

Dolmen sites (Korea)

No 977

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Koch'ang, Hwasun, and Kanghwa Dolmen Sites
<i>Location</i>	Koch'ang-gun County, Chollabuk-do Province; Hwasun-gun County, Chollanam-do Province; Kangwha-gun County, Inch'on Province
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Korea
<i>Date</i>	28 June 1999

Justification by State Party

Dolmens are megalithic funerary monuments, which are numerous in Asia, Europe, and North Africa. Korea has the greatest number of any country. These are of great archaeological value for the information that they provide about the prehistoric peoples who built them and their social and political systems, beliefs and rituals, arts and ceremonies, etc.

The Koch'ang, Hwasun, and Kanghwa sites contain the highest density and greatest variety of dolmens in Korea, and indeed of any country. They also preserve important evidence of how the stones were quarried, transported, and raised and of how dolmen types changed over time in north-east Asia.

Criterion iii

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 group of *monuments*. It may also be considered to be a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

Dolmens are manifestations of the "Megalithic" culture that figured prominently in Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures across the world during the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE. This use of large stones resulted from the emergence of new technologies and led to the creation of stone alignments and ritual circles such as Stonehenge and the Orkney monuments in the United Kingdom, the chambered tombs of Brugh na

Bóinne in Ireland, and the stone circles and tombs of West Africa.

They are a notable feature of the prehistory of East Asia during the 1st millennium BCE. They are to be found in western China (Tibet, Sichuan, Gansu) and the coastal areas of the Yellow Sea basin (the Shandong peninsula, north-western Kyushu).

Dolmens appear to have arrived in the Korean peninsula with the Bronze Age. The Chungnim-ri group in Koch'ang are considered on the basis of archaeological data to date from around the 7th century BCE. Dolmen construction ceased here in the 3rd century BCE. The Hwasun dolmens are a little later, from the 6th-5th centuries BCE. There are insufficient data to permit dating of the Kanghwa group, but they are thought to be earlier rather than later.

Description

Dolmens usually consist of two or more undressed stone slabs supporting a huge capstone. It is generally accepted that they were simple burial chambers, erected over the bodies or bones of Neolithic and Bronze Age worthies. Earth mounds (barrows) would have covered them, but these would gradually disappear as a result of weathering and animal action. However, it is also possible that they were platforms on which corpses were exposed to permit the process of excarnation to take place, leaving bones for burial in collective or family tombs.

Dolmens are usually to be found in cemeteries on elevated sites. This would permit them to be seen from the settlements of the people who built them, which were usually on lower-lying ground.

In East Asia two main groups have been recognized, classified according to their form: the table type (the "northern" type) and the go-board type (the "southern" type). The first is an above-ground construction: four stone slabs are set up on edge to form a box or cist and a large capstone is laid on top. In the second case, the burial chamber is constructed below ground, with walls of slabs or piled stones; the capstone is supported on a number of stones laid on the ground. The so-called "capstone" type is a variant of the go-board type in which the capstone is laid directly on the buried slabs.

- Koch'ang Dolmen Site (8.38ha)

The Chungnim-ri dolmens, the largest and most diversified group, centre on the village of Maesan. Most of them are located at altitudes of 15-50m along the southern foot of the hills running east-west.

The capstones of the dolmens here are 1-5.8m in length and can weigh 10-300t. A total of 442 dolmens has been recorded, of various types, based on the shape of the capstone.

- Hwasun Dolmen Site (31ha)

Like those in the Koch'ang group, the Hwasun dolmens are located on the slopes of low ranges of hills, along the Chisokkang river. Individual dolmens in this area are less intact than those in Koch'ang. The Hyosan-ri group is estimated to comprise 158 monuments and the Taeshin-ri group 129. In a number of cases the stone outcrops from which the stones making up the dolmens were quarried can be identified.

- Kanghwa Dolmen Sites (12.27ha)

These sites are on the offshore island of Kangwha, once again on mountain slopes. They tend to be higher than those in the other sites and stylistically early, notably those at Pugun-ri and Koch'on-ri.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The three sites are designated Historic Sites or Local Monuments under the provisions of the Protection of Cultural Properties. Together with their buffer zones they are further designated Cultural Property Protection Zones under the same law. As a result, any form of development or intervention requires authorization and the carrying out of an Environmental Impact Assessment. Any repair work must be carried out by licensed specialists. The sites must be open to the general public.

The sites are also designated Natural Environment Preservation Zones under the National Land Use Management Law and similar constraints apply.

Management

All the properties belong to the Government of the Republic of Korea.

Overall responsibility for the preparation and implementation of protection and conservation policies at national level rests with the Cultural Properties Administration. The National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, an agency of the Cultural Properties Administration, carries out academic research, field survey, and excavation (in association with university museums).

Day-to-day preservation and management is the responsibility of the relevant local administrations (respectively Chollabuk-do Province, Koch'ang-gun County; Chollanam-do Province, Hwasun-gun County; and Incheon Metropolitan City).

Funding for repair work is provided by the central government under the terms of the Protection of Cultural Properties Act. Other sources of funding are the revenues from admission fees to the sites and private donations. Anticipated visitor figures are 350,000 (Koch'ang), 300,000 (Hwasun), and 280,000 (Kanghwa).

Management plans have been drawn up in respect of the three properties. Their primary objective is preservation of the original character of the dolmen sites and their immediate environments. The plans cover scientific research (survey, inventory, selected excavation, palaeo-environmental studies), protection of the environment (selective clearance of vegetational cover, routing of visitors so as to cause minimal impact on the natural environment, purchase of neighbouring farmland to prevent incursions, etc), systematic monitoring, and presentational aspects (signage, access roads and parking, interpretation facilities, increasing public awareness and participation of local communities, organization of festivals and other events on-site).

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Awareness of the cultural significance of these dolmen groups is comparatively recent. The first excavations did not take place until 1965, at Koch'ang, when ground survey was first undertaken. This was followed by an intensive programme of survey and inventory in 1983 and 1990. Further excavations took place in 1992, as part of several research programmes in the 1990s, which also covered means of conservation and land-use.

The Hwasun group was not discovered until 1996. Since they are located in a forest reserve, their state of conservation was good. The Academy of Korean Studies surveyed the Kanghwa group in 1992.

Authenticity

As is the case of the majority of prehistoric sites, the authenticity of the dolmens making up this nomination is high. Most of the monuments have been untouched since they were built in antiquity, their present condition being the result of natural processes of decay. In a few cases they have been dismantled to some extent by farmers, but the stones survive intact and their location and original form can be identified without difficulty.

Plans are being discussed for the re-erection of certain collapsed or dispersed dolmens. This work will be based on meticulous scientific research in order to establish their original configuration and location.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the properties in February 2000. Experts nominated by ICOMOS also participated in a consultative meeting on the protection of dolmens held in the Republic of Korea in April 1999 and their reports were made available for this evaluation.

Qualities

The Korean dolmens constitute what is probably the largest and is certainly the most representative assemblage of these exceptional examples of prehistoric culture in East Asia.

Comparative analysis

There are comparable dolmen cemeteries elsewhere in east Asia, notably in China and Japan. However, the types represented is more restricted in both cases. The Korean groups contain a greater diversity of types, and are also larger than any others in the region.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

It is observed in the photographs supplied that at Hwasun (which is in a forest reserve) the dolmens appear to be surrounded by young trees. In view of the considerable damage that tree roots cause to archaeological sites as they approach maturity, trees should be cleared from the immediate vicinity of all dolmens.

Brief description

The prehistoric cemeteries at Koch'ang, Hwasun, and Kangwha contain many hundreds of examples of dolmens, tombs from the 1st millennium BCE constructed of large stone slabs. They form part of the Megalithic culture, to be found in many parts of the world, but nowhere in such a concentrated form.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iii*:

Criterion iii The global prehistoric technological and social phenomenon that resulted in the appearance in the 2nd and 3rd millennia BCE of funerary and ritual monuments constructed of large stones (the "Megalithic Culture") is nowhere more vividly illustrated than in the dolmen cemeteries of Koch'ang, Hwasun, and Kangwha.

ICOMOS, September 2000