

Korea's Challenges in Shaping Government-Private Partnerships in order to Establish a Code of Ethics for Cultural Heritage Conservation

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes Korea's three-year research project to establish a code of ethics for conservation (2010–2012) as an example, in order to share a methodology for setting out a working partnership between a government and the public. A code of ethics, as a set of guidelines for conservators which can help them perform rational decision-making, is a new tool in Korea. The project aims at codifying a decision-making process in a written text in order to improve the standard of conservation practice in Korea. This paper examines the way in which historical and social contexts have been considered in the process of establishing a government-public partnership. It gives a set of models for working together, which are the same as those implemented in the project to establish the code of ethics.

Introduction: Local context in establishing government-private partnerships

The difference in cultural and historical context in a society requires flexibility in making a decision on the conservation of heritage. Values attributed to heritage and various aspects of authenticity are subject to cultural diversity and historical change. The decision to conserve an object should be made not only considering its intrinsic values, but also within its social and political context. A historical object has its own history and meaning as well as social and physical contexts, making it unique and different from others. Therefore no single principle can be applied to all. There is no correct answer on a decision to be made. What is more important in conservation is whether the decision is made through a rational and logical process of thinking, or not. Therefore, a conservator repeats the same process of reasoning for rational decision-making in every conservation project, yet may reach a different conclusion in each case. Such aspects of conservation as a social process of conserving what is valued, explains why different decisions have been made at different times in different cultures.

In many cases, social factors, such as who is a decision-making authority and how they assess values of heritage, what kind of stakeholders are involved and what their attitudes are towards preserving and understanding heritage, become important aspects in deciding the fate of heritage, as shown in the case of the carved Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan and also in Seokuram, Korea. The former statue has been destroyed, while the latter has been designated and preserved in good condition. The above factors are not independent, but interact with each other. Above all, a private or public institute which is an authority makes decisions and plays an important role in leading other factors in certain directions. Ideally their partnership can make a balanced and value-based decision to respect the opinions of the various different stakeholders.

A suitable model for sharing roles between government and private sectors can be different, depending on each culture. This is because of