

# The greatest inventions



??? The greatest inventions were produced in the times of ignorance, as the use of the compass, gunpowder and printing???. (Jonathan Swift) Discuss. Inventions have always been an important part of civilisation, as they are constantly progressing and adapting to suit modern needs. Inventions are the fundamentals of human society, as they add beneficial objects and ideas to the cultures of the world.

??? The greatest inventions were produced in the times of ignorance, as the use of the compass, gunpowder and printing???. (Jonathan Swift) This statement would not necessarily be considered true, for several reasons. The three inventions mentioned in the above quote, the compass, gunpowder and printing, were not produced in times of ignorance, as Ancient China, the origin of these inventions, was not an ignorant society.

They were also not produced at a certain time, as inventions evolve gradually. As they could not be considered great, due to the fact that ??? great??™ is a subjective term, and also that better inventions have been produced, nor were the compass, gunpowder or printing produced ignorantly, this statement would not be regarded as being true. Ancient China would not be classified as an ignorant civilisation, and nor would the times surrounding the creation of the compass, gunpowder and printing. Ignorance is defined as being ??? The condition of being uneducated, unaware, or uninformed???. (thefreedictionary.

com, 2009). The times of Ancient China were not uneducated, as a number of great scholars, such as Confucius, had a large impact on education and knowledge of Ancient China. They were not unaware, nor uninformed, which

is evident from the attentive behavior that was exemplified to the world around, and the strong beliefs that they held and displayed, through things such as astronomy, the concepts of Buddhism, astrology, and Feng Shui, a placement of objects they believed would generate balance with health, happiness, and prosperity. These are not things that are associated with times of ignorance, thus Ancient China was not a time of ignorance. The invention of the compass was mostly likely produced in the Qin Dynasty of Ancient China, first used by Chinese fortune-tellers who had not realized the full potential of magnetic loadstones, which were discovered while mining for ores.

(Ray K. 2009). The compass was invented in the conditions of awareness and information, as the Qin Dynasty was perhaps one of the most notable dynasties of Ancient China. It produced a large amount of beneficial material to China, including the connecting of the Great Wall of China, standardising currency, language and writing, as well as building roads. This was a significant period of Ancient China, and had large influences on their culture today. Therefore, the invention of the compass, which originated in the Qin Dynasty of Ancient China, was not produced in times of ignorance, nor gunpowder and printing, as these times were not ignorant.

The 'greatest' inventions are not the compass, gunpowder and printing, as far greater inventions have been produced. The word 'great' is a subjective term, and it therefore cannot be used as a fact to decide on the quality of inventions, including the compass, gunpowder and printing. These would not be considered 'great' inventions, as better creations, such as democracy and the alphabet, have been produced. These

inventions are more beneficial, frequently used and ultimately, greater, innovations of society. Democracy is a vital addition to civilisations around the world, as it is a fundamental part of many societies today, and looked upon as one of the ??? greatest inventions??™. It is an ancient invention, which has had a beneficial use to today??™s culture, and has immensely changed the way that countries are ruled; imposing a major difference on the various systems that previously existed. It was first used in Ancient Greece, and in 510BC, Cleisthenes introduced a series of acts, pushing democracy to exist as a form of government for the first time in the world.

The system of democracy has changed very little since these times, and the ideas and concepts remain the same. Another significant creation is that of the alphabet. ??? Of all the accomplishments of the ancient Middle East, the invention of the alphabet is probably the greatest.??? (Encyclop? dia Britannica, 2009). The alphabet is the invention of associating sounds with symbols, and is used in every country around the world today.

It plays a major part in society, and also in the advancement of literacy over the past years. The progression of communication and intelligence has been greatly aided by the influences of the alphabet, an extremely valuable invention. The innovations of both democracy and the alphabet could be considered ??? greater??? than the invention of printing, as they are valuable parts of society, and are beneficial and frequently used. Hence, gunpowder, the compass and printing would not be considered the greatest inventions, as greater inventions exist, and great can not be used as a classifying term.

Inventions cannot be produced at a certain time, as they are created gradually, developing from beginning ideas, and progressively created to their full potential. Therefore the production is one that evolves over time, and cannot be produced in a certain period, as it is constantly adapting, to suit the ever-changing environment, society and culture surrounding it. Printing is a useful invention, which was invented gradually, and adapted over time. Stone tablet rubbing was first produced in the Han Dynasty, (206BC-25AD), and approximately 300 years later, in the Sui Dynasty (581-618AD), it further developed into block printing, where the text was carved into a piece of wood, covered with ink and then used, and eventually the printing idea developed into individual characters carved into pieces of clay (Song Dynasty, 960 – 1279) (Ray K, 2004). It is evident that inventions are constantly a work in progress, and there is no specific time at which they come into existence. They are always modified and enhanced to better suit the task for which they are created, their faults evaluated and improved.

The innovations of society are therefore not produced at a certain time, due to the modifications that are constantly inflicted upon the original design.

The term "accidental ignorance"™ is not related to the definition of accidental, which is "Any event that happens unexpectedly, without a deliberate plan or cause" (thefreedictionary. com, 2009). The inventions stated by Jonathan Swift, gunpowder, printing and the compass, were not produced in ignorance, but rather, accidentally.

There is a significant difference between the two terms, and the inventions of the compass, gunpowder and printing are one's™ which fall under the category of accidental. These are inventions that were discovered

unexpectedly, without a deliberate plan or cause, not inventions which were discovered in a state that was unaware, uninformed or uneducated.

Gunpowder was first discovered by necromancers in search for an elixir of immortality. They discovered that a combination of certain fuels and ores, mixed in the right proportions and at the correct temperature, could produce an explosion, which led to the invention of gunpowder.

Ignorance is the lack of knowledge, awareness and information, which does not classify the conditions under which gunpowder was created. The necromancers which unpredictably discovered the creation of gunpowder, had enough knowledge, awareness and information to realise the potential that the explosion held, continuing to experiment, investigate and modify the materials that produced it, managing to perfect the invention to a state where it was fit for use, not being categorised as ignorant. The innovations of ancient and modern civilisation are not ones of ignorance, especially in regards to the inventions of the compass, gunpowder and printing. These inventions were not produced in times of ignorance, or in an ignorant manner, as the definition of ignorance does not relate to the circumstances of which these inventions were first produced. They were not necessarily produced at a certain time, as they were a constant work in progress, adapting and modifying to meet the needs required. The term 'greatest inventions'™ would also not be used to describe the above-mentioned items, as it is a relative term, and inventions that could be considered 'greater'™ have been invented.

These points prove that the statement made by Jonathan Swift is false, as the greatest inventions were not produced in times of ignorance, nor were

the compass, gunpowder and printing the greatest inventions. Bibliography:  
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