

Koguryo Tombs (D. P. R. of Korea)

No 1091

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: Democratic Peoples' Rep. of Korea

Name of property: Complex of Koguryo Tombs

Location: Pyongyang, South Phyongan Province,
Nampho, South Hwangghae Province

Date received: 25 January 2002

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, it could be a *monument*. It is a serial nomination.

Brief description:

Several groups and individual tombs from the period of the Koguryo Kingdom. The Koguryo was one of the strongest kingdoms in northeast China and half of the Korean peninsula between the 3rd century BC and 7th century AD. These tombs, from the later period of the kingdom, many with beautiful wall paintings, are almost the only remains of this culture.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

Complexes of tombs, all together consisting of about 30 individual ones, located mainly in agricultural areas and some in villages. Several types of these tombs exist – stone piled, stone chambered and earthen mound tombs. So far over 10,000 tombs belonging to the Koguryo kingdom have been identified, in China and Korea. Among those, some 90 are decorated with wall paintings, 70 of which are in Korea and almost half are the subject of this nomination. These decorated tombs are supposed to be specially made for kings, members of the royal family and other aristocrats.

The paintings in the tombs are divided into several types: paintings of portraits, portraits and Four Deities, Four Deities alone, decorative patterns.

There are also several types of tombs, according to the number of burial chambers – single chamber, two chamber, multi chamber and side chamber types. They are built of stone and corridors lead into the burial chambers.

The tombs have varied shapes of ceilings some quite elaborate, having to solve the need of roofing wide spaces without columns, with stone slabs which had to carry the heavy load of a stone or earth tumulus (mound).

History

The Koguryo kingdom existed for nearly 1,000 years, from 277 BC to 668 AD. It was established in Huanren, Liaoning Province in China, relocated in the year 3 AD to

Kungnae Castle in Ji'an, Jilin Province, China, to Mt. Taesong area in Pyongyang, in 427 AD and finally to the Jangan Castle in the centre of the present day city of Pyongyang.

Pyongyang, situated in a strategic location, had long been the political, economic and cultural centre, as the capital of ancient Korea (Kojoson) which is the reason why the Koguryo kingdom moved its capital here and made great efforts in developing it.

The Koguryo kingdom expanded its territory to cover northeast China and half of the Korean peninsula, becoming one of the strongest powers in the east. It collapsed in the year 668 AD.

The best known cultural heritage remains of this kingdom are thousands of tombs, built of stone and covered by stone or earthen mounds. Earthen mound tombs, including many with murals, were prevalent once Koguryo moved its capital to Pyongyang – but existed in other parts of the kingdom as well.

Most of the known tombs suffered of clandestine excavations in the last thousand years. As a result very few were scientifically excavated prior to such activity and there are very few complete objects coming from the tombs. The tombs received worldwide attention only in 1905, when during the Japanese occupation many of them were opened to the general public. The first scientific research and documentation were carried out by Japanese scholars between 1911 and the 1940s.

Regular surveys, excavations and documentation took place from 1945 on.

Minor conservation actions took place in early 1940's, such as restricting entry to tombs and creating entrances to some. Regular maintenance, protection and conservation works started in 1946, with proper legislation and nomination of site managers.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The main three laws protecting cultural heritage and its management are: Presidential decree 35, 'Socialist Constitution of the Democratic Peoples' Rep. of Korea' and the 'Law of the Dem. Peoples' Rep. of Korea'. Other relevant laws are land, environment, forests laws as well as different by-laws, regulations and operational guidelines.

Management structure:

- I. MBCPC – Management Bureau of Cultural Property Conservation, under Ministry of Culture;
- II. BCP – Bureau of Cultural Preservation, at provincial and city levels;
- III. Cultural preservation departments of city, county or district;
- IV. CRMO – Cultural Relics Management Office, prepares and implements the conservation and management;
- V. Site Managers.

Resources:

Consists of national and local budget.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

Criterion i: Excellent artistic quality wall paintings depicting daily life pictures and other scenes. Important for its artistic and historic values. Outstanding architectural elements showing planning and technical skills.

Criterion ii: The burial practice of Koguryo had an influence on that of other cultures in the region, including Japan.

Criterion iii: The wall paintings document the history, religious beliefs, and customs of the contemporary people, as well as science and culture. They show costumes, arms, musical instruments, dance, astronomy, etc.

Criterion iv: The nominated tombs represent an important architectural form of tombs in this region and period.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS mission visited the sites between the 2nd and 9th of July 2002.

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Wall Painting.

Conservation

State of conservation:

Most of the tombs are properly maintained and well preserved. Some of the tombs suffer of deterioration of the paintings. Some are regularly flooded. Old conservation interventions seem problematic. Several tombs have special doors installed to prevent direct impact of exterior environmental conditions.

Management:

The management structure and staffing is good and qualified. There are problems with monitoring, adequate equipment and with lighting.

Risk analysis:

Lack of any alarm system. Two of the tombs are in a village and have no buffer zone. Flooding of one tomb. Future tourism – no plans for its management.

Authenticity and integrity

The interiors of the tombs and the mural paintings are authentic and untouched. There were some authenticity issues raised regarding the Mausoleum of King Tongmyong, certain gravestones at the Jinpha-ri tomb and entrance to Tokhung-ri tomb.

These are certainly new, but are part of the presentation and interpretation of the sites – not pretending to be an authentic element, nor compromising the cultural values of the tombs.

Comparative evaluation

The Koguryo tombs are unique to this important culture. Therefore the only comparison can be of the different tombs of this culture to each other. It seems, comparing them also to those included in the nomination submitted by China, that a proper choice has been made.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

Due to the importance of the culture and the excellent representation of the culture by the paintings, the property meets the requirement of Outstanding Universal Value.

Evaluation of criteria:

The high significance of the property comes from the importance of the Koguryo kingdom's culture to which the structural solutions of the tombs ceilings, as well as the testimony to daily life depicted on the wall paintings, are the only remains.

The nomination meets *criteria i, ii, iii and iv:*

Criterion i: It is certainly a representation of special engineering genius and solutions. Its wall paintings are art masterpieces of the culture and period of the Koguryo kingdom as well as important documentation.

Criterion ii: These special burial habits had influence on others cultures in the region, including in Japan.

Criterion iii: The nominated tombs are a unique testimony to the important Koguryo kingdom, its culture and civilization.

Criterion iv: The tombs, wall paintings and engineering solutions are all together an outstanding example of type of buildings and technology. The Koguryo culture had an impact on later cultures in the region, much of it represented by later, though similar type of burials (for example – in Japan).

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

- Strengthen modern research, including on pigments;
- Prepare visitors management plan;
- Install signage which will tell the history of the kingdom and sites including the fact that some sculptures at entrance to tombs are reconstructed for interpretation purposes and that the tomb of the "First King" is his second tomb, which did not house his body.
- Improve monitoring equipment;
- Improve lighting.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria i, ii, iii, and iv***:

Criterion i: For the outstanding skills of the artist preparing the wall paintings and for ingenious engineering solutions for the construction of the tombs.

Criterion ii: For these special burial habits had influence on others cultures in the region, including in Japan.

Criterion iii: Being an exceptional testimony of the Koguryo culture, its burial habits as well as its daily life and beliefs.

Criterion iv: Being an important example for burial typology.

ICOMOS encourages DPR Korea and PR of China, who is also nominating a site of the Koguryan culture, to look in the future for a possibility of a joint nomination.

ICOMOS decides not to get into an existing conflict of the exact dating of the culture and the tombs. While these are important scientific and cultural questions, ICOMOS believes that they have no impact on the cultural values of the nomination.

ICOMOS, March 2004