



RARE BOOKS FROM KOREA

Andrew Gosling continues his appraisal of the McLaren–Human Collection

The National Library houses the richest set of rare Korean books in Australia.

In 1984, Rachel Human donated 136 titles which her mother Jessie McLaren had acquired in Korea between 1911 and 1941. This gift is now known as the McLaren–Human Collection.

I earlier described Jessie McLaren’s life as an Australian in Korea, in the August 2007 issue of *National Library of Australia News*. The present article reveals a few of the gems in her book collection, which ranges from Korean history and literature, to philosophy and religion, from dictionaries and grammars, to calligraphy and cooking. Most, but by no means all of the titles, relate to Korea’s pre-20th-century culture. Jessie obtained rare old editions, as well as reprints issued while Japan ruled Korea from 1910 to World War II. A number of these reprints are now rare themselves, as many books have been lost during Korea’s turbulent modern history.

In Rachel Human’s words, ‘my mother became interested in many aspects of Korean culture, and collected much material, a small proportion of which she brought back with her to Australia during the Second

World War.’ Rachel also recalled that her mother bought books from travelling salesmen who came to their home in Seoul. Jessie bargained with them to bring down the price and the sellers soon learned that she only wanted good books.

Rachel Human also presented publications, papers and artworks to other Australian institutions. She deposited three boxes of documents at the Uniting Church Archives in Melbourne, including letters Jessie sent home from Korea. Rachel gave the National Gallery of Australia several East Asian paintings, prints, and a colourful folding screen depicting a Korean tribute mission to the Chinese court, dating from the Chosŏn dynasty. (This dynasty was extremely long, lasting from 1392 to 1910; the screen is late Chosŏn period, and dates from late 18th to early 19th century.) These artworks had belonged to her parents. She presented books about China and Japan to La Trobe University Library in Melbourne, and a few of her mother’s volumes on religion to the Korean Church in Victoria.

The McLaren–Human Collection contains important works of philosophy

above:

Folding Screen, Depicting a Tribute Mission to the Chinese Court late 18th or early 19th century ink and pigment on silk, mounted on screen on eight panels; unfolded 150.0 x 357.0 cm
Courtesy National Gallery of Australia, accession no. NGA 94.1036
Gift of Rachel Reeve Human in memory of her parents, Charles and Jessie McLaren, 1994

below:

Unknown photographer
Jessie McLaren in her thirties
Courtesy Andrew Gosling and Rachel Human





above left:
Illustrated page from *Pumo ūnjunggyōng* ('Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents') (Hamgyōng-pukto Hoeryōng: Obongsan Man'gyōngam, 1766)



above right:
Illustrated page from *Samgang haengsilto* ('The Three Principles of Basic Human Relations') (Korea: 1729)

and religion—particularly Confucianism, which was the orthodox ideology of Korea for many centuries. The sayings and doings of the Chinese philosopher known in the West as Confucius (551–479 BC) are recorded in the *Analects*. This was the best known of the Chinese texts studied in traditional Korea, providing rules for daily life and moral behaviour. It is one of the *Four Books*, selected many centuries after their composition, as the highest examples of Confucian teachings. Jessie McLaren collected early 20th-century editions of all the *Four Books* published in Korea. She often annotated her acquisitions. In her copy of the *Analects* she wrote simply 'Jessie McLaren 1913'. This is her earliest dated annotation in the collection. She also obtained 16th- and 17th-century editions of works by Korea's greatest Neo-Confucian philosopher, Yi Hwang (1501–1570).

Two of the most fascinating books in the collection are popular guides to Confucian and Buddhist virtues. Both are written in the Chinese characters used by the ruling

elite, but with parallel text in the Korean alphabetic script now known as *han'gŭl*, to make them accessible to a wider public which could not read Chinese. *Han'gŭl* (meaning 'Korean' or 'great' writing) was developed in the 15th century, but little used by educated Koreans until the modern era.

Jessie acquired *Pumo ūnjunggyōng*, 'Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents', in an edition now thought to be unique. The original version of the sutra appears to have been composed in China in the 7th century. It purports to include the words of the Buddha. As the historical Buddha lived in India in the 6th century BC, while this is a Chinese-language work produced many centuries later, it is called an apocryphal sutra. In fact it is not purely Buddhist but combines Buddhism with the Confucian ideal of filial piety. Filial piety (properly honouring and respecting parents, particularly fathers) lay at the heart of Confucianism. In Chinese Buddhist texts such as the sutra, sons were urged to feel indebted to both parents for the many kindnesses received in childhood,

and to repay such debts by being good Buddhists. The importance of the mother's role was stressed much more than in Confucianism. There were many editions of this work, but the 1766 copy in the collection is exceptional, as it was produced in Hoeryöng, in the far north-east of Korea, where there was very little publishing. The book displays regional characteristics of Korean as spoken in this remote area close to the Chinese border.

The second particularly fascinating title is a popular guide to Confucian ethics, originally published in the 15th century. Jessie's copy of *Samgang haengsilto*, 'The Three Bonds and True Examples of their Practice, with Illustrations', is believed to date from 1729. The three bonds are the basic Confucian relationships: between parent and child, ruler and subject, and husband and wife. It is a parallel text in Chinese and Korean scripts, produced by the court to discourage indigenous forms of worship and behaviour in favour of Chinese Confucian models. It includes inspiring moral tales from Chinese and Korean history, accompanied by woodblock illustrations. In view of its fragility, this work has been made available electronically via the Library's website, at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.gen-vn1142677>.

While there is little on specifically Christian topics, the collection includes important translations, grammars and dictionaries by Western missionaries and their Korean converts. A few are now very rare. For example, James Scarth Gale's *Present Day English-Korean* is an extremely rare if not unique English-Korean dictionary. Gale was a Canadian missionary, scholar and leading interpreter of Korea to the West during the late 19th and early 20th century.

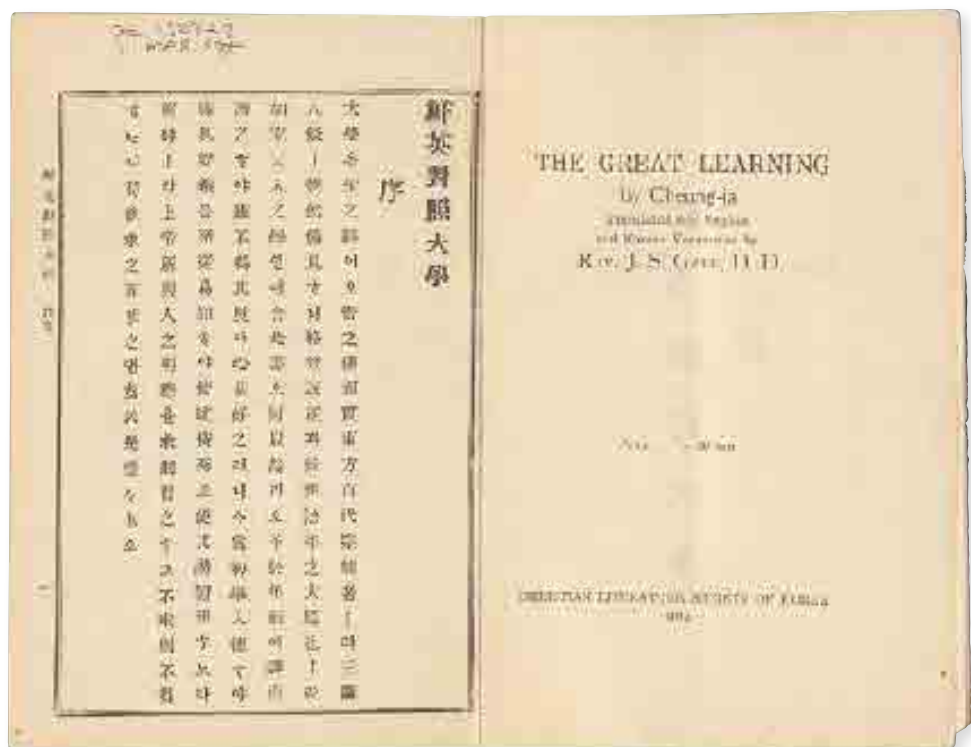
Sön-Yöng taejo taehak ('The Great Learning'), translated by Gale, is also extremely rare. This work includes the original Chinese text with Korean and English translations. 'The Great Learning' is a

short work on the essence of Confucian humanist ethics and government, and was highly influential in Korea. It is one of the *Four Books* of Confucianism.

Kuunmong ('Nine Cloud Dream') is one of Korea's most famous works of fiction. Set in 9th-century Tang dynasty China, it was written in classical Chinese in about 1687 by the Korean official Kim Man-jung. It tells of a young Buddhist monk who dreams that he is reborn to worldly success and marriage to eight women in succession, only to wake up and discover that he is still a monk. The McLaren-Human Collection contains a rare 1803 edition of the book. (The National Library also holds modern Korean and English-language versions of this classic work.)

Jessie McLaren also held in her collection a reprinted Korean travel diary, which is now rare. The author, Kim Ch'ang-öp, accompanied a Korean mission to the Manchu court at Beijing in 1712-1713. Korea sent large annual missions of around 300 people to China, as a vassal state offering compliments to the emperor on New Year's Day, which was conventionally regarded as his birthday. The ruler of China at the time was the great Kangxi emperor (1654-1722), who was on the throne for more than 60 years. Kim's diary is a lively and inquisitive account of the journey. The beautiful folding screen donated by Rachel Human to the National Gallery of Australia depicts just

English title page and Korean introduction reproduced from *Sön-Yöng taejo taehak* ('The Great Learning'), translated by James S. Gale (Kyöngsöng: Chosön Yaso Kyosöhoe, Taejöng 13, 1924)





An example of royal calligraphy, depicting the characters for 'under' (left) and 'forest' (right) reproduced from *Yölsöng öp'il*, a book of calligraphy rubbings by successive Korean kings from 1392 to 1724 (Hansöng: s.n., c.1725)

such a Korean tribute mission to the Chinese court.

Most of the older books Jessie collected were produced by woodblocks, the main form of printing in traditional Korea. A sheet from a Buddhist sutra dating from the early 8th century, and rediscovered in 1966 at Kyöngju, the ancient Korean capital, is thought to be the world's oldest extant example of block printing. Only a few of the early titles in the McLaren–Human Collection are not block printed. Movable wooden type was employed for an 1861 edition of the work of the 18th-century Korean poet, Hö Ch'ae. The 1713 version of *Tongmunsön* ('Anthology of Eastern Writings'), Korea's most famous collection of early prose and poetry, was produced with movable metal type. Koreans appear to have been using movable metal type since the 13th century, long before Gutenberg's Bible.

Not all the works are printed. Two Confucian texts produced around 1900 are handwritten. Calligraphy was one of the major arts of East Asia. An 18th-century volume, *Yölsöng öp'il*, consists of rubbings of calligraphy by successive Korean kings, from 1392 to 1724. Interest in calligraphy has continued into the modern period. O Sech'ang was a writer imprisoned by the Japanese after signing the Korean Declaration of Independence in 1919. After release, he devoted himself to calligraphy. Jessie

acquired his biographical study of Korean calligraphers and painters.

The collection also contains 44 titles which are wholly or partly in Japanese, or are by Japanese authors but in Western languages. What is particularly striking is that most of these publications are about the botany of Korea and other parts of East Asia. They include several titles by the Japanese colonial-era Government Botanist in Korea, Nakai Takenoshin (1882–1952). Jessie McLaren had a deep love of horticulture, and this part of her collection has strengthened the National Library's holdings on Asian botany.

After a visit to the National Library in 1996, Rachel Human wrote:

I came away with such a feeling of satisfaction to see my mother's books being valued and preserved. It had long exercised my mind, thinking what was best to do with them. I am happy to have placed them where they are, and it is most gratifying that in the years since they were brought from Korea, there has developed so much exchange between our two countries, not only in business and trade, but cultural awareness also.

The National Library's Korean-language collection remains the largest in the southern hemisphere. It consists mainly of post World War II texts from South Korea, and to a lesser extent from North Korea. Korean holdings at Monash, the University of Sydney, the Australian National University and other leading tertiary libraries, are similarly modern. The donation of the McLaren–Human Collection has thus provided Australia with its most significant repository of old and rare Korean books.

ANDREW GOSLING is former Chief Librarian, Asian Collections, at the National Library. He is currently preparing a guide to the Library's Asian treasures. He wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Rachel Human and family as well as experts on Korean culture, including Mr Choi Kyung Hun, Dr John Jorgensen, Professor Ross King and Professor Kenneth Wells. Sadly, Rachel Human passed away in October 2007, while the guide to the McLaren–Human Collection was nearing completion

For a more detailed account of Jessie McLaren's life and books, see *Jessie's Korea: Guide to the McLaren Human Collection in the National Library of Australia*, compiled by Andrew Gosling, 2007. A free printed copy of the guide can be obtained from Asian Collections, National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT 2600. The guide is also available online, at www.nla.gov.au/asian/form/mhuman.html