

Koguryo (China)

No 1135

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: The Peoples Republic of China
Name of property: Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom
Location: Huanren County, Liaoning Province and Ji'an, Jilin Province
Date received: 22 January 2003

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of *sites*.

Brief description:

The nomination includes 40 tombs, of which 14 are Imperial and 26 of Nobles. It includes also 3 cities (archaeological). All properties belong to the Koguryo culture.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

Wunu Mountain City located on top of a mountain by the same name. The city was of a considerable size, measuring 1,500 meters in length and 300 to 500 meters in width. It is only partly excavated. The upper part of the city includes watch terrace, base of a palace, site of military camp and a city gate. The lower part of the city was surrounded by defence wall, partly built and partly natural, using the cliff. The wall measures about 1,600 meters in length in is built of stone tablets at the outside and irregular stones on the inside. It measures 2.5 – 3.5 meters at the top and about 5 meters at the bottom. The city has 3 gates. In its central part there is a large pool (the dossier does not explain its function). There are foundations of a palace, 20 sites of army camp with semi-pit houses, a watch tower measuring 15 by 17 meters (only foundations) and remains of warehouses.

Guonei City is located on the right bank of the Yalu river. It is within the modern city of Ji'an and is of approximately square shape, measuring around 550 by 700 meters. It is surrounded by well built stone walls.

Wandu Mountain City was one of the capitals of the Koguryo. It is surrounded by stone walls, following topography lines and has seven gates. There are two springs in the city, flowing towards the southern gate and into the Tonggou river. Three large architectural elements are known in the city – remains of a large palace built on three step terrace with several buildings as part of it, a watch platform, site of military camp and a water pool. Inside the city there are also 37 tombs from the period after the city was deserted.

Imperial Tombs – 14 in total, each represents the burial system of Koguryo royal families. Most of the tombs are built of stones, creating kind of stepped pyramid or a pile of stones. They vary in size between 7x40 to 9x55 or 35x35 meters and other dimensions. Inside there are stone chambers and many of the tombs were covered with clay tiles.

A stone stele, from the year 414 AD, with 1590 characters, telling the story of the founding of the Koguryo state, is part of the Imperial Tombs complex. It is 6.4 meters high and has a square section of 1 to 2 meters width.

Nobles' tombs – 27 tombs of which 26 have an earth mound on top. They have a stone chamber and are decorated with wall paintings, describing daily life scenes, parties, sports, hunting, nature, gods, fairies, dragons and others.

History

The Koguryo kingdom starts as a regional power and ethnic group in the year 37BC, when its first capital city, Wunu Mountain City was built. 30 years later the capital moved to Guonei city. The capital moved again in 427 AD to Pyonyang, nowadays the capital of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea.

Guonei City and Wandu Mountain City were the economic, political and cultural centers of the Koguryo for hundreds of years. Guonei City was destroyed in the year 197 AD when Koguryo were defeated by another power. Wandu Mountain City was built in 209 AD. Both cities were damaged in wars and rebuilt several times.

After moving the capital to Pyongyang, Guonei city was considered as a "supporting capital". It was then deserted for long period and repaired again after the founding of modern Ji'an in 1902. The remains of Wunu city were repaired in the years 1999 and 2002.

The sites of the historic towns were declared as protected monuments since the second half of the 20th century and in 1983 all the residents of newly built Wandu city moved out.

Thousands of Koguryo tombs are known. Their first excavations date to the period of the Japanese occupation, during World War II. The People's Republic of China attached great importance to their protection, study and conservation.

Management regime

Legal provision:

All nominated sites are legally protected and declared as national key cultural relics. The dossier specifies number of laws and regulations to protect cultural heritage, including the state constitution. The tombs are protected as a whole, but individual groups have their specific legislation and management.

Management structure:

Special management units and agencies were created to protect and manage the different components of the

nomination. Management plans and Master Plans exist for the cities and tombs.

Resources:

Page 34 of the nomination file brings a list which shows the costs and protection/conservation projects, by years since 1961. The funds are from state, province and town budgets.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The Koguryo kingdom was one of the most important, wealthy, influential and long living in this part of the world. As such, its most characteristic and important cultural heritage should be considered as one of the region's most important cultural property. The cities represent three different examples of town planning of the period-region-culture. The tombs, in addition to being a representative group of typical Koguryo burials, represent special building and engineering skills and depicting daily life scenes.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An evaluation mission took place between 2 and 8 September 2003.

Conservation

State of conservation:

The ICOMOS expert describes the site as being in good state of conservation. In his words, most sites and their elements are "relatively well preserved".

Management:

The management system is described as efficient and effective. The plans attached to the dossier are impressive and it seems that all components of the nomination have short and long term plans including maintenance and monitoring. The sites are well protected by legislation and have quite substantial buffer zones.

Risk analysis:

It seems that main development pressure risks existed in the Ji'an city, being a modern settlement within the historic city. The new plans forbid any new construction in the area and predict moving new structures out of the heritage area within five to ten years. Flood risks exist specially for some tombs. Anti flood teams and special measures are responsible for prevention and immediate response in risk periods. Ji'an is in earthquake active region.

Authenticity and integrity

The sites are as authentic as archaeological sites can be. The cities are only partly excavated and the visible remains preserved and protected without affecting their authenticity. The tombs are authentic, with no modern or late additions (except for small and modest entrances and monitoring systems).

Comparative evaluation

Two of the cities are the first capitals of the Koguryo kingdom and therefore without comparison. One of them is a mountain city and the other built in flat area.

The tombs are a selection out of 7000. Their only comparison is in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Most of those belong to later period of the Koguryo, thus complimenting each other.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

Representing an important culture of a large and important region of the world, these properties are of outstanding universal value.

Evaluation of criteria:

Criterion ii: For the cities being an early example of mountain cities, later "copied" by neighbouring cultures. For the important stele and a long inscription in one of the tombs, showing the impact of Chinese culture on the Koguryo (who did not develop their own writing). The paintings in the tombs, while showing artistic skills and specific style, are also an example for strong impact from other cultures.

Criterion iii: These cultural properties are no doubt the very special remains and evidence of the extinct Koguryo civilization (in the 7th century AD).

Criterion iv: For the capital cities, affecting the idea of building capitals by the Koguryo. For the evolution of tomb construction and styles.

Criterion v: For the perfect use and blending of the capital cities with nature – whether with the rocks or with forests and rivers.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

Encouraging PR of China and DPR Korea to join their Koguryan sites nomination – whenever both State Parties will see it suitable.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

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

Criterion i: The tombs representing a masterpiece of the human creative genius in their wall paintings and structures.

And *criteria ii, iii, iv and v* as explained in the relevant previous paragraph.

ICOMOS, March 2004