

Ancient chinese contributions

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Assignment 2: Project Paper Ancient Chinese Contributions Introduction The modern world is full of wonderful devices and ideas which allow societies to create elaborate cultures and exploit the rich resources of the natural world in novel and exciting ways. It is often forgotten, however, that many of these modern gadgets, processes and systems would be inconceivable without the contribution that the Ancient Chinese civilization has made in the form of key inventions. This paper identifies ten of the most useful inventions that we owe to the ancient Chinese culture, and then pinpoints four of the author's particular favorites. It explains why these four are the most important in terms of their contribution to the sum of human knowledge, and then singles out one particular invention: that of porcelain, which is the one thing that this writer just could not imagine the world doing without. Ten (or more) useful inventions that we owe to the ancient Chinese culture Most people are aware that the Chinese invented paper and gunpowder, though (Deng, 2011, pp. i-ii) cites the four major inventions of the Chinese as the compass, gunpowder, paper and printing, and lists many other important items. These include iron, steel and copper smelting which could count as three inventions, or perhaps just one with three different applications. The extraction of petroleum and coal are another two inventions which clearly have influenced the way the human race has developed, particularly in the last four hundred years or so which have seen widespread industrialization, largely supported by the burning of fossil fuels. Further key inventions include porcelain liquor, tea, an elaborate seismograph, acupuncture, Kung-Fu, the kite, the abacus, the hot air balloon, the parachute, and matches. Lin Liyao (2011, p. 1) adds the mechanical clock and silk to this long list. The four most ingenious or innovative Ancient Chinese Inventions The most

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famous Ancient Chinese Inventions are not necessarily the most ingenious of innovative. Certainly gunpowder must qualify as one of the top four inventions because of its spectacular properties and the many historical events which have been influenced by the application of a little gunpowder. Paper, too, must qualify for a place in the top four inventions. Ancient Egyptians relied on clay tablets (rather heavy) or papyrus (a fickle plant requiring particular conditions in which to grow) and Ancient Europeans carved on wood, or dried animal skins for parchment. Paper is relatively cheap and very light in weight making it highly portable and an ideal medium for the preservation of vast quantities of human knowledge. The compass is also a highly innovative and useful invention, allowing travelers to navigate across long distances on land or at sea without having to rely on the weather for opportunities to measure sun and I would agree with this invention as the third most useful in the world. The fourth most ingenious invention is porcelain, a substance which blends chemical properties with human skill to produce objects of great strength and beauty. Why these four inventions are the most useful Continents have been overcome, firework displays the world over have delighted millions, and many machines are kick started into action using principles first invented when the Chinese learned how to control the awesome power of this invention. On a more positive note, modern universities right up until the very last years of the twentieth century have been built on knowledge preserved and transmitted via the paper books in their libraries. Computers may one day replace paper books, but this does not detract from the immense usefulness of paper over the last ten centuries or more. The invention of the compass lies at the heart of all modern transport systems and our modern globalization would be

unimaginable without the advantages that accurate determination of direction provides. Travelers no longer have to rely on sun or star positions in order to determine directions. Finally, porcelain represents a combination of artisan craftsmanship and the highest creative art. It is a translucent substance with both strength and fragility, representing some of the finest art work that humans have ever created. Porcelain: the invention we just cannot live without The word “ china” is used to refer to pottery objects that people use every day for all sorts of purposes, from eating and drinking, to containers for flowers, and ornamental objects for display inside living quarters. It was first used to make “ wine vessels, tripods, grain containers, jars, spouted pots, bowls, bells and cups (Kelun, 2004, p. 3). The properties of this substance, malleable when raw and then very hard when fired, prompted much experimentation, and stimulated researchers and craftsmen to constantly seek improvements. There are also numerous industrial uses for porcelain ranging from insulation in electrical machinery to very advanced superconductor products in medical and space technology. The versatility of this invention, through many centuries makes it my number one Ancient Chinese invention, and as I sip my morning tea I always reflect on the debt we owe to this clever and resourceful civilization. References Deng, Y. (2011) Ancient Chinese Inventions. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press Kelun, C. (2004) Chinese Porcelain: Art, Elegance and Appreciation. San Francisco, CA: Long River Press. Liyao, L. (2011) Top 10 greatest inventions of ancient China. Retrieved from: http://www.china.org.cn/top10/2011-03/04/content_22054243.htm [Accessed 23 November 2013].