2-1-1992

The Yi Song-Ui Collection of Korean Rare Books in the C. V. Starr East Asian Library of Columbia University

Amy Hai Kyung Lee
Amy Vladeck Heinrich

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

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol1992/iss95/5
THE YI Sŏng-ŭi COLLECTION OF KOREAN RARE BOOKS 
IN THE C. V. STARR EAST ASIAN LIBRARY OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Amy Hai Kyung Lee
Amy Vladeck Heinrich

Columbia University

History of the Library

The C. V. Starr East Asian Library was founded in 1901, as one of the first collections in North America, in conjunction with the initiation of Columbia's Chinese studies department by Horace Walpole Carpentier. Early acquisitions included a gift from the Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi. The Library expanded to include Japanese materials when the Japanese program began in the 1920s under the leadership of Professor Ryusaku Tsunoda. A substantial gift of premodern books, by the Japanese Imperial Household ministry, included many Edo-period woodblock printed books, which are now, at long last, being cataloged. The collection as a whole contains many valuable research materials from the prewar period, some of which are no longer readily available in East Asia. These materials were housed originally in Low Library; the East Asian Library moved to its current location, which was originally the Law Library, in 1962 when the new Law School facilities were completed.

Korean Collection

Although for the past decade or so library tradition has maintained that the Korean collection was started in 1953, it actually began with a donation of books by Korean students at Columbia University in 1931. According to a recently rediscovered article in The Korean Student Bulletin of December 1931, "the much needed and the long planned Korean Library and Culture Center was recently established at Columbia University.... At present the Korean Library has nearly 1,000 volumes of Korean books, largely contributed by the Korean students in New York." It goes on to hope, optimistically, that "the Library Committee expects to have over 2,000 volumes of Korean books ..." by the end of 1931, and that "a large collection of books is expected in the near future and according to the plans of the committee, the library will have at least 20,000 to 25,000 books by 1936." This was presented at the panel, "Rare and Unique Archival and Library Resources on China and Korea in the New York Metropolitan Area," of the Mid-Atlantic Region/Association for Asian Studies twentieth annual meeting at Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, PA on November 2, 1991.

1The Korean Student Bulletin IX, no. 4 (December 1931), pp. 1, 7.
not how it turned out. Although the Library still has some of those early donations, the Library Committee mentioned in the article seems to have dissolved, and other and perhaps more urgent processes occupied Korean students. There was a long hiatus which we are still in the process of reconstructing; however, it is clear that the systematic collecting of Korean materials began only after renewed interest and University commitment in the early 1950s. The collection now has a total of approximately 36,300 volumes, plus subscriptions to 330 periodicals.

Yi Sŏng-ŭi Collection

Among those volumes are the 517 titles in 1,857 volumes of the Yi Sŏng-ŭi Collection of rare books, acquired by the Library in the late 1960s. Yi Sŏng-ŭi was an antiquarian book dealer in Seoul, and became the foremost authority on old moveable type in Korea. When he died, in the winter of 1964-65, his personal collection was put on the market by his heirs. Columbia spent close to two years negotiating the purchase. The collection as finally acquired was smaller than the one originally sought, since strong pressure developed in Korea to keep the whole collection, but certainly the typographically oldest items in it, within the country. Some particularly valuable and unique items did remain in Korea. The 1,857 volumes Columbia acquired are housed in over 700 chilli cases and printed, either with woodblocks or movable wood or metal type fonts, on Korean paekchi fa jaK paper, made from mulberry tree fiber. A significant number of these are movable metal type printed books, and the type fonts used may in some cases have been made before the 1590s. Over 900 volumes are classical Yi dynasty language and literature books.²

²A breakdown by the subject matter of the books in the Yi Song-ui Collection is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astronomy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confucianism</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictionaries</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and travel</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and ethics</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/miscellaneous</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,857</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20
Over the years, many of the volumes, which are in generally good condition, were cataloged. However, it is only recently that the collection has been reviewed by a specialist in Korean rare books. Last spring, Paek Rin 帕麟, 3 formerly of the Harvard-Yenching Library, evaluated the collection, and identified fourteen titles which he labelled "most rare."

**Major Holdings**

We will briefly describe a few of the fourteen "most rare" items, with some illustrations, and an additional volume which was not part of the original purchase of the collection, but which indeed had been part of Yi Song-uki's collection.

1. *Ch'illum imunwŏn kangŭi* 親臨倫文院講義, compiled by Kim Chae-ch'ŏn 金載淳. 2 vols. Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1777. Published in 1781 (5th year of King Ch'ongjo). A seal called *Tongmin chibo* 同文署보, used on this book, is the king's seal, which indicates that the king owned, used, and studied this book. It contains the lectures, called *kyŏngyon* 命筵, given to the king in the Imunwŏn 耳聞院 lecture hall. The topic of the first lecture was the *Kunsarok近思錄*, or *Chin-ssu-lu*, compiled by Chu Hsi and Lŭ Tsu-ch'ŏn. See figure 1 below.


3. *Isibil kongsin hoemaengnok* 二十一功臣會盟錄, compiled by the king's order. 1 vol. (36 leaves). Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1668. Published in 1728 (4th year of King Yongjo). The 1728 convention of hereditary nobles of the dynasty. After the suppression of the Yi In-jwaŭi nan 寒麟俊惟乱 rebellion in 1728 and the awarding of the title Punmu Kongsin 崑武功臣 to fifteen men for contributing to the victory, King Yongjo summoned all the previous and new holders of the title to this assembly.

---

3Professor Paek received the Master of Library Science degree from the Graduate School of Yonsei University, Seoul; he was later Head of the Reference and Acquisition section of the Seoul National University library, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Korean Library Association. He also taught at the Library Education Institute of Songgyun'gwan University, and at the Library School of Ehwa Women's University. He worked as rare book cataloger in the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, until his retirement in June 1991. He is the author of *Han'guk tosogwansayon'gu* (A study of the history of libraries in Korea); *Kyujanggak changso e taehan yon'gu* (A study of the Kyujanggak Collection); *Koso mongnok kyuch'uk* (Rules of cataloging koso classical Chinese books); and others.
4. *Isip kongsin hoemaengnok* 二十六臣會盟録, compiled by the Nokhun Togam, 1 vol. (29 leaves). Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1668. Published in 1694 (20th year of King Sukchong). A formal roster of the 2680 convention of twenty groups of hereditary nobles, including those awarded titles for their part in suppressing an alleged attempt at rebellion.

5. *Kach’e sin’gum samok* 加髢甲禁革目, compiled by King Chŏngjo’s order in 1788 (12th year of King Chŏngjo). Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1777. This is an ordinance issued by the king prohibiting the kach’e 加髢 style of female hairdress. It provides valuable data for students of social life and customs of the Yi dynasty period. The most obvious point of interest is that while the ordinance is written in Chinese, with a few clarifying comments in Korean relating to particular hair styles, a complete Korean translation is provided, so less well-educated people, and especially women, could read the proclamation. See figures 2a and 2b below.

6. *Kigwa Kaengjaerok* 省科庚載録, written by King Yŏngjo in 1772 (48th year of King Yŏngjo). 1 vol. (15 leaves). Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1772. A record of special examinations held to celebrate the first anniversary of Kirobang 俊老榜, for several thousand people who were over sixty years of age. This copy has a seal indicating it is a royal presentation copy.

7. *Kyewŏn p’ilgyong chip* 桂苑筆耕集, written by Ch’oe Ch’i-wŏn; b. 857). 20 vols, in 4 physical volumes. Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1795. Published in 1834 (34th year of King Sunjo). Collected works of Ch’oe Ch’i-wŏn, who was sent as a student to China at the age of twelve, and six years later passed the Chinese chin shih 進士 examination in 874. For ten years he served in the T’ang government in China, returning in 885 to his native Silla, where he rose to the highest posts at court. Later he retired to a Buddhist monastery, where he spent the rest of his life. This collection of Ch’oe’s work contains poems written during his service in China, and is the earliest personal literary collection by a Korean. This copy is from the Sŏ Yu-gu 徐有翼; (1764-1845) edition printed by Chŏngnija in 1834.

8. *Nogoltae ŏnhae* 名大解. 2 vols. Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1668. Published in 1670 (11th year of King Hyŏnjong). This is a textbook of colloquial Chinese for professional Chinese-Korean interpreters. It includes the transliteration of Chinese characters in two ways: a contemporary northern Chinese pronunciation and an earlier Chinese standard pronunciation recorded in fifteenth-century Korean lexical works. It also includes a complete translation of the Chinese text into the Korean spoken in the seventeenth century. This transliteration and translation process is called ŏnhae 解. The transliteration of Chinese—older standard on the left side of the column and contemporary standard on the right—provides very valuable data for students of seventeenth century spoken Chinese. The two volumes of this title in the Yi Sŏng-ui Collection are from the first edition printed in 1670. See figures 3a and 3b below.
9. **Oje asong** compiled by King Chŏngjo. 8 vols. in 2 physical volumes. Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1668. Published in 1799. In compiling this book, King Chŏngjo gathered poems of Chu Hsi together with Chu Hsi's own commentary. The word *asong* indicates that those poems were frequently read and sung by the king.

10. **Paeja yebu unyak** written by Chŏng To. 5 vols. in 2 physical volumes. Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1668. Published in 1678 (4th year of King Sukchong). This Korean edition of a standard Chinese rhyming dictionary, the *Li-pu Yun-lüeh*, was designed in such a way that the rhymes of Chinese poetry were arranged and listed for the benefit of those taking civil examinations.

11. **Sangoil komun chinbo taejŏn**. 2 vols. only in the Yi Sŏng-ŭi Collection. The copy in the Kyujanggak Collection is in 22 volumes, in 8 physical volumes. Material of type: bronze. Published in 1680? (6th year of King Sukchong). This is one of the best books for students of the semantics of Sung dynasty Chinese poetry and prose.

12. **Taehakchi kyŏngsi** written by Chŏng Minsi and others. 1 vol. (28 leaves). Material of type: ferrous. Origin of font: 1723. Published in 1790 (14th year of King Chŏngjo). Poems written and greetings presented in celebration of the one hundredth day after the birth of the crown prince. Authors of the poems and greetings were government officials holding the titles of *chinsa*, *saengwon*, and *yuhak*.


14. **Uian [Kun'guk Kimuch'o]**, compiled by the government office, Kun'guk Kimuch'o. 2 vols. (77 leaves). Material of type: bronze. Origin of font: 1795? Published in 1894 (31st year of King Kojong). King Kojong's administration instituted an organizational reform of the government in 1894, called *Kabo Kyŏngjang*, by historians, which was designed and implemented by the Kun'guk Kimuch'o. This book is a list of that agency's organizational proposals. Each proposal is supported by reasons for the recommendation and the king's decision. Although published less than a hundred years ago, few copies are extant.

The last items to be discussed were not acquired with the body of the Yi Sŏng-ŭi Collection, although they had indeed been owned, and repaired, by Mr. Yi. They are two volumes of
an extremely early printed version of Yongbi Ŷch'on'ga 龍飛天歌 (Songs of the dragons flying to heaven). Vols. 9 and 10 (of 10). Mr. Paek believes these two volumes may have been printed from the original blocks, but later; however, he dates them as pre-1573. This epic poem in 125 cantos in Korean and Chinese, celebrating the history of the Yi dynasty founding, was commissioned by King Sejong (1419-1450) in praise of his ancestors and forebears, the founders of the Chosŏn (or Yi) dynasty. It was compiled in 1445 by three court poets and scholar-officials: Kwon Che, Chong In-ji, and An Chi. In 1447 it became the first work printed utilizing the Korean script, han'gul, which was invented and promulgated in 1446 under King Sejong's patronage. The Columbia volumes are either from the original edition of 1447, printed later from the same blocks, or from the "old" edition printed later in the century. Both Mr. Paek and Professor Lee Ki-moon of Seoul National University are investigating further in order to date the volumes more precisely. These books are important culturally and historically in several ways: in the history of printing, of the development of the Korean written language, and of the rule of the Yi dynasty. See figure 4 below.

Access to the Collection

The Library is open to all scholars and researchers, although free borrowing privileges are restricted to Columbia University affiliates. Reading cards, and borrowing privileges for a fee, may be arranged with the Library Information Office, 234 Butler Library (telephone: (212) 854-2272. The Rare Book and Special Collections reading room is open to the public on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2 to 4 p.m. and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m to 12 p.m.

Bibliography


Figure 1. Ch'illim imunwon kangui
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>日期</th>
<th>事件</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>王书</td>
<td>王书</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王书</td>
<td>王书</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王书</td>
<td>王书</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王书</td>
<td>王书</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王书</td>
<td>王书</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

根据图2a，Kach'e singum samok
Figure 2b. Kach'e sin'gum samok

28
Figure 3a. Nogoltae onhae