Cultural diplomacy, national identity and national museum: South Korea's first overseas exhibition in the US, 1957 to 1959
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Abstract

The exhibition Masterpieces of Korean Art, which toured 8 cities in the US from December 1957 to June 1959, was the first large-scale overseas exhibition of Korean cultural objects that the South Korean government organized. This overseas exhibition in the US was designed to secure a cultural identity for South Korea on the world stage by explaining to US citizens that Korean culture has peculiar characteristics and independence from Chinese or Japanese culture. It was in the same context that the South Korean government was trying to secure a place within the world order controlled by the US. This touring exhibition shows that, through this exhibition, the National Museum of Korea was engaged in a dual mission to both gain cultural citizenship on the world stage and, reflexively, to internalize this for internal consumption so as to consolidate a sense of Korean cultural identity at home.

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In Japanese diplomacy, PR and cultural activities are typically under the same umbrella. I experienced diplomacy in the field when I worked as a public relations and cultural affairs minister of the Japanese Embassy in France during a two-year secondment. My department had integrated its public relations and cultural affairs work, and while this was partly a manpower issue, it also stemmed from the traditional view that culture had little independence in diplomacy. The development of overseas networks for turning culture into diplomacy is particularly inadequate. We need to assign good people to the task at hand, and create organizations and allocate resources to allow Japan to fulfill its potential. But as the museum's list of events suggests, the exhibition presents an opportunity to learn about China, but there is no suggestion that there will be a corresponding discussion about the UK over there. What determines the underlying difference between diplomacy and exchange in the cultural sphere is the question of relative power among the parties involved. British reluctance to promote its national culture abroad was judged to be partly a result of a kind of trenchant form of philistinism. It was not until 1973 that the first BC office was opened in the US, with its first office linked to the embassy in Washington. The list of offices opened...
and withdrawn needs also to be read alongside efforts both to expand the operations of the BC and to close it down.