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A New Issue in Depth Oldest Book Printed from Moveable Metal Type

South Korea issued two stamps on 9 December 2005 (Scott 2213a-b) that are of varying interest to graphics philately. Both depict Korean cultural treasures that are included on the United Nations Memory of the World International Register. The Seungjeongwon, or Royal Secretariat of the Joseon Dynasty, was responsible for keeping *Seungjeongwon Ilgi*, the Diaries of the Royal Secretariat. The Diaries are a detailed record covering 288 years (12 March 1623 through 29 August 1910) of the daily events and official schedules of the court from the Joseon Dynasty's first king, Taejo, to its 27th and last, Sunjong. They are thus primary historic sources for the study of modern times in the Far East. The Diaries record not only important national events, but also simple routines—the king's appointments, for example, and discussions he had with scholars on the Confucian and other Chinese classics, meetings with court functionaries, administrative acts, and affairs in the queen's inner palace. Through the vicissitudes of time, especially fire and war, only 3,243 diaries are extant today. The Diaries were designated National Treasure No. 303 in April 1999 and registered as a Memory of the World in September 2001. Memory of the World is UNESCO's program to preserve and disseminate valuable archival holdings and library collections worldwide.

The second stamp depicts the *Baegunhwasang Chorokbuljo Jikjisimcheyojeol* (*Jikji*, for short), a two-volume book that an aged Buddhist monk by the name of Baegunhwasang wrote in 1372 to summarize the essentials of

Zen Buddhism. The monk's disciples, Seokchan and Daldam, under the auspices of Myodeok, a Buddhist nun, had the books printed on a movable-type printing press at the Heungdeoksa Temple in Cheongju City in 1377, the first printing press of its kind known in the world. Records indicate that Koreans developed metal type in the 13th century. Since such records are not backed up by any physical remains, however, *Jikji* is recognized as the first extant book printed from movable metal type in the world. The invention carries a great deal of historic significance, as it preceded Gutenberg's "42-line Bible" by 78 years. Primacy is one thing, however, and impact is something else again. The impact of Gutenberg's independent inventions were obviously greater than those in Korea, as they played a significant role in ushering in the Renaissance and religious reform by enabling mass printing.

It's interesting to note that *Jikji* is not housed in a Korean library. It had been in the collection of Collin de Plancy, a *chargé d'affaires* with the French Embassy in Seoul in 1887, during the reign of King Gojong. The book then went into the hands of Henri Vever, a collector of classics, and when he died in 1950, it was donated to the National Library of France, where it has been ever since. Although *Jikji* consists of two books, the first volume has never been found, and only the second volume is currently kept at the National Library. It originally had 39 chapters, but the first chapter is missing. *Jikji* is shown on the larger (green) stamp on the souvenir sheet reproduced on page 20.



세계유산등록특별우표
SPECIAL POSTAGE STAMP
REGISTRATION OF KOREAN CULTURAL
TREASURES AS PARTS
OF THE WORLD HERITAGE



세계유산 등록특별

디자인 김소정
요판조각 신인철

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7



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South Korea, Scott 2213a-b