

The Development of Printing in the East

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Introduction

- A world without printed matter is now unimaginable. Almost all everyday things that we come across are printed; newspapers, books, circulars, images in books, cinema posters and so on. It was due to the development in printing that made all these possible. The print itself has a history that shaped our contemporary world. This presentation discusses on the development of print in the East.

Earliest Print Technology

- The earliest kind of print technology was developed in China, Japan and Korea.
- BLOCK PRINTING
 - This was a system of hand printing.
 - In China , books were printed by rubbing paper against the inked surface of woodblocks from AD 594 onwards. Hence also known as, ‘woodblock printing’.
 - Since, the paper was thin and porous , the traditional Chinese ‘accordion book’ was folded and stitched at the side.
 - Skilled craftsmen also did calligraphy, the art of beautiful and stylized writing.



ACCORDION BOOK

The oldest known printed works were made by this technique. The first known book ‘Diamond Sutra’ was made in China in 868 using the woodblock printing method.

MOVABLE TYPE.

A Chinese alchemist, Bi Sheng is said to have invented the movable type printing. This method replaced panels of printing blocks with moveable individual letters that could be reused.

WANG CHEN’S WOODBLOCK TYPE.

To create more efficiency in printing, a magistrate Wang Chen brought the usage of wood in printing once again by devising a process wherein the wood is made more durable. This method offered speed in printing. This was used to print a treatise on agriculture and farming practices called ‘Nung Shu’. The Nung Shu is considered the world’s first mass-produced book.

The Chinese empire was the major producer of printed material for a long time. China had a huge bureaucratic system which recruited its personnel through civil service examinations. Textbooks for the examination were printed in vast numbers. From the sixteenth century onwards the number of examination candidates went up which increased the volume of print.

By the seventeenth century as literacy spread , print was no longer just used by scholars. Reading became a leisure activity. This demanded new genres in writing. Rich women and wives of scholars began to read as well as publish their poetries and plays.

Later, as the western powers established their power in china , hand printing gradually shifted to mechanical printing. Shanghai became the hub of the new print culture, catering to the Western-style schools.

JAPAN

The Buddhist missionaries from china introduced the hand printing technology in japan around AD 768-770. Pictures were printed on textiles, playing cards and paper money. During the medieval times in japan poets and prose writers regularly published their works , hence, books were abundant and cheap.

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