A Critical Look at Google Arts & Culture's 'Korean Heritage'

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I   Introduction

Production and consumption of heritage increasingly occur digitally and online. Digital

heritage (DH) is viewed as both a threat and as having a lot of potential. Supposedly,

digitization not only "open[s] up heritage to new groups" (accessibility), but also facilitate

"a restructuring of authority and the possibility for a more democratic engagement" (King

et al. 78). Some scholars have argued that the use of digital media has triggered "a crisis of

authority" (Cameron and Kenderdine 8). By projecting heritage into digital space, some

argue that it is 'freed' from traditional heritage institutions and its authority (Hogsden and

Poulter 81). However, recently skeptical voices have expressed the need for a more critical

look at DH, and what consequences a particular digitization may have in terms of

representation and practice.

Not unimportant in all this is the fact that more and more museums are choosing

to collaborate with private partners. Specifically, tech giant Google has set up the platform

Google Arts & Culture (hereafter GA&C), which has since grown exponentially in scale,

scope and influence. According to Google at least, their platform is a step forward in the

'democratization' of heritage. GA&C's influence is undeniable and some argue that being

selected to collaborate with the platform has become a badge of honor (Rodríguez-Ortega

5). Such developments certainly raise questions, and the need for a critical look at this

platform.

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine GA&C and one of its projects to see how issues of authority, accessibility and 'democratization' actually manifest themselves in practice. The question asked is what is 'new' and what is 'old'? That is, how do the production and consumption of heritage manifest on this specific platform, specifically with regards to authority, accessibility and democratization, and how may this differ from their manifestation in an analogue heritage context? Does GA&C change the name of the game, and if so how? This thesis hopes to add to both the understanding of a (arguably very influential) platform initiated by a tech giant, as well as the growing body of research that critically examines DH and its influence.

Firstly, GA&C as a whole is examined at the surface level: how is content presented, how can users interact with and contribute to it, and how 'accessible', 'participatory' and 'democratizing' is GA&C in a practical sense. Secondly, the case study 'Korean heritage' is used to critically analyze representation in relation to Authorized Heritage Discourse (see below) and authority more generally. Lastly, a broader Critical Heritage Studies perspective is employed to look at the implications of the existence of platforms like GA&C.

The Verb of Heritage

In a class I took this semester, we were asked to bring along an object or picture that represented our own heritage. One student brought a bottle of olive oil, another her grandmother's old ring, yet another talked about a Korean ancestor ritual. When asked about heritage, the answers ranged

from clothes to food to buildings to traditions. This certainly raises the question: what exactly *is* heritage?

The concept of heritage was first defined in the International Charter of Venice (1964), in which it was tied closely to preservation and restoration concerns, and the idea of safeguarding the 'past' for the 'future'. However, at that time the idea of 'heritage' as material 'things' was already widespread. Interest in old and 'monumental' buildings started growing in Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Sørensen and Carman 13). In the context of growing nostalgia triggered by dissatisfaction with the present, heritage came to represent the 'past' (Lowenthal, *Foreign* 6). It was used by both conservative and progressive movements as a remedy for the problems of modernity, and became something to be safeguarded for the 'public' (Sørensen and Carman 16)

Heritage became institutionalized and professionalized, and public interaction conceptualized in terms of leisure and tourism (Harvey 324). It was in this period that heritage first became something of national significance (Harvey 328). In the twentieth century, the definition of heritage broadened to something of 'universal' or 'global' value, influenced by UNESCO (Vecco 323). In the process, more and more emphasis started to be put on "aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value" (the Burra Charter of 1982). Only quite recently the definition of heritage came to include the intangible (Vecco 323).

From the admittingly short history above, it is clear that heritage is a broad and ambiguous concept. Lowenthal notes that heritage is "untrammeled by definition" and can be used to denote anything; "an archive, a tithe barn, a snuffbox, an ancient woodland" (or, a bottle of olive oil for that matter) (Lowenthal, *Crusade* 95). 'Heritage' has indeed experienced broad shifts (e.g. to

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include the intangible) over time, and has been appropriated for a number of causes. Following

this observation, the idea that heritage is a 'value-loaded concept' formed through present

circumstances first started gaining ground in the 80s and 90s, with the growth of heritage studies

as a discipline (Sørensen and Carman 11). There was the realization that heritage is, or at least

involves, "the selective use of the past for contemporary purposes" (Graham et al. 7).

It should be noted that taking this definition as a starting point, the above history becomes

somewhat problematic; that is, it describes not the history of heritage, but rather the development

of western modernity's *specific brand* of heritage. Harvey argues that heritage has always existed,

pointing to the ways heritage was regulated by the catholic church in medieval times (320).

Sørensen and Carman similarly note that something akin to heritage existed in ancient Greece and

Rome (13). Notably, not just the time, but also the space dimension is important in the

construction of heritage. A Korean perspective, as will be discussed in chapter 3, may differ on

some grounds from an European one.

Critical Heritage Studies

If heritage is socially constructed, this raises the question on what *basis* it is; how do values

surrounding heritage form? What contemporary processes shape it and its uses? With the turn of

the century, a so-called 'discursive turn' has taken place: questions regarding engagement with and

meaning-making surrounding heritage have taken center-stage (Waterton and Watson, *Handbook*

9; Maags and Svensson 15). Specifically, Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) views heritage as a cultural

practice, Discourse with a capital D (Wu and Hou 38). CHS is concerned with how heritage, as a

political resource, is constructed and negotiated in relation to power, and the consequences of

'using' heritage (Smith, *Uses* 82). Initially, CHS was a critique to the use of heritage for nationalism and the dominance of European values, with as main forerunners Rodney Harrison and Laurajane Smith.

Smith's analysis centers around the concept of *Authorized Heritage Discourse*(AHD), a concept since picked up by many scholars. Guided by Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA), she focuses on how the discourse of heritage is constructed and maintained, arguing that AHD appoints heritage specialists as 'spokespersons' for 'the past' (29). This restricts engagement by e.g. the general public and access to heritage's meaning making process (34-36). AHD is a naturalized discourse, that based on European values, "privileges monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/site significance tied to time depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgement, social consensus and nation building" (11). For Smith, CHS forms a counterweight to AHD.

Harrison views his research as an addition to the work done by scholars such as Smith who focus more on the discursive (Harrison 112). Heritage (and its analysis) he argues, is two-fold. There is the discursive "the politics of representation and the knowledge/power effects of the discourse of heritage" (228). He argues that the commonsense notion of heritage as something old and authentic is distinctly modern (227). He draws the distinction between official heritage, authorized by the state and official documents, and unofficial heritage, significant to individuals or communities but unrecognized (15). Moving past the discursive however, there are "the affective qualities of heritage, the ways in which it is caught up in local and global processes" (228). For Harrison CHS is a way to take an active and informed role in engagement with heritage and broader issues.

CHS and specifically AHD have been used to criticize the dominance of European values of heritage globally (Maags and Svensson 16). Recently, some scholars have shed light on AHD's influence in an Asian context. Wu and Hou argue that Chinese cultural understandings of heritage exist alongside the global AHD, powerful in their local context (44). Maags and Svensson emphasize that more attention should be given to how nations can come to develop their own brand of AHD (17). Of course, it should be noted that Smith herself emphasizes that AHD is never completely uncontested (162). In other words, unofficial and local understandings exist alongside global and official ones; moreover, the former can be transformed into the latter.

Methodology

In this thesis, the GA&C platform is examined through a number of frameworks. Firstly, the case study is contextualized by sketching out the development of DH more generally, and the concept of (Digital) Heritage and AHD in Korea.

Secondly, the GA&C platform is examined on a surface level through the use of a framework developed by Hafizur Rahaman and Beng-Kiang Tan. Like CHS, this framework takes as a starting point that heritage is a 'process' and offers a way to evaluate DH using a number of criteria. This framework was chosen because it allows evaluation of GA&C's presentation and participatory elements, in order to investigate how accessible and 'democratizing' GA&C is in practical terms; how can information be accessed, manipulated and contributed, and how do these things relate more theoretically to accessibility, democratization and authority?

Thirdly, the content of 'Korean Heritage' is examined in more detail on a discursive level in relation to authority. The analysis uses a CHS perspective supplemented by CDA, in order to answer the question of who is producing the discourse on 'Korean Heritage' and towards what means. Waterton et al. have argued that if heritage is a discourse, then CDA can be a toolset of analytic techniques to 'unpack' it (342; Wodak and Meyer 6-7). Employing this perspective, discourse is understood as multi-layered, consisting of social practices, discursive practices and texts (Wodak and Meyer 6-7). This approach was chosen not only because CDA and CHS have often been combined, but also as CDA can be employed more broadly to analyze e.g. mass media texts (Wu and Hou 46).

Lastly, the project and its implications are examined in its broader social context. Have we reached the end of the hype train where we are maximizing the full 'potential' of DH? What are the possible (long term) consequences of this kind of collaboration (e.g. for AHD)? This thesis concludes by looking at how a platform like GA&C and a project like 'Korean Heritage' may shape (future) social practice.

II   Heritagization and Digitization

This chapter provides a brief overview of Digital Heritage (DH) and current perceived challenges and opportunities in order to contextualize GA&C. Broadly speaking, DH is digital content that possesses cultural significance, including both 'born digital' and digitized heritage. As defined by UNESCO's Charter for the Preservation of Digital Heritage (2003), the former concerns heritage with "no other format but the digital object". In other words, 'born digital' heritage involves heritization of digital content. For example, projects such as the Internet Archive foundation have pushed for born-digital documents to be recognized as heritage (Musiani and Schafer 2).

On the other hand, DH can refer to access to otherwise analogue heritage facilitated by digital technologies. Most commonly, digitization includes taking photos and videos (2D) and making 3D models. Some other applications are Virtual reality (VR) and Augmented reality (AR), which aim to create more of an engaging experience. Additionally, (the generation of) metadata – information about an heritage site/object – is also part of DH (Rizzo 252). Metadata can provide context and interpretation, usually through a short description, similar to a catalogue. Online exhibitions may provide more information, center around different themes and draw new connections.

Digital Optimism

Initially the discussion surrounding DH was defined by 'digital optimism'. DH was, and still is, viewed as a realm of new possibilities. As some argue "[t]he digitization of antiquities is facilitating

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a renaissance for scholars who have unprecedented access to rich representations of objects."

(Landon and Seales 361).

However, the benefit of access extends outside of the academic realm, with heritage institutions large and small increasingly making use of digital resources. From their perspective, digitization can help reach new audiences and maintain old ones (Carreras and Mancini 88). Digitization provides a 'shop window'; museum websites and online catalogues can be browsed through by future visitors. Digitization offers access to objects otherwise not on display, or to past exhibitions; the British Museum offers online access to its entire collection, including objects in storage. Digital copies often serve as surrogate records that enhance the visitor experience and stimulate visits to actual sites, and in extension to this, tourism (Carreras and Mancini 88; Natale 19).

Accessibility for non-experts is important within heritage, because as Sørmoen points out if "it is people who define what heritage is, then people also needs accessibility to heritage if it is to makes sense to them"(15). The benefit of accessibility is not just about *who* can access heritage – e.g. anyone with a computer and internet connection – but also about *what* heritage can be accessed and *how*. Accessibility can be defined in physical or practical terms, but generally it also includes more qualitative aspects, e.g. access to knowledge (Sørmoen 13). Digitization enables viewing "parts and details of works that could not otherwise be seen, not even through the direct observation of the original" (Natale 19).

Similarly, digitization allows preservation of and access to a greater variety of materials (e.g. including objects in storage). With heritage sites threatened by terrorism and climate change, but also more mundane processes such urban expansion, digital technologies offer a solution; heritage

otherwise lost can be preserved digitally. For example, the #NEWPALMYRA project encourages the

public to submit old pictures of destroyed or damaged monuments in order to create 3D models.

DH may include sites too dangerous or delicate to be visited or objects too fragile to be displayed

(Magnani et al. 262).

Digital Democratization

 While 'brute access' is certainly a benefit of digitization, digital access may also invite more

interactive public engagement (King et al. 78). When multiple media formats are used, this results

into a more dynamic and interactive display, creating a more engaging experience (Carreras and

Mancini 92). Specifically, the flexible and interactive nature of digital technology may facilitate

more participatory engagement, e.g co-production, crowd sourcing or discussion. Crowdsourcing

entails asking users to complete tasks, such as correction, transcription, and tagging (Oomen and

Aroyo). The most well-known example of this is Wikipedia, but crowdsourcing is more and more

often applied in heritage projects. These projects, when well thought-out, motivate deeper

engagement and lifelong learning (Ridge 446).

Besides the fact that user-generate content helps solve otherwise impossible tasks – many

hands make light work – it can help ensure multivocality (Raham and Tan 104). Perhaps

unsurprisingly, "the democratization of heritage through digital access is well documented as an

aspiration for heritage" (Taylor and Gibson 408). Early on, Ian Hodder suggested that the internet

could give marginalized voices a larger platform (186). This relates to more universal access, but

some scholars have gone further to suggest that DH may cause a shift in authority and power.

Hogsden and Poulter argue that "projecting the object into the digital domain frees it up from the ties of the physical museum and in doing so shifts the balance of power and authority associated with it" (81). As digital tools facilitate co-production, DH may challenge the dominant discourse of heritage by "offering the potential to enhance active two-way engagement with heritage" (King et al. 78). Smith herself notes that social media platforms such as YouTube allow individuals and groups to showcase their own heritage unmediated (Smith, "Intangible" 141).

A Technology Trap?

This is all sounds quite promising. However, there may be reason for caution. Gartner's Hype Cycle is a model that suggests that any new technology is first met with overenthusiasm, then disillusion, before the technology and its relevance can be understood and reach its full potential (Fenn and Time 3). This raises the question: where exactly on the hype train are we?

While intentions may be grand, execution can be a problem. Tomislav Šola suggests that we may fall into 'technology trap', where technology is pursued for its own sake, without critically evaluating the value of digitization (393). Carreras and Mancini note that "only [some expectations for DH] have been completely fulfilled and real practices have changed a little from those idealistic views" (87). There are many practical problems one runs into when generating and managing DH, both being labor intensive (Navarrete 254). Shortage of funding can result into deterioration and technological obsolescence (Evens and Hauttekeete 164). Fragmentation is another problem (Richards et al. 312)

Moreover, recently, scholars have criticized the somewhat technologically deterministic view of the internet and digital access as being inherently democratic and inclusive (Manžuch 12; Taylor and Gibson 409; Smith and Waterton 131). The issue is to what extent the goals of accessibility and democratization are actually met in practice. Many DH projects are still very frontal; content is spoon-fed, perhaps in a dynamic way ('here comes the airplane!'), but "the present trend of DH is predominantly descriptive, technology-driven and imposing; rather than user-centric" (Rahaman and Tan 4).

Digital media, even when more accessible, is limited in interaction and representation, as the availability of digital content is dictated by real life, e.g. financial, factors (Manžuch 11). Taylor and Gibson note that digitization "can subtly reinforce non-democratic structures" (409). For example, in the ICONS of England project celebrities and institutions could exercise significantly more influence on the final decision of England's national icons (414; Mason and Baveystock 20). Simply put, what is digitized, how it can be interacted with and by whom are often limited; DH is often 'dialogically closed' and framed in terms of information acquisition, rather than "exchange, debate and discussion" (Smith and Waterton 137).

The overarching discussion is slowly starting to shift to critically examining how DH affects the heritage experience and practices (Economou 225; e.g. Cameron and Kenderdine; Mason and Baveystock; Pickover; Giaccardi). As Kalay argues:

Like every medium ever used to preserve cultural heritage, digital media is not neutral: it impacts the represented information and the ways society interprets it. *Perhaps more than any older technology, it has the potential to affect the very meaning of the represented content in terms of the cultural image it creates*. [italics added] (1)

For example, Michele Pickover, studying the digitization of heritage in South Africa, notes that digitization projects often lack transparency, and actually reinforce heritage as tied to nation building and "South Africa's post-apartheid collective amnesia" (3).

DH is far from being the holy grail of heritage. While having promising potential, the question is how much of it is realized in practice, and how much is enthusiasm driven optimism. Similarly, how and for whom DH is produced, and how accessibility and democratization actually manifest itself in practice in any given case, need to be carefully considered.

III   Korean Heritage

So far, (digital) heritage has been discussed in more general terms. However, it is undoubtedly true that heritage practice is significantly shaped by its local context. This chapter discusses the formation of heritage in Korea, and how it has been shaped by (historical) circumstances as well as western AHD.

Heritage in Colonial Korea

The idea of heritage in Korea began during the colonial period. From the onset of colonization in 1910, the Japanese took on the role of "caretakers" of Korean cultural heritage, which value, according to them, had been lost on the Korean people (Manginis 66; Atkins 102). In part this interest was motivated by the search of the continental origins Japanese civilization (Pai, *Management* 137-138). By 1945, the colonial registry contained 591 items: "(1) 340 treasures; (2) 101 ancient remains; (3) three ancient remains/famous places; (4) one famous place; (5) 146 natural monuments" (Pai, "Legacies" 79).

During this period the emphasis on Buddhist objects and sites, which had priorly been subject to precolonial anti-Buddhist policies, grew (P. Park 88). Some of the first preservation attempts were the Temple and Shrines Laws of 1911 (Pai, *Management* 77). Buddhism was promoted to emphasis Korean-Japanese kinship and offer 'familiar and stable spiritual foundation for the populace' (Brandt 90; Atkins 121). Many contemporary heritage listings are Buddhist remains, a legacy of the colonial period (Pai, "Legacies" 84).

The curational interest in heritage was not restricted to tangible remains. Folks arts and crafts, in particular ceramics and folk music, were exotified, charming in their lack of aesthetic self-awareness (Atkins 124, 132). In 1924 the Korean Art Museum was opened, dedicated to the work of anonymous craftsmen (Atkins 125; Brandt 7). This appreciation reflected and helped shape colonial power, and resulted into folk crafts being preserved, but also detached from daily life (Atkins 125; Brandt 3).

Highly political, colonial curation targeting the wider public through newly established museums (Hanh 77; Jang 64-65). Claiming the ancient past, Japan could assert its nationhood and 'rightful' position as imperial power. Heritage was appropriated in a narrative that emphasized both difference and kinship with Korea (Atkins 106). Korea was 'exotic' and 'nostalgic' – making the colony a suitable Japanese tourist destination – and not unimportantly, rightfully part of the empire (Pai, *Management* 133, 159). This approach mirrors nineteenth and twentieth-century western imperialism; antiquities where taken from 'the cradle of western civilization' by colonizers in order to claim ancestry and legitimize power (De Cesari and Herzfeld 176).

Monopolizing Heritage in Postcolonial Korea

While according to popular belief Japanese colonialism actively repressed Korean culture, contradictorily, the colonial period triggered a heightened awareness of heritage (Atkins 104). The pre-colonial government had shown little interest in (rapidly decaying) ancient remains and actively repressed folk culture (Atkins 189; Pai, *Constructing* 32; Jang 33-35). While the concept of 'museums' was known, few had been convinced of their use (Jang 19). Furthermore, the Japanese had created a framework and valuable body of material that could be used to assert and define

Korea's nationhood (Atkins 145). For example, the newly discovered remains of Silla became a source of nationalism, with one newspaper remarking if "we, Korea, did not have Gyeongju, how could we prove and say [to have an] indigenous culture?" (Jang 52). Thus, heritage in postcolonial Korea was both a counter reaction and a continuation of colonial practice.

However, shortly after liberation, material culture was not foregrounded in governmental policy or the average Korean's consciousness (Jang 85-90). Instead, the Park Chung Era in particular shaped heritage practice (Pai, *Constructing* 3; Sîntionean 253-254). Park Chung, president from 1963 to 1979, used heritage to distance himself from the colonial regime which had supposedly suppressed Korean cultural expression and neglected or destroyed heritage (Atkins 191; Sîntionean 253-258). Under Park's regime, expenses on culture needed to be justified through the frame of ethnic nationalism (Jang 141).

The Office of Cultural Properties and national museums were instrumental in the appropriation of heritage for nationalism. The OCP, founded in 1961, was charged with expanding the heritage registry, based on the criteria of 'Koreanness' referring to "an inherent essence residing in objects, places and customs [...] [that] simply needed to be discovered by expert eyes" (Sîntionean 259). The OCP focused on the Three Kingdoms period and Gyeonju, in search of Korea's golden ages (Jang 165). Similarly, the National Museum of Korean (NMK) became the main institute in charge of explaining heritage through the framework of ethnic national culture (Jang 11, 140).

Intangible heritage played a more significant role in Korea than the West. In 1962 the Cultural Property Protection Law was instated in order to protect both tangible and intangible heritage (Jang 185; Yim 11). From the 1960s onwards 'intangible national treasures' and its

'holders' were designated by the OCP (Atkins 188). The major goal was to maintain traditions, in a static and 'perfect' form, and holders were selected on the basis of faithfulness (Yim 11; Atkins 190). Tradition was detached from its social and oftentimes religious context through institutionalization (Atkins 191)

In terms of discourse, Korea was constructed as a resilient nation resisting foreign invaders, retained its unique quality (*Han minjok)*, without imperialistic tendencies (Yim 38; Logie 146). Anti-Japanese sentiments were foregrounded, Japan accused of destroying and looting 'Our heritage', with e.g. Gyeongbokgung coming to symbolize colonial resistance (J. Kim 86). Additionally, it sparked interest in Joseon court culture, priorly erased and regarded negatively by the Japanese (Jang 164; Moon 37). ICH came to embody the Korean spirit, released through performance in an act of resistance (Atkins 189).

In short, heritage and its interpretation became tied to ethnic nationalism and anti-colonialism, with as three goals "(1) restoring Korean racial traditions; (2) reviving the National Spirit; and (3) overcoming national disasters through cultural education" (Pai "Legacies", 86; Yim 44; Jang 145, 166). From 1974–1978, 70% of cultural funding went to traditional culture and folk arts, with the former thought to economically boost the nation (Yim 40-44; Jung 155).

However, while heritage discourse was filled with anti-Japanese sentiments, ironically, it was in many ways a continuation of the colonial management. Colonial heritage list were duplicated in the 1962 law (Pai, "Legacies" 86). Although the colonial power had never formally registered ICH, its management became to be based on the Japanese system, as most experts had been trained in Japan (Howard, *Intangible* 2; Pai, "Legacies" 77). In contrast to Japan however, the focus was more on folk traditions, whose foreign roots were downplayed, as opposed to high

culture (Howard, *Intangible* 8-9). *Gugak* dances of the court, were also canonized, but there still

exists a naturalized dichotomy in traditional Korean culture between 'indigenous folk culture' and

Neo-Confucian 'high culture' (Howard, *Intangible* 453; Logie 146).

As Herzfeld and De Cesari have noted, "nationalist successors to colonial powers continue

many of the policies of the former occupiers in the name of national redemption" thereby

oftentimes reproducing certain colonial legacies of exclusion (1176). Specifically, Korea was left

with lists, but also the idea that heritage had to be centralized and controlled by the state (Pai,

"Legacies" 77). The 'right' public involvement and with the 'right' heritage was important, "purified

of the vulgar elements of popular culture, considered inferior to traditional culture" and the Park

and Choun regime condemned folk religion and shamanism (Atkins 191; Sîntionean 261; Yim 44).

This is not to say that there were no competing narratives of heritage. State

monopolization of heritage was countered by political dissidents. Minjung activists' narrative of

folk culture was one of class, serving to destabilize state control (Atkins 188). This stood in stark

contrast with preservation as determined by experts:

in the hands — and feet and voices — of the minjung activists, folk performance retained

its dynamism, malleability, participatory ethos, contrariness, and relevance (Atkins 188)

The Park regime and its attempts at cultural monopolization became successors to the yangban

elite and Japanese colonial power as the object of folk performance's ridicule. Until the end of the

1980s, folk culture was a site of contestation (Atkins 196).

To summarize, contemporary heritage practice in Korea has been shaped by colonialism

and authoritarian regimes, both restricting alternative narratives. During the presidency of Kim

Young Sam another shift occurred: heritage became fundamental in the creation of the national

brand (Yim 41). Of course, international recognition was an aspiration served by heritage from

early on, with overseas touring exhibitions targeting the West having started in the cold war period

(Jang 102). However, with the country more stable and Korean identity more naturalized, the focus

on promoting heritage for tourism and soft power, became stronger. As a result, the government

has become much more hands-on in the promotion and management of heritage assets in recent

years (Pai, *Management* 30-32).

Korea's AHD

To recap, the global Authorized Heritage Discourse is based on Eurocentric values and "privileges

monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/site significance tied to time depth,

scientific/aesthetic expert judgement, social consensus and nation building" (Smith, *Uses* 11). It

reinforces who gets to speak for 'the past' heritage represents (experts), and "disengage(s) us from

the very real emotional and cultural work that the past does as heritage for individuals and

communities" (Smith, *Uses* 29). Smith's AHD concept thus denotes two important aspects: (a) the

role of expert judgement, and (b) the dependency on western values. However, arguably heritage

discourse is as much a product of its local as its global context. Consequently, scholars have argued

there are national AHDs that mix local values with a fair bit of state control (Svenson and Maags

16-17).

AHDs are 'self-referential'; they "continually legitimizes itself and the values and ideologies

on which it is based" (Smith, *Uses* 30). AHD creates a top-down relationship, in which experts are

in charge of explaining heritage to a larger public. At one point the idea that certain authorities are to speak for heritage becomes naturalized. This is a dynamic especially present in Korea:

> Under the national heritage protection scheme in South Korea, museums have become keepers of heritage. By explaining what Korean culture is, the museum controls and at the same time promotes public engagement in Korean heritage (Hahn 76)

With state control of heritage being legitimized by bureaucracy, especially museums have become the keepers – or authorities – of heritage. This idea of expertise finds expression in governmental organizations such as the OCP, which membership is reserved to well-known academics whose "expertise has qualified them to be the designated spokesmen for Korean art and culture" (Pai, "Legacies" 74). This is not to say that there is no popular enjoyment of heritage. In contemporary Korea, "people continuously seek the affirmation of belonging to Korea's unique racial and cultural heritage" (Pai, *Constructing* 107). The point, however, is that popular involvement has been mediated by the state and experts, and through a specific framework.

What is this framework? Under AHD heritage becomes closely connected to national identity (Smith, *Uses* 3). Indeed, in Korea heritage is interpreted primarily through the frame of ethnic nationalism. One former NMK's director explicitly connects 'essential aspects of Korean culture' with the nation (Choe 12, 22). Jang argues that the NMK and the Korean public have internalized ethnic nationalism as interpretative basis for material culture, hardly leaving room for other frameworks (e.g. gender, class) (Jang 233-234). The government is the prime authority and "[a]ll cultural property is defined defended, appropriated and re-appropriated to maintain (national) identity" (Pai, *Constructing* 14).

AHD constructs heritage as having inherent value recognizable to and explained by experts. In the Korean context, this 'essence' is equated with 'Koreanness' (Saeji 529). 'Koreanness' erases social differences internally, and emphasizes heritage as unique and distinct. Global tropes of aesthetics, preservation, and monumentality have certainly also influenced Korea's AHD. For example, Pai notes that monumental sites, symbolizing the ancestors' achievements, are privileged over e.g. Neolithic sites (*Constructing* 16). Similarly, the OCP emphasizes among other things "exceptional artistical quality" and the state of preservation (Pai, *Constructing* 5). However, 'uniqueness' and 'distinctiveness' also form a major source of pride. This may partly be the result of a (self-)orientalism; Jang e.g. notes that during NMK's touring exhibitions overseas, American curators urged the museum staff to pick the most 'Korean-looking' paintings (461).

AHDs use the equation of heritage with the 'past' to subject it to the judgement of experts. Due to the popular belief of Korea's "continuous existence as a unified country", the above 'Koreanness' is deeply historicized (Yim 38). Both Koreas continuously try to assert their 'koreanness' by trying to claim the past (Pai, *Management* xxx). Of course, what is considered worth claiming is partly shaped by the colonial and postcolonial period (e.g. the discovery of Silla, the interest in Joseon). Korea's division has also had its influence, with Silla becoming a major topic in the South due to its geography (Ahn 420).

The relative importance of ICH in Korea is clear. However, as the ideal of preservation can be applied to ICH, Smith cautions that it is not necessarily a challenge to AHD (Smith, "Intangible" 136). Since the 1990s, ICH has transformed from a site of popular resistance to one of nation building (Atkins 196). Furthermore, there is a clear trend of 'fossilization', of constructing ICH "as an unchanging form of expression of ethnic identity" protected by the state (Hanh 78).

Lastly, "the commercial branding of 'culture', 'tradition' and 'ethnicity' [...] is [...] characteristic of contemporary heritagization" (Waterton and Watson, *Semiotics* 444). Globalization, commercialization, nation branding and tourism are strong forces in Korea. The state increasingly appropriates heritage in big business and branding, with increased lobbying to get UNESCO recognition for Korea's "distinctive" heritage and attract tourists (Pai, *Management* 30-32). In '100 Years Of Korean Museums' the at the time director of NMK concludes that "Museums have to play a pivotal role in promoting the "national brand" by providing abundant cultural content" (Choe 22). Nation-branding is the new nation-building, and it is aided by AHD, with the authorized 'nation's communal heritage' forming the basis for overseas promotion (Waterton 158).

To summarize, Korea's very own brand of AHD is focused on promoting ethnic nationalism and minimizing differences, is controlled by the state and supported by experts who "considered [it] to be their urgent mission" (Jang 4). It is closely connected to the historicized idea of the uniqueness of Korean culture, claiming previous kingdoms as ancestral and 'Korean'. While this AHD is not entirely uncontested – "some South Korean academics [...] have begun to disclose agendas or identities that this discourse has concealed, such as issues of gender, ethnicity and class" – it has been greatly successful, forming the basis for not just nation building, but also more recently, nation and commercial branding (Jang 2).

'Digital Korea'

During his inauguration speech in 2008, former president Lee Myung-bak proclaimed that:

Our traditional culture, when coupled together with our technological prowess, will no

doubt transmit to the world an image of a more attractive Korea.

In the 1980s, digital technologies developed through the efforts of chaebol (large conglomerate

companies) and the government (Oh and Larson 195). It was an unexpected success: Korea

became the forerunner of ICT within East Asia. Sequentially, Korea's digital prowess became

integral to the nation's collective identity and branding (Cha 130).

Korea's public diplomacy has focused especially on engaging the foreign public through

social media (Park and Lim 94-95). However, one problem is that Korea's digital environment does

not integrate well into the global one; Korean web design is notorious, and oftentimes inaccessible

to non-windows and non-internet explorer users (Robertson 679; Cha 132). Other problems

hindering digital diplomacy include the language barrier and conservatism (Melissen and

Keulenaar 7; Robertson 679).

This 'digital turn' extends to cultural heritage and humanities. Cultural products marketed

through digital means are believed to be major sources of soft power (Park and Lim 81). Starting in

the 1990s, the government has pumped large amounts of money into digitization projects,

resulting into a striking amount of digitized heritage resources, such as the National dbs (Cha

127-137). For example, the Culture Information Integration Searching System produced by the

ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism provides access to a heritage collection compiled from the

Culture Properties Administration and 26 museums (https://www.culture.go.kr/index.do).

Additionally, there has been a trend of moving towards 3D reconstruction and VR, with Seokguram

Grotto being the first site to be scanned (Park et al.). This process of digitization has been very

top-down, with the government viewing it as a way to promote "commodified uses of cultural

heritage" and the idea of Korea as a 'creative economy' (Cha 131-140).

IV   Accessibility, Democratization and GA&C

This chapter discusses the GA&C platform in relation to accessibility and democratization. GA&C is

analyzed through Rahaman's framework for interpreting digital heritage. It is argued that while

GA&C's use of digital technology is innovative on the front of presentation, it is questionable

whether it is as 'democratizing' as is claimed.

Accessibility and Democratization

Accessibility in its most basic sense refers to physical and practical access. However, even in an

analogue context, it can also refer to social, cultural and intellectual access. For example, Deffner

et al. argue that accessibility has 3 stages: 1. *Physical Accessibility*, 2. *Perceptual Accessibility*,

defined as understanding or access to knowledge, and 3. *Appropriational Accessibility*, the

possibility to "reproduce the cultural product in novel, appropriated form" (6). More broadly,

accessibility is thus connected to heritage interpretation, presentation, and the of inclusivity.

　　　How accessibility does or does not create meaningful experiences are important questions,

especially for DH, where concerns of physical access largely fall away. While it should be noted that

access to the internet is not absolute (dropping as low as 15% in developing countries), online

visitors usually outnumber physical ones (Papadimitriou et al. 35). Thus questioning whether

digital access offers a complementary or a valuable stand-alone experience – digital and traditional

audiences may not overlap – is of relevance. Digital technologies have their own strengths and

weaknesses, and accessibility should be seen in relation to these. For example, instead of

traditional 'routes' based on e.g. chronology found in physical museums, information can be accessed in a less linear, more personalized and 'on-demand' way (Papadimitriou et al. 36).

With regards to democratization, access is certainly a prerequisite for it; indeed 'democratization' may refer to making something accessible to all people. However, although hardly ever defined within heritage literature, democratization is also clearly closely tied to participation. Controlled participation and broader, e.g. community, engagement are thought to enhance heritage interpretation, representation and even authenticity (Fredheim 624; Jeffrey 148).

Heritage democratization is often conceptually paired with "power-sharing participation and the negotiation of traditional roles of 'experts' and 'stakeholders'" (Freheim 619). Smith's work has triggered calls for democratization in an effort to challenge AHD (Freheim 619). According to this line of thought, participation can create new spaces in which to negotiate power and authority, and push institutions to move away from the role of "authoritarian narrators of the past" to "functioning as 'contact zones' between different stakeholders", enabling bottom-up diversification (Papadimitriou et al. 34).

However, several scholars have noted that efforts for democratization are often embedded in existing power structures and help maintain them, by controlling how and where participation is acceptable (Fredheim 625); often 'community engagement' and 'stakeholder dialogue' are just controlled and rhetorical ways to appear 'democratizing' (Fredheim 624); in an analogue context collaboration is coordinated, often by traditional authorities.

However, as Jeffrey points out, there is a real potential for the un-directed co-production of DH (148). This is one of the reasons why some scholars have suggested that DH should make use

of (existing) social media platforms: these have limited intervention into content-production, which allows for bottom-up discursive space and even online community formation (Smith, "Intangible" 41).

Google Arts & Culture and its Ideals

Google Arts & Culture was established in 2011 by Google's non-profit branch The Google Culture Institute. Initially a collaboration with 17 western museums and called 'The Google Art Project', it was dedicated to Art with a capital A. However, it has since grown exponentially, with more features, a broadened scope and change in name: 'Google Arts & Culture'. In part this was a response to the criticism that the platform was too focused on a Western idea of Art and "cherry-picking" (Sooke). In 2019, it features "a total of 6,272 artists, 228 media and 121 art movements, [...] 641 historical movements; 6,250 historical figures; 9,692 places; 3,226 museum views; 1,702 zoom views; 39,607 featured videos; and 5,528 featured stories" (Wani et al. 111).

While brute accessibility to a large quantity of objects is a certain benefit of the service, GA&C and its commentators also speak of accessibility in a broader, inclusive, and 'democratic' sense. Amit Sood, the president of GA&C, according to his google profile, "leads Google's effort to make culture accessible to everyone" (Google I/O). In his 2016 TEDtalk, Sood argues that "the world's population is living without real access to arts and culture" and raises the question "[w]hat might the connections be when we start exploring our heritage, the beautiful locations and the art in this world?". While this rhetoric certainly reveals a somewhat limited (and indeed "authorized") definition of 'arts' and 'culture', it also point to the rhetoric of inclusivity.

The 'real' however also suggests access to experience. In the VICE article 'Democratizing

Art With the Guy Behind the Google Art Project' Sood says:

> I developed the Project around this concept of accessibility. I didn't want to just create a
>
> list of the world's great museums and here's some pictures of inside. I wanted there to be
>
> a bit of a whimsical, almost magical, experience in using it. The whole idea was we can't
>
> replicate the physical experience, and we don't want to. But let's at least try and give
>
> people a sense of magic (Callil).

Rather than brute access, Sood's rhetoric is one of digital access as a stand-alone and valuable

'experience'.

The idea of the platform as a 'contact-zone' where the lines between users and experts

blur is also present. GA&C's about page boasts that you can "join a community of like-minded

people"; users can "create, connect and share. Join the global community", "become [their] own

curator", "get social" and "learn with experts", all suggesting a type of discursive space. Similarly, in

a TEDtalk from 2011 Soot says:

> for me, the main thing is that all the amazing stuff here does not really come from
>
> Google. It doesn't, in my opinion, even come from the museums. I probably shouldn't say
>
> that. It really comes from these artists.

What he suggest is a connection with culture that is 'direct', unmediated, equal. Many

commentators have praised the platform specifically for its 'democratizing' benefit, extending to

scholarly literature; Pesce et al. argue that i.a. digitally getting up close to an object "contributes to

'democratizing' access to specialized knowledge", breaking down "the distinction between users

and researchers"(1894). In this regard, it is striking how GA&C's rhetoric echoes the optimism of

DH scholarship.

Framework for Analysis

Based on the idea that accessibility is closely related to presentation and interpretation, Rahaman's

framework for interpreting digital heritage was chosen to facilitate analysis. While mostly

concerned with assessing if a given DH initiative enables comprehensive interpretation, for this

case study the framework is useful as it offers a systematic way to think about GA&C's practical

aspects in relation to 'accessibility', 'interaction' and 'democratization'. Rahaman and Tan critique

the fact that oftentimes DH projects take the form of a 'product', rather than a 'process' which

considers end-users as active contributors (209). Grounded in previous research on heritage

experience, they base this framework around the idea that popular participation, dialogue and

interaction will benefit heritage interpretation (see figure 1).
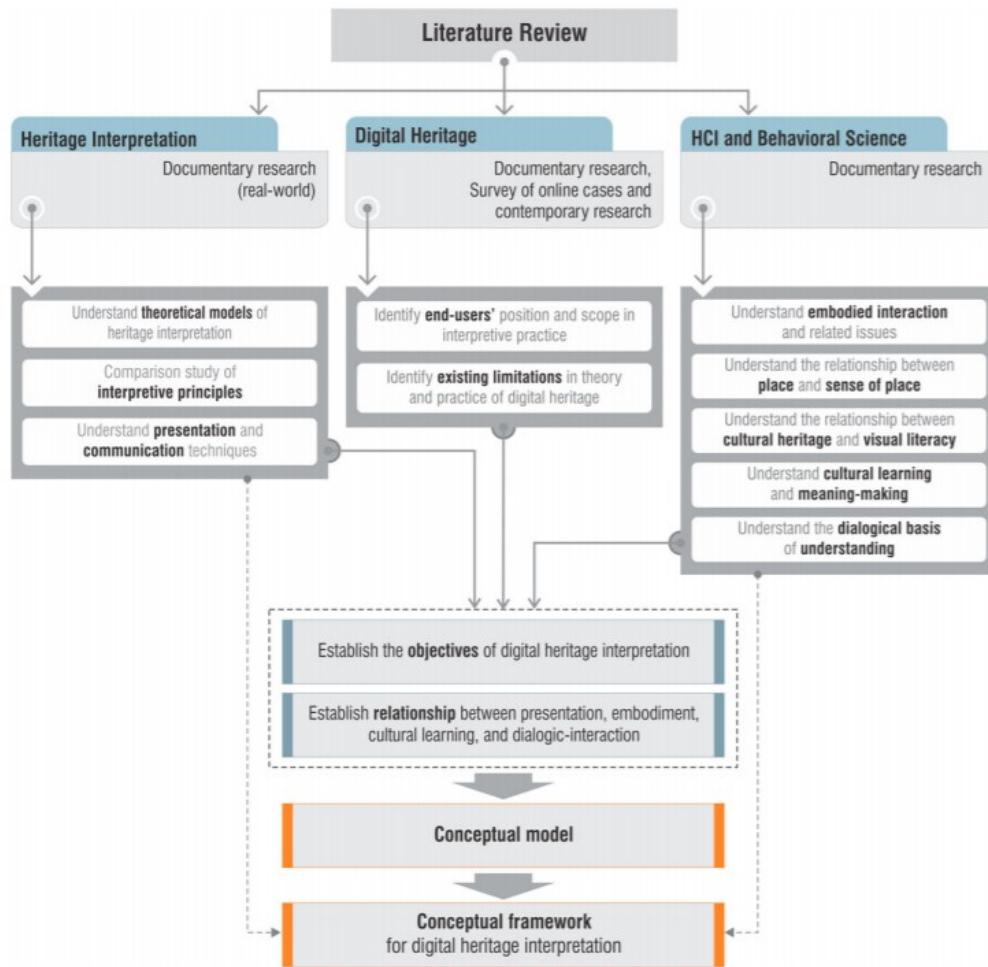
Figure 1: Process of framework creation (Rahaman)

GA&C is analyzed according to whether it offers "(i) effective presentation (or communication), (ii) cultural learning, and (iii) embodied interaction—within an environment that supports (iv) dialogic interaction among the participants and experts to generate a collective knowledge base through" (215). While not every DH platform should necessarily contain all these aspects, examining GA&C according to them offers insight into where the platform stands in relation to digital technology's possibilities its ideals. Within this framework, Parés and Parés

conceptualization of effective interaction as including exploration, manipulation and contribution –

which has been used to study heritage VR environments – was also taken as inspiration (239)

Effective presentation

Rahaman suggests that Effective presentation includes six aspects:

     i.   Variety in content with consumer-led approach
    ii.   Novelty, conflict and surprise in content presentation
   iii.   Setting cognitive dissonance by challenges to explore
   iv.   Easy orientation and freedom of visit
    v.   Openness to new information
   vi.   Affordances and connection to the visitors' experience

Interactive contents are key to point i and ii, and GA&C generally quite strong on this front. Variety

in content can be achieved through e.g. "360° panoramas, interactive maps, VRML models, images,

videos, and animations" (Rahaman 216). One of GA&C's more exciting features is the use of street

view to "walk" through museums and sites. In the app phone movements simulate 360°

movements. Additionally, the app's *'cardboard exhibitions'* enables users, through the use of a

cardboard viewer, to take VR audio-tours of select sites. Projects feature 360° videos and '*gigapixel

images'*, which enable the user to zoom impossibly close to an object. The integration of external

platforms also serves content variety; for example, through Google Earth, users can "take a tour"

(e.g. 'Lisabon through the eyes of Fernando Pessoa'). Additionally, the section 'Experiments', albeit

separated from the main platform, features innovative ways of presentation with more

sophisticated techniques like 3D, VR and photogrammetry (e.g. 'VersaillesVR: The Palace is Yours').

Presentation is 'consumer-led' in the sense that information can be explored in a variety of

on-demand ways guided by personal preferences. Content can be explored through several

different frameworks ('Themes', 'Movements' etc.), which enables more personalized and fresh

connections. What facilitates this feature is GA&C's strong indexing capabilities and machine-learning, which depends on meta-data provided by institutions. Freedom of organization extends to sorting according to popularity, time, color, entity (e.g. rose) and visual similarity. The app expands on personalization with the ability to search according to the colors from any uploaded picture, and through the 'Art Selfie' feature the user can find portraits that resemble themselves.

Similarly, 'Easy orientation and freedom of visit' (point iv) is another box GA&C mostly checks. The general interface is simple, intuitive and user-friendly. While RL museums generally urge visitors to follow a certain route, in *street view* this is not the case. Effort is also made regarding point vi 'Affordances and connection to the visitors' experiences'; this relates to effective communication e.g. imitating conversational language and addressing the user, using daily life analogies and metaphors (Rahaman 216). The language used on the platform is every-day and indeed not overly technical, and information is available in more than 8 languages. On a rhetorical level this is also present with titles such as "Hidden Facts You Didn't Know About Joseon Dynasty and Korean Empire".

Point iii 'Setting cognitive dissonance by challenges to explore' on the other hand is absent; while users can take 'control' in the sense of personalization, there is not much effort or thought required in it. Point iii can be implemented through competition, points, i.e. task completion. DH platforms that do include this often fall into the realm of gamification. Similarly, features enabling point v, 'Openness to new information', are strikingly absent.

Cultural Learning

Under Cultural Learning, Rahaman includes:

      i.   Collect, personalize and communicate through artefacts
     ii.   Reveal symbolic meanings of artefacts and signs
    iii.   Encourage the discovery of new information

Relating to point i, the gallery function is hyped up on GA&C's about page:

> Nothing is more personal than culture. So curate and share with the world your own
>
> collections of art, landmarks and historical events.

GA&C users can 'favorite' content (e.g. objects, themes) adding them to their profile, or create personalized galleries by collected objects. This gallery can then be given a title and a description up to 800 characters, and shared on a social media platform of choice. It should be noted that 'communication through artefacts' is not facilitated by the platform and within the userbase; communication happens externally on social media with one's personal network.

Point ii closely relates to 'Embodied' and 'Dialogic interaction' as discussed below. The easiest way to implement this feature is through e.g. forums to ask questions, and the ability to add comments. While these are absent, point ii and iii are met in other ways; for example, some exhibitions take the form of quizzes, as with 'Guess That Craft: Test your knowledge of India's art forms'. Similarly, our case study 'Korean Heritage', opens with the words "Explore stories that have shaped the lives of the people of Korean." To what extend this is 'new information' in the sense of 'Effective Presentation' point v however is debatable.

Embodied and Dialogic Interaction

Under Embodiment and Embodied Interaction, Rahaman groups:

i. Promote active participation (at the narrative level)
ii. Encourage task accomplishment
iii. Ensure real-time feedback and practical action

which greatly overlapping with those of Dialogic Interaction:

i. Maximize interaction
ii. Encourage discourse
iii. Promote dialogue between the locals, participants and experts

There was certainly an attempt made at 'Dialogic Interaction' point iii. The Art Talks broadcast on Google+ formed an opportunity for discussion between users and experts, and is indeed promoted as such:

Join the cultural conversation. Discover new ideas and hidden stories from the world's

leading experts. #ArtTalks [...] Viewers are welcome to ask questions in real time and share

their comments with the community.

However, with Google+ having been shut down for regular users in 2018, this feature has fallen away.

Digital contents, online forums, feedback sections, real-time chat functions, task accomplishment etc. are features through which interaction can be promoted. However, none of these things are present on GA&C. There are no communication channels available, with the sole 'send feedback' button seemingly meant for general comments and technical issues. Any 'discourse' or 'dialogue' (point ii) happens on external platforms, with GA&C YouTube channel

perhaps coming the closest. The channel's most popular video 'A journey of invention and discovery' has been viewed 19 million time, liked 14 thousand times, disliked (a strikingly high) 8 thousand times, with nearly 500 comments. However, this channel and other social media platforms are not actually integrated into the GA&C interface. Quite the contrary, comments have been permanently turned off on most YouTube videos featured on the platform.

GA&C as a contact zone?

To summarize, while GA&C checks many of the 'Effective Presentation' boxes, it checks none of the 'Dialogic Interaction' ones. That is, while the platforms enables exploration, and some manipulation of, it does not allow contribution or response to contents.

GA&C general strength lies with a good understanding of digital technology's advantages and user friendliness, facilitating innovative modes of presentation. While 360° videos and street view museums are engaging content formats, GA&C's main potential relates to its indexing capabilities, which can help form fresh and personalized connections that are, to an extent, unmediated. As Sood recalls:

> One of the curators told me, "Amit, what would it be like if you could create a virtual curator's table where all these six million objects are displayed in a way for us to look at the connections between them?" You can spend a lot of time, trust me, looking at different objects and understanding where they come from. It's a crazy Matrix experience. (TED 2016)

Importantly, it is not just the curator that can look at this 'matrix', but any user. Together with the ability to get incredibly close to art works, this "up close and searchable" aspect is quite 'new', and it creates a stand-alone experience not easily found elsewhere (TED 2016). It should be noted that this matrix is also highly dependent on algorithms and machine-learning.

However, what the above analysis also reveals is what the platform lacks, namely the ability to share these insights, and to participate. Pesce et al. suggest that through the 'favorites' and 'galleries' feature Google offers a YouTube-like functionality as users can "share [galleries] on social media, write reviews, share photos, answer questions, add or edit places, thus acting as local guides in the digital world" and GA&C's about page boasts "Be Your Own Curator!" (Pesce et al. 1894). However, there are important differences with a platform like YouTube: while the 'democratizing' potential of YouTube has been called into question recently because of the implementation of increasingly biased algorithms, any user can post video/playlists viewable to the entire userbase. Similarly, an important feature of YouTube is the discourse that happens *around* content; videos can be commented on, reviewed, rated etc., which has brought about phenomena such as commentary channels.

Indeed, some scholars have suggested that heritage should make use of existing social media specifically because of technological features that facilitate what Castells calls 'mass self-communication': dialogic interaction where users play an essential role (2010). For example, on Flickr – a picture and video hosting service – users can 'curate' their own photos using albums, galleries etc. complete with captions and comments section. Indeed, several scholars have noted that flickr is a 'digital Wunderkammer' for amateur heritage content, facilitating "new public

engagements with world heritage sites" (Terras 686; Jett; Garduño-Freeman 353). Similar platforms

exist for 3D models – e.g. Sketchfab.

However, there are also heritage platforms and archives with features such as

user-generated meta-data and comments. The Image Database of the National Archives of the

Netherlands, while lacking in other ways, lets users comment on and contribute to the archive, by

e.g. relating an image to their own experience (van Hooland). Other examples include platforms

such as Historypin where institutions, but also regular users can add 'pins' (bookmarks), 'tours' and

'collections' to a map in order to collect places, share personal stories and insights, or comment on

existing material (Armstrong 294-298; https://www.historypin.org/). Other similar current and past

platforms are 'The City of Memory', 'Adelaidia', 'Sepiatown' and 'Lost 100'. Tellingly, more

bottom-up platforms are often dedicated to 'local' or digital born heritage.

This is not to say that user participation has been the norm; oftentimes supposed goals are

unrealized. Valtysson examines Europeana – GA&C's main 'competitor' – and notes that while its

surrounding discourse emphasizes "interactive creative participation at the fingertips of people", it

actually "does not allow users to contribute actively to its content" (152). While it is not hard to

find proposals for projects integrating more user participation, and information regarding

discontinued past projects, lack of funding, technological resources, and fragmentation are

legitimate problems. For example, Culture Gate is an ambitious "online participatory digital

platform for cultural heritage" proposed in 2017, but navigating to its website the user will be met

with the message "Bandwidth Limit Exceeded" (Koukopoulos et al.).

Evens and Hauttekeete observe that the scarcity of public resources is a major obstacle,

and propose public–private partnerships as a solution (164). It may go without saying, but for

GA&C funding and lack of technological resources do not seem to be an issue, with the 'For

Cultural Institutions' page urging institutions to "Leverage Our Digitization Technologies".

Nevertheless, GA&C does not realize the envisioned participatory space. While GA&C galleries

come closest to 'being a curator', they are permanently set to 'private'. Any user who wants to "act

as a local guide in the digital world", "write reviews", "answer questions" etc. has to do so through

external social media, and for an existing personal network (Pesce et al. 1894). There are no traces

of user activity on the platform, and certainly no sense of the "global community" that GA&C

boasts you can join. GA&C, despite being a Google project, is not even particularly well integrated

with other social media platforms; share buttons are abundant, but these are a standard feature of

many websites. In this sense at least, it is questionable whether GA&C offers anything 'new' in

comparison to e.g. regular museum sites.

To conclude, GA&C offers interesting presentation modes, a good user experience, some

genuinely new tools for making sense of heritage, and a somewhat engaging stand-alone

experience. With the large quantity of content available 'free' of charge – more on this later – it is

fair to say that brute accessibility is largely met. However, user participation is not a feature of the

platform, so while Google may be 'democratization access' in a narrow sense, it is highly

questionable whether its 'democratizing' potential goes much further than that, as it simply lacks

the technological features to create embodied and dialogical interaction.

V   Reproducing AHD in 'Korean Heritage'

While GA&C includes many personalized ways to access content, many users will navigate the

website through 'Themes' and 'Stories', like those featured on the homepage. So far, the front-end,

that is, how accessible and democratizing is GA&C on the user side of things, has been examined.

As users are only able to contribute in very limited ways, this naturally raises the question of

authority: if not users, who is in charge of the representation of heritage – Google, partner

institutions, or a combination?

In order to answer this question 'Korean Heritage' was examined. This project was made in

collaboration with nine Korean institutions: Gyeonggi Provincial Museum, Gyeongju National

Museum, National Palace Museum of Korea, National Gugak Center, National ICH Center, National

Folk Museum of Korea, National Library of Korea, Suwon City and Sookmyung Women's University

Museum. The analysis employs a CDA perspective and is guided by the following questions: (1)

According to 'Korean Heritage', what is Korean heritage? How is Korean heritage represented? (2)

Who is producing the discourse on 'Korean Heritage' (3) and towards what means (chapter 6)? The

analysis is grouped according to theme.

Buddhist Objects as 'Art'

The exhibitions on Silla and Buddhist material culture have a prominent position in the project,

being the first exhibitions on the page, but also the longest. Buddhism is a traditional choice as

many objects from the National Museum and the national registry are Buddhist (Pai, "Legacies"

84). However, in 'Buddhist Art of Silla', Buddhist object are not presented in the context of religious

meaning, but rather in connection to the centralization of the state, and as the title suggests, as

'art'. For example, the acceptance of Buddhism is said to have brought "tremendous changes in the

political, social, and cultural landscape of Silla", but most of the exhibition focusses on how

Buddhism offered an "ideological unification of their kingdom", with little mention of social

changes(GA&C:2).

The flourishing of Buddhism is closely connected to the greatness of the kingdom, and the

richness of material culture; "at the height of the kingdom the royal capital of Silla contained

"temples as numerous as the stars in the sky and pagodas that looked like a large flock of seagulls"

(GA&C:2). The aesthetic qualities of these 'art' objects is emphasized; a particular statue is "an

invaluable example of the Buddhist sculpture of early Silla", another is "a beautiful testament to

the masterful technique for sculpting granite that marked the realistic trend of the Unified Silla

Period in the mid-8th century" and sculptures exercise a "unique aesthetic sense in gilt bronze

sculpture"(GA&C:2). Through this, objects become the witness to the 'greatness' of the Silla

kingdom, and that of Korea.

Scientific Aesthetics

The emphasis on aesthetic qualities is particular strong in the exhibitions on Silla. Silla's material culture is expressed in terms of beauty, advanced craftsmanship and monumentality. Golden objects are 'elaborate', 'splendid', 'sumptuous', 'luxurious', 'resplendent', 'numerous', 'sophisticated' and sites are 'huge', of 'unprecedented size' and 'magnificent'. The Bell of King Seongdeok the Great receives its own exhibition, with this particularly rhetorical introduction:

> This is the *most exquisite* piece among all extant bells in Korea. The formative *aesthetics* of the bell and its heartrending sound makes this artifact a *world-class masterpiece*. [...] This bell is considered to be one of the *best* religious monuments and *artistic masterpieces* from its era, *in recognition of its formative beauty, perfect casting technique, and spiritual value* (italics added)(GA&C:23)

Smith notes that as part of western AHD objects' inherent qualities, such as monumentality and aesthetics, are often linked to the idea of progress (197). While this rhetoric is present for the Buddhist objects, as discussed above, it is particularly evident in 'Silla, The Golden Kingdom'; "Silla earrings are highly elaborate and resplendent, indicating the Silla people's aesthetic sense and advanced metalwork craftsmanship" (GA&C:21). The exhibition 'Wolji, Royal Garden of Silla' is interesting in the sense that strays away from this approach, and discusses objects in relation to daily life. However, here too,
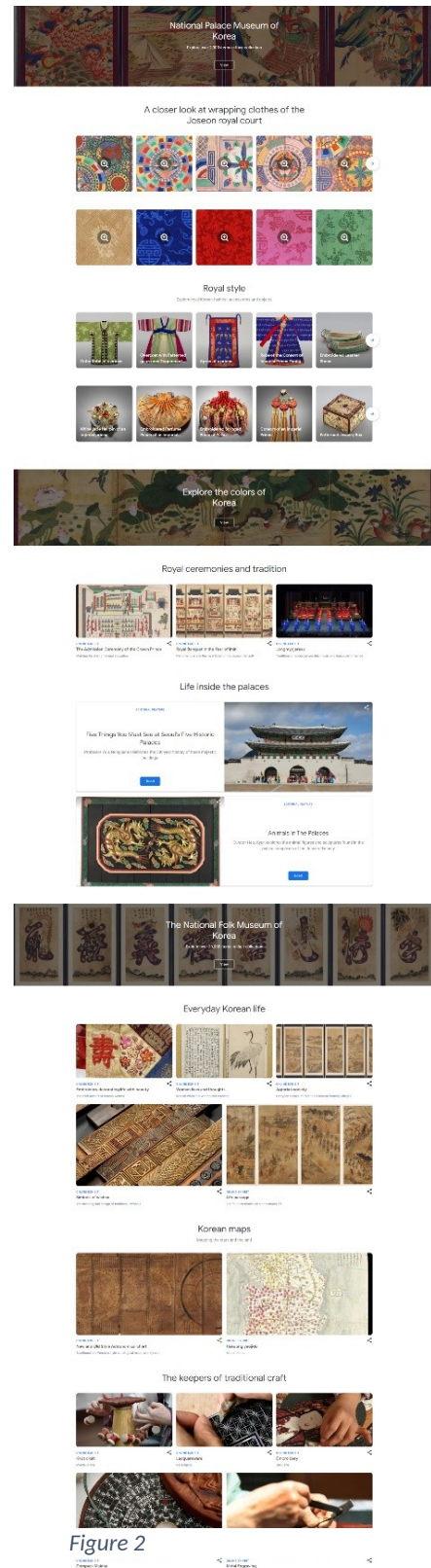

Figure 2

44

objects are described in relation to craftsmanship, connected to high culture and "the elegant and

tasteful leisure life of the Unified Silla aristocrats" they "conjure"(GA&C:25).

Court vs. Everyday Craft

The Korea specific, conventional dichotomy between folk culture and Confucian high culture is

reproduced through the Joseon period exhibitions. 'Royal ceremonies and tradition' introduces ICH

at the Confucian side of the spectrum, and is separated visually from the next sections 'Everyday

Korean life' and 'The keepers of traditional craft' on the homepage (figure 3).

'The Royal Banquet in the Year of Imin' is an exhibition by the National Gugak Center and

introduces a number of dances through a folding screen – described as 'precious cultural heritage'

– supplemented by YouTube videos. One thing that is immediately noticeable in these exhibitions

is the use of present instead of past tense, denoting the dances as 'living tradition'. This is even

clearer in the exhibition 'Jongmyojereak', which is described as "Carried on Over Five Hundred

Years, and Remaining as Everlasting Music at the Everlasting Space" and as "an everlasting classic

of the Korean people"(GA&C:12). However, as scholars have noted, through the institutionalized of

traditional music culture by e.g. the National Gugak Center 'high culture' is reinforced as an

exclusive category, disconnected from daily life (H. Park; Howard, *Living*).

The section 'Everday Korean Life' contains five exhibitions, with two contributed by

Sookmyung Women's University Museum. In 'Women, Lives and Thoughts' we find the sole

mentions of class, gender and Korea as anything else but a harmonious unity, kicked off with the

words "Women were not allowed to work in public service and had little chance of an education"

(GA&C:26). Sookmyung's exhibitions feature student works, personal items and private correspondence: the personal dimension is emphasized. Tellingly, Sookmyung is the only non-governmental organization in the collaboration.

Korea vs. The Rest

Resistance to foreign powers and uniqueness of culture are themes for both the pre-modern and modern period. While Buddhism in Korea is part of a larger East-Asian tradition (China, Baekje and Goguryeo had adopted Buddhism priorly), what is foregrounded is Buddhism in relation to foreign resistance. The first thing one learns in the exhibition 'Gameunsa Temple Site' is that it was built to "block the invasion of the Japanese troops"(GA&C:6). Resistance to surrounding kingdoms is constructed as something quite 'peaceful' and productive, rather than aggressive and destructive; "[a]s warfare with neighboring states continued, Silla put forth the ideology of "State Protection Buddhism" which led to the construction of "numerous temples"(GA&C:2). Similarly, King Munmu "building Donggung Palace, digging a pond, planting flowers, and raising rare animals around the palace" is said to be a source of "political stability" "even in the midst of war"(GA&C:6).

Tellingly, the unification of the Kingdoms is portrayed as not only bringing an end to conflict, but also as a joined, unified effort:

King Munmu embraced the people of Baekje and Goguryeo and joined forces with them to oust the Tang dynasty from the Korean Peninsula with their help, thereby leading to the first unified country on the peninsula (GA&C:6).

In reality this "embracing" and "joining forces" was the result of military victories, and not of building temples and planting flowers. Similarly, it is said that pagodas at Gameunsa Temple Site with their "stable proportions and magnificent appearance show the progressive spirit of Unified Silla". However, unified Silla was quite politically unstable and contemporary scholars have argued that it was in fact Goryeo, not Unified Silla, that was "the first unified country on the peninsula" (e.g. J. Kim xi; GA&C:6).

While influence from China and India is mentioned, in treating the objects as art, these are reduced to artistic influences. That being said, "Silla's indigenous style" and "nativization and localization" is also emphasized; Silla e.g. "developed and discovered original techniques for carving solid granite different from India and China" and sculptures exhibiting western Chinese influence are "exotic-seeming"(GA&C:2). The conclusion of the 'Buddhist Art of Silla' is especially rhetorical: the Unified Silla period style is portrayed as taking in the 'best' of foreign influences and aesthetics, but in the end replacing it by "an independent, uniquely Unified Silla form" unlike that of China and Japan(GA&C:2). When cultural influence is admitted this is in context of the Altaic myth, with "cultural prosperity" being brought about through cultural exchange with the northern nomadic tribes.

Korea vs. Japan

The juxtaposition against Japan is ever recurring. For example, 'Keepsakes from Princess Deokhye, the Last Princess of the Korean Empire' is based on baby-clothes of Princess Deokhye, which are represented in a positive manner as reflecting royalty and "wishes of prosperity"(GA&C:13). However, they also offer a negative view of the colonial period, representing "the stories of a

troubled nation"(GA&C:13). Similarly, 'The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty' both emphasizes the uniqueness of the annals – justifying their status as national treasure and UNESCO heritage – but also its preservation, not just against disasters, but against Japan, the "foreign nation" where it "drifted around"(GA&C:22).

However, this juxtaposition is clearest in 'Recording the Brief History of the Korean Empire': the empire's history is presented as one of modernization and globalization, emphasizing "the emergence of the Korean Empire on the world stage"(GA&C:18). The construction of public transport "according to international standards" "with independent Korean resources", communication networks, and electricity are stressed(GA&C:18). However, continuity of traditions is also emphasized: "Just as the four ascendants of King Taejo were honored when he founded the Joseon dynasty, Emperor Gojong's four ascendants [...] were duly recognized by the production of imperial seals" (GA&C:18). The exhibition 'Seal of the Emperor' continues this narrative, the seal symbolizing "the nation's independence" as "an important national treasure that must be preserved long into the future"(GA&C:20).

The Korean Empire is thus portrayed as on its way to becoming "an independent and modern nation" in possession of its own tradition, but accepting of (western!) modernization(GA&C:18). This theme of blocked modernity reoccurs in 'Five Must-sees at Five Historic Palaces in Seoul'(GA&C:5). In general it reads – as its title makes suspect – like a tourist brochure, with a particular emphasis placed on the "subtle" and "humane" "beauty without extravagance" of the palace buildings, and the "happy harmony between the natural and artificial"(GA&C:5). An underlying theme however is the destruction of these things at the hands of the Japanese and Korea's search for survival through the acceptance of western modernity. Most

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strikingly, the pavilion Jeonggwanheon is described as "showing a mixture of cultures together

with a dynasty's unrealized dreams"(GA&C:5).

While none of the exhibitions discuss the colonization period in depth, by constructing the

Korean Empire as "a self-reliant, prosperous nation", the Japanese colonialism is put in a bad

light(GA&C:8). Furthermore, it obscures the fact that modernization continued during the colonial

period, albeit at the hands of a colonial power.

Voices of Authority

Throughout 'Korean Heritage' sites and objects are implicitly and explicitly authorized by expert

voices. On a linguistic level, this is done through constructions such as "[t]his bell is considered to

be one of the best religious monuments and artistic masterpieces from its era", "[t]his piece is

considered the most beautiful" and "[t]he tile is believed"(GA&C:23; GA&C25). Through the use of

passive voice, the presence of some anonymous authority that can judge objects 'scientifically' is

implied. Subjective judgement is presented as objective fact, as is the case in the above excerpt

from 'The Bell of King Seongdeok'. Interestingly, when judgement is cast by non-experts, these are

explicitly named e.g. "considered a holy site by the people of Seorabeol" and "has long been

beloved by the people of Gyeongju"(GA&C:2; GA&C:25).

UNESCO and the state are called forth as authorities throughout the project, directly, in the

case of the former, and indirectly through the national heritage registers, in the case of the latter.

Take for example this passage on Jongmyo:

Jongmyo jerye(the sacrificial ritual performed at the royal ancestral shrine)—National

Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 56—and Jongmyo jeryeak(the music used for the ritual)—

National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 1—were designated as Intangible Cultural

Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001 (GA&C:12).

This rhetoric shows the self-referential tendencies of AHD; it emphasizes the heritage as valuable,

while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that UNESCO and the Korean state are the rightful

authorities to make such judgment.

Experts are put in the spotlight through the practices that most legitimizes them, namely

preservation and restoration. While preservation is mentioned in passing throughout the project,

the 'Conservation and Restoration - Efforts to hand down the heritages to posterity' section, which

shows the restoration process of four pieces, explicitly foregrounds it. While these exhibitions may

partly demystify preservation/restoration, they also reinforce their position within heritage

practice, while simultaneously creating an air of authority and professionalism around it through

the use of technical vocabulary.

For ICH, the state-authorized intangible heritage holders become protagonists, thanks to

whom traditional crafts "have been handed down to the present day"(GA&C:11). Their authority is

underscored by the difficulty of the craft – requiring "incredibly complex skills and techniques,

which makes it nearly impossible to explain in words" – the long learning process – "[i]t takes

thousands of hours of sewing to get just one step closer to the essence of embroidery" – and the

idea of crafts being "passed down" from one generation to the next – "[Choi Eunsun] inherited all

the nobility and tenacity at the same time" (see Smith, *Uses* 29 on inheritance in AHD; GA&C:15;

GA&C:11). Additionally, the exhibitions feature a recounting of the holders' life stories. Their

closeness to the crafts is expressed through inheritance and even geographical proximity to the

rural origin of the tradition (see Tangherlini 64-65 on the conceptual connection between folk

culture and the countryside).

Reproducing the Nation State

To summarize, 'Korean Heritage' focusses on Silla, Buddhist and Joseon heritage. The absorption of

global AHD is clear in the way that aesthetic qualities and monumentality are stressed. In the case

of the earlier material, these things are connected to the culture's "progressive spirit"(GA&C:6).

However, Korea's AHD's specific tropes also make ample appearance. The unified and independent

nature of the Korean nation is stressed in part through the focus on royal culture, and resistance to

foreign powers, especially Japan, is a recurring theme. The exception to this are the exhibitions of

Sookmyung Women's University Museum, which touch on diversity within Korea.

Heritage is constructed through the frame of the nation state, and differences are mostly

glossed over. As most of the institutions contributing to the project are sponsored by the state, this

is perhaps not particularly surprising. All sites featured are registered as Historic Sites by the

Cultural Heritage Administration, and the total number of objects digitized for the project is 32,238

items, but the selection used for the actual exhibition is significantly skewed to 'National Treasures'

and 'Treasures'. For example, 'Silla the Golden Kingdom of Korea' contains 5 National Treasures

and 13 Treasures. Furthermore, a closer look reveals that each category of objects discussed

contains at least one national treasure, which is usually featured first. In other words, treasures

form the 'back bone' of the exhibition, with other similar objects serving as supplementary

material. Single-object exhibitions similarly are all focused on National Treasures. In other words,

heritage is selected from a highly canonized and state-authorized body of material.

VI 'Korean Heritage' and Authority

'Korean Heritage' reproduces much of what characterizes Korean AHD, in part by calling on traditional authority (the national registers, UNESCO, ICH holders etc.). While authority is clearly reflected in the text, the major source of authority lies in the (re)production of heritage discourse. Who in this case is speaking for heritage? Who is producing 'Korean Heritage' and towards what means?

Producing 'Korean Heritage'

What exactly is the role of institutions in the project? At the end of each exhibition is a short page listing credits for the material and text. The distribution of the exhibitions of 'Korean Heritage' in relation to institutions looks like this:
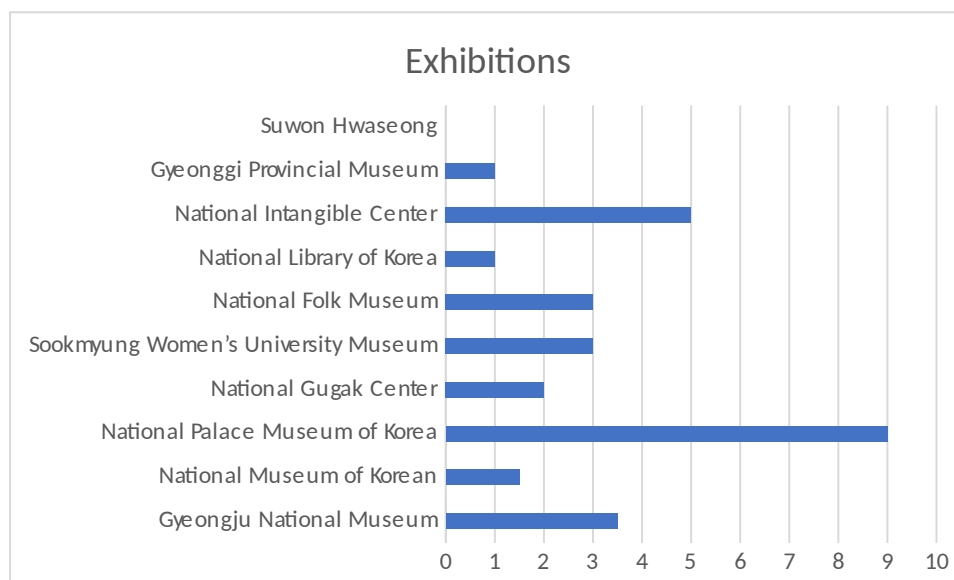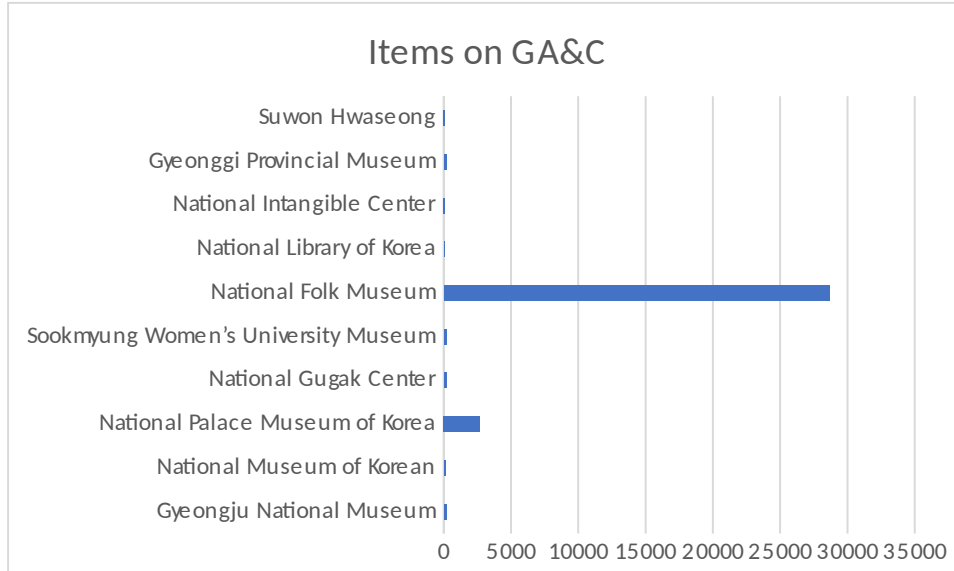
Items on GA&C

It should be noted that the 'Items on GA&C' refers to the total of digitized material, not the material that is actually featured in exhibitions.

According to Google, the selection of artworks has been made by the partnering museums (Rodríguez-Ortega 4). The amount of digitized material greatly varies per institution; this inconsistency seems to point not to the availability of material that can be digitized, but rather the choice of each individual institutions to upload either a small selection or a large body of material. In the case of exhibitions, institutions are credited for content provided, as well as text, sometimes with individual names. There is a fair bit of inconsistency with how credits are composed, with e.g the National Gugak Center adding a reference list at the end of exhibitions, an inconsistency which points to the credits being composed by each individual institution. Similarly, as an internship report from last year reveals, the organization of content on the home-page is determined by collaborating institutions, although it remains unclear how decisions with regards to this are made (Costa 52-57).

There is some involvement of third-parties. In the case of editorials, images are provided by museums, but text is not. This project features three editorials by Park Gyeong-ji, Heo Kyun and You Hong-june. No further information is provided regarding the identity of these individuals, though speculatively You Hong-Jun may refer to the Former Director of the Cultural Heritage Administration, Park Gyeong-ji may be a curator at the National Palace Museum and Heo Kyun may refer to the former director of the Institute of Korean Folk Art (Cultural Heritage Administration; National Palace Museum of Korea; Art Minhwa).

Translation to other languages seems to also be the responsibility of the institutions. Shinya Maezaki and Masako Yamamoto write that for 'Made in Japan' a major challenge was finding qualified translators "as there are few native speakers of English that also specialize in Japanese crafts" [translation from Japanese] (77). Judging that the English is sometimes of questionable quality in 'Korean Heritage', this may have been a problem here as well.

Admittingly while there exists some unclarity with regards to third-party writers and translators involved, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it seems that in this case content for 'Korean Heritage' is provided and curated by a rather traditional set of authorities of state-sponsored cultural institutions (the exception being Sookmyung).

GA&C and Authority: A Fragile Balance

However, what is GA&C's role in all this? Firstly, it should be noted that as opposed to Europeana, agreements with museums are not made public (Papakonstantinou and the Hert 328), so transparency is a can of worms in its own right.

According to one Korean news article Sood, during the launch event of the project, proclaimed that "Google is good at technology, but has no knowledge of culture or curating" [translation from Korean] (P. Kim). Google's about page for cultural institutions opens with flattering words:

> For hundreds of years, cultural institutions have collected and safeguarded our history and heritage. Powerful technologies can amplify this mission, while preserving these artifacts for a worldwide audience today and tomorrow.

In one of his TEDtalks Sood similarly says:

> And just a quick call-out to all the amazing archivists, historians, curators, who are sitting in museums, preserving all this culture. And the least we can do is get our daily dose of art and culture for ourselves and our kids.

This not only puts institutions in a position of authority, but it also constructs the relationship between institutions and its audience as one of supply and demand. A lot of GA&C rhetoric directed towardds institutions is of the reassuring nature: 'don't worry, you can still provide the culture part, just let us take care of the technology bits.' The explicit crediting and the general visibility of institutions on GA&C also adds to this reassurance.

At the same time, however, Sood also makes the assertion that the 'amazing stuff' 'doesn't [...] come from the museums', in other words, that it enables a direct connection that might blur lines of authority. The fact that this statement precedes 'I probably shouldn't say that', points to the fact that this is a fragile balance to maintain (TEDtalk 2011). More importantly, it is not that no constraints are placed on institutions by the platform. In practical terms, the format of exhibitions

limits the ways in which information and metadata can be presented. In other words, format is

GA&C's domain, which means that it is hard for institutions to innovate on this front. Botelho et al.

note that the biggest challenge for their GA&C collaboration related to "the responsibility to carry

out what had been agreed with Google Arts & Culture" which "directly influenced every decision in

terms of exhibition curatorship", though it is unclear what this practically entails (Botelho et al.

123). This is unsurprising, as public-private partnerships would require contracts and thus

constraints.

Things start to get more tricky when looking outside projects. As much as GA&C asserts to

have "no knowledge of culture" there is also content on the platform that is curated 'By Google

Arts & Culture', using content from partnered institutions (see e.g. the '…From Around The World

themes' series). While material is still copyrighted by institutions, it is not all that hard to find the

words "The story featured may in some cases have been created by an independent third party

and may not always represent the views of the institutions who have supplied the content" while

browsing the platform. This means that the materials that are part of 'Korean Heritage' can be

used outside the project for Google curated content (click-bait titles and all).

Traditional Authority on the Web

Why do institutions choose to collaborate with GA&C and what is the aim of this project

specifically? GA&C about page invites institutions to "Leverage our digitization technologies",

stating the numerous benefits of doing so. Indeed, in a practical sense, the GA&C platform tackles

many of the problems surrounding funding, fragmentation, resources etc. mentioned before. For

smaller institutions, GA&C offers digitization possibilities otherwise absent, with the basic contract

being free (Maezaki and Yamamoto 76). Maezaki and Yamamoto write, after noting difficulties

regarding digitization faced in the past, :

> It is a sad truth, but we felt that the contents produced for [the GA&C site] could be the last
>
> record [translation from Japanese] (77)

However, many big institutions have also chosen to collaborate, beyond this basic contract, and

have set up more projects.

Relating this to authority, Peter Walsh predicted in the early days of DH that the increased

influence of the internet will challenge heritage institutions to successfully transition to becoming

an authority in the digital realm, which will mean finding a new voice (81). This type of motivation

can also be seen in Maezaki and Yamamoto 'Made in Japan' article:

> In comparison with Wikipedia, which can be edited by anyone, resulting into problems of
>
> reliability, the information provided [on GA&C] is the official view of the collection's
>
> institute (76).

With regards to this requiring a switch of voice, Sood told the Art Newspaper:

> we'd get very long academic papers submitted to us and then the partner museum would
>
> complain, "No one's reading them." And we'd say, "Well, if you want people to read them,
>
> you're going to have to start with the image; you're going to have to bring interesting facts
>
> that people can understand easily because you're catering to a different audience." (Cocks)

In other words, contemporary institutions may feel the need to have a presence on the web in order to fulfil their traditional role of authority, but this requires both digital technology and digital literacy.

Rather than a force of democratization then, GA&C may just as well be viewed as a platform through which institutions can reproduce their authority in a digital space, unhindered by practical problems. GA&C ensures visibility. GA&C helps institutions 'keep up with tech' and 'modern trends', values which are part of a broader discourse surrounding the digital (Faber). In this way, GA&C should be viewed in the context of increased digitization, which has far-reaching consequences for every part of our lives. However, AHD's influences can also be seen in GA&C. AHD dictates that heritage is the domain of particular authorities, which can then have their say on this platform, excluding other voices. Indeed, the first institutions GA&C collaborated with were not only western, but also some of the most 'authoritative' in the field.

Branding Korea through 'Korean Heritage'

Is this the main driver behind the "Korean heritage" project as well? While it may be part of the reason – for example, one museum director emphasizes that they "will continue to use advanced technology and digital media to develop various programs to actively introduce Suwon's cultural and art infrastructure in line with the digital era" [translation from Korean] – there seems to be a different dimension as well (D. Kim). For one, in the frame of Korea's push for a creative industry, heritage in Korea is booming, with no lack of digitization projects and resources around, both public and private. For example, Naver, Google's rival in Korea, has its very own street-view-like function to visit museums. Similarly, a critical look at the total selection of items in the project

reveals that most images and information are direct copies of what is already available on the respective museum websites.

Instead, it seems that the main thing 'Korean heritage' is leveraging is not digitization technology, but rather the ability to promote heritage and stimulate tourism. At the end of exhibitions many of the Korean museums have put information about their location and opening times. Tellingly, some pieces, like 'Five Must-sees at Five Historic Palaces in Seoul,' read like travel-guides. Of course, these institutions are not alone in wanting to stimulate tourism (see e.g. Pascoal et al.); for example, the 'Nearby' tap on the platform allows you to view nearby institutions and related POI i.e. information for a potential real-life visit.

It is questionable whether this is focused mostly on domestic tourism however. For one, the easiest way to land on GA&C is through the Google search engine, which is hardly used by Koreans. Web traffic statistics show that the GA&C platform's visitors mainly come from countries outside of Korea (SimilarWeb). Then there is the slightly peculiar name of the project in Korean; '□□□ □□□□', a hangulization of the English name. Additionally, as mentioned before, alternative and more comprehensive digitization projects in Korea are in no short supply.

If 'Korean heritage's intended audience is non-Koreans things start to make a lot more sense. While plentiful, digitization resources in Korea are often lacking in accessibility for non-Koreans because of linguistic and technological barriers (hard to navigate web design). Korean articles published on the launch of the project emphasis that through it "The entire world sees Korea's royal heritage and intangible heritage" [translation from Korean] (Lee). Similarly, at the launch, You Hong-Jun went on record saying:

The launch of this exhibition on the Google Art and Culture Platform is expected to enable

many people to meet the true charm of Korea's unique cultural heritage. [translation from

Korean] (Lee)

Reaching a broad, international audience is of course not a motivation restricted to this particular

project. For example, Botelho et al. note that a major advantage of their collaboration with GA&C

was the ability to reach diverse and international audiences (123).

Considering the particular representation of the project however, its aim seems to be a bit

more specific than that. Not only does the project include major touristic sites and objects from a

body of mostly canonized material, it portrays heritage almost exclusively through a national

framework. In other words, it is introducing not just heritage, but also the Korean nation (and the

"stories that have shaped the lives of the people of Korea") through heritage. Contextualizing this

with contemporary Korean heritage practice and the increased use of both heritage and digital

technology for the promotion of the idea of Korea as a creative economy, suggest that nation

branding was an important motivation in setting up the project in this manner. Thus, even while

heritage is projected into the digital realm, it is shaped by local, and in this case national, concerns,

such as that of nation branding.

Google's Gain

While tech giant Google is a bit of a black box, there are clearly benefits to setting up this platform.

The general PR rhetoric of the company states "a strong desire to create technology products that

enrich millions of people's lives in deep and meaningful ways" (Strom 33). 'Free' access, usability,

democratization and user-friendliness are at the core of Google's rhetoric; one of Google's CEOs

once argued that "technology is a democratizing force, empowering people through information"

(Pichai).

GA&C and the discourse around it fit neatly within this. On the one hand, GA&C is a clear way

to improve Google's reputation, as art and heritage generally have positive connotations, as does

educating the public about it. With regards to the 'Korean heritage' project specifically, there are

clear advantages in terms of reputation building. As noted before, amongst much praise, one

criticism levelled against GA&C was the existence of a western bias. Indeed, Sood said at the

launch of the project that "[t]here is a focus on western art and culture and we are working hard to

address this imbalance through the use of the internet" [translation from Korean](Cho). In terms of

reputation, GA&C is thus as smart move.

However, alarm bells should ring when 'free' access is provided by a tech giant. As popular

belief goes: if you're not paying for a commercial product, then you're not the customer, you're the

product being sold. The type of PR rhetoric that GA&C puts out and 'the discourse of digital

democracy' it is part of, obscures the fact that the platform is still connected to the surveillance

machine that is Google (Strom 37).

GA&C for its part falls under Google's general privacy policy, which explicitly states:

We and our partners use various technologies to collect and store information when you visit a

Google service, and this may include sending one or more cookies or anonymous identifiers to

your device. We also use cookies and anonymous identifiers when you interact with services

we offer to our partners, such as advertising services or Google features that may appear on

other sites.

Google's entire business model is built on "the power to pull data traces from a person's everyday

life into its commercial circuits," something that is not just done through 'googling' but also

through the use of Google services like Gmail, Google Maps and indeed, Google Arts and Culture

(Strom 37).

Conclusion: the 'Old' and the 'New'

This thesis examined the platform Google Arts & Culture and one of its projects through the lenses of accessibility, democratization and authority. While the platform is innovative on some fronts – interesting presentation modes, user-led selection of content– and certainly provides brute access to a large body of content, it is not nearly as 'democratizing' as it likes to claim. That is, while it is boasted that GA&C blurs the lines between users and experts, in the end, the platform is set up in such a way as to keep cultural institutions on their pedestals. In other words, it is dialogically closed and in many ways it reproduces the relationship between institutions and the public as one of supply and demand.

The result of such a set-up is that traditional authorities can reproduce a particular view on heritage. In the case of 'Korean heritage', the majority of partners are state-funded institutions, material is taken from a highly canonized and state-authorized body of material, and the frame through which heritage is constructed is that of the nation state. Tropes particular to the Korea's AHD such as resistance to foreign invaders, the folk-court dichotomy, the emphasis on Buddhist objects etc., as well as strands from the global AHD, such as monumentality, preservation and expert judgment, are reproduced for an international audience to see. In doing so, 'Korean heritage' becomes a powerful tool for nation branding.

In other words, rather than being a force of democratization, on GA&C reproduces existing power relations. Google Arts & Culture should thus be seen in relation to both the push for the digital, but also as functioning within and having its part in maintaining AHD. On the one hand, for institutions that feel the need to keep up with technology GA&C is an attractive proposition. On

the other hand, GA&C helps maintain the idea that institutions and experts get to speak for

heritage, through flattering words, the general visibility of institutions on the platform, and by

providing a space for an institution's particular representation. This shows that we should be

critical of how digitization is actually implemented within heritage, and whether certain goals are

actually met in practice, rather than being guided by digital naivety.

What is new is that while heritage has been used for imperialism and nationalism, heritage

serving the digital cultural imperialism of 'big tech' companies is certainly a new development.

While lack of transparency means it is hard to judge how much influence GA&C is actually

exercising on heritage discourse, even if it is not, as Sood claims, there remain aspects to be critical

of. GA&C provides a reputation boost by connecting itself to education, and heritage and all its

positive connotation. Furthermore, without conjuring doom scenarios, it is important to note that

the core of Google's power lies at surveillance. Google strives on platforms that allow them to

control access to culture content, even uncopyrighted, in order to capitalize on digital consumption

(Nixon 216).

Relating this to GA&C specifically, recently the 'Art Selfie' function went viral, triggering an

upheaval of privacy concerns, which goes to show that people are uncomfortable with the idea of

Google collecting personal data. Still, while Google may not gain direct profit from its 'non-profit'

GA&C initiative, its privacy policy reveals that insights gained into user activity on the platform can

be used for targeted advertisements, Google's main source of profit.

Given that Google can make profit off of contents it does not own, in some ways it is

irrelevant if Google is becoming an authority that can speak for heritage; it does not need to, as

long as it becomes an authority for *access* to heritage. For individual institutions GA&C may offer a

solution to practical problems related to digitation and access, or even just an interesting

experiment, but the question is where digital optimism leads us. Undoubtedly, it is hard to predict

what kind of long term impact GA&C will have on heritage practice, but looking at the effects of

Google more broadly may be enlightening.

Notably, there is a significant body of literature dedicated to Googlization and its critique,

which refers to Google's growing influence on libraries, universities and even health research

(Miller and Pellen; Cayley; Sharon). An particularly interesting parallel to GA&C is Google books,

which was first met with much enthusiasm for a variety of reasons (one of them, you guessed it,

'democratization'). However, this initiative has mostly served Google, its stockholders and its

partners (Vaidhyanathan 165). More importantly, however:

> Through its size and willingness to throw away money, Google has crowded out any
>
> reasonable alternative service. No competitor will ever have the leverage to negotiate a
>
> similar deal with authors and publishers. But perhaps more important, Google is
>
> positioned to be the chief way we discover new books as well as old (173).

In other words, Google has become an important "mediator, filter, and editor of culture and

information"(173).

It is not hard to see how this translates to GA&C. What is also worth stressing is that

money and size connect to dependency. Google likes to maintain that users could switch to

competitors any time (Strom 35). However, as Strom points out:

> Google's sheer market domination means its search engine—and other services, such as its
>
> maps—has huge advantages over the offerings of competitors. As well, people establish

online routines and habits, so once a person begins using Google's services it isn't

necessarily easy to leave (35).

Google services have the seeming ability to lock people in. In other words, for institutions, what

might have been a fun experiment may become the norm, especially as digitization through public

funding remains hard. The convenience of having GA&C's app "in your pocket" in order to "enjoy

culture anytime, anywhere" may also impact the relationship between people and heritage in the

sense that it normalizes digital and on-demand access to heritage. While this is speculation,

considering that most of us are no stranger to being dependent on other Google services, the

question is how unlikely a scenario this actually is.

Word Count: 15345

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