



10-1-1988

Korean Holdings in the British Library

E. McKillop

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

McKillop, E. (1988) "Korean Holdings in the British Library," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 1988 : No. 85 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol1988/iss85/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of East Asian Libraries by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

KOREAN HOLDINGS IN THE BRITISH LIBRARY

E. McKillop

British Library

Korean language material is predominantly housed in Oriental Collections (OC) in the British Library. The total holdings are 31 manuscripts, about 4000 monographs, 243 periodicals, and 3 newspapers (currently received).

Manuscripts

The library's small collection of Korean manuscripts began with a translation of the Lord's Prayer into *Hangul*, the Korean alphabet, presented in 1843. The largest single group of manuscripts is a collection of maps and atlases, including a large late 19th century scroll (*Taehan chonjido*) with place-names in Chinese, Hangul, and English. Other maps include two hand, or pocket, atlases (Or.5714 and Or.7367) in the folded-page format used by officials, both dating from around 1890. Kim Chong-ho's *Taedong Yojido* [General atlas of Korea] is held in two versions (Or.11624 and Or.13144) and there is a large four volume atlas, concertina-bound and also dating from the 19th century, at Or.5715. The revised 1813 edition of Kim Ch'i-in's *Tongguk munhon pigo* [Korean Encyclopedia] is at Or.6793. This official compilation used gazetteers, population records and materials about illustrious families to present a record of contemporary Korean government. It was compiled at the behest of King Yongjo in 1770; the library's copy is of the expanded, revised edition, made in 1809 and 1813.

Manuscript versions of three historical novels, *Records of the Kingdoms from the Spring and Autumn annals*, *The jade ring*, and the *Romance of the Foundation Feast at the Chinshan Temple* (Or.7363 and Or.7362) complement the printed collection of popular fiction.

In the 17th century, an important philosophical school, known as *Sirhak* (practical learning), grew up in response to the acute social and economic problems of the time. The Catholic convert Chong Yag-yong, who was banished from court in the Christian persecution of 1801, is an outstanding figure in the *Sirhak* movement. The library holds two of his works: *Mongmin simso* [Admonitions on governing the people] (Or.7867) and *Humhum sinso* [Towards a new jurisprudence] (Or.7864). A rare manuscript compendium of 18th century legal practice, *Chonyul tongbo* (Or.7872) gives details of penal and administrative codes. It was prepared for publication but for some reason was never printed, so only manuscript copies survive.

Other manuscripts include a set of acupuncture charts, collections of historical anecdotes, a group of genealogies and a work on fortune telling, and a handsome, brightly-colored volume depicting the coronation in 1869 of Queen Min, wife of King Kojong (Or.7458). A recent acquisition is a small volume of 100 genre paintings of occupations and scenes from daily life by the Yi dynasty artist Kisan (Or.14344), similar to a collection in the British Museum's Department of Oriental Antiquities.

Printed Material

Western missionaries were responsible for an interesting collection of late 19th century printing, primarily scriptural, which is of considerable significance in documenting the transition from traditional to modern printing methods in Korea. The most highly prized items in the collection are

however a small group of extremely early moveable type printed works. Given Korea's early and outstanding accomplishments in the development and application of moveable type technology, the library is fortunate to possess works like *Chunchu kyongjon chiphae* [Collected commentaries on the Spring and Autumn annals] of 1442, which bear testimony to Korea's central place in the history of printing. The Satow collection of mainly Japanese editions, most of which were acquired by the British Museum in 1884 and 1885, contained several important Korean works, and the library continues where possible to expand its holdings of early Korean printing, as for example with the recent purchase of a group of fine moveable type editions from the Fang Chao-ying collection. Another monumental achievement of Korean printing, the 13th century Buddhist *Tripitaka* housed at Haeinsa, South Korea, is represented by two volumes printed from the 13th century blocks at later dates, while there is a small but interesting collection of Buddhist material (*sutras, dharani*) from the Yi dynasty (1392-1910). The 1966 reprint of the entire *Tripitaka* made by Dongguk University is also held.

Korean material appears to have entered the library sporadically. Apart from the Satow and Fang Chao-ying collections, one cannot point to individual donors, although there is a preponderance of material acquired from British travellers to Korea, as one might expect.

Among illustrated works, there are several editions of the *Iryun haengsildo* [Illustrations of virtuous conduct], woodblock printed on typically wispy, white Korean paper, and of the Taoist *Kamung p'yon* [Rewarded virtues] and the apocryphal Buddhist *Pumu enjung kyong* [Sutra of filial piety], illustrating three major strands in traditional Korean thought. An important Confucian historical work, the *Kongja kao* [Family sayings of Confucius], was at one time thought to date from the early 14th century, but recent scholarship has determined that this dating was based on a mistaken assumption and that the work is in fact printed with type cast in 1455 (with woodblock printed pages supplied where necessary). There is a small collection of late 19th century works on ritual and court ceremony. These woodblock printed compendia detail the dress, musical instruments, position, and location of the grand events which punctuated life at the court of the Yi dynasty. There is a large group of language primers and rhyming dictionaries designed to teach Korean school children Chinese characters and their Hangul equivalents. Two block-printed volumes of the *Tripitaka Koreana* are held.

In addition to Confucian texts collected as examples of the history of printing and of different fonts used between the 15th and 19th centuries by the government printing works, there are also intellectually significant works of Korean neo-Confucianism, such as the *Songhap siptu* [Confucian diagrams] of the 16th century scholar Yi Hwang. The monumental Chinese encyclopedia *Munhon tonggo* [Wenxian tongkao] by Ma Duanlin, is held in an 18th century edition. A collection of 19th century popular fiction, woodblock printed for circulation to women and other uneducated readers, is unusual in being entirely in the Korean script, *Hangul*. Most premodern Korean material is mainly printed in classical Chinese, the *lingua franca* of the Confucian scholarly elite.

A large proportion of current acquisitions comes through official exchanges with the National Central and National Assembly Libraries. There is a wealth of statistical and economic data unequalled in Britain in the periodical collections. Oriental Collections is mainly concerned with the humanities and social sciences, while scientific and technical material is collected by the Science Reference and Information Service. Traditional Korean science and medicine is however taken by OC, which also holds a set of acupuncture charts from the 19th century. At present 243 periodicals are taken from South and North Korea. There is also a small collection of journals published in the US and elsewhere by the overseas Korean community, and a little from Korean-speaking areas of the People's Republic of China. Because of space shortage, many Korean periodicals are out-housed, and some officially-published titles are available at the Official Publications Library, Great Russell Street, where a microfilm catalog (for older holdings) and card index (of current receipts) is maintained, country by country. A limited budget and the lack of a

full-time member of staff for Korean make it impossible for the collection to reflect adequately the growth of publishing activity, particularly in South Korea, over the past decade, but every effort is made to acquire essential works, especially in the fields of art and archaeology (which have recently attracted widespread interest as a result of major exhibitions in various western countries), history, and literature. There is close cooperation with the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University (Malet Street, London WC1E 7HP) which currently acquires considerable amounts of material in Korean.

Among many travellers' accounts of Korea held in the Western and English language sections of the library, the earliest western work about Korea, Hendryk Hamel's *An account of the shipwreck of a Dutch vessel [...] with the description of the Kingdom of Korea* should be mentioned. The French edition of 1670 and Churchill's 1704 translation (from the French) are both held, at 1047.b.4 and L.R.297.b.13 respectively. The 1705 Amsterdam edition of Witsen's *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (G 7025) is another important early Dutch work on the Far East, including Korea.

(Adapted from the *British Library India Office Library and Records Oriental Collections Newsletter* no. 40 (March 1988): pp. 6-9.)