

Nomination Form
International Memory of the World Register

Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea

2014-40

1. Summary

- This documentary heritage, collectively named the “Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea,” comprises 64,226 hand-carved blocks used for printing 718 titles of works written during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). They have been entrusted by 305 family clans and Confucian academies.
- The woodblocks are a prototype of textcommunication technology that enabled exploration and dissemination of ideas, engaging scholars and intellectuals across time and distances. They covered a wide range of subjects, including literature, politics, economy, philosophy, and interpersonal relations. The ultimate theme is creating ideal communities built on Confucian morality.
- Collective consensus by local groups of intellectuals shaped the content and ensuing process with a network of family clans, kindred scholars, private academies, and local supporters — a unique effort in community publishing, from production process to shared costs.
- People in the network were closely connected to one another, as between master and disciple, relationships maintained through the mid-20th century, thereby forming a pool of collective intelligence transmitted for over 500 years.
- A timeless symbol of learning to be preserved in perpetuity, the woodblocks were created to make codices to facilitate the circulation of books. All the remaining woodblocks can still be used for printing.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Cultural Heritage Administration, Republic of Korea

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Government office of the Republic of Korea in charge of managing all cultural heritage

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Park Hee-ung	Director International Cooperation Division Cultural Heritage Administration
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2.4 Contact details

Name	Address	Telephone	Facsimile	Email
Park Hee-ung	International Cooperation Division Cultural Heritage Administration Government Complex-Daejeon 189 Cheongsa-ro, Seo-gu, Daejeon	+82 (0)42-481-4730	+82 (0)42-481-4759	hwpark63@korea.kr

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

- Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea: The nominated documentary heritage consists of 64,226 woodblocks used for printing a total of 718 books. They include 583 collections of Confucian scholars' writings on wide-ranging subjects; 52 books on Neo-Confucianism; 32 genealogies and chronologies; 19 books on ritual study; 18 history books; 7 textbooks for children; 3 books on geography; and 4 others. These woodblocks were entrusted to the Advanced Center for Korean Studies by a total of 305 family clans and Confucian academies.

[Appendix 1: List of Families and Confucian Academies Entrusting the Nominated Documentary Heritage]

Categorization of Woodblocks Entrusted to the Advanced Center for Korean Studies (As of August 31, 2013)

Type	Total	Collections/ Anthologies	Neo- Confucianism	Genealogies/ Chronologies	Ritual study	History	Children's textbook	Geography	Others
Number	718	583	52	32	19	18	7	3	4
Percentage	100	81.2	7.2	4.5	2.6	2.5	1.0	0.4	0.6

3.4 History/Provenance

- The catalogue comprises a total of 718 titles produced between 1460 and 1956, including the woodblocks for a Chinese rhyme dictionary, *Paizi libu yunlue*, or *Baeja yebu ullyak* in Korean (1460).
- Produced in different periods, these wooden printing blocks were preserved from generation to generation by the authors' descendants or disciples in family clans or private Confucian academies (*seowon*) and have now been placed in the custody of the Advanced Center for Korean Studies. Though each set of woodblocks has its own title, for the purpose of this nomination they collectively come under the name "Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea" to reflect their common themes.
- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea, used to produce texts in codex form, served as both an instrument by which Confucian scholars looked deep within themselves and a window through which their critical views of the world were expressed. As for the descendants of the authors, this documentary heritage has been a symbolic medium enabling them to engage and learn from the spirit of their ancestors carved onto these wooden printing blocks.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Letters of consent of the owners of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks for this nomination for inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register have been obtained and appended. [**Appendix 4: Letters of Consent for Nomination**]

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

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Advanced Center for Korean Studies

Address: 1997 Toegye-ro, Dosan-myeon, Andong, North Gyeongsang Province

Telephone: +82 (0)54 851-0783, 0772

Fax: +82 (0)54 851-0779

Email: istopia@koreastudy.or.kr

4.3 Legal status

- Managed by the Advanced Center for Korean Studies (placed in custody by the owners of the documentary heritage)
- Responsible administrative body: North Gyeongsang Province (under North Gyeongsang Province Act No. 3071: Act for Establishment and Support of the Advanced Center for Korean Studies)

4.4 Accessibility

- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea are preserved in the woodblock archives at the Advanced Center for Korean Studies. A selection of the woodblocks can be viewed on the fourth floor of the Confucian Culture Museum, also located in the compound of the center, where they are on permanent display. In addition, the Advanced Center for Korean Studies

maintains a website dedicated to the woodblock archives (<http://mokpan.ugyo.net>), which provides photos and bibliographic annotations about the woodblocks as well as information on the authors of the texts and their major works. Thus, the printing woodblocks can be easily viewed online not only by scholars and researchers but also by the general public. The contents of the woodblocks are currently being uploaded to the website, a project that is expected to be completed in 2017. [**Appendix 5: Photographs of the Woodblock Archives Website**]

- Researchers and other individuals wishing to view the woodblocks in the archives may do so upon permission in accordance with the guidelines on viewing the archives as set under the bylaws of the Advanced Center for Korean Studies.

4.5 Copyright status

- The entire collection of Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea, in the custody of the Advanced Center for Korean Studies, is not covered under Article 36 of the Copyright Act, which stipulates a copyright protection period of 50 years. Researchers are permitted to photograph and print from the woodblocks for research purposes as stipulated under the Advanced Center for Korean Studies' Rule No. 3 "Research," Article 7 "Rules for Management of Materials."

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity

- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea are all authentic original articles. They have been preserved by direct descendants of the authors for 60 to as long as 550 years, and hence constitute a documentary heritage whose provenance is clearly known.
- The existence of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea is mentioned in Korean texts that have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, including *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty (Joseon wangjo sillok)*, *Records of Daily Reflections (Ilseongnok)* and *Diaries of the Royal Secretariat (Seungjeongwon ilgi)*. Their existence is also mentioned in various bibliographies published by the state, which means their authenticity is confirmed by official state records.

- Books from the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were produced only after gathering opinion in the local community and gaining collective consensus, instances of which are rare in the history of the printing culture. For this reason, revisions were made many times during production of the woodblocks, removing the possibility of mistakes or false content. The inclusion of only refined content recognized through collective consensus has ensured authenticity of content. This production process is attested to by *Ganyeoksi ilgi*, a detailed record of printing woodblock production.

5.2 World significance

- While there is no doubt that the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were made in order to print books, they functioned as more than a simple print medium. These woodblocks are considered symbols of the learning of the sages, and have been preserved and handed down by successive generations of scholars.

- **Public Consensus:**

All the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were produced by collective consensus. Collective consensus in this case means the opinion of intellectuals living in the countryside, who were the opinion leaders of their time. Limitations were placed on publishing content that went against public opinion, either in whole or in part. Woodblocks containing such content were not destroyed but preserved for later generations, who could decide for themselves whether to publish the content or not. This is an important distinguishing feature of Korea's documentary culture.

- **Community Publishing Network:**

The books printed with the woodblocks were published by the local community. Public opinion leaders formed a network of local clans, academic circles, private academies, and leading members of local society. They took charge of all matters, from organizing the carving of the woodblocks, selecting the contents to be carved onto the woodblocks, overseeing the carving to completion, publication and distribution of the books. Carving the woodblocks required so much money that it could not be carried out by any individual or family clan alone, and the costs were divided among the members of the network. The overarching theme of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea is the

realization of communal society. The woodblocks were produced under a community publishing system, few cases of which are found in the world.

- **Collective Intelligence:**

The scholarly significance of the woodblocks can be found in the continuity of collective learning for more than 500 years. Though the texts were published by different authors living in different times, the academic achievements of scholars were handed down to their disciples from generation to generation, not accepted blindly but built upon to reflect current debate and criticism, and transmitted through these printing woodblocks. In this way the overarching theme of the contents of the woodblocks, to build an ideal community that enables people to live with dignity, was developed and made more concrete over time. The values that scholars tried to realize through these printing woodblocks are in line with the universal human values sought in world history.

- **Unique and Irreplaceable Heritage:**

The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea nominated for inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register are the only printing blocks made for the respective texts. Dating back 60 years up to 550 years, each woodblock is the only extant original; only one set of each was produced. As almost no reproductions of these hand-carved woodblocks were made in later times, they are absolutely unique and irreplaceable, so if these woodblocks are damaged in any way, a collective scholarly tradition lasting over 550 years will be lost forever.

5.3 Comparative criteria

1. Time

- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were produced continuously from the latter half of the 15th century to the mid-20th century. Over this period spanning more than 500 years, in the Gyeongsang provinces where the woodblocks were made, the Joseon-era consensus-based order of rural society was maintained until the outbreak of war in the mid-20th century.

2. Place

- Most of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were produced in Korea's North Gyeongsang Province. Called a "documentary repository" from long in the past, this area was known to publish more books than any other part of Korea.
- The authors of the texts were mostly scholars from the so-called Yeongnam School, who lived in North Gyeongsang Province and based their studies on the scholarship of the scholar-official Jeong Mong-ju (1338–1392, penname Poeun). More than other scholars living in other parts of Korea, the intellectuals of North Gyeongsang Province were strongly motivated to preserve the learnings of the sages on carved printing woodblocks; half of such woodblocks produced in Korea were made in this area.

3. People

- The authors and producers of the Confucian woodblocks were all members of the literati, or the intellectual elite class of scholar-officials of the Joseon Dynasty, known as *sadaebu*. They were kindred thinkers who, rather than the dynasty's policy of strong central government, preferred local self-governance through empowered rural community groups. Using their knowledge, they led agricultural reform and sought to realize in the provinces the ideal of a community built upon Confucian morality. In the strictly class-based society of Joseon, they sought to create a society of great harmony (*daedong*) according to the Confucian tenet that heaven bestows all people with the same inborn nature.

4. Subject and theme

- Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system that seeks, through reflection on self and human nature and investigation of the laws of nature, to create an ideal society where all people are good and are able to live with dignity. The scholar-official class believed the answer was to be found in the formation of communities where everybody helps each other, and the methodology for forming such a community is the consistent theme of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea. The Joseon Dynasty may have collapsed and faded into history, but the community tradition established by Joseon's Confucian scholars remains alive in various aspects of Korean society.

5. Form and style

- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea comprise 718 different book titles made with different calligraphic scripts. Arranged in chronological order, the woodblocks are important materials that show the changing styles of calligraphic scripts over time, which scripts were prevalent in each period. The woodblocks contain the authors' finely carved handwritings, portraits and various illustrations, providing valuable information on the history of painting and calligraphy.
- The prefaces and epilogues were carved in replica of the author's own handwriting and attached to the front and back of the book. This is a distinguishing feature of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea, which is hard to find in other books not only in Korea but anywhere else in the world.
- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea were carved for printing multiple copies of the same book. The characters were deeply carved at an angle of 45 degrees to prevent damage from repeated printing. The woodblocks are visually balanced and pleasing to look at with the width and height in a proportion of 3:2.

6. Social/ spiritual/ community significance

- The common content of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea is the creation of a communal society and ways to achieve such a society in the real world. In the Western world moral duties are enforced by legal means; in Korea they are handed down as tradition. This can be seen as the result of continual study and efforts to create a moral community and find ways to ensure that all people live with human dignity, as reflected in the contents of the woodblocks.
- In this regard, the "campaign to redeem the national debt" owed to Japan in 1907, or the voluntary participation of many Koreans in the "gold collection drive" to replenish foreign exchange reserves amid the 1997 Asian financial crisis represents the revival of community tradition handed down through history. Likewise, the New Community Movement (Saemaul Undong) of the 1970s would not have been able to take root and become a leading factor in Korea's economic development without the long-established community foundations.
- At a time when it is widely acknowledged that the Confucian spirit lies behind Korea's rapid economic development, loss of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea, the legacy of that spirit, would mean losing the symbol of the Confucian community that generations of Korean thinkers aspired to

create. The disappearance of this link to collective intelligence handed down over more than 500 years would be a great loss to the intellectual history of humankind.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

- The printing woodblocks of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, the entire Buddhist canon, were protected by the state and this has enabled their preservation to this day. They have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. In contrast, the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea, the results of scholarship handed down from master to disciple through more than 500 years, have been preserved by individuals or private academies in the provinces. The fact that such monumental heritage with its unique provenance has survived intact is itself a case of great rarity.
- The 718 titles of the Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea are all unique authentic originals, and almost no later reproductions were made. As such woodblocks can no longer be produced, they constitute documentary heritage of great rarity; once damaged they will be lost forever.

6.2 Integrity

- The Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea are authentic documentary heritage handed down in their original form since the time of their production. Although some woodblocks are partially damaged and some have been lost, this hardly diminishes their integrity. Indeed, the loss and partial damage to some of the woodblocks emphasizes the urgency of coming up with better measures for their preservation.

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