

INTERNATIONAL REGISTER FOR MEMORY OF THE WORLD

Documentary heritage

"Woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty"

PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. SUMMARY

The woodblock is a plate of wood on which words written in Chinese or Chinese transcribed Vietnamese were carved in reverse as a method of printing books in feudal time. They are now being preserved in National Archives Center No. 4, the State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam, including official literature and historical works compiled in Nguyen Dynasty, classical books and woodblocks from Literature Temple in Hanoi.

Under Nguyen dynasty, due to the need to popularise social standards, compulsory articles of law, Kings' and Lords' life and career and historical events... the Imperial Court allowed to carve many sets of history books and literature works for delivering. This helped to form a special kind of record, which are the woodblocks. They are the unique original records.

Due to such significant characteristics, woodblocks were considered as national treasure in feudal period, which could only be accessed by authorized people and people in Historiography's Office. People could only carve books under the Emperor's order.

2. DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1. Name: **The State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam**

2.2. Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated:
Administrative organization

2.3. Contact person: **Dr. Tran Hoang, Director General of the State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam**

2.4. Contact details:

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3. IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1. Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty are plates of wood on which opposite Chinese characters transcribed Vietnamese or pictures, maps were carved to print into sets of books.

3.2. Description

At present, 34,555 plates of **woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty** are being preserved in the National Archives Center No. 4. They were researched, edited and carved on wood by the Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty and Historiographer's Office. This was also a valuable library with more than 152 book titles in various topics, including history, geography, social affairs, politics, military affairs, legislation, education, prose and verse...

Apart from the woodblocks of official literature and history of Nguyen dynasty, **woodblocks** also included classic and historical books which were collected from the Temple of Literature of Imperial College (Hanoi) and transferred to Imperial College in the dynasty of Minh Mang and Thieu Tri.

Historiographer's Office (established in 1820 of the first Minh Mang dynasty) was responsible in researching, editing, carving and printing those kinds of books. It researched old books and Imperial records – the original records formed during the past activities of the Emperor and bodies under the feudal machinery of administration in Nguyen dynasty, to compile and carve and print books.

Imperial records, Woodblocks and Nguyen dynasty's historical books have close ties. Imperial records are foundation to compile books – manuscripts of the works being carved on woodblocks. Then, woodblocks were used to print into books.

Due to this relation, Imperial records, Woodblocks and books under Nguyen dynasty could complement each other when each of them had missing part(s). Woodblocks are sources of reliable history to help to study, compare, review relevant history materials to serve better for researching in the fields of Vietnamese history.

There are many valuable and rare woodblocks such as: Đại Nam nhất thống chí (History of the unification of Great Vietnam), Đại Nam thực lục (Royal annals of Great Vietnam), Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục, Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sử lệ... They also include poems and literature works written by prominent Emperors like Minh Mang, Thieu Tri and Tu Duc.

Therefore, apart from historical value, the woodblocks also have artistic values and values in manipulating technique, marking the development of woodblocks carving and printing profession in Vietnam.

Due to their importance and high values, feudal dynasties and state regimes in history of Vietnam paid a lot of attention to preserve these records.

Before 1960, the woodblocks were preserved in Hue. Then they were transferred and managed by Archives branch in Da Lat in 1960. After 1975, the National Archives Center No. 2 has preserved them, and now, they are currently being managed and preserved by National Archives Center No. 4.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1. Authenticity of the woodblocks

The woodblocks are original with clear origin from its creation. Most of them were compiled by the Court on the basis of official documents, which were carefully verified and were managed by state bodies through different historical periods.

4.2. Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

These woodblocks are specially valuable and rare records of Vietnam and also quite rare in the world. However, this kind of information support has not been widely used since feudal regime was collapsed.

Regarding content: Nowadays, woodblocks on the field of official literature and history of feudal dynasties like this kind of the documents in the world are very rare. They were created during the performance of the feudal administrative system and prominent historical figures.

Regarding method of making the records: A close procedure costing a lot of time and effort:

1. The Emperor launched a royal decree to allow to compile book

6. MANAGEMENT PLAN

The State of Vietnam has invested to construct a repository with rather modern equipment to preserve these records with a budget of 57 billion VND.

Direct management agency: The National Archives Center No.4 of the State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam.

Presently, all the woodblocks (including copy and original records) have had database, software for finding, management and utilization.

7. CONSULTATION

Detail of consultation about this nomination with the owner of the heritage

The State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam

PART B - SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8. ASSESSMENT OF RISK

Now, the collection of woodblocks is preserved in specialized repository so it seems to have less risks caused by preservation condition. Anyway, due to the time, it is impossible for the woodblocks to avoid getting old. Therefore, it is necessary to study the necessary methods to slow down the aging process.

9. ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

Previously, due to the difficulties emerging from the war or the lack of facilities and improper awareness of people towards value of the woodblocks, thus the preservation was limited. Recently, people's consciousness of these records has changed. The State and the higher authorities have paid more attention and invested necessary facilities to help improve the preservation of the collection.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

The State Records and Archives Department of Vietnam

Signature:
CỤC TRƯỞNG

Date: 02 November 2007



Trần Hoàng