China applies for UNESCO listing for wood engraving pictures

China will apply for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status for wood engraving paintings. Respected folk artists from more than 10 places that developed the art form have signed their names in support of the application.

At a forum in Weifang, Shandong province, on January 13. wood engraving artists from Taohuawu, Suzhou; Yangliuqing, Tianjin; Weifang, Shandong; and Mianzhu, Sichuan discussed wood engraving pictures’ present and future with experts and scholars from the Art Academy of Tsinghua University and the Chinese Arts and Crafts Institute.

Huo Qingyou, an artist from Yangliuqing, explained at the forum the process of applying for the UNESCO listing. The application was initiated in November 2011 by Feng Jicai, a famous Chinese writer and artist.

Huo sees wood engraving art as the "encyclopedia of Chinese culture," because it incorporates elements of history, society, fairy tales, religion, beliefs, ethics, and fine literature.

Wood engraving pictures are a Chinese New Year tradition, and there is a long history of households nationwide displaying pictures to celebrate Spring Festival. But the artform needs to adapt to fit the values and aesthetic standards of modern society and gain interest from China’s youth.

This application could help ensure that wood engraving pictures are passed down to future generations, and attract attention and gain support from home and abroad.

Wood engraving is passed on in two ways: from the previous generation to its descendants, or by artists recruiting students from outside the traditional art circles.
If the UNESCO application is successful, wood engraving pictures will follow opera, the Chinese zither, shadow plays, Chinese acupuncture, and the 24 solar terms to become China's latest intangible cultural heritage.