). Under the guidance of the committee an enormous restoration process was undertaken in 1969 that lasted for four years. The most significant excavation work was conducted during this particular restoration. The Hall of No Tongue,<sup>18</sup> the Vairocana Buddha Hall,<sup>19</sup> and the Hall of Avalokiteśvara<sup>20</sup> were rebuilt from almost the ground up. The corridor buildings in the upper part of the monastery were also restored. Thus, most of the wooden structures and cloisters are twentieth century reproductions of the original eighth century architecture. Besides the restoration of the buildings that were partially extant in the twentieth century, there were buildings that were built only on the basis of the excavation work. This means that the wooden structures were completely missing at the beginning of the restoration process. Such is the case with the Single Beam Gate, the first gate leading to the monastic complex (<http://www.ocp.go.kr/>). The foundations of the gate were excavated in a 1969 dig that took place in the vicinity of the monastery. One cannot help but wonder how the restoration team was able to restore something that they didn't know exactly how it used to look. It is true that Pulguksa is a representative monastery of Silla, but this does not necessarily mean that all the buildings and construction were the same at all the monasteries built around the same time. I would like to put some emphasis on the main argument of the reconstruction managers,

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<sup>16</sup> He graduated with a degree in architectural engineering from Nihon University in 1932 and the following year was employed by the National Museum of Korea, then under Japan's colonial administration. For the next ten years, until his death at the age of 35, Yoneda devoted himself to the study of Korea's ancient architecture. He also worked hard to restore Sōkkuram to its original form and tried to decipher the mathematical principles applied to its construction (Kang 1996:1-2).

<sup>17</sup> A traditional Korean measure that equals approximately one foot.

<sup>18</sup> The Hall of No Tongue (*Musōljōn*) is the largest building in the complex.

<sup>19</sup> The Vairocana Buddha Hall (*Pirojōn*) enshrines a seated gilt bronze figure of Vairocana Buddha whose gesture signifies that the Buddha and the common people are equal and delusion is none other than enlightenment in nature.

<sup>20</sup> The Hall of Avalokiteśvara (*Kwanūmjōn*) is positioned to the east of the Vairocana Buddha Hall and is built at the highest point of the temple, housing the statue of Avalokiteśvara.

which was that all the temples of this time had a Single Beam Gate; hence, Pulguksa's gate must be erected again. We could juxtapose the excavations at Pulguksa and the discovery of the Hwangnyongsa Temple Site,<sup>21</sup> for example, which was also a result from the undertaking of the Park Chung Hee government and a sharp interest in Buddhist heritage on the peninsula. At Hwangnyongsa, there were also quite a significant number of determinations of buildings belonging to the temple grounds, but no one decided to erect wooden structures, unlike the case with Pulguksa's Single Beam Gate. My point here is that the erection of the Single Beam Gate is as unjustified as the erection of some of the buildings at the Hwangnyongsa site. Sometimes it is wiser to just accept that time takes its "victims" and leave the damaged site as it is rather than make unjustified suppositions and rebuilt structures without any visual background as to the way they used to appear.

Another rather striking decision was made for the overall design of the monastic complex during this renovation. The project managers decided to dig an artificial pond at the entrance of the complex, right after the Single Beam Gate. The pond's form of quadrangle represents East Asian values. It is not even fully related to Buddhism; furthermore, there is no evidence that it used to be there when the monastery was erected. On the other hand, a lotus pond,<sup>22</sup> which was proven to have existed underneath the bridges leading to Pulguksa's main courtyard, has so far been left out of any renovation. There seems to be insufficient reason why the former was designed and the latter was left out.

## 2. Sōkpulsa

Despite all the attempts to prevent the accumulation of humidity, mold, and moss inside the shrine done during the Japanese colonial period, the preservation of the temple was still at stake at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. The government of President Park Chung Hee instigated an in-depth investigation on the structure of Sōkpulsa to be carried out in the early sixties. Following a thorough study of the structure, a massive restoration was launched in 1962 and was finalized in 1964. Finally the problem of humidity and temperature control was resolved to a remarkable extent with the application of mechanical systems. Thus the long "torment" on the temple in the name of preservation was finally put to an end. However, neither the cement nor the asphalt structure was removed (<http://www.ocp.go.kr/>). It took the Silla people twenty-three years to erect the grotto and it took contemporary scholars, architects, technicians, and engineers fifty-one years to find a way to prevent the accumulation of humidity and the appearance of mildew, moss, and mold.

Notwithstanding the fact that in the sixties the grotto was finally saved from corrosion, another rather controversial construction was carried out. A wooden antechamber was added and this action raised a number of discussions among Korean scholars over the problem of restoration work and its quality. A lot of scholars still believe that this addition is in confrontation with the architecture of the temple because such a structure was not originally present. What is more, the building cuts the view to the sunrise from the East Sea, thus altering one of the main purposes for the creation of the temple, i.e., to protect the state from

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<sup>21</sup> The erection of Hwangnyongsa began in 553 and was completed in 645. The Cultural Properties Research Institute conducted an extensive excavation project in 1976 and it was revealed that the temple site was originally a swampy land covering 82,500 square meters.

<sup>22</sup> Beneath the Bridge of the White Clouds (*Paegun-gyo*) and the Bridge of Azure Clouds (*Ch'ongun-gyo*) a lotus pond was situated and the myth related to the erection of the Pagoda of Sākyamuni is closely related to it. The pagoda, also known as "Pagoda without Reflections," denotes the sad legend of Asanyō, the wife of the mason Asadal, who built the pagoda. The poor woman came to Kyōngju to see her husband as years had passed without any news from him. No outsiders were allowed into the site of a holy project and she was told to wait by a pond near the temple until the completed pagoda cast a reflection in the water. She waited in vain and finally threw herself into the pond (<http://www.ocp.go.kr/>).

Japanese attacks (Yi 1988:31). Besides cutting the view, the additional structure cuts the airflow into the grotto. Also, a glass window was placed to keep visitors outside the main chamber. This addition, together with the wooden antechamber, is still a contentious issue when it comes to debates about the temple's preservation. Undoubtedly a contradiction between the original purpose of the temple and the modernistic concept of a treasure belonging to the world where anyone can visit and enjoy its aesthetic beauty arises when it is part of the UNESCO World Heritage.

When examining the reconstructions that took place at both Pulguksa and Sökpulsa during the presidency of Park Chung Hee, we have to take into serious consideration the fact that his governance has mainly been depicted as a severe dictatorship. Again we must draw the conclusion that the preservation of these national treasures was under the hand and word of the person of the day, not the lay Buddhist followers, and not even the Buddhist order. Furthermore, during this restoration work a modernistic method of approach was used in the form of adding mechanical systems. A parallel can be drawn with the attempts to apply modernistic ideas during the Japanese renovation when first cement and then asphalt was used to deal with the numerous erosion problems within the cave.

## V. Pros and Cons of Inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List

According to the convention on the Protection of the World and Cultural Heritage, UNESCO World Heritage means cultural and natural legacies from around the world designated by UNESCO in an attempt to support diversity as well as to protect and preserve the value of humanity since 1972 (<http://www.unesco.org/>). The inclusion of these two temples will serve as a guarantee against any other reckless restoration works or waywardness of those who are in power at the moment. In the report on Sökpulsa from the official records of UNESCO and submitted by ICOMOS,<sup>23</sup> it stated that:

A number of rather drastic measures were taken in the earlier part of the present century<sup>24</sup> which have to some extent reduced the authenticity of the grotto in terms of form and to a lesser extent of materials (although they were acceptable in their time and in the face of serious deterioration). The authenticity of function and site are completely intact. (ICOMOS 1995:4)

First, I would like to point out that there is a certain responsibility which the organization has already assumed for the preservation of the sites. That is the bright side of the coin when examining the inclusion of Pulguksa and Sökpulsa. Currently the sites are managed as part of the Kyöngju National Park. The supervising national agency is the Office of Cultural Properties of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Other collaborating institutions are the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Environment (ICOMOS 1995:3).

What is more, the current projects for Sökpulsa, also assimilated by UNESCO, include a comprehensive investigation of the installation and effectiveness of temperature, air flow and humidity control devices, the planning for permanent measures, and the implementation of a comprehensive academic study aimed at the restoration of the grotto to its original state (ICOMOS 1995:3). These plans draw a rather bright future for the temple, but on the other hand we should ask the question to what extent is it possible to return Sökpulsa to its original

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<sup>23</sup> ICOMOS stands for International Council on Monuments and Sites.

<sup>24</sup> The report was submitted to the UNESCO Committee on 21 September 1994; hence, "present century" refers to the twentieth century.

state. And could this be an idealistic initiative bound to be as unsuccessful as all previous initiatives that have been undertaken? However, what counts at this stage, when Sōkpulsa is in a favorable condition of preservation, is that some responsibility is finally taken and attempts are made to try and point out all the numerous mistakes committed in past reconstruction works.

Furthermore, with the inclusion of the sites a considerable amount of visitors' attention has been drawn to the temples. With the entrance fee of 4,000 Korean won for each of the sites, a considerable amount of money enters the sites' exchequers, so the above mentioned plans could actually be put into effect in the future. Along with the entrance fee, virtually at every corner of the monasteries, the cunning people involved in the administration of the temple have come up with ways to collect either common visitors' or lay Buddhists' money. Foreigners can buy roof tiles and engrave their wishes for 10,000 Korean won, whereas lay Buddhists pay a considerable amount of money (100,000 Korean won) to be included in the winter retreat prayers of the monks residing on the temple grounds.

On the other hand though, the fact that both the temples are significant monuments on the UNESCO list deteriorates their main function as Buddhist sanctuaries. Neither temple plays any important role as spiritual medium for the transmission of the Buddhist dharma. None of the explanatory signs in the complexes state the spiritual or ideological thought behind the buildings, paintings, or any structures on the grounds. The actual reason for the inclusion of Pulguksa and Sōkpulsa is the refined way in which the Buddhist thought and belief is represented in both of them. When touring the temples, however, visitors find themselves lost in structural and technical explanations, but with no connotation to the primary meaning. What is more, those signs are not literal translations from Korean to English or to Chinese, thus the visitor is often startled to find huge discrepancies in the texts. Given these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that visitors come, make noise, take a great many pictures, and hurry to leave. In addition, there are no guided tours offered at the entrance of either site, not in Korean or in English.

The fact that the main chamber of Sōkpulsa is sealed off with a glass screen prevents visitors from damaging the grotto, but it also prevents them from observing the carvings and the statue within. However, given the common understanding of these visitors and, in addition, the lack of any explanatory signs on those carvings, it turns out that it is not such a great loss that they cannot observe the grotto in its full splendor.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to examine the preservation history of Pulguksa and Sōkpulsa. The major restoration works were divided according to political and cultural time periods and were also enumerated in chronological order. The aim of this paper was mostly to highlight the historical, sociological, and political background of each major restoration work and to prove that the work itself is not an isolated process and is always influenced by the surrounding situation in the country. Be it Confucianism, imperialism, dictatorship, or globalization, they all reflect in one way or another a social event in a given country and a restoration work of a significant Buddhist temple is surely categorized as a social event. Sometimes these social systems influence in a good way, sometimes a bad.

Nevertheless, every period has its own drawbacks but as soon as there is something positive from the currencies of a given time, we should focus on that and remember the negative things so as to avoid them in the future. One of the most distinctive messages UNESCO tries to spread by adding cultural monuments is that everything concerning these monuments should be done in the name of preservation, not in the name of restoration.

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