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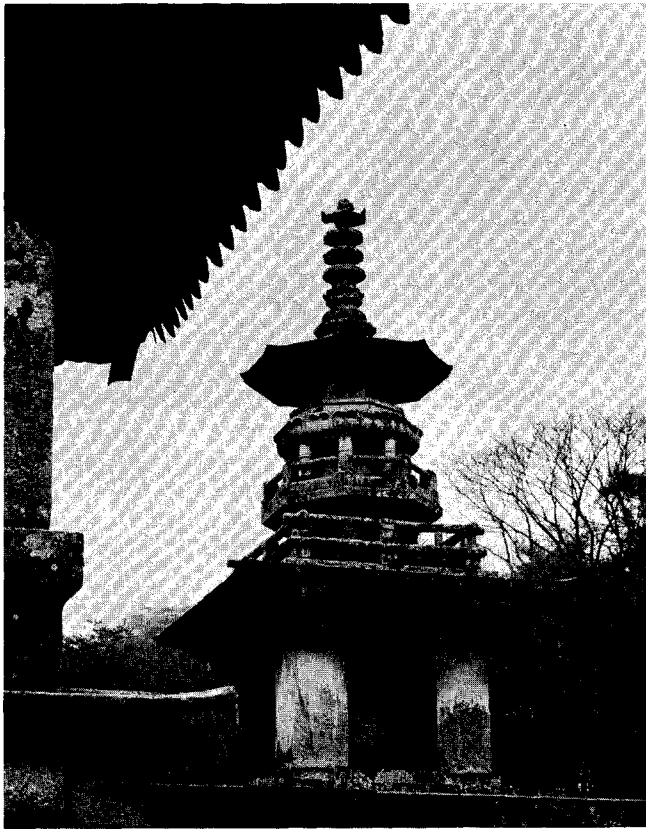
28 Uguisudani-machi  
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

Mr. Richard Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10017

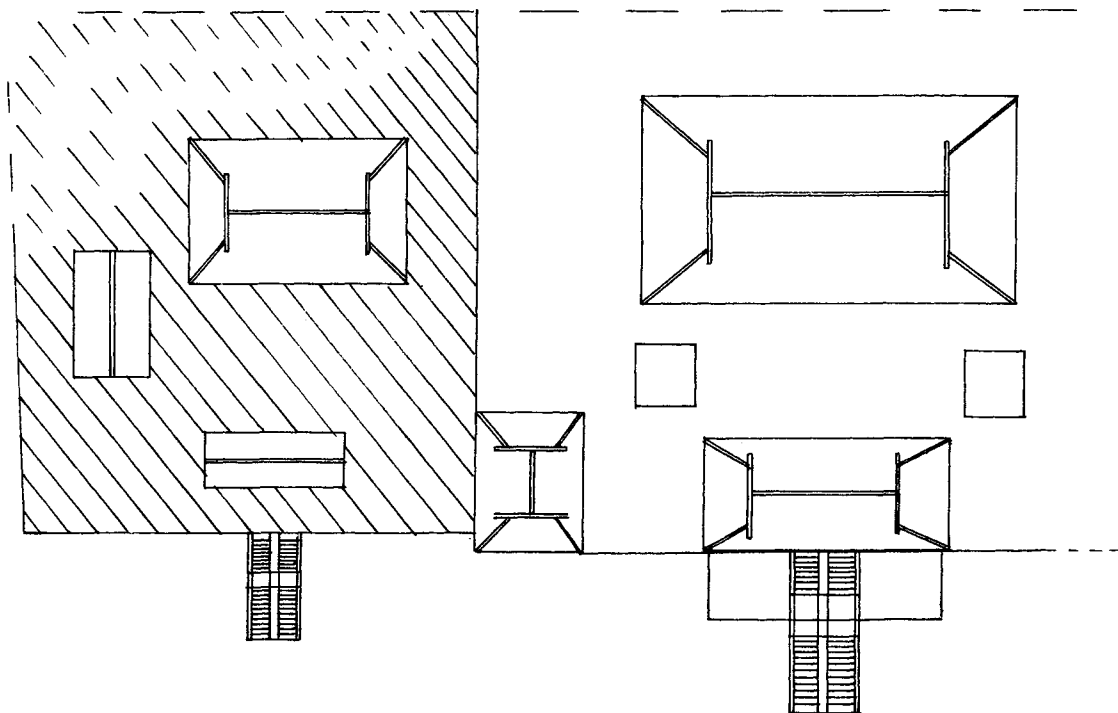
Dear Dick:

In Kyongju, the rising expectations stimulated during the train ride from Pusan were amply fulfilled. A city of over 1,000,000 during the Unified Silla Period (7th century), it has now shrunk to less than 5,000 persons living in an apparently undistinguished village. The most important monument in the area is the Pulguksa Temple, the oldest surviving in Korea. Built originally in the early 6th century, it was reconstructed and enlarged in the mid-7th and again in the mid-8th century. The overall plan is distinguished, and the setting was particularly atmospheric in the dark morning rain.

The stone foundations of the buildings as well as those used to create the raised platform upon which the temple complex is laid out were constructed without mortar, and yet survive intact. The wooden buildings date from the Yi Dynasty, however, and are believed to be somewhat smaller than the originals. Ascending the steps of the Blue Cloud and White Cloud Bridges on the right, one looks through the main gate toward the Main Hall. On the right, in front of the main building, stands the



Tabo Pagoda, said to demonstrate the Buddha's "manifestation in a diversified universe." 34 feet high, it is unique in Northern Asia, an exuberant construction again accomplished without the aid of mortar. On the left is the simpler Korean prototype, the Sokka Pagoda. This, "the pagoda that casts no shadows," is meant to symbolize "Buddha absorbed in transcendent calm." Both are thought to date from the origins of the Pulguksa Temple. On the left of the Main Hall, on a lower level is the Nirvana Hall which houses two large gilt bronze Buddhas also from the early Silla Dynasty. The smaller hall may be left by the Lotus and the Seven Treasures Bridges.

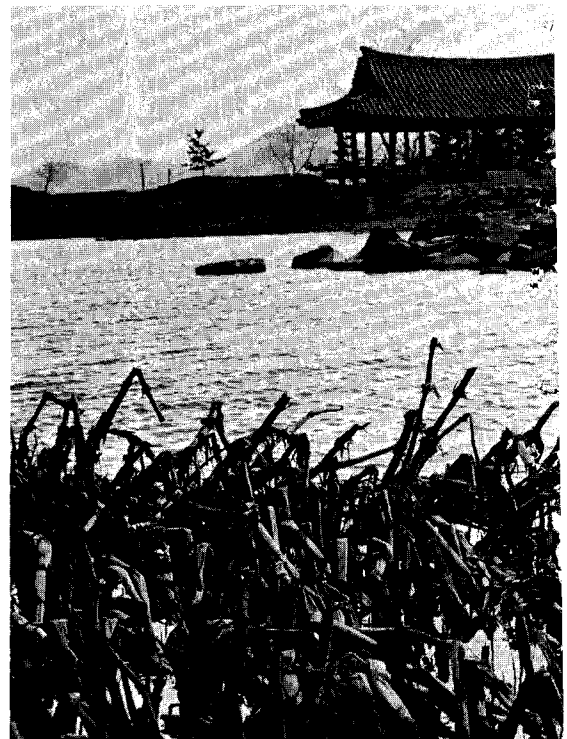






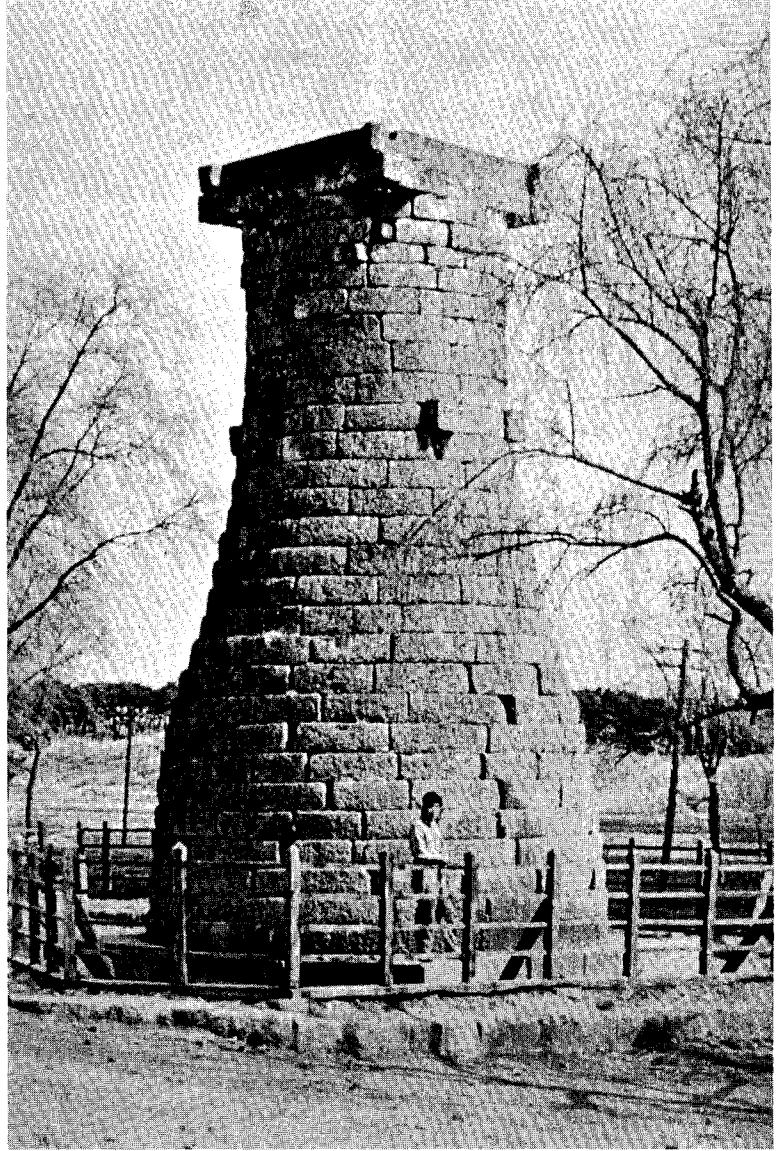
Later in the day, we climbed Toham mountain in a fine drizzle to see the artificial cave temple, Sokkuram. Placed at the top of the mountain, and commanding a broad view of the Sea of Japan, called the East Sea in Korea, this temple strikes an immediate and anguished chord in the visitor, for its doors are locked shut. Monks living on the grounds open them on request, though, and one's accumulated relief after the long climb insures an attentive visit. The Sakyamuni Buddha within is 11 feet in height, and carved from solid granite as are the numerous other panels in the entrance passage and the main chamber. The carving is of a very high order and was well worth the effort necessary to reach it.

On the following day we had an opportunity to visit most of the other important sites in Kyongju including the first astronomical observatory in East Asia, constructed during the first half of the 7th century. There is no clear theory at this time as to how this observatory was used, and the complete absence of similar structures in Asia complicates investigation. An interesting side light for numerologists is the fact that the number of horizontal blocks used in the curved, vessel-like body equals 364 (one less than the number of days in the year). Concerning innovation, the Koreans have at least one other distinguished claim: the first use of moveable type (in 1234), over two centuries before Guttenberg. Here, as in so many instances, invasion played a germinal role. The same foreign incursions that resulted in the loss of monuments and records were



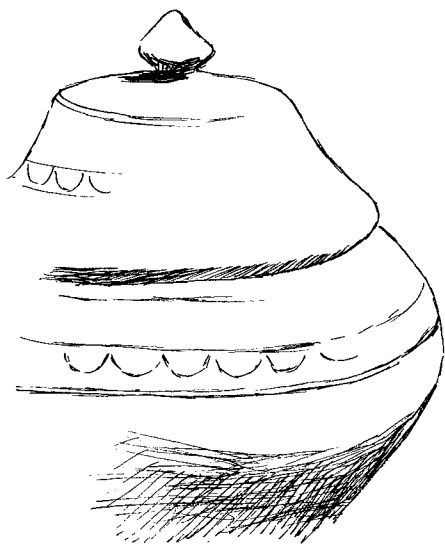
responsible for the printing development. During the Mongol invasions, the complete Buddhist scriptures were carved on 81,258 wooden blocks for printing... this in hopes of obtaining divine intervention.

Ch'omsongdae ("Star Observatory")



The duck pond, Anapaji, shown at the left, is an artificial lake and form part of the original 7th century "palace at the water side," Imhaejon. The pavilion is modern. Such structures were and are favorite settings for the enjoyment of wine, song, and women (the order used by our Korean guide).

## Silla Dynasty stoneware

URN, 8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> CENT

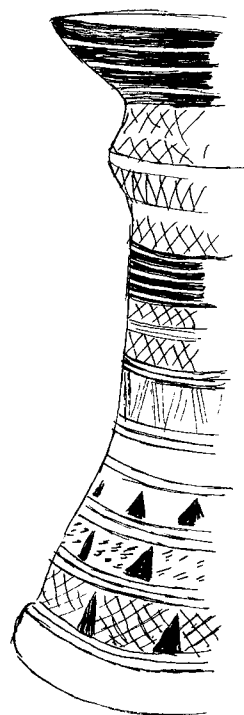
Silla Dynasty pottery and other relics are abundant. Possibly this explains, in part, their ready availability at reasonable prices. Authentic, attractive pots, some clearly revealing their function as antecedents to Japanese ceramic art, are available from reputable dealers and from shacks along country roads. The Japanese, with their efficient eagerness, appropriated, not just Korean samples or techniques, but the potters themselves. Though the elegantly glazed Celadon vases from

The royal burial mound at Kwaenung is situated in a grove of pines that form an unusual, angular grid. It is reached by a broad, grassy avenue that is lined with large, three-dimensional figures sculpted from granite. It was probably constructed in the late 8th century, and is one of the largest of many similar mounds in the Kyungju area.

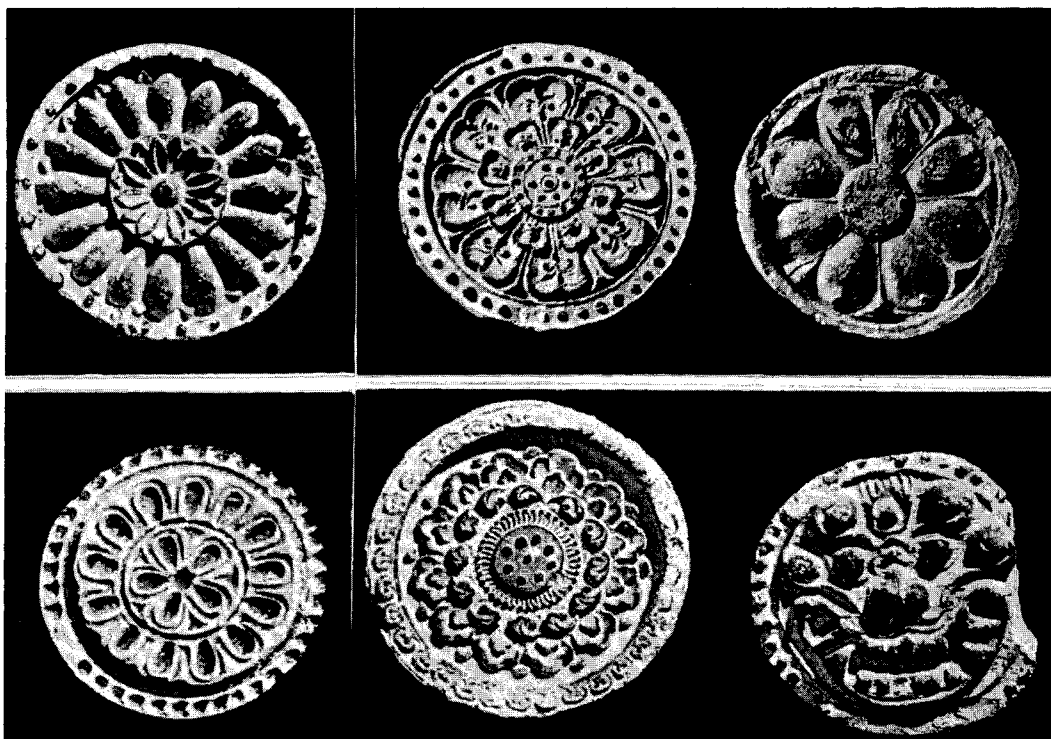




the Koryo Dynasty and the ornately decorated Yi porcelains are understandably popular with tourists, we were more attracted by the eccentric, soiled, bare stoneware from Silla times. Many of the most striking Silla pieces have an unsettling tendency to slouch giddily to one (or several) side(s), producing an almost antic effect. One frequently overhears foreign buyers carefully stressing the importance of finding "straight ones" to bemused Korean salesmen. An accessible and reasonable, grey earthenware item which I found particularly intriguing was the roof tile. Most date from the 6th through the 9th centuries. Included in the dozens we saw were very few near duplications of design. All attest to the virtually inexhaustible source of inspiration that the lotus flower provides. The tiles shown below range from the 5th century in the upper right to the 10th century in the lower right corner. The monster mask heresy came only after 500 years of the lotus, and perhaps this can be taken as an indication of Korean conservatism.

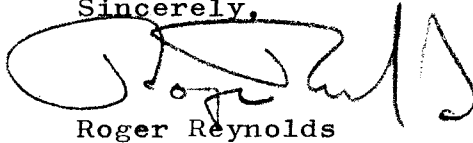


POTTERY STAND,  
5th-6th CENT



Under the almost hostilely severe surface, we found Korea an extraordinary experience in itself as well as in its role as a provider of valuable perspective on our Japanese experience.

Sincerely,



Roger Reynolds

Photo credits:

Sakyamuni Buddha, page 4, Ministry of Culture and Information, Korea

Ch'omsongdae, page 5, and village huts below, The Arts of Korea, by Evelyn McCune.

All others and sketches, R.R.

Below, a somewhat unattractive photo of Korean village huts which still form a great preponderance of living space in this primarily rural country.

