

Koreans of unforgettable memories of shame and humiliation. Once Koreans had achieved sufficient economic growth and political stabilization to enable them to take an interest in recovering their national dignity, the building became a hated symbol, which had to be removed from the royal palace complex. When in 1995, the newly elected president, Kim Young-Sam, announced a plan to remove the building in order to restore destroyed buildings within the royal palace complex, there was little protest. However, when the plan was carried out later in 1995, protesters argued that the building was a part of history and was going to be buried by the unchallenged authority of government.

It took only ten years before decision-making authority started to move from the government to the public, as shown by the case of removing part of the city hall in Seoul. This is similar to that of the headquarters building; the city hall had been an uncomfortable legacy for Koreans. However, when the city council began to remove the rear part of the building in 2008, the public outcry was recognized and respected in a totally different way from the 1995 case. The Korean Government, which was responsible for looking after the listed building, opposed the authority of the city council and criticized its outdated value assessment of colonial buildings. The government supported public opinion to preserve the building against the plan of the local government. Public involvement in the decision-making process in Korea is now considered as an encouraging and essential aspect in keeping the balance between conflicting opinions and leads a more rational and democratic decision-making process.

A new approach: government and private partnerships in establishing a code of ethics

As one effort to tackle the problem on the lack of applicable conservation principles in actual practice, the government-based National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (NRICH) of Korea has launched a research project: a Preliminary Study for Establishing a Code of Ethics of Conservation. It aims to establish an applicable set of ethical principles for conservators, both in government and private sectors, in order to help them make rational decisions. Although most codes of ethics have been drafted and adopted by a non-governmental institute or an association of conservators abroad,¹ NRICH has decided to initiate the research and to take a leading role in introducing ethical guidelines for conservators. It has taken into consideration the cultural and historical context of the policy, which the government has played a leading role in advancing for the last 60 years. The three-year project (2010–2012) planned to take three steps:

1. to publicize the importance and the need of a code of ethics in Korea and to introduce international codes of ethics to domestic conservators and heritage related professionals;