South Korean Heritage Diplomacy
Sharing Expertise on Conservation with the World

Codruța Sîntionean
Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Abstract　This paper investigates the dynamic involvement of the South Korean government in international efforts to regulate the preservation and conservation of heritage, using as primary sources heritage declarations and recommendations that are placed under the aegis of the UNESCO. The paper argues that the guideline texts that have emerged from South Korea represent a form of soft diplomacy that reflects the country's ability to voice its own concerns regarding heritage on the international scene, to participate in the global conversation on heritage by drafting recommendations that derive from South Korean conservation practices and interests.

Keywords　UNESCO. Soft diplomacy. Soft power. Heritage preservation. Heritage conservation.

Summary　1 Introduction. – 2 The UNESCO Brand. – 3 Asian Efforts to Redefine Conservation Practice. – 4 South Korean Heritage Diplomacy. – 5 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

In 1995, the Republic of Korea celebrated its first successful nominations of national heritage to the prestigious World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Since then, South Korea has actively pursued the international promotion of its cultural and natural properties, and the most effective instrument for doing so has been the use of the widely recognized international brands UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites, the advisory body of UNESCO). Moreover, in the last decade and a half, South Korea has moved beyond the mere position of passive beneficiary of the UNESCO brand and has taken up the role of active legislator in the international arena of heritage management. The present paper investigates the dynamic involvement of the South Korean government in international efforts to regulate the preservation and conservation of heritage. This engagement has materialized in the organization of UNESCO international forums and conventions on heritage in South Korea. Notably, these international events have resulted in the appearance of globally recognized declarations and recommendations that reference the name of South Korea (e.g. several "Seoul Declarations") and are placed under the aegis of UNESCO or ICOMOS.

This chapter argues that the UNESCO and ICOMOS guideline texts that have emerged from South Korea represent a form of soft diplomacy that ultimately reflects not only the economic and political power of South Korea, but also its ability to voice its concerns regarding heritage on the international scene, to participate in the global conversation on heritage by drafting recommendations that derive from South Korean conservation practices and interests.

The chapter analyzes the content of the declarations and recommendations stemming from South Korea, framing them within an international (Asian) context. To illustrate the local experience and professional expertise upon which these texts have been drawn, the chapter proposes a particular mode of analysis, pairing the declarations with heritage management practices already established in South Korea.

2   The UNESCO Brand

South Korea is not alone in seeking international recognition for its cultural and natural heritage, as many countries mobilise tremendous economic and diplomatic resources to advance culturally and historically rich profiles. One influential instrument for validating cultural accomplishment is the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, originally conceived as a program focused on the protection and conservation of sites of outstanding universal value. The at-

tention given to heritage sites receiving UNESCO recognition has transformed the World Heritage Site designation from a professional label for conservation into a brand that impacts tourists' choices and modes of consumption (Ryan, Silvanto 2009). The success of this brand is reflected in its enhancing impact on visitor numbers, revenues from tourists, and tourism-related industries (Kim 2016). Perhaps because of the economic implications, Adie (2017) goes as far as to propose that "World Heritage" is a brand franchized by UNESCO to the State Parties, bound together contractually by adhering to the World Heritage Convention; since the agenda of many countries is motivated by political and economic factors, their relationship with UNESCO resembles a business model.

Since 1995, South Korea has rapidly learned how to make successful use of the UNESCO brand for legitimation, endorsement and international visibility. As of June 2022, it has fifteen properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, and an additional twelve on the Tentative List, from which the South Korean government chooses how to prioritize its yearly applications. In recent years, the central administration of South Korea has encouraged local governments to prepare their own nominations for UNESCO in order to boost local tourism. So at any given moment, competing application files await their turn to go through multiple evaluation stages (first at the national stage, then at UNESCO) to acquire the coveted World Heritage Site status.

Besides using UNESCO as an instrument for branding its cultural and natural heritage, South Korea has undertaken an active role in cultural diplomacy, lobbying for its own cultural and political interests. An influential role in this arena means that State Parties succeed in promoting their goals, sometimes nationalist agendas unrelated to conservation, leading to the politicization of heritage (Logan 2012). One case in point is South Korea's prominent role in pressuring Japan to include in the interpretation of the "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution" an adequate explanation about the use of Korean forced labour at these sites in the 1940s. Initially, South Korea opposed this nomination vehemently, invoking the questionable need to memorialize and perhaps sanitize the dark history of these sites. It was only after a series of tense bilateral (Korea-Japan) negotiations during the 2015 meeting session of the World Heritage Committee that the sites received World Heritage status (Takazane 2015). Although the final decision resided with the Committee, South Korea's ability to influence it reflects the government's understanding of heritage as an instrument of soft power and a medium for conveying firm political messages. Another example of cultural diplomacy is a recent Korean inscription on the UNESCO's "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". At the end of November 2018, South Korea and North Korea made the first-ever joint inscription of an item in UNESCO (Korean wrestling,

ssirŭm). The South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that it was the result of President Moon Jae-in's efforts to alter the original nomination, which was done on behalf of South Korea only. Until now, the two countries have made separate inscriptions of the same Korean traditions, as if to affirm that there are distinct South and North traditions of Arirang singing and *kimchi* making. But in the case of *ssirŭm*, the South Korean government has taken advantage of the visibility of the UNESCO brand and made a point about recent advancements in South and North Korean relations.

Other forms of diplomacy pursued by South Korea are perhaps more subtle. The government has invested technical expertise, economic resources, and political influence to organize conferences and meetings under the patronage of the UNESCO and ICOMOS, resulting in the drafting of internationally-recognized declarations and recommendations. These are manifestations of heritage diplomacy as defined by Tim Winter, who dissociates heritage diplomacy, focused on "bi- and multi-directional cultural flows and exchanges", from all-encompassing, "expansive" cultural diplomacy, set to export or project various cultural forms to the outer world (Winter 2015, 1007). The notion of exchange inherent in heritage diplomacy is of key importance for the present chapter, as is the concept of exporting expertise (James 2016) when actively participating in the international governance community which regulates heritage.

3 Asian Efforts to Redefine Conservation Practice

South Korean efforts to voice its own advice on heritage management can only be understood within a wider (East-)Asian framework. In 1994, Japan organized a conference in Nara that resulted in the highly influential *Nara Document on Authenticity* (ICOMOS 1994), that challenged for the first time the idea that the fundamental charters of the UNESCO (all emerging from Europe, such as the 1931 Athens Charter and the 1964 Venice Charter)[1] are universally applicable in all cultural contexts and that UNESCO evaluation criteria can be based on absolute values. The centrality of materiality (i.e. original form and fabric) in the Western-born conservation practice and theory originally emerged from the Romantic taste for ruins of the fathers of conservation theory. Gradually, best acceptable practice was narrowly defined as minimum intervention in the restoration of

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1 Even the list of signatories of the Venice Charter is a reflection of the Eurocentrism inherent in the field of heritage conservation. The authors of this influential document are predominantly from Europe (17 endorsers), with only two representing Latin America and one from Africa, but none from Asia. See ICOMOS (1964).

architectural heritage, preservation of original form and fabric, reversibility of repair work. In the twentieth century, this focus on material fabric was reinforced by the adoption of scientific methods in conservation practice, particularly the application of chemistry and physics principles, while

> non-scientific approaches were disregarded as obsolete at best, or as a product of ignorance in many other cases. (Muñoz Viñas 2005, 70)

At the Nara conference, Japanese professionals initiated a conversation that shifted the focus on values other than materiality: the importance of the cultural and local context, community values, and vernacular traditions, which might have a completely different understanding of preserving the material fabric of monuments, than the Western world. The *Nara Document* is now one of the most widely cited documents in the field of heritage conservation, because it places due focus on local cultural contexts and nuances the definition of heritage authenticity by considering aspects such as

> form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling. (ICOMOS 1994, 47)

Although the *Nara Document* was drafted after considering a wide variety of conservation practices from East and South Asia, it is still the Japanese practices that get mentioned most often when trying to explain the document. In particular, conservators pay attention to the centuries-old Japanese practice of ritually dismantling the main building of the Ise Shrine every twenty years, and rebuilding a complete replica using new timber,

> in regular rhythm to symbolise the eternal regeneration of the spirit and the continuity of the nation's life. (Bock 1974, 55)

Similar traditions are pervasive in Asia, particularly in areas with a rich tradition of sacred wooden architecture, which require frequent repair and replacement of old, decayed materials, often in ritual participation of religious communities. There, material change and renewal are integrated in conservation practices, either as an adaptation to the effects of climate on wooden architecture, or as a reflection of religious traditions (particularly Buddhism, Shintō) and the philosophy of impermanence. For instance, in Thai Buddhism, believers routinely rebuild and enlarge stupas, integrating the original fabric and structure, to ritually increase or revive the sacred efficacy of the stupa (Byrne 1995). Tim Winter notes that, in Asia, "the organic decay of material (wood/thatch) has been linked to philosophical traditions of

impermanence, renewal and rebirth to assert fundamental cultural differences", generating "a discourse of difference" that posits Asia as culturally and materially different from the West (Winter 2012, 123).

The merit of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* is that it gave momentum to a conversation questioning the validity of universalist claims of conservation principles originating in Europe. The document represented a first stage in acknowledging the plurality of sources of knowledge about conservation, the coexistence of multiple discourses which richly complement each other. This approach responded to fears that limiting principles lead to standardization and cultural uniformity (Taylor 2004, 420) and challenged the Western focus on materiality and monumentality. The very notion of 'monumental' had been constructed on the features of Western cathedrals and palaces, and did not apply to aboriginal sites in Australia or modest religious buildings from Asia and elsewhere. But these were, nevertheless, monumental in their own right, their monumentality bound to a cultural context and rooted in the respect for nature and rich spiritual traditions, as critics of the Venice Charter have often argued (Wei, Aass 1989; Chung, Kim 2010). In India and other parts of Asia, colonial power relations were responsible for imposing Western definitions and practices related to heritage, risking to "negate indigenous practices" (Krishna Menon 1994, 42) and supersede them. This claimed universality has been challenged since the Nara conference by complementing technically-oriented conservation with indigenous techniques, recognized as intangible heritage in danger of being lost and forgotten. That is why, to some extent, the Asian movement to enlarge the notion of acceptable best practice of conservation has been a response to these colonial forces and an attempt at decolonization.

Following the Nara conference, the ensuing proliferation of charters, conventions, declarations, and recommendations stemming from Asia was in itself a reflection of how the notion of heritage is expanding, to incorporate local specificities from all over the globe. Perceived as peripheral in relation to the Western world, various Asian countries started to voice their own concerns about heritage conservation, in an attempt to get closer to the so-called centre proclaimed to be the authoritative source of relevant knowledge about heritage. In 2005, UNESCO adopted the *Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia*, a series of guidelines clarifying the ambiguities of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* and giving recognition to the indigenous and minority cultures incorporated in modern Asian states (UNESCO Bangkok 2009, 17). It voiced the particular concerns of Asian countries, including a culturally-sensitive definition of authenticity:

> Authenticity, the defining characteristic of heritage, is a culturally relative attribute to be found in continuity, but not necessarily in the continuity of material only. (18)

Other examples of regulatory documents, stemming from China, include: *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (2000); the Shanghai Charter on museums and intangible heritage (2002); the *Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas* (2005). At the same time, Japan has continued to formulate its own perspective on heritage management, through documents such as: the *Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2004); the *Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage* (2004); the *Himeji Recommendations* (2012). Taken individually, most of these have had little impact on the international regulation, because they are often very broad formulations. They have more of a cumulative effect: together, they voice their resistance to eurocentric practices, and demand respect for cultural diversity and local specificity. At the same time, by promoting their own agenda, these countries have managed to garner visibility and prestige on the global stage.

4   South Korean Heritage Diplomacy

In the two decades following the formulation of the *Nara Document*, South Korea has joined the conversation, organized international forums that eventually resulted in documents that reference these countries (see **table 1**). Although these documents have proved much less influential than the *Nara Document*, they have nevertheless continued to proliferate. It is my contention that South Korea has tried to actively participate in the conversation open by the Japanese case, and has issued international declarations which promote its own heritage agenda and try to influence international conservation practices. Declarations and recommendations emerging from Korea are clearly an attempt to integrate the specificities of Korean culture and traditions into a larger, international frame, and to formulate international guidelines based on (or considering) the Korean reality. Projecting the image of a strong country, influential enough to organize international forums labelled with the UNESCO or the ICOMOS brands, is just one aspect of the phenomenon, perhaps not even the most important one. More significantly, South Korea aims to project the image of a culturally rich country, whose cultural practices and traditions have enough global relevance to stand at the basis of international guidelines for best practices.

The involvement of governmental institutions in the organization of conferences and forums, and in the drafting of declarations, reflects the high stakes at play in voicing the Korean experience of cultural heritage to the world. Most recommendations and declarations are drafted by ICOMOS-Korea, with the support of governmental or-

ganizations (the Cultural Heritage Administration, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea), while others are formulated and promoted by professional organizations (for instance, the *mAAN Seoul Declaration 2011 on Industrial Heritage in Asia*, drafted by the modern Asian Architectural Network, with the support of the Korean government). These institutions bear the responsibility to create a local framework of heritage management adapted for Korean culture and naturally emerging from Korean traditions. But they also assume the diplomatic role of conveying local experiences to an international audience, and promote them through international declarations, by claiming universal relevance.

Table 1 List of declarations and recommendations originating from South Korea

Title of declaration/ recommendations	Year	Korean institutions involved in the drafting of documents	Conference associated with it	Main issues
The Jongmyo Declaration on the Protection and Use of World Heritage	2004	The Cultural Heritage Administration	*Segyeyusan kwalli mit hongbo wŏk'ŭsyop*, "World Heritage Management and Promotion Workshop" (Seoul, March 22-23, 2004)	• World Heritage as tourism resources • The promotion of smaller cities with tourism resources as "slow cities" (i.e. Suwŏn, areas in Koch'ang-gun)
The Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Areas	2005	ICOMOS-Korea	"Managing Tourism in Historic Towns and Areas in Asia", ICOMOS Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting (Seoul, May 30-June 1, 2005)	• The impact of tourism on the historic towns and areas of Asia • "Establishing a balance between tourism and conservation" • Diplomatic agenda: *The Seoul Declaration* was to be presented to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Xi'an, China, in October 2005
Andong Recommendations	2006	ICOMOS-Korea, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Cultural Heritage Administration, Andong City and the City of Kyŏngju	"Impact of Mass Tourism on Historic Villages: Identifying Key Indicators of Tourism Impact", ICOMOS Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting and ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee Workshop (Seoul and Andong, June 10-13, 2006)	• "Sustainable conservation of historic and traditional villages as living places" • Recommendations based on the experiences of the Yangdong and Hahoe villages

Title of declaration/ recommendations	Year	Korean institutions involved in the drafting of documents	Conference associated with it	Main issues
ICOMOS Declaration on Heritage and Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific	2007	ICOMOS-Korea, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Cultural Heritage Administration, and the Seoul Metropolitan Government	"Heritage and Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific", ICOMOS Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting (Seoul, May 29-June 1, 2007)	• Challenges of heritage conservation in large cities • Conserving the integrity of historic urban landscapes (HUL)
Declaration of the International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property (*Seoul Declaration*)	2011	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, and Korean National Commission for UNESCO	"International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property: Strategies to Build the International Network for the Return of Cultural Property" (Seoul, July 19, 2011)	• Acknowledges "the value of non-governmental and civil organizations' networks in deepening cooperation and raising awareness of return of cultural property" • Recommends the continual "use the relevant legal frameworks and multilateral cooperation tools more actively"
mAAN Seoul Declaration 2011 on Industrial Heritage in Asia	2011	mAAN International and mAAN Korea (modern Asian Architectural Network), in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea, Seoul Museum of History, ICOMOS-Korea, ICOMOS Shared Built Heritage Commission, and TICCIH (International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage)	"Our Living Heritage: Industrial Buildings and Sites of Asia" (Seoul, August 25-27, 2011)	• "Expand our understanding of industrial heritage in Asia to include traditional industries that remain living and vital to our culture and not restrict it solely to heritage associated with development paradigms rooted in the industrial revolution in the west"

One such case is *The Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Areas*, which proposes several strategies addressing the impact of tourism (i.e. gentrification, commodification of local properties, values, and traditions for tourism consumption) "on the fabric and identity of many historic towns and areas of Asia" (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2005). The declaration was strategically issued in advance of the ICOMOS General Assembly, to be held later that year in Xi'an, China; hence the text explicitly states the hope that it will become relevant beyond the regional boundaries of Asia, calling

for the declaration to be presented to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Xi'an, China in October 2005 so that its recommendations can be shared with the wider network of ICOMOS committees and partners, and that it can help encourage cooperation between National and International Committees on this universal subject of tourism and historic towns and areas. (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2005)

According to the declaration, the intensification of tourism in Asian historic towns has coincided with the emergence of experiential tourism, through which visitors seek to get a more authentic sense of the place and immerse both physically and spiritually in the local culture. In response, the declaration emphasizes the "need to maintain the authenticity of heritage places" and "ensure the introduction of respectful and authentic cultural tourism to heritage sites" (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2005). However, the mention of authenticity adds nothing new to the international guidelines for the preservation of cultural heritage, as authenticity has long been a working concept in the identification and protection of heritage. Although the text of the declaration identifies authenticity as an "issue" to be concerned about, there is no further mention in the "Strategies and Approach" section. Therefore, the declaration fails to illustrate concrete strategies for safeguarding the authenticity of material fabric, intangible values and traditions associated with heritage sites. The most meaningful of the strategies is the suggestion to involve the local communities and all ranges of stakeholders in the planning of effective tourism management, because they need to be educated on the importance and impact of tourism, and also constantly consulted. South Korea itself offers a prominent example of good practice in this direction: in the years following *The Seoul Declaration*, the Seoul Metropolitan Government set to restore and partially reconstruct the Seoul City Wall, aiming to get the historic centre of Seoul listed as a UNESCO site. Although the fortress walls of the old capital functioned as a means of exclusion and marginalization of certain social groups during Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) (because they had to live outside the inner capital), the Seoul Metropolitan Government artificially reinvented the wall as a symbol of community life and social inclusion. In order to strengthen the authenticity claims, the Seoul Metropolitan Government promoted the lifestyle of a few residential communities situated along the wall as intangible heritage (although without a formal designation in the national registry). This ostensibly showed that the wall was not simply a lifeless monument devoid of meaning for the people, but had been actively integrated in their lives (Sîntionean 2017).

The *ICOMOS Declaration on Heritage and Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific* addresses the difficulty of protecting heritage in dense

metropolitan areas, and broadly formulates recommendations for developing adequate policies. The declaration is noteworthy for its concerned tone, signalling the impact of intense urban development on cultural heritage and its surrounding areas. In particular, the text of the declaration highlights the dangers of "major public and corporate investments in real estate densification" and the negative impact of metropolitan expansion, such as

> deep social, economic and physical transformation and pressures of an unprecedented scale and nature on communities and the heritage. (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2008, 5)

Unlike other declarations which tend to be very broadly formulated and conventional in expression, this text is remarkably specific in pinpointing the risks of "land speculation, loss of traditional knowledge, corruption", possibly "leading to the large scale loss or alteration of significant structures, sites and areas" (5). Although these risks can occur in all metropolitan areas around the globe, the declaration focuses on the particular context of Asia and the Pacific area, where "rapid growth" and "new urbanization and infrastructures" (5) are more likely to endanger heritage. Likewise, the recommendations and principles formulated in this declaration have global relevance, due to their broad and rather vague language. For instance, the text urges metropolitan authorities to recognize cultural heritage as a non-renewable asset, which is already a widely accepted notion among practitioners and scholars of heritage. Other common-sense recommendations include planning programmes that integrate the protection of heritage, along with adequate legislation for safeguarding both heritage sites and their settings and surroundings. The suggestion to develop protection tools based on "recognized best practice and local conditions and traditions" (6) adds nothing new to the language and content of previous international charters.

The remarkable element of the 2007 ICOMOS declaration adopted in South Korea is that it discloses to benefit

> from the particular experience of Seoul and the ongoing efforts of the Korean and metropolitan authorities to protect and conserve cultural heritage sites and their surroundings, including sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and traditional neighbourhoods, as well as the successful achievements of major urban revitalisation projects like the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn. (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2008, 5)

The mention of the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn reconstruction project in the context of heritage conservation is particularly problematic. Unfold-

ed from July 2003 to September 2005 in Seoul, the project replaced an aging, increasingly unsafe highway with an artificial stream. It aimed to restore the old Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn stream (gradually buried in concrete from the end of the 1950s), together with the cultural and historical heritage alongside it, improve traffic flow, and create a natural ecosystem in the heart of Seoul. In 2007, when the *ICOMOS Declaration on Heritage and Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific* was drafted, the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn reconstruction project was hailed by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the general public as a successful case of urban regeneration and environmental improvement, a landmark attracting tourists. The public and political support the project enjoyed explains its mentioning in the *ICOMOS Declaration*. However, critics of the project (Cho 2010; Kim 2020) have since pinpointed the lack of historical and ecological authenticity of the reconstructed stream, misconstrued as a *pogwŏn* 'restoration' of the original watercourse. Given the high political stakes of the project[2] and the speed of project execution (27 months), the authentic restoration of historic sites along the stream was readily sacrificed. The compromises made in the reconstruction of historic bridges are most indicative in this respect: Ogansu Bridge was reconstructed parallel to the watercourse, not surpassing it; Kwanggyo Bridge could not be reconstructed in its confirmed original location, now occupied by a large traffic intersection, and was moved upstream; and the original Sup'yo Bridge remained in Changch'ungdan Park, where it was relocated in 1958, because the width of the new stream exceeded the length of the bridge; instead, the Seoul Metropolitan Government opted for a replica of Sup'yo Bridge. Moreover, the water was pumped from the Han River, causing the project to lack ecological authenticity and instead present only a deceptive spectacle of nature, "inconducive as a habitat of biological species" (Cho 2010, 161). Considering these authenticity issues, which became apparent even in the planning stage, it is puzzling that the *ICOMOS Declaration on Heritage and Metropolis in Asia and the Pacific* mentions the revitalization of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn in the context of heritage protection from excessive development. The *Andong Recommendations* are based on the expertise gained from preserving Yangdong and Hahoe, two historic and traditional villages organically integrating the local residents' lifestyles and traditions. The reality of preserving these historic villages has revealed that tensions easily arise when preservation measures undertaken by the authorities impinge on the res-

2 The reconstruction of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn was the focal point of Lee Myung-bak's (Yi Myŏng-Bak) election campaign for the role of Mayor of Seoul, a position he occupied from 2002 to 2006. He then capitalized on the public success of the revitalization project, and won the presidential election in 2007.

idents' aspirations to alter their traditional houses, designated as cultural treasures. In Andong, the epitome of Confucian tradition and the area where the Hahoe Folk Village is situated, the locals have argued for improved quality of life and petitioned the Cultural Heritage Administration to modify the house interiors by installing modern facilities such as Western-style toilets and kitchens (Moon 2011, 95). In Yangdong, when the owners of thatched-roofed houses wanted to extend their interiors and change the function of the auxiliary facilities, they entered a conflict with the authorities over what constitutes the architectural *wŏnhyŏng* 'original form' that has to be preserved and protected, since most houses have continually changed over time (Kim, Kang 2013). These conflicts indicate that the desire for sustainable living in traditional houses fundamentally collides with the authorities' understanding of preservation principles and their insistence on maintaining the integrity of material fabric. Although not naming these challenges, the *Andong Recommendations* reflect the experience of actively negotiating with the locals and propose a residents-participatory model for the making of conservation and management policies. The text formulates concrete recommendations for each category of stakeholders involved in the conservation of traditional villages: the people living in Yangdong and Hahoe, the local authorities of nearby Kyŏngju and Andong cities, national authorities, members of the tourism industry, and international organizations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS. Directly addressing each of these participants to the conservation process, the guidelines offer significantly more constructive and specific advice than the other declarations analyzed here. A recurring point is the authors' insistence that each stakeholder properly communicate its evaluations, planning, and management to the other parties involved. Some guidelines are particularly pragmatic in character; for instance, tour operators are advised

> that congestion pressure in the villages be minimised by establishing adequate coordination of visits by the local tourism office and the tour operators. (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2006)

The presence of the locals living in their ancestral homes (as opposed to a village museum) has raised great concern for sustainable tourism and for ways to diminish the impact of tourism on the quality of life of residential communities. The text of the *Andong Recommendations* suggests, for instance, tourism marketing targeted to audiences interested in culture, instead of mass tourism, and appropriate scheduling of large tourist groups. Moreover, regional and national authorities are advised to incorporate the expertise and traditional skills of the residents in the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage (ICOMOS National Committee of Korea 2006).

In 2006, when the recommendations were drafted, the two villages were still nominated on the UNESCO Tentative List, aspiring to receive World Heritage Site status. Even before receiving this recognition in 2010, the villages were struggling to cope with large number of tourists, and the UNESCO designation only aggravated tourism impact. The inhabitants of the Hahoe Folk Village, for instance, reported that the World Heritage Site status had only a mild beneficial impact on the village, while increasing invasion of privacy, litter, traffic congestion, overcrowding, and noise pollution affected the quality of their lives (Kim 2016, 7). Research has shown that even the ideal participatory model did not generate the expected results, since the bureaucrats from the cultural sector, heritage professionals, and the residents could not reach a consensus over what represents the best conservation approach for all the stakeholders (Kang, Park 2011). Therefore, the *Andong Recommendations* proposed a standard model of sustainable practice for historic and traditional villages around the world, but the realities of conservation practice have proved to be much more challenging. It is possible that the Korean authorities promoted the *Andong Recommendations* with a purely diplomatic agenda, in order to make the two villages more visible internationally, while they were undergoing the screening for the UNESCO inscription. At the very least, the Korean government disseminated knowledge and expertise arising from the Korean experience of dealing with traditional built heritage.

Another prominent aspect reflected in the forums organized by South Korean institutions is that their declarations and recommendations revolve around the individual concerns of South Korea. While the promotion of the historic centre of Seoul was one such concern, the repatriation of lost cultural properties is another notable example. The issue has long been an object of dispute with Japan, given that many cultural properties have reached private and public art collections in Japan during the colonial period (1910-45). The 2011 International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property (resulting in another *Seoul Declaration*) illustrated the ability of the South Korean government to organize an international debate on a topic that is intensely discussed in Korean society and media. This notable ability to channel the international conversation towards topics of particular local interest is interpreted here as an efficient form of soft power and soft diplomacy that generates positive results in international relations. However, the resulting *Declaration of the International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property* (*Seoul Declaration*) does not contribute significantly to the existing legislation and principles for the return of stolen or illegally exported cultural artefacts. As most texts analyzed in this paper, the language of the declaration is very generic and the proposed guidelines add nothing substantial to the international charters. For instance, the 2011 declaration stresses that

bilateral and multilateral international cooperation for the return of cultural property constitutes a crucial means to restore a people's identity and enhance mutual understanding and respect. (International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property 2011)

The 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* has already recognized the principle of international cooperation as "one of the most efficient means of protecting each country's cultural property" against the dangers of illicit appropriation of heritage (UNESCO 1970). Furthermore, the *Seoul Declaration* formulates a series of recommendations for good practice: the continuous use of databases of stolen cultural properties, the creation and support of institutions and networks that cooperate for the return of heritage, and the active use of existing legal frameworks. Apart from the broad scope of these propositions, their impact is limited by the fact that none of them are legally binding: the declaration represents a mere set of recommendations. In my view, their value resides in their ability to convey the South Korean cultural and political standpoint within the international debates and practices on the repatriation of cultural property.

5 Conclusion

A multitude of such declarations regarding various aspects of cultural or natural heritage conservation have proliferated in Asia since the 1994 Nara conference. However, critics of these charters, declarations and recommendations have voiced concerns about their inefficiency, lack of clarity, broad character, and repetitive content, sometimes duplicating existing charters. Ken Taylor (2004, 430) has criticized even the *Nara Document* for "its generalised nature" and for "being non-specific". Tim Winter (2012, 2) has expressed concern that claims of "Asian approaches" to heritage

> risk creating a policy arena that bifurcates the east and west via essentialist constructions of "culture" in and across regions.

Given the proliferation of charters, Luxen (2014, 464) has questioned their credibility and also their coherence: being so broadly formulated, they leave room for diverging interpretations, causing confusion.

Likewise, the declarations and recommendations emerging from South Korea have brought little novelty to international discussions about heritage conservation. These documents mostly replicate principles already formulated in previous charters and conventions, and share their generalized language on the importance of heritage con-

servation, communication between stakeholders, and international cooperation. The broadly formulated principles are somehow to be expected: by their very nature, international charters and declarations have to shape universal guidelines, reflecting internationally recognized conservation practices. The fact that South Korean declarations mostly repeat the content of existing international documents or are very similar in content does explain why they have had very little actual impact in the international field of conservation practice. Although these documents have been recognized by international bodies like ICOMOS and UNESCO, they have not generated sweeping changes or further international charters deriving from South Korean proposals. Although a few guidelines for conservation practice mention the declarations and recommendations analyzed here,[3] it is difficult to assess to what degree they were actually influential in shaping concrete practices. One possible factor diminishing their impact is their non-compulsory nature as mere recommendations for good practice, lacking a legally binding status.

Nevertheless, the present investigation has found that the merit of the declarations issued through the diplomatic efforts of the South Korean government lies elsewhere. South Korean institutions involved in the management of heritage have drafted documents focusing on topics of particular interest for South Korea, such as the protection of historic towns and traditional villages, or the return of illegally appropriated cultural properties. Most importantly, the documents stemmed from the expertise and practice of Korean institutions, demonstrating that management practices are highly influenced by local cultural values. As a consequence, the language of the Korean declarations finely balanced the universality specific to international principles with an adequate flexibility for cultural and regional specificity. Therefore, the documents have managed to push the international conversation further against the notion of global cultural uniformity and universality of practice. This power of self-representation and the will to communicate shared values, to exchange expertise on heritage have been interpreted here as forms of heritage diplomacy. It is evident that South Korea is making every effort to surpass a perceived identity of a peripheral country and

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3 For example, Elizabeth Vines (2005) mentions *The Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Areas* in her practical guide for the conservation of Asian heritage, including it among other charters stemming from Asian countries (China, Indonesia, India). However, Vines understands these guidelines as having become "a conservation code of practice for the countries concerned" (Vines 2005, 2), an understanding which suggests the limited sphere of influence of such documents to a national scale. The *Andong Recommendations* are listed in the bibliography of a conservation plan for the Hill End historic village in Australia (Morrison 2013), although it is unclear to what degree the recommendations were actually put in practice or shaped the planning process.

position itself closer to the centre of the international conversation on heritage management principles. The use of heritage declarations by South Korea makes an enlightening case of alternative diplomatic means to gain international visibility and not only participate in, but also trigger and influence the global conversation about heritage conservation practices.

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