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14th Century Korean Book Printing

Emily King

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14th Century Korean Book Printing

Emily King

Abstract

Throughout education, it was always expressed that the movable printing type (the printing press) was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the late 1400s.

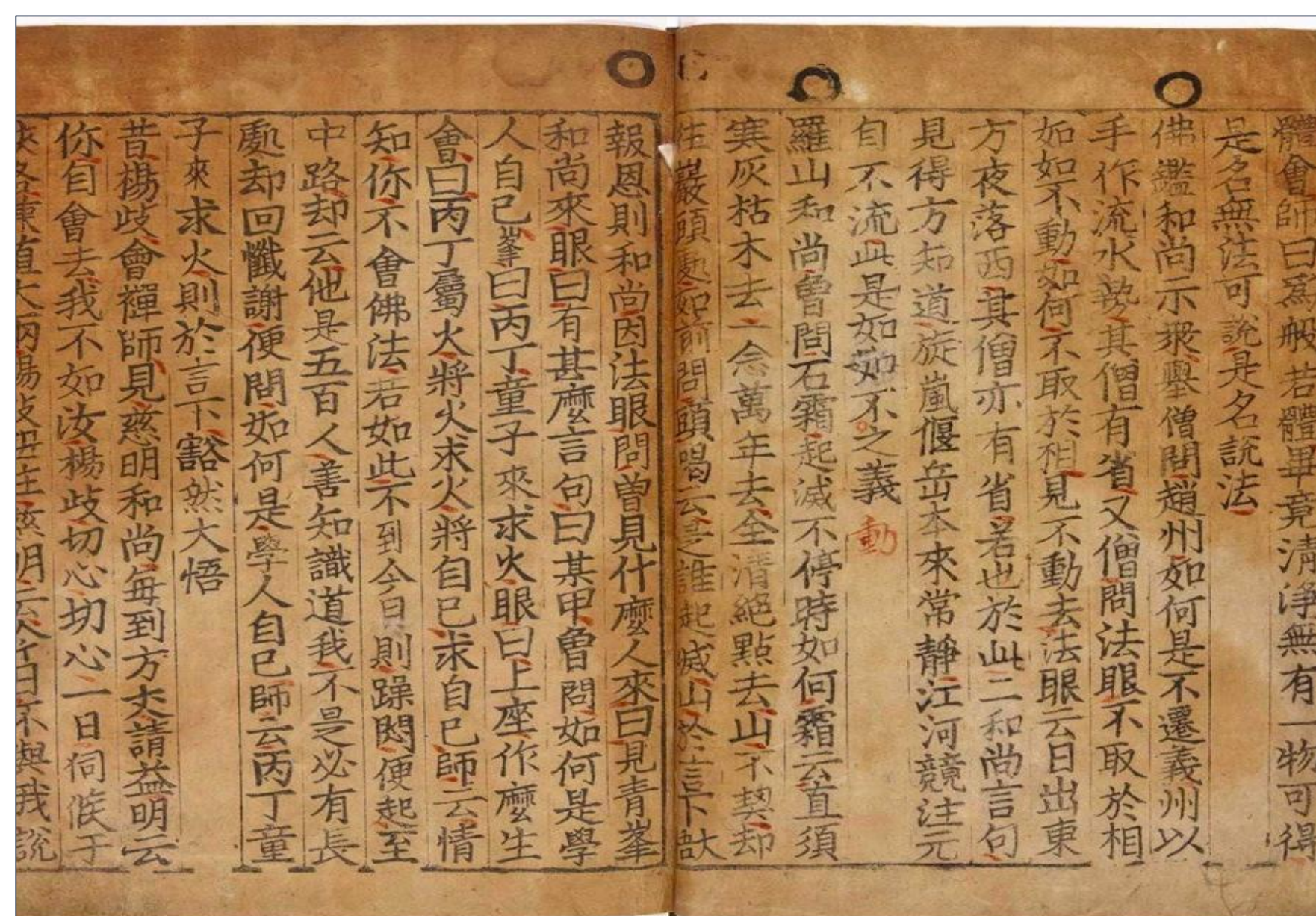
However, there is historical evidence that the movable type was invented over 200 years earlier in Asia, more specifically Korea.

The purpose of this research poster is to not only give credit to the original printing press but to shift the western narrative of book construction and production to a worldwide perspective.

Look at how trading between Korea and China affect the way both countries evolve in the production of literature.

Trade Route and Movement of Ideas

The Goryeo dynasty engaged in a lot of trade, especially with the Song dynasty of China. “Traders from Song sold satin, silk and medicinal herbs, while traders from Goryeo sold hemp cloth and ginseng” (Goryeo Dynasty). The trading of silk would be the gateway for Koreans to continue to improve their methods of making paper. And according to Sophia Newman, “Around 971 AD, printers in Zhejiang, China, produced a print of a vast Buddhist canon called the *Tripitaka* with these carved woodblocks, using 130,000 blocks (one for each page). Later efforts would create early movable type—including the successful but inefficient use of ideograms chiseled in wood and a brief, abortive effort to create ceramic characters.” Later, imperial imports to Goryeo would bring these innovations to Korea and evolve to the first official movable type printing press. Trading along the silk road would bring the printing press into Europe.



Brief History of 14th Century Korea

The Goryeo dynasty ruled Korea from 918 CE to 1392 CE. During this time, the leader of the dynasty, Wang Geon, was a major patron of Buddhism. The dynasty also adopted Confucianism which resulted in a great emphasis on education.

Arts flourished during this time. Wang Geon commissioned ten Buddhist monasteries to be built in his capitol building. After a century, there were 70 monasteries in Songdo (Modern Gaesong). More than 80 thousand wood blocks were carved to represent the complete edition of Buddhist texts.

Education was of high importance. According to Mark Cartwright, “Buddhism was directly responsible for the development of printing for it was to spread Buddhist literature that woodblock printing improved, and then movable metal type was invented in 1234 CE.” The influence of Buddhism also influenced metal working and high-class art for the patrons.

Towards the late 14th century, Korea was under invasion by the Mongols, prohibiting the fast spread of their printed works.



First Movable Type

“Movable type printing is a process of arranging types created by either engraving or casting in a case and then printing” (Ok).

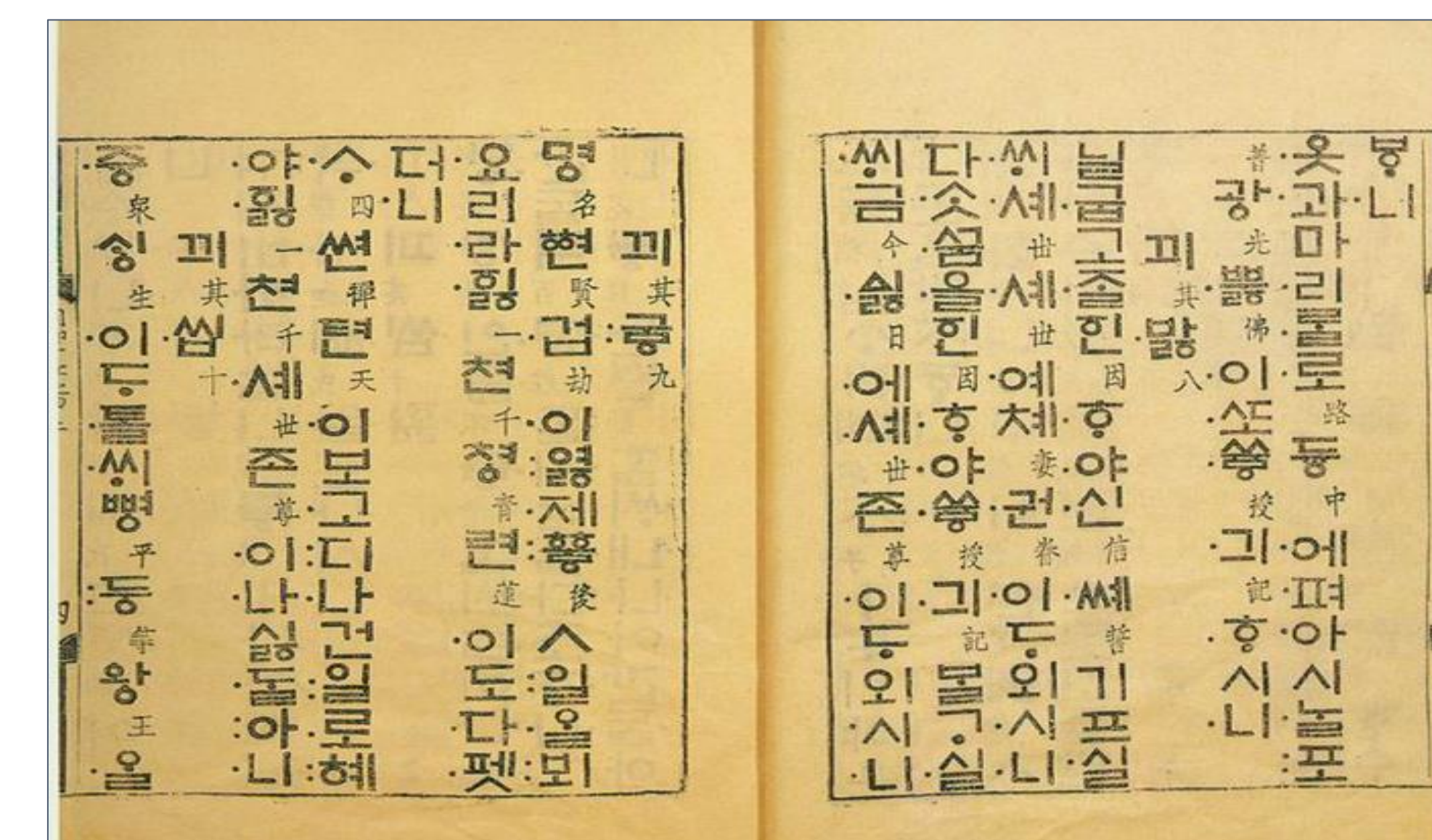
The first movable type printing technique found in Korea are wooden. There is no certainty when the wooden movable type was invented since there are no records of it. However, it is guaranteed that it was used before the metal movable type which was invented during the Goryeo period. “Woodblock printing starts out with a calligraphy on paper done by a master; next, this paper is put face-down on a wooden plate the letters on the page are see-through. Then, the chiseler engraves the plate meticulously to perfect the woodblock. The ink is applied on the block and paper is pressed on top of it and rubbed” (Ok). The most notable advantage of movable type printing is that there is a sort of freedom involved. The sorts can be rearranged once they are created.



Paper and Ink

According to Y.J. Ok, “he contemporary Chinese Song Dynasty praised Goryeo’s paper as ‘the best in the world’. This acclamation from China, the country that invented paper, was due to Goryeo’s superior raw material quality, made from mulberry tree, and the advanced paper manufacturing technique producing hard and silky papers.” Throughout the dynasty, paper production continued to evolve.

Ink was made by mixing carbon-black from pines and glue from water deer. About 10 geun of boiled and dried pine charcoal would be put in a bag with four geun of glue, and 10 geun of water. Then put four geun of glue in nine geun of water in a copper pot and heat it until the glue melts. Mix in the charcoal, stir until combined, and transfer to a different container.



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