

# Fiction

Group 2



# From Desperation to Innovation

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chan, Cho Kiu Trinity – 10*

It was a humid early morning, a door clicked shut and hurried footsteps pounded on the gravel pathway as a man rushed out of his house. Lu-Ban, a renowned architect, was entrusted with an important building project: constructing a new luxurious holiday home for the royal family.

Unfortunately, heavy rainfall in the past few days had caused widespread flooding, so Lu-Ban rushed to the construction site to assess its condition. As soon as he brushed past the cloth covering the site entrance, he gasped in shock. He had anticipated to be greeted by the clamor of a bustling area filled with busy workers, the thumping noises of hammers and the scraping sounds of wood logs being dragged around. However, to his dismay, not a sound could be heard, and not a single worker was in sight – only soaked wood logs scattered across the empty site.

Suddenly, a call echoed across the site: “Master! I’m relieved to see you!” a worker exclaimed, depositing a fresh cart of wood logs.

“Oh Xiao-Zhang! Where’s everyone else?” Lu-Ban demanded.

“I beg your forgiveness, Master,” Zhang said apologetically, “but as you can probably tell, the heavy rainfall has caused damages to the site. We’ve been dismantling what we’ve built so far because rainwater seeped through the floor into the wooden house, destroying most of it. The workers are in the forest now, cutting more wood. But that’s not the worst part of the situation.” Zhang mumbled anxiously. “We’re told that an officer will visit us soon to inspect our progress.”

Lu-Ban was startled. “The emperor might get enraged if he discovers how little progress we’ve made,” he thought, but kept his mouth shut, not wanting to scare Zhang.

Soon, the two of them arrived at a dark and dim hollow, panting, surrounded by pine trees. The air carried an earthy and musky scent. They brushed through low-hanging, rough pine branches to the center of the hollow. The trees gave way to a clearing filled with sweating, red-faced workers swinging rusty and dull axes to chop down the trees. Despite exerting all their strength, they could barely cut one centimeter with each swing. They looked exhausted and stony-faced; their lips pressed together in endurance. Some grumbled under their breath:

*“I toil with my bare hands,  
No aid from all the lands,  
I exert my strength to earn little,  
Yet life shatters like a brittle riddle.”*

Hearing the grumbling, Lu-Ban’s heart sank, and he realized all their lives were at stake. The workers were innocent, merely seeking to earn enough for basic necessities with bare hands. They deserved respect. Yet, if the emperor was displeased about anything in the holiday home, even a tiny crack in a floorboard, he would execute all of them, including Lu-Ban himself. The weight of the workers’ lives pressed upon him, every action or decision he made could determine all their fates.

“I must find a way to expedite the construction, but what shall I do? What could I do?” Lu-Ban thought fiercely, for he felt a deep sense of responsibility. As he was wandering alone in the forest desperately, lost in thought, he suddenly felt a sharp pain sear his leg.

“Ouch!” Lu-Ban shouted. Brushing away the torn clothing covering his leg, he discovered a long, thin cut oozing blood. Just beside him grew a patch of tall, green, and lush grass.

“How could grasses make such a clean and neat cut?” Lu-Ban muttered. Abruptly, a lightbulb flashed in his head. “Could this be the key to our survival?” Without hesitation, he rapidly sliced off a strand of grass from the patch.

Back in his laboratory, Lu-Ban immediately pulled out a magnifying glass and carefully inspected the grass, not in the least caring about his bleeding wound. To his surprise, he discovered the edges of the grass strand were sharp and jagged, capable of cutting through hard objects. His heart raced with hope and excitement, fueling him with newfound determination. He began prototyping a tool that could harness the cutting power like the jagged grass.

With his mind whirling like a symphony of spinning gears, Lu-Ban grabbed a few sheets of metal and blocks of wood from his scrap materials, swiftly assembling them into a handheld tool with a sturdy wooden handle and a flexible metal blade capable of precision wood cutting.

Hours turned into days as Lu-Ban tirelessly refined his invention, making countless adjustments and iterations. He shut himself in his laboratory, working undisturbed, ignoring his servant who informed him of a guest’s arrival or dismissing his wife’s request for a meal. He also snapped at his son when the child pleaded for him to play. Without rest and food, after what felt like years, he finally held the finished tool, which would later be known as a saw, in his hands. It was a marvel of craftsmanship, a testament to Lu-Ban’s dedication and determination to invent this new tool.

With a sense of anticipation, Lu-Ban rushed back to the forest to demonstrate the use of the saw. He observed the weary expressions etched on the workers’ faces; their eyes filled with despair. He picked up a wooden plank and positioned the saw against its surface, effortlessly slicing it in half. The workers gasped in amazement and astonishment, applauding Lu-Ban with admiration. Tears welled up their eyes as they recognized the immense potential of this invention, their gratitude overflowing.

“This tool is a game-changer, Master!” Zhang exclaimed excitedly, and his bloodshot eyes filled with tears as he became overwhelmed with emotion.

Not wanting to waste a second, they promptly distributed the saws to everyone and commenced sawing the wood. Lu-Ban rolled up his sleeves and joined in the work with unwavering resolve. “Let’s make things happen!” they all bellowed.

The forest echoed with the screeching sounds of sawing, and the once seemingly annoying noise now brought consolation and renewed confidence to all of them. Together, they hoped to accomplish the construction work safely.

# The History of Printing, Retold

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Leong, Tsz Yan Bernice – 12*

Sitting at a worn desk, Bi Sheng was hunched over a wooden slab, carefully using a knife to engrave Chinese characters into the wood. This was the original printing technique used to make copies of the same document. It was time consuming and it didn't facilitate mass production— if even a small mistake was made, you would have to start engraving again.

Worry was palpable on his face and his features were scrunched in concentration. If you looked closer, you would see his fingers trembling and his eyes were bloodshot from the constant staring. It was obvious he had been working at the desk for a long time already.

Anxiously, he set his knife down onto the weathered table, eyes darting frantically to the door. Today was the summer solstice. At sunset, Bi Sheng would have to present his work to the emperor.

A fortnight ago, the emperor tasked Bi Sheng— who was talented in woodblock carving— with the mission of reprinting one of the most important documents ever recorded. Bi Sheng wanted to prove himself worthy and demonstrate his skills, so he accepted the task without a moment of thought, and was left with only fourteen days to produce seventy pages of documents. The task was impossible to complete within such a short time, and Bi Sheng soon realized the dire consequences he would have to suffer should he have failed the emperor.

Bi Sheng shook his head in disbelief as he saw the stack of pages he still had to work on. All of a sudden, an ominous knock sounded and the door was kicked open. Two imperial guards stood with all their might and glory, towering over the terrified Bi Sheng.

“There's no way,” he cried in despair, eyes bulging out of its sockets and sweat dripping off his face. “There's no way! It's impossible— impossible! Have mercy! Just ten more days. Please!”

“The emperor does not forgive. You've had your chance to prove yourself— that chance is gone now.”

His pleas meant nothing to the guards. They blindfolded him, chained him, and dragged him onto a cart, their faces impassive. Endless torrents of tears streamed down his face, soaking the blindfold.

Not long after, he was flung into a cell roughly, and the blindfold was removed. The lock clanked shut. Bi Sheng opened his eyes to bars surrounding him, and a lone table and a chair in the middle of the cell. Beside the table were a thick stack of paper and wooden slabs. A small toolbox was set on the old table. This was just like the workshop in his house.

A voice sounded above him. “In penance for your crimes, you are sentenced to work in the dungeons and produce those slabs of wood that you were unable to. Beside you are a thousand pages of documents to be reproduced into wooden slabs. Once you finish making those slabs, you shall be set free.”

Bi Sheng, defeated, sat down onto the chair and started working. Hours and hours he slaved away, carving and crafting, until he fell down in exhaustion and into the deep dark hole of oblivion.

“Wake up! This is not a place for you to rest!” Bi Sheng didn't respond. The angered guard swept Bi Sheng's slabs of wood onto the floor and kicked him. “Serves you right,” the guard said, stalking out of the prison door.

Pieces of wood laid on the floor, Bi Sheng's hard work was irreparably broken. There was a moment of deafening silence as Bi Sheng stared at the pieces of wood. Chinese characters broken apart, characters arranged in such a way that it seemed somehow, impossibly, forming a sentence.

Bi Sheng continued to gaze at the wooden pieces. The gears in his brain were whirring, formulating an idea in his mind, telling him—urging him— to understand. He bent down, picked up the pieces of broken wood, and pieced them together.

Gasping in wonder, he grabbed more pieces and gradually formed a sentence with them. He then took them apart again, arranging them in a way different from the last time, but then the characters, together, still held meaning. Looking at the pieces in his hand, an idea popped into his mind—a candle flickering to life.

“What if I made the characters separately? I could piece them together in different orders for different pages— it would be so much more efficient! Soon, I'll be free of this prison!” Smiling giddily to himself, he immediately started working on his project, all qualms about resting gone.

Bi Sheng took out a slab of wood and sat down once again at the table. Picking up the knife again, he sawed the wood into even pieces of the same size, and started engraving a character onto each of them. He took out another slab of wood, did some measurements, and created a tray. He then proceeded to put the characters neatly onto it, arranging them so that they all fit snugly. Finally, he took out the ink and painted it over the characters, and then flipped the tray over and pressed it onto a blank sheet of paper.

As he lifted the wooden tray, he was met by a beautiful piece of document, the words clear and defined. They were all arranged into neat, straight rows, without a single mistake. “This is a miracle!” Bi Sheng cried in astonishment and amazement, smoothing his hand over the piece of paper. “With this new technique, I'll be free from prison in no time at all!”

Bi Sheng continued to use his new way of printing, and in just a few months, he was able to present his work to the emperor and was finally free of the prison. Bi Sheng was rewarded, and received the recognition he deserved. More importantly, though, his invention of the movable type printing technique became well known and was spread across the world, allowing knowledge to be made common, changing the world as it was.

# Dream, Desire and Death

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Lo, Eilis – 12*

## **Spring 1040**

Shen Kuo, all bright eyes, nimble fingers, flickering intently through yellow, ageing tomes that were once his father's, was eager to soak in all the knowledge they held.

The young child trickled thin fingers across the black and white pictures of Yangtze: armies of trees guarding the falling and rising layers of mountains. Although the drawing was colourless, he could clearly imagine everything with his eyes closed: musical crunches of leaves under his feet, indistinct susurrations of the glass-clear lake, a soft breeze tangling his wispy curls-

A ragged cough from his father pulled him back to reality. Shen Kuo's guilt immediately snapped his eyes open. Biting his lip, the naive child attempted to articulate his dream.

"Pa..."

"Yes, dear Kuo?"

"I want...I wish to visit Yangtze, to draw inspiration from there.." his face as scarlet as a tomato, his eyes that were glowing not a second ago were now blinking owlishly, looking at anything but his father.

A long sigh escaped the dry, cracked lips of the older man, slicing the uncomfortable line of silence strangling them. "Kuo...you know we don't have the time and resources to do so. We're also moving to Xiamen next week." Laboriously, the old man slid back to his room and closed his door silently behind him, leaving his son behind.

## **Summer 1050**

"Yangtze..." Shen Kuo murmured as he twisted around on his mattress.

His father rested on an old wooden chair, gazing at where his son lay restlessly. "I do wish the best for you," the old man coughed. "But I'm afraid I can't go on with you. I'll leave you behind one day."

"Yangtze..." Shen Kuo mumbled.

## **Winter 1051**

The snow is as soft as a blanket, as beautiful as a flower, as cruel as a punishment. Shen Kuo was wrapped in layers of cloth from mouth to toe, soaking his icy tears and muffling the sobs that wracked through his figure as he stared at the still body of his late father.

"Pa, you've left me behind," Shen Kuo sobbed, holding the freezing, bony hand of his father.

Even amidst the suffocating grief of the family, Shen Kuo could clearly hear the hoarse voice of his father ringing in the frosty air.

"I will always support you. Go."

## **Autumn 1086**

Drenched in the silvery light of the crescent moon, the light scratching of quill against sheet drowned the silence.

"Kuo," Shen Kuo's second wife, Zhang Chu, glided across the chilly floor in her nightgown, then set a platter onto his table. "Still writing about directions and medicine? I've

prepared a drink for you.” He didn’t spare a single glance at her, fixated on the parchments in front of him.

“Night,” she whispered, leaving the room in her ghost-like steps. Without tearing his eyes away from the words that danced before him, Shen Kuo grabbed the cup and downed the wine at once.

“Father,” Shen Kuo exclaimed, his mind sentimental and hazy from the drink, “I’ve learned so much from you, but I wasted my chance by chasing Yangtze, didn’t I? I promise you, Father, to make it up to you. I will make it worth it.” Pouring another cup, he raised it to the moon; a toast to his father.

“I will.”

### **Spring 1090**

Bright light crept into the room, illuminating Shen Kuo pouring over another book about metallic compasses. “They invented the lodestone-spoon magnetic compass in 206 BC for divination. Interesting... I wonder if I can experiment with that.” He walked out of the room, in search of a lodestone spoon.

Shen Kuo pointed the tail of the spoon south and tossed it onto the metal board. The spoon spun quickly before slowing to a stop, its tail seemingly pointed towards south. Shen Kuo attempted this again and again, but noted amiss each time, but couldn’t put a finger to it. After countless tries, he found out that the spoon pointed towards the south-east direction instead of the exact south.

“Well, that has to be fixed.” Shen Kuo frowned.

After numerous weeks of experimenting with different metallic mechanisms, such as putting fish-sized magnets in a water-filled bowl, or re-inventing the south-pointing chariot, Shen Kuo concluded that the only way to correct the deviation was to use suspended magnetic needles that could determine the distance between north and south.

The long, tedious weeks of examination and observation had ultimately paid off with an accurate and functioning metal compass.

Cradling his newest invention like it was the world’s most valuable treasure, Shen Kuo trembled with excitement as he crowed out in joy.

“Yangtze, here I come!”

### **Winter 1093**

Once again, Shen Kuo stood grieving in the soft, beautiful and cruel snow.

“Ah, sorrow! Why do my loved ones leave me behind in this wretched season? Sorrow, indeed!” Shen Kuo raised his head to the white sky that snowed relentlessly on the body of his wife. As if sorrow was a parallel universe, Shen Kuo was once again wrapped in cloth from mouth to toe, shrouded in the veil of misery, this time mourning the death of his second wife, chugging on a gourd to stifle the bitter sadness throttling his heart.

“To you, my darling Zhang Chu; to you, my precious father!” Shen Kuo trekked backwards back to his abode, heart heavy with loneliness and despair, cheeks smeared with tears and drink, letting tipsiness and despair reign over him.

### **Spring 1094**

Sloshing his gourd while drunkenly following his compass, Shen Kuo finally reached the fairytale-like scenery of Yangtze after decades of dreaming. Reaching the edge of one of a thousand mountains next to the ever-flowing river, Shen Kuo stared down at it, depression

shaking through his weak body. Taking one final swig from the gourd, Shen Kuo tossed it away and leaned forward, letting the wind catch him like a soaring bird, a single word slipping through his wine-stained lips.

*“Goodbye.”*



# New Tales of China's Inventions

*Discovery Bay International School, Lee, Suhyoon – 11*

The villagers had seen a lot of things. They saw royalty who married peasants, cruel emperors, and even a number of gruesome executions. However, they had never in their dreams predicted that a poor teenage servant girl would invent something that would change the world forever...

Present

Moonlight washes over the silent village. I try to walk as stealthily as I can, dodging stones and broomsticks as I slowly open the bright red door of my dusty mudbrick home. I peek inside. The light is on, which means that my parents are awake. Before I know it, the door fully opens and mother is standing in front of me, furious. "Inside. Now." She orders.

Sunbeams filter through the thin ceiling. I groan. It's morning! I crawl out of bed and open my crooked cabinet, throwing back broken hair combs and crinkled tunics until I dig out a small black box. I cautiously start to open it, and at that exact moment mother bangs open the door. "Up to something, I see? At 6:00 in the morning?" She says. "I thought you had enough with your little 'adventure' yesterday night." I had forgotten. I quickly tuck the box away and smile at her. "Let's go, mother." I head to the toilet, my shoulder bumping against hers.

Our daily routine is simple: Pottery, all day long. It's very boring but today I'm looking forward to it. I have a plan to invent printing on paper, with clay blocks! How I got the idea was simple: I wanted to write stories. In my head, there are tales of fire-breathing dragons, charming warriors, and hidden temples. The only problem is that it is only in my head. Ideas bubbling, I jump to work and hi-five every woman in the room, humming to myself as I set up my workplace. I hear appreciative whispers behind me. Mother gives me an affirmative grunt and sets to work too.

While I work on pottery, I sneak a few clay blocks to make small cubes and scritch the basic characters onto them. I grin proudly, not noticing that mother is looking at me suspiciously.

We carry on grimly until the sky turns pink, which melts to a deep, starless black. My hands ache, my back hurts and my sight is blurry, but I picture my parents' proud faces when I show my invention to everyone. That keeps me going.

Suddenly, the door bursts open, and Mrs. Jing, the presumptuous village gossip, comes in, red faced and panting. "Mrs. Cai! I have news for Mrs. Cai and her daughter!" Everyone's eyes turn to us. Mother raises an eyebrow. "Your husband isn't-breathing!" Mother gasps, then faints on the spot.

The last few minutes were chaotic. We carry mother home, make sure Mrs. Jing isn't lying, and the women sighs and pats my shoulder as if I'd just fallen down, not lost my father forever. My eyes burn with tears but I'm not about to cry in front of all the people, no. I have to stay brave. Stay brave for mother. The news was like a sword slicing through my guts, and the more the time passed, the pain started to sink in. Finally, after all the craziness, I decide to donate the one precious bowl of rice to a sobbing and screaming mother. I figure things out in my head. We'll have to sell the porcelain bowl and the jade ring, the only treasures my parents had, in order to get proper white robes for the funeral. I'll have to sell my little black

box, too, which contained a small ruby I found in the street. I'm not sure if it's real, though. I get ready, and climb in bed. I probably won't sleep.

I must have slept, because it was daylight that flooded into my room, and sounds of children shouting and playing. I rub my head, still groggy. Mother is up, I can hear the sound of her sweeping the floor downstairs. When I come down, neither of us mention father. We work on the pottery as normal, trudge back home as normal, skip dinner, and go to sleep. That's how the last few weeks have been. I've been working on my invention lately. Today is the day when I test it! I prepare, paint the cubes in ink, and try it. When I find out it doesn't work, I throw everything against the wall. What a waste of time, of ink, of paper. What a waste of everything.

I feel so many emotions.

Disappointment.

Grief.

And rage.

So. Much. Rage.

Rage that roared through my blood and made me clench my fists, rage that made me turn away from everyone. Rage that stayed with me every moment of the day.

The gingko tree next to my home always calmed my rage. Recently, it was like it was telling me something. Something... "That's it!" I say, understanding. Wood would be strong. Perfect for carving blocks. I clap my hands. This is it! All hope was not lost! I asked the woodcarver to follow my instructions and make them for me. He looked surprised.

"This is such a wonderful invention, Jia!" He chuckled. "I knew you would go far some day, with that imagination of yours." My ears glowed. No one's ever complimented me before.

I brought the small black box home, now containing the printing blocks with the basic characters, because I gave the ruby to the woodcarver. I raced up to father's room, cleared some of the dust, and sat on the side of his creaky old bed. I breathed in the familiar scent of father. "How come you're always not here when I need you the most?" I ask, even though there is no one there to answer me. "I miss you so," I continued. "Please come back, father. Come back, even as a ghost." I wait. But all I hear is wind, and all I see is a room where I'm all alone.

# The Invention that changed the world

*ESF Sha Tin Junior School, Wang, Helena – 10*

Just another day of work. As his sweat dripped steadily into his congee, Cai Lun crossed off July sixteen on his calendar, counting down the days until his holiday, and just the thought of finally taking a day off excited him. As usual, he was in a hurry. Pushing away his thoughts about his holiday and the stone-cold congee, he recited his list of things that must be completed that day. As he hurried out the door, his stomach protesting at its emptiness, his wife reminded him to pick up the children after school. Cai Lun sighed, thinking aloud, “Such a long to-do list!” He rushed to the elaborately decorated palace doors just one minute before he would have been late, softly muttering the password to the guard before rushing towards his office.

He had completely forgotten the fact that the day before, the Empress had commanded him to pick up some fresh, meaty baozi (buns) from the royal chef on his way to the palace. Thoughts were crammed into his head, none of which had to do with the empress’s breakfast. He had just gotten to his office when the Empress’s manager stepped in front of him and blocked the door with his bulky figure.

“Where is the baozi you were supposed to bring to the Empress’s lounge for her breakfast!?” he thundered.

“Uh, um t...the ba...ozi i..is..uh,” Cai Lun stammered, while the manager glared at him.

Cold sweat dripped down his dirty unshaven cheeks. If looks could kill, passing people would see a pale body, whose eyes had rolled to the back of his head, and lying on the floor.

The manager threatened, “If this happens one more time, you will be fired. Understand?”

“Y...yes,” Cai Lun managed to say—another trouble to add to his long “Things that are overwhelming me” list.

Having a forgetful nature, this happened often, but he had never been threatened with being fired! If that happened, his family would run out of money, they would starve, and “all’s bad ends bad”. He couldn’t possibly write everything he had to do on bamboo slips, could he? That would be as heavy as a brick of iron! But... What if he could invent something that could replace bamboo slips and he, Cai Lun, would be in the history books as the famous inventor of paper? ‘Nah, stop your childish imagination, brain.’ he thought. Just then, a friendly reminder dinged in his mind that the manager had left him a task to order and file the Empress’s letters. Cai Lun sighed and headed off.

Soon, lunchtime came, and it was also the Empress’s ‘writing time’. His job was to carry a yoke of bamboo slips to the writing house, then come back for more, and so on. This was his first time doing it; and honestly, he was very nervous. He had seen workers faint from this exhausting job before, and especially now that it was the hottest month of the year, he couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Time ticked by, and bamboo slips came and went. Cai Lun was sweating buckets, and no sooner had they finished the tenth yoke his partner turned white, his eyeballs only showed the whites, and he collapsed on the floor. Startled, Cai Lun dropped the carrying yoke, and the bamboo slips clattered to the floor. The sound jolted him out of his shock, and Cai Lun ran to the manager’s office to report this incident.

While he ran, he passed a paper wasp hive, and his thoughts dragged him back to his previous daydream about making paper. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that he could do it. He could “borrow” the idea of paper wasps building their hives and use that to try and conduct his idea of inventing paper. Later, he would be relieved that his childlike spark of imagination hadn’t abandoned him.

One day, he was strolling in the royal garden for inspiration when his eyes flickered towards a woodpecker hammering at a tree with its beak. Inspiration announced its arrival in his head. Why shouldn’t he use tree bark? It was easy to collect and contained fiber, which made paper sturdy. That afternoon, he decided to start his paper experiment.

He went through the paper-making process with tree bark, and the result came out perfect! When he was noting down the process, he found the total time needed was around sixty hours. Too long. What about the grass? Again, it was easy to collect, so it could be mass-produced. He tried again and again, hoping to one day have a free hour to play with his children. For the last time, he lifted the soggy piece of paper out of the tray and prayed for success.

Cai Lun brought his paper to the Royal Court, and the emperor promised him riches and a place for his children at the greatest school in China. When he was interviewed for the Royal newspaper, he described his process, his time and effort and most of all, his family who supported him. His nine-word summary was this- “Never give up, and you will never regret it.”

Not just another day of work. Cai Lun was relaxing in his comfy chair, reading the paper. Unusually, he was not in a hurry.

His wife joked, “I’m glad the emperor promised us riches and a stellar education for our children!”

Cai Lun chuckled and answered, “Of course, I just hope he seals his promise by writing it on paper!”

As he strolled out the door, his stomach sighing in pleasure as it digested a warm, comforting breakfast, Cai Lun inhaled the fresh morning air. He was well aware that he would be hard at work as soon as he stepped out the door, but he was glad he could spend precious family time in the morning before setting out for his busy day of work.

# The Boy, the Belt and the Banknote

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hui, Miles – 10*

Carrying the heavy bag full of coins on his shoulder, the farmer walked out of Cai Lun's house with joy. He was glad he chose to believe Li, and now he sold his cow for fifteen yuan more than he would have.

Back inside the house, Cai Lun held the piece of paper in his hand, the paper that would be the first ever banknote in history.

One day earlier...

Li flipped through each crinkled page in his dusty notebook on his wooden desk. Looking back through each of his inventions that might just change the world. Redrawing each sketch in his mind and rereading each explanation meticulously.

“Wheelbarrow, made to make life easier, especially for the people working on the Great Wall. This device was made to carry large amounts of supplies which would be impossible to be done by hand.”

“Stirrup, made men less vulnerable to falling off a horse during battle, giving more strength to the Calvary and completely changing former tactics.”

“Kite, made not only to entertain but also for weather detection.”

Most of his inventions came from first-hand experience, experiences that told him what the world needs, to make everything and everyday life easier for people. He knew he had the ability to create what was in his imagination. He sat there for hours in his favourite corner of the house, flicking through pages after pages, hoping to get inspiration for what he would create next.

Li went to the shops to buy some new materials. He was in deep thoughts again as he was waiting his turn to pay: “These coins in my pocket are just so hard to manage and keep, since you couldn't hold many in your hand, pickpockets had it easy. There had to be an easier, safer way of carrying money around. On his way home, he thought of different ideas – wooden money, plastic money, leather money – but none of them seemed right.

Then he remembered his inventor friend, Cai Lun, who became famous for creating paper a few years back. Paper was still new and rare and only a few people owned it. He knew that to get his hands on some, he would have to pay Cai Lun a visit and share with him his world-changing idea.

“What do you mean my idea is far-fetched!” Li exclaimed.

“It's not worth it,” replied Cai Lun, “I can sell 10 sheets of paper for fifty yuan, and you want me to give 100 sheets for your social experiment?” Not in a million years!”

Discouraged, Li trudged home. On his way, he stopped by the river for some water. A boy with a horse strolled next to him and asked, “Hello Sir, I need to cross the river to pick up some medicine for my mother, but my horse can't swim. Can you look after him so I can quickly go and come back?” Li nodded but when he takes the horse, he saw a sign of hesitation on the boy's face.

Li chuckled, “You are worried that I might take the horse away, are you?” Li took off his belt and handed over to the boy. “Here, take this with you, I can't go anywhere without my belt!” The boy smiled and took the belt across. In no time, the boy came back with medicines in his hand. When the boy handed the belt back to Li in exchange for his horse, that was when the thought struck Li.

He jumped up, hugged the boy and ran off, leaving the boy in confusion. Li was in a rush with his plan. He went home, gathered every single coin he had in his house and counted a hundred yuan. The next day, he paid another visit to his friend. “Cai Lun, I am not here to ask for free paper,” Li explained, “Here is five yuan, I would like to buy a piece of paper from you.”

Li took the paper and continued, “By the way, can I keep the rest of my coins with you for a few hours. I need to hike over several hills to the farm. The coins here total ninety-five yuan and they are simply too heavy.” Li held out the piece of paper he just bought, “before I go, could you sign this piece of paper. Just so I have something to prove that I have ninety-five yuan with you, like a promissory note.” Cai Lun saw no harm and signed.

Li took off with the piece of paper, over the hills and to the farm. He spent some time there choosing the healthiest-looking cow. It was time to test his plan. He approached the farmer, took a deep breath and started, “I would like to take this cow.”

“Great choice my friend,” said the farmer, “that would be eighty yuan please.”

“Sorry I don’t have any money with me, but here, this piece of paper proves that Cai Lun owes me ninety-five yuan. If you take this paper to his house, he will pay you in full and you can keep the change.” The farmer hesitated but thinking that Li was not unknown to anyone with his recent inventions, and tempted by the extra fifteen yuan that he would get, he took the piece of paper in exchange for the cow.

The rest, is history.

# The Cherry Blossom Tea

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wong, Arthur – 11*

Past a narrow, jagged valley weaved a dirt path enclosed by tall spruce trees. The path faded into the grey moving shadows of the trees. Around half a mile into the forest lied an opening. The red and orange sun-rays lit up the meadow.

There, stood a wooden house supported by three rows of four wooden beams. Behind the ladder which led up to the house, a thin, frail man bent down by a metal kettle as he boiled water. As the water bubbled, the man dropped a bunch of herbs that he picked from the forest. The man mixed the herbs with a hand carved wooden spoon that he then picked up to taste a sip of his herbal remedy. The man, Chang, expected the herbs would cure his bedridden wife, who laid upstairs. He climbed up to the house and handed his wife a cup of warm tea. She drank the cup of tea that he gave to her. But it did not work.

Her face remained pale.

The next morning, Chang trudged through the grey valley to his post at the imperial palace. The imperial palace was situated in Luoyang, about eleven and a quarter mile east from his home. The palace, ornamented with a shimmering of golden paint atop a cherry red backdrop, was the seat of the Chinese emperor, Shen Nong.

In the eastern wing of the palace, Chang was busy peeling potato skins when he heard the guard at the doorway to the servant's kitchen yell, 'Herbs! Herbs! Move 'em in.' As Chang stepped outside he saw his wife's poor face appear in the rainwater puddle beside the beige sacks of herb leaves. Back inside, he was busy picking away at the hay-rope that tied the sacks up. Upon opening the first sack, he smelt the gentle essence of the red and white Camellia flowers. Chang, desperate, imagined his wife's face. This time, it was a face sprung with happiness.

After having dragged the Camellia flowers to the servant's kitchen, he laid them on the wooden kitchen table for the cook, who would later make tea for the emperor. As the cook prepared tea for the emperor, Chang pinched some herb leaves from the sack. He then sat back down calmly without anyone having noticed his mischievous deed. He continued doing his job of peeling potato skins until the time was over for him to go home.

While he walked out of the palace, he hummed cheerfully as he thought of his beloved wife. He was happy knowing his wife would get better. He was proud of himself as he was able to steal the expensive herbs from the bag.

As the purple-red sunset disappeared over the horizon and the grey clouds loomed over him, Chang felt a sense of joy. He knew tonight his wife would take a sip of the glorious tea and get better. Little did he know her time was slowly trickling away.

When he reached back home, he heated the water inside the metal kettle and dropped some tea leaves inside. The water churned quietly. When it came to the boil, he took the wooden spoon and poured a cup of tea. He carefully climbed up the ladder and opened the creaky wooden door. There, Chang saw his ailing wife. He walked up to her and helped her take a small sip of tea.

'Thank you,' she whispered gently.

'You will wake up better tomorrow, I promise,' Chang insisted.

The next morning, Chang woke up to find his wife pale and motionless on the straw bed. It was too late. Too much time has past and there was nothing left for him but to weep. He laid

his head on her stone-cold chest. There was no thump - no sound to be heard coming from her heart. Outside, he heard a nightingale singing away softly the tune of sorrow and unimaginable pain. For Chang, the song of the nightingale felt like his wife's soul speaking to him.

He could hear her gentle whisper, 'My heart, plant a cherry blossom tree, where you will lay my body to rest. Pick it's petals, my love, and drink the tea of everlasting life.'

And so he did.



# The Rocket

*Singapore International School Hong Kong, Larard, Charles – 11*

*500 years before the Shenzhou and Chang e rockets*

*The bird lies, scarred and harmed,  
It slams itself on the heavy metal cage,  
Desperately wanting to take flight.  
It sings,  
Yet it is not a harmless carol,  
It is a prayer, a plea, to god.*

Wan Hu checked his poem one last time for any gaffes. Chuffed to not find any, he put the poem aside.

He had spent the vast majority of his life dreaming and envisioning to one day escape the cage-like realm he's been living in and feel ..... free

*28 years previously*

It had been a beautiful, clement afternoon, and seven year-old Wan Hu had just finished his lunch before kissing his mother goodbye, and striding off with his friends to the prairie to play with their kite. It had started off uneventfully, as there was unequivocally no wind at all. They tried to throw it in the air, but it simply got stuck in a tree. They tried to retrieve it but the tree was just too arduous to climb, and so, the other boys walked off.

Wan Hu didn't.

He climbed and fell, again and again and again. Bruised and cut, it took poor little Wan Hu five hours to retrieve the kite. High up in the tree, where the kite was stuck, he had the perfect vista of the moon. Wan Hu nearly fell out of the tree in astonishment. As it was getting late, the sun dipped below the horizon, and the moon became clearly visible. It was perfectly round and beautiful, like a shy little girl who came out only at night. Wan Hu foolishly reached for the moon, forgetting that it was 384,401 kilometres away. Chagrined at not being able to touch it, little Wan Hu slowly climbed down the tree to bathe in the moon's rays.

*I must become an inventor, he thought. I must invent something that can fly me to the moon.*

*500 years before the Shenzhou and Chang e rockets*

Wan Hu stared dreamily into the sky, thinking about the incident that had occurred 28 years ago. As a child, he had been talked out of being an inventor, and had become a carpenter and then poet in lieu.

That was 28 years ago, however.

He had been following his brain, and now he wanted to follow his heart.

He had every right to become an inventor and *nobody*, not even the *Emperor of China* could stop him.

Wan Hu knew that to get to the moon, he would need something to push him up, and there had been nothing, *nothing* in ancient China of this sort.

So he would need to do it unchaperoned.

It was not as unambiguous as going to a store and buying a jet pack, or hopping on the *Discovery* or the *Enterprise* or the *Saturn V* (although that may not be so simple). Wan Hu definitely had the brains and the genius, but he had no experience nor the technology to build such an item, and, most importantly, no team to help him. He knew it was risky, stupid, extremely dangerous, but Wan Hu had waited for 28 years.

That was long enough to drive a man crazy.

He started planning. Unfortunately, he got nowhere, and to refresh his brain, he walked out to the lantern party in the village.

The sight in front of him dumbfounded Wan Hu.

The villagers ignited the bottom of each lantern and they slowly rose up, disappearing high in the sky, possibly *reaching the moon*. The lanterns were whitish-yellow, each about the size of a human being.

*That's it, he thought, I can use fire*

At the speed of light, Wan Hu sped back to his house. He filled 47 cylindrical tubes with gunpowder, (which had just been invented by ancient Chinese alchemists) thinking that it would make him go faster. Poor Wan Hu didn't realise that when fire reached gunpowder, it would blow him up, and that this blood-curdling invention would be used by people for generations to come. Then, he attached ropes onto the top of the tubes, where the gunpowder was, and fixed all 47 of them to a chair. Afterwards, he got his servants to lift the chair, and bring it out onto the lawn. Finally, he brought out the old kite that had been stuck in the tree many faithful years ago and held tightly onto it.

*When I get back, I will call it a rocket*, Wan Hu thought. Of course, he didn't know that he wouldn't come back. Wan Hu looked up at the moon, and a thread of doubt crossed his mind.

*What if I don't make it to the moon?* But determination overcame him, like a tsunami over an ant, and he bravely walked up to the chair.

He signalled for his servants to ignite the rockets.

Nothing happened.

Then, suddenly, he took off, and the rocket raised a few metres off the ground.

That was it though.

The fuses were still burning though, and the fire reached the gunpowder.

Kaboom.

Wan Hu would never know that hundreds of years later, the Chinese adapted his invention and turned it into the *Chang e 3, 4, and 5*, which were unmanned spaceships which went to the moon, or the *Shenzhou* series, which carried a team of three to space.

It is good to pursue your dreams, but you *cannot* let your dreams overtake you. A good man follows his heart, but a wise man follows his heart *and* brain.

# Stories of the Silk Lady Retold

*Singapore International School Hong Kong, Liu, Siyao Emma – 11*

In a rural village, a little girl peeks out from amongst the thicket of mulberry trees and spots an old woman weaving silk. She curiously approaches the old woman's loom. "Need help, Silk Lady?"

The old woman pokes her head up. "A Qiao! Well, thank you for the offer. It's about time you learnt about silk making." She hobbles over to her bucket, pockets bulging with plucked mulberry leaves. "There's *plenty* to learn."

"Silkworm larvae eat only these leaves" she explained, as she evenly spread leaves amongst the silkworms which tore voraciously at the leaves.

"Where did you learn all this?" A Qiao asked, peeping over the Silk Lady's shoulder. A pause.

"Goodness knows how long," she answered simply, "The ladies in the Imperial Court taught me how to make silk when I was a child, and I've been doing that ever since". She seems at peace, reminiscing. "Here, help me with the cocoons".

"The Imperial Court?" A Qiao gasped, indreclulous. "You cultivated silkworms for the Emperor?"

"I was the Emperor's daughter."

The thick steam from the boiling water warped the air, as cocoons bobbed up and down in the water, as part of a steamy soup. The two ladle out the golden bright cocoons, still steaming, and start unraveling the silky bundles. The soaked cocoons unwinded into a single, fine thread, then carefully reeled and left to dry, before being strung onto the loom. The Silk Lady works the thread gently, but quickly, the individual fibers weaving into shape under her fingers.

"As his daughter, I lived there." She reached a hand into the basket of white, plump silkworms. "I hated it. The rules and traditions of the place." Her tone turned wry.

"The other princesses and I spent monotonous days trapped in the palace, life passing by barely. By Imperial customs I was expected to be pretty, prim and passive."

"Members of the Imperial Court fawned over silk as a status symbol. They made the process of silk making a tightly guarded state secret so that no one else could have it. That part of Imperial traditions I despised. But what made silk special for me," she continued, spooling the threads around her hand, "was the hard work and artistic skill needed to master it. The time spent perfecting my craft was my escape." She pushes on the pedals and the loom creaks in response.

"The moment I turned of age, the Emperor decreed to marry me off to the prince of Khotan." She paused. "That was when I realized I had to leave. I had no more freedom than before. So I escaped the palace, bringing with me my silkworms hidden in a bamboo cane, and a dream to live my own life." A flurry of wings rippled through the canopy overhead, as silkmths took flight from their branches, and for a fleeting moment, the sun glinting off their white bodies parted the dense leaves.

The years past softened the blow, but her blissful, euphoric smile faded, as reality crushed the Silk Lady, even now. "I couldn't stop moving from thereon, with the guards in active pursuit. So I went from village to village until I reached a village outside of the Emperor's authority."

She traced a finger around the creases in the fabric, outlining a path in her head. "I lost my status, my title; but I'd never felt so free. but still I continued to make silk." The Silk Lady

stared at the length in her hands, and smiled with genuine contentment. “You’d be surprised how comforting it was to find myself in this village, in the art of silk, was.”

“Why tell everyone the secret to making silk?” A Qiao asked.

“Why did I teach them the process of crafting silk? This impoverished village, out of all chose to let me stay. This was an active act of gratitude on my part. It was all I had to offer in return to these kind people. I taught them the skill of making silk.”

A Qiao opened her mouth, but no words came to her. Her unanswered question hung in the air. Are you done? Are you fulfilled? Are you satisfied with your work? Silence penetrated the fortress of mulberry trees, as the Silk Lady ran her hand across the rough wood of her loom.

“I have done what I can, all I can,” she mulled. “I’ve taught everyone what I know about silk, I’ve passed down the craft.” The Silk Lady stared thoughtfully over the treetops, where steam from the vats of boiling cocoons formed a hazy cloud far out over the horizon, distorting the distant figures of merchants and traders, loaded with swaths of silk, traversing across the known world. “It seems that my craft has traveled further than me.”

She paused, soaking in the view of the setting sun, before turning to her young student. “And you, A Qiao. Silk, through you, will continue to touch so many generations more lives yet.”

# A Message From The Sky

*Singapore International School Hong Kong, Yu, Yat Hong David – 11*

The golden sun shone brightly on the picturesque fields. Lu Ban, a short and skinny young boy, was taking a stroll with his father, Lu Feng, a burly royal guard from the palace who was off duty for the week. They ambled through the vibrant fields, exchanging warm greetings with the hardworking farmers. Suddenly, a gust of wind swept through the rice field, causing one farmer's hat to lift off his head. However, to their surprise, the hat was not blown away and simply hovered in mid-air.

The father and son stood amazed at the peculiar sight. The farmer laughed heartily, "Autumn is always so windy! I'm tired of my hats getting blown away so I decided to tie it to my head with a string!" Intrigued, Lu Feng commended the farmer's cleverness while Lu Ban's eyes sparkled with curiosity. "If the string was much longer, the hat could fly up into the clouds, just like a bird!" he blurted. "Father, let's try to make one ourselves!"

Back at home, they experimented making a "hat" with different materials, and finally came up with the perfect design: a piece of thick paper attached to a light wooden frame, crafted in the shape of a bird. Giggling excitedly, they ran outside to test it out. With a swift throw against the wind, their paper bird defied gravity and ascended high into the sky, fluttering majestically. Lu Ban could almost feel himself soaring through the sky, riding the winds like a bird.

Their blissful moment was interrupted when a messenger suddenly arrived, urgently summoning all off-duty soldiers to return to the palace. In the midst of chaos, Lu Ban followed his father to the palace as they did not have time to go home first. The moment they arrived they felt the tension in the air, the generals huddled together with grave expressions. News had arrived that after a year of peace, the barbarians were again charging from the north, threatening the empire, so it was crucial to move all troops to fend off the impending invasion. At the break of dawn, General Liu, the most fearsome warrior in the country with a long lush beard, led most of the soldiers up north. Meanwhile, Lu Feng and some remaining guards stayed behind to protect the Emperor at the palace.

A few hours had passed since the soldiers left, and urgent cries suddenly echoed from outside the palace walls. Startled, Lu Feng and the others rushed to investigate. A group of commoners, battered and out of breath, cried out, "We were travelling back from the West and on our way in we saw the barbarians! There were thousands of them, fully armed and charging towards the palace!" The guards were appalled, immediately realising that they were fooled by the diversion that the barbarians had created. "They must have stationed some of their army in the North to lure our soldiers away, but in fact their main battalion is attacking from the West!" Lu Feng gasped. "It would be too late to send a messenger out and summon the army to return, by the time he reaches General Liu it would already be night!"

Listening to the guards, Lu Ban sat quietly aside but his mind raced. Then, a spark of inspiration ignited within him. He recalled the powerful sight of their "hat" soaring high in the sky. Perhaps, he thought, the "hat" could serve a greater purpose. "Father! I have an idea!"

Lu Ban's plan was to use their "hat" to signal the soldiers to return. "This may work as the soldiers may see it immediately and retreat!" his father exclaimed. The guards created a huge "hat" with a gigantic word "RETURN!" written on it, and tied it to a string that could

extend up to a mile. With the assistance of the wind, they launched it into the air. As the “hat” soared high above the palace, its message was visible for all to see.

The “hat” flew for hours, but still General Liu and his men were nowhere in sight. The sun had set and the cloudy sky was now basalt-black and brooding. Suddenly, the barbarians appeared in front of the palace.

Trembling hands clasped their weapons as Lu Feng’s men gazed upon their foe. The cold wind whispered and drifted through both the battlefield and the souls of the men. “Our plan didn’t work!” Lu Feng gasped. “We can only fight with just the few men we have here in the palace!”

The vast number of barbarians swarmed and swayed like corn in a field, yet it seemed like there were more of them than a thousand bushels could hold. Lu Feng, standing amidst the remaining soldiers, held their proud pennant aloft in defiance. Suddenly, the leader of the barbarians cried out and they charged, their feet clapping off the ground like the rumbling of thunder.

In the moment of desperation, a familiar voice suddenly bellowed, “We got your message from the sky!” The clouds cleared as General Liu appeared, riding on his black stallion and holding his axe up high. All around him, his troops emerged, roaring and jumping head first into battle, immediately turning the tide of the battle in their favour. The air pulsed with electric energy as General Liu rode forward, his eyes molten red and slaughtering any barbarians that dared to cross his path.

The enemy fought valiantly but the sheer number of returning soldiers outnumbered them and soon, they had no choice but to surrender. The clashing of spears, clapping of hooves and battle cries had finally stopped.

The barbarians were defeated, and the empire was saved. Lu Ban and his father were hailed as heroes and awarded medals of honour by the Emperor. This invention of what subsequently became later known as the kite had not only saved the emperor but had also inspired many more inventions by Lu Ban, the legendary Chinese inventor, whose achievements are still celebrated to this present day.

# The Rise of the Other Sun

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Chong, Tsz Lun – 12*

Speeding along the vast plains of China, the high speed rail travelled silently, without a sound of rattling wheels or billowing steam of traditional trains. The scenery of the plains flashed in front of the window, allowing me to catch glimpses of windmills, greenhouses, farming vehicles and the darkened sky. Swirls and patches of ink-black clouds filled the sky, lightning bolted and thunder boomed, while the train remained untroubled. Instantly, a streak of blinding lightning pierced the sky and struck the train. The train tilted dangerously, the light tubes on the ceiling went out consecutively with soft clicks barely heard over the screams and shrieks of panic from the passengers. However, my heart skipped a beat as I became aware that instead of slowing down to a halt, the damaged train accelerated to breakneck speed as the carriage plunged into darkness with a deafening crash.

Wondering how much time had passed, I realized that I was lying on a solid ground. Barely had I wished for light than warm, soothing rays filled the carriage. I glanced around, paralyzed in shock as I found myself in a different train! I peered out of the window, my jaw dropping — on the field, interlocking railways knitted a web on the farmlands, cars extending wings of planes soared in the blue sky... my gaze followed the cars to the sky and I nearly had a heart attack — there were two blazing suns! I muttered, “I must not stay on this mysterious train anymore.” Turning around a corner, I found a boy, about my age waiting on a platform and approached him. “How can I help?” He greeted me with a friendly wave. I stuttered, “Excuse me, I want to ask...” I had three questions: where I was, when I was and why on Earth there were two suns.” “Oh, You’re here in Chengdu, Sichuan, in Year 2045, and that—” he pointed to the suns, “—one of the suns was artificially created by the China Technology Development Department two years ago, and was launched into space to orbit the Earth. The excessive content of carbon dioxide and tritium in the atmosphere are converted into heat that can reach one hundred million degrees Celsius. My father was one of the lead directors of this project and explained to me that the purpose of the artificial sun is to stabilize sunlight supply to grow crops, while alleviating the severity of global warming caused by the imbalance of gases in the atmosphere.” I nodded and pondering what to do when he called, “Wait, who are you? You don’t seem to be around here... Did you accidentally time travel?” I turned and explained my situation that I came from year 2024. The boy grinned and offered, “I might be able to find someone who can help you. I’m Tony, by the way. You can be transported in time at the Beijing Laboratory, where I am going to visit my father.” “I’m Julian.” I introduced myself as a vactrain, a super speed train, arrived at the platform and we boarded the next-gen vehicle departing for Beijing.

The journey from Chengdu to Beijing took us only forty-five minutes by the vactrain, which was completely computer-controlled and travelled on magnetic forces in an enclosed vacuum tube to reduce air resistance. As the train whizzed past the farms, I noticed a bizarre sight: farms were divided into sections, and though they appear to grow under one sky, some of the crops were blown by powerful wind while others were spattered with rain, or stoked by a miniature flaming sun. A quizzical expression appeared on my face and I asked Tony, “That is the Ecosystem Independence Program,” he replied, “using saved up rainwater as man-caused rain, and solar panels are to start wind, creating a copy of different weather in

order to foster growth of crops, and therefore China will not face famine. My home has installed a miniscule version of this facility.” I gazed at the farms and wondered “How rapidly has China developed in twenty years?” The new inventions of China are utterly impressive and have solved numerous problems, taking the lead in different scopes in the world.

An hour or so later, the vehicle skidded to a stop in Beijing Station and we walked to the laboratory. We hovered, as skateboards like drones drifted around and carried pedestrians barely an inch above the ground. This method reduced the friction between skateboards and the ground, increasing the speed of skateboards, therefore cutting down energy usage. The air of the city was more refreshing and cleaner than I remembered, and no sooner had the question formed in my mind that a gigantic transparent orb filled with dense smog transferred to a tower through a tube, the smog was released through the tube and the pressure of the gas moved a windmill in the glass tower, while a panel on top showed the amount of electricity. The facility was obviously converting harmful air into useful energy by utilizing air pressure to generate electricity. We entered the laboratory, which was a towering, hulking structure. In the hall, there were a dozen narrow tubes that could fit only one person at a time. I stepped into the tube and instantly rocketed up. Tony landed next to me and I followed him as he dashed off to find his dad.

We soon found his father, who was setting up the time machine and expecting my arrival, “Julian, welcome to the China Technology Development Department — the core of all China’s inventions, but I unfortunately do not have time to show you around today. The other end of the time tunnel is your time dimension and thank you for accompanying my son. I wish you a fine journey back.” Tony and his dad waved goodbye. I stepped into the tunnel and Tony’s father exclaimed, “We will see each other again — one day, right here.” I plummeted into the abyss before having time to consider his words. A split second later, I fell down on my seat on a train, and for a second I feared the time travel had not succeeded. I clambered to the window, watching the clouds floating away and revealing one single dazzling sun. I heaved a sigh of relief.

Nine years later, in an early morning, I set off for the Beijing Laboratory to report to work by train. As I once again gazed at the single sun, imagining another hovering nearby. I understand what Tony’s father meant — I would join the project of “the Other Sun” at the laboratory and contribute to the technological achievement of China. Come to think of it, I was probably in the same department the first time I visited the laboratory. Isn’t this a miracle?



# Untying the Knot: Harmony

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Liu, Sofia – 10*

It was the year 2050. Greenhouse gasses trapped heat like a blanket, and the Earth was boiling hot.

Grace Wei was watching the COP conference from her home in China. Year after year, the climate crisis got worse. She watched every year because she wanted to use her inventions to solve current problems. The president of the UN, Ronald Hyden, stepped up to the podium. “The Earth is in a grave situation. Most of us think it’s pretty much unsaveable. Let’s admit, humans don’t really cooperate with nature. So next year, we are going to be rolling out a new space travel program. We can’t live on Earth anymore.” Grace was in shock. Was he actually saying that it was a choice between Earth and leave? She was Daoist and believed that humans and nature could work together. She was very attached to that, as it was a part of her identity. Daoism was almost a lost culture, and she strived to change that. That statement thrown out by Ronald was opposite of her belief. She knew she had to invent something to stop that nonsense. Something that would save the Earth, and save humans.

Usually, Grace had a lot of ideas, but she was feeling a bit empty. She racked her brain for ideas. None. She thought back to her mother, telling her poems. Daodejing was one of them.

*The Way - cannot be told.*

*The Name - cannot be named.*

*The nameless is the Way of Heaven and Earth.*

*The named is Matrix of the Myriad Creatures.*

*Eliminate desire to find the Way.*

*Embrace desire to know the Creature.*

*The two are identical,*

*But differ in name as they arise.*

*Identical they are called mysterious,*

*Mystery on mystery,*

*The gate of many secrets.*

... ..

“The gate of many secrets.” She glanced out the window, hoping for more inspiration. She saw a lone robot, cleaning the street. He looked isolated. An idea clicked. She could invent a robot that cleaned the environment! That would show the UN that the Earth could be cleaned, and humans wouldn’t be affected! It would also halt that pesky environmental group saying Earth couldn’t be saved by humans.

Air pollution, water pollution, temperature rise. All because of greenhouse gasses, thought Grace. How to solve it? CO2 absorber, water purifier. That would solve the problem. A solar panel and wind turbine to power it, plus chargers sticking out of the side? Needed. People drained their batteries way too quickly. She got to work immediately.

Over the next three months, Grace took a group of around 15 scientists and inventors and split them up into a few groups. Ideating, designing, building and testing. They finally found

one design that stood out to them. It was unveiling time. Everyone had worked very hard on one or two parts of the project. Now, they were going to see it come together.

Grace lifted her creation out of a box. It looked like someone attached LED lights to a box full of liquid, making it glow rainbow. It was about as big as a few water bottles. There were smaller compartments on the side, hidden with a push of a button. “First of all, I got help from all of you. I couldn’t have done this without you. The liquid part is a liquid tree. It purifies the air. I took inspiration from liquid trees in Serbia, but made it smaller but three times more effective.” Grace said. She pushed a button, and a smaller version popped out of the side. “This one only has the liquid tree function, but it’s more portable.” she said, handing over the smaller version to the scientists. They passed it around, examining it. She pushed another button. Another device popped out. This one was bigger. It consisted of a cup and a metal cylinder. “I got help from everyone on this water purifier.” she said gratefully. People clapped and cheered. Grace smiled slightly. She slid the water filter back into its spot, then pushed yet another button. A solar panel. With a cable. Everyone was waiting. Another button. Wind turbine. Cable. Everyone was growing impatient. Without Grace’s permission, someone clicked the last button. Cables. Wires. Grace’s face lifted with something in between a smile and a smirk as that person’s hands got tangled. “There’s a passcode to unlock the charging cables, and it can be customized to become personal.” And with that, Grace whispered her passcode. “Harmony.” The cables loosened, and the person pulled their hands out of the trap. “Whoa! Show me if the chargers work!” everyone said. Grace connected her wristwatch to the charger. The wristwatch was charged. “All the energy comes from the solar panel and wind turbine. It is very sustainable, Plus, it is cheap and accessible.” Grace said. Everyone clapped and cheered. They had done it!

At the next COP, Grace had a speech to make. “I’ve invented this. It’s a climate change solver. I know a lot of people think that humans are the main cause of the climate crisis. That is true. But I also want to say that humans can also solve climate change. Through this air purifier, we are not only cleaning the environment, but also cleaning humans to become better earthlings.” she finished. Everyone was clapping. And Grace was in the spotlight.

A few years later, Grace was taking a walk. She was holding her portable mini purifier and observing all the changes in the neighborhood. She was also taking a break from being the CEO of the company HarmoniousNature. The air was now clean enough to not need a purifier, but most people still carried around a purifier because they were so used to it. She wasn’t used to taking walks; the environment used to be so dirty. Now, greenery lined every road, the water was clean enough to consume after a quick boil, and it wasn’t boiling hot. Grace smiled as she thought about the changes that she made to improve the environment. Climate change was once like a dead knot that got tighter if you pulled. Grace had found the password to untie the knot: harmony.

# Flight attendant

*Ying Wa Primary School, So, Yu Hang – 12*

Sprinting across the grass. Letting go. Straining to be free.

And falling.

I woke up with a splitting headache as if someone was pounding a nail into my head. Immediately I knew something was wrong as I looked around at the walls of gold and the tiles of bronze.

If only I were this rich.

It was then I realised that I was not alone as I saw a few people in red and white robes who all wore matching pointed military-design boots. I looked down and my casual clothes had morphed into the same outfit, which I guessed was the uniform worn by the Dynastic emperor's advisors. I was sure this wasn't 2023, because the price of the palace would have tripled Musk's fortune.

I looked back and saw a glistening throne and on it was an emperor whom I recognised from my history class, bearing the royal crown with dangling spheres on the ends.

He was speaking in Mandarin in a way that children would not do when talking to their mothers. 'If they are really telling the truth and going to tunnel across the land, we have no way of knowing when they will start or where they will be.'

An advisor whose facial features I remembered from my history class, Lu Ban spoke up. He stepped onto the dais and swept his hands up. 'We should create something to measure the length of both cities to see if they are telling the truth. If the distance is too long, then there is no way of tunnelling over without wasting a great deal of resources. In contrast, if it is short, then they will have numerous ways to come over, thus increasing their chances of winning; therefore we have to be prepared for anything.'

The emperor's eyes lit up and he nodded satisfactorily and smiled shrewdly. 'Work with Mo-Tse and create this invention.' Mo-Tse came forward, bowing low.

Lu Ban then spoke up, 'Your Majesty, this task might be taxing. Please grant my request for three people instead.'

The emperor nodded and pointed straight at me.

The emperor exited the room along with the rest of the generals and advisors. Lu Ban shut the door and looked at me skeptically but worriedly, 'You've risen through the ranks quite quickly, boy,' he said as he joined Mo-Tse on the dais, 'now is the time to prove yourself.'

'Maybe a hot-air balloon?' I suggested after a minute's time. It came to my mind on the spot as I was fascinated in a hot-air balloon.

'“Hot-air balloon”?' Mo asked.

'Well, a cloth should be stitched into a spherical, oval shape. Then fire should be lit at the base of the sphere. The reaction between the mixed temperatures should result in the balloon floating upwards. You could install a large cockpit so that you could sit in it and fly to the enemy base while riding on it and calculate the distance with the average speed of the balloon and the time needed.'

Mo and Lu stared at me blankly.

Suddenly Lu inhaled a sharp breath. 'You're not from this Dynasty, are you?' He looked at me thoughtfully. 'It defies all logic, but it should be true. Although the balloon

is impossible to make in a day's time, which means we have to think of another idea, your direction of thinking is definitely not from our era. '

'It just all seems like a strange dream to me,' I mumbled, 'but I maybe could help.' With Lu and Mo still shocked, I sat down on the dais with them and recalled how I got here. Sprinting across the grass. Letting go. Straining to be free.

And a sliver of an idea hit me.

Both of their eyes widened even more.

Mo and Lu instructed me to my quarters and started to work together on this contraption. I missed my family and was confused about my alternate lifeline, but I would not give up on such an important project.

Everyone was already in the backyard when I woke up and arrived in a rush to the court the next day. Lu handed a wooden kite, which I guessed was what the advisors had also been working on, to General Han Hsin, and he nodded his head at the emperor, indicating it was going to indeed work, and threw it in a large arc, controlling it with a string. He angled the kite towards the enemy base, looked at the calculations on the string and he broke into a mad grin.

'Well, from this distance, I'd say it's impossible to tunnel over.'

I wanted to hear more of the cheering, the laughter but the noise shut off and the corners of my eyes started to turn white. The only people I could see were Lu Ban and Mo Tse. Mo worriedly rushed forward, but Lu held him back and calmly said, 'I think your time in our dynasty is up,' he told me and the old me would have danced in joy.

But who gets to experience old dynasties every day?

My legs turned into wisps of smoke as Mo Tse also stepped forward. His usually furrowed brow loosened and he smiled. 'Keep alive,' he said, and that was the last thing I heard in 450 BC.

I sat up straight, on a patch of grassland with a kite next to me. I picked it up. Keep the bird alive. Kites were used for wars and science? Suddenly I was afraid to touch it as if it was a hydrogen bomb. But now the kite has been converted into a toy, to keep its traumatic memories alive by converting it into good ones. Keeping it alive, and the people who played with it were all history's attendants.

I let the kite soar again, unsure if it was a dream or not. It all seemed like a time-travel story cliché.

But was the history true?

In my diary's defence, it's new tales.

# A Character's Start

*YK Pao Primary School, Gong, Hanxin Rosie – 9*

In a time before WeChat or TikTok, in a time before cars or airplanes, in a time even before paper or printers had been invented, our story begins. In fact, this was a time before any words had ever been written.

Hidden within the mountains of eastern China, a kind-hearted girl called Yingzi Luo was born in a village that was too small to name. Used to their simple and predictable life, the villagers weren't ready for a mute girl who could only communicate through her smile.

Lonely and in search of friends, Yingzi snuck off every morning, where she made friends with animals in the woods. Though she couldn't communicate with people, she understood the animals, and they understood her. Yingzi created symbols for her bird, horse, and animal friends that she would scratch onto rocks. Eventually, she created new symbols for the trees, the sun, the mountains, and all of nature around her.

One year, hardship struck. As they watched their dear pond slowly dry up, the elders talked about how many full moons it had been since it last rained. Desperate groups of men searched for water, but they always returned empty-handed. As the last shrubs disappeared, Yingzi's animal friends also left to find food.

On one of Yingzi's morning walks to her circle of carved stones, a flock of birds flew by. When she called out and asked where they came from, they told her about a river they had found beyond the mountains.

Without waiting to hear more, she ran back to the village with the good news. They were saved!

Yingzi ran from house to house, pounding on each door. As her parents and the other townsfolk gathered, Yingzi grasped her mother's hand and gestured for the villagers to follow her.

By the time they reached her circle of stones, the birds were already gone. Thinking their long trek was only to see Yingzi's stone art, the villagers rolled their eyes. Some of them even started yelling angrily. Yingzi gestured beyond the mountains, but one by one they turned their backs and silently walked the dry, dusty path back to their village.

Tears came to her eyes. but as she looked towards the mountain peaks, her eyes shined with determination. That night, she quietly gathered her blanket, a little food, and her walking stick before setting out into the moonlight.

The journey was difficult. After winding up back in the same place, she started to mark her path by scratching symbols onto rocks as landmarks. When she came across a once lush forest that had lost all the leaves to the drought, she carved out her symbol for 'tree' on a boulder; when she came across a dried-up lake, she scraped her character for 'lake' on a stone near the now empty crater; at the base and peak of each mountain, she left a stone marked with her symbol for 'mountain'; and on she went.

On the fifth morning, as she peered above the final mountain peak, Yingzi felt the sun's rays on her face. The sound of birds chirping and a river flowing reached her ears. Shielding her eyes, she looked out and saw an open, grassy plain, scattered with trees. Right in the middle, there was a big river snaking through the plain. Overcome with excitement, she started running and tripped over a root, tumbling downward.

Limping the final distance to the river, Yingzi reached forward with cupped hands. Water had never tasted so sweet. Looking down at her scraped-up leg, she carefully washed the blood off. There was no way that she could travel all the way back to her village. How would she send the good news?

Yingzi peeled off some soft bark and crushed the juice out of some berries. She would use this to draw a map. Starting on the left, she wrote big characters to represent the mountains, the forest that she met, the dried-up lake, the sun to show where it would rise, and a final character to show the river.

Once she was ready, Yingzi called out to the nearby birds who quickly flew down to see what she needed. After carefully tying the rolled-up map with her necklace, the birds took it in their beaks, and off they went.

Arriving at the village, the birds circled overhead, their chirping drawing the attention of the villagers. They fluttered down, dropping the map before taking off again. Amid the elders' confused murmurs about what this meant, a child darted forward and picked up the tree bark. Tied to it was Yingzi's necklace.

Unrolling the bark, puzzled whispers filled the air.

"Those look like mountains!" one said.

"And that, a forest of trees," another pointed out.

"Isn't that the sun rising from the east?" a third mused.

The villagers stood divided, unsure whether to follow the strange symbols. Yingzi's mother stood up, "This is clearly a message from Yingzi! Who's coming with me?" she declared.

One by one, the villagers joined in, saying, "ME TOO!" With quickened steps, they gathered their sparse supplies and set out. Guided by Yingzi's map and the marked stones, they easily found their way across the mountain range.

As they crested the final mountain peak, smoke from Yingzi's fire came into view. Descending onto the lush grassy plain, gratitude filled their hearts.

The villagers worked swiftly to rebuild their homes. At the village entrance, they erected a sign with their new village name, symbolizing their new beginning. Each family asked Yingzi to create a unique family character, proudly displaying it above their doorways. Along the main street, large signs with characters showed directions to the river, farms, and other landmarks.

Life blossomed anew, and Yingzi found herself no longer alone but respected and cherished. However, each morning, she still ventured to a peaceful part of the river, sitting quietly with her animal friends, gazing into the clear waters that breathed life into their home.

# Creative Writing Fiction

## Group 2

### New Tales of China's Inventions

*Alliance Primary School Kowloon Tong, Law, Cheuk Wai – 10*

Li Yue woke up on a large merchant ship. The wooden planks creaked as the ship danced with the waves. He rubbed his eyes and stepped out onto the deck, where the salty sea breeze instantly refreshed him. The sun climbed up the sky and painted a path of gold on the water.

“Good morning, Li Yue!” called a fellow sailor, a friendly man named Ah Xia. “Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you, Ah Xia. You must be tired after keeping watch all night. Take some rest,” Li Yue replied while stretching.

“I’m too excited to rest now,” Ah Xia said with a wide grin. “We’re nearly there. Look ahead, and you’ll see the towering pagodas and lush jungles of the Srivijaya Empire. It’s one of the busiest ports on the Malay Peninsula!”

Li Yue was a young man during the Tang dynasty. Li Yue’s father had been a student of the legendary alchemist Sun Simiao and was both a doctor and an alchemist. Immersed in his quest for medicine for eternal life, he experimented with burning various substances. Tragically, during his last experiment, his pot exploded and fatally injured him. Soon after his father’s death, Li Yue’s mother also passed away. Becoming an orphan at the age of 13, Li Yue grieved for his parents but also felt that his father’s obsession had been foolish. To feed himself and satisfy his curiosity, he decided to do something more practical and became an apprentice to a merchant, Mr. Zhang, who frequently set sail for Southeast Asia.

Li Yue was diligent and eager to learn from Mr. Zhang, who treated him like a son. He taught Li Yue how to barter with the cunning traders and shared secrets of the monsoon winds that carried them across the sea.

One sunny morning, they set sail for the Srivijaya Empire. Their ship was full of the finest goods. Li Yue’s eyes widened with enthusiasm as they approached the port, where boats laden with exotic goods from across Asia were docked and merchants from different countries were discussing prices. Li Yue could see colourful textiles and smell the rich aromas of spices. Li Yue’s heart was pounding rapidly as this was his first visit to such a foreign bustling port.

In the sweltering heat, Mr. Zhang and Li Yue traded bolts of silk and delicate chinaware for aromatic resins, exotic spices, and gold. Mr. Zhang, thrilled with the significant profit he made, rewarded the sailors and apprentices with gold coins. Li Yue and Ah Xia purchased some fresh tropical fruits. That night, Li Yue showed Ah Xia a snow-like substance. Ah Xia, wide-eyed with curiosity, asked, “What is that?” Li Yue replied, “It’s saltpetre I inherited from my father. It’s what took his life, but it can be used to make ice to cool our fruits.”

However, their peace was abruptly disrupted when a gang of pirates, notorious for robbing and killing along the Malacca Strait, descended upon the harbour. The city was in panic.

Li Yue remembered his father’s alchemical experiments and had an idea. He rushed to his wooden chest and retrieved all the saltpetre. Ah Xia asked with a trembling voice, “What are you doing? Are you making ice for preserving our dead bodies?”

Li Yue said no words. He mixed saltpetre with sulphur powder and wood ash by following the steps he had seen his father perform countless times, though never for this purpose. Ah Xia watched, puzzled. “Aren’t those the ingredients alchemists use to seek eternal life?”

Li Yue remembered one of his father's notes that recorded a conversation with his teacher, Master Sun, about the combustive properties of sulfur, charcoal, and saltpetre.

"Yes, but my father may have discovered something else – something powerful," Li Yue admitted, feeling the weight of his father's legacy in his hands. "He sought immortality, but perhaps he found a different kind of power and overlooked its potential."

Li Yue and his fellows prepared the mixture and packed it into pots with makeshift fuses. Then they went to a coastal fort. "Light them and run away," Li Yue instructed with a steady voice despite the chaos around them. The fuses were lit, and with a tremendous roar and a series of blinding flashes, the pots exploded and sent smoke and terrifying echoes through the city.

Those arrogant pirates had never seen this power before and fled in terror because they believed the city had magical and mysterious weapons. Filled with relief, the citizens cheered. Li Yue's father had not found eternal life, but in that moment, his work had saved many people.

A Tang Dynasty ambassador, who was en route to the Srivijaya capital and had witnessed the event, was astounded by the power of Li Yue's "weapons." The ambassador approached Li Yue and said, "Your talents could contribute to our great Tang empire. Would you consider becoming a consultant for our military?"

Li Yue loved his country and felt honored, yet at the same time, he was conflicted. "Sir, my knowledge is a legacy from my father and his teacher, Master Sun Simiao. I hope to use it for defence and protection, not for conquest. But who can promise such things?" Li Yue replied, declining the offer respectfully.

The ambassador was a noble man. He understood Li Yue's choice and did not force him to accept the offer. However, he was concerned about the risk that other countries might learn this technique before them. The ambassador investigated the remains of the exploded pots and his eyes brightened with surprise.

As Li Yue's ship cut through the waves, he mulled over the enigmatic power hidden in those ordinary ingredients. The world seemed to be cheekily keeping its mysteries. Some, like Master Sun, had the luck to catch a glimpse, while others had paid a price. With a mix of fear and respect for the unknown, Li Yue continued on his voyage.

## Chopsticks

*Pui Ching Primary School, Fok, Ho Yee Kalie – 12*

"Wake up and get to work!"

There was a booming voice ringing in her ear as Jade dragged herself out of bed. It felt oddly rough like the bark of a tree. A cold gust of wind was blowing on her back. She swore she had shut the windows tight last night. Jade rubbed her eyes and realised she was in a stable! Shocked yet confused, she rushed out to see a palace full of bustling servants.

"Ah, there you are, new kid. Help me with this food. Be quick, the Emperor is getting impatient."

Jade looked up to see a tall and plump man staring at her. He pointed at a stove and a pair of chopsticks that were neatly placed next to it. Not knowing what to do, Jade grabbed the chopsticks and started to stir the soup.

*What is this place? Jade thought. Should I go to the market and ask? That would be stupid...*

Jade decided to go to the market once she finished the soup. She made an excuse that they were out of eggs and set off. People in Hanfus walked hurriedly around the busy streets, barely paying attention to Jade.

As Jade walked around, she realised this was Ancient China. She saw one of the stands with no customers and walked towards it. As she approached the stand, she caught a glimpse of the things the seller had. There were chopsticks of different sizes, some had weird sharp ends and some looked like twigs plucked from an old tree. It reminded her about the assignment she was supposed to do about China's history. She shivered at the thought of the face Ms. Johnson, her strict History teacher, would make if she didn't hand it in.

"Excuse me, sir. May I ask which year we are in?" Jade asked in a timid tone. Surprisingly, the seller laughed at her.

"Hahaha! You really took a hit in the head, haven't you?" teased the seller, "Haven't you looked in a mirror? Your clothes look so odd! Is that some kind of clown costume? Well, before you get changed, just to let you know, we're in the Han Dynasty since you are so curious." added the seller.

Sure enough, Jade looked down and realised she was wearing her pyjamas from last night! She tried to put on a confident tone as she spoke, "Er—these are some nice chopsticks you're selling... how'd you get the idea?"

"These are my special handmade chopsticks. I used some twigs and my chisel to make these exquisite shapes." replied the seller. Jade made a slight cough when she heard the word "exquisite" as she thought it was nowhere near. She finally thanked the seller for his time and left.

As she made her way to the palace, she thought about how she was going to write this assignment. Without realising it, she had arrived at the kitchens, which were still filled with people running around, preparing food for the emperor.

"Where were you, new kid? The emperor was furious when he didn't receive his breakfast. We're trying to make a feast for lunch to make it up to him. And we never run out of eggs! What did you go out for?" Shouted the head chef. His face was bright red like he was about to explode.



Jade panicked as she tried to help the chef. Seeing as the chef is calming down, she approached him once she finished her work.

“Pardon me, but can you tell me the history of chopsticks? I’ve been so fascinated with them lately.” asked Jade, batting her eyelashes.

“Well, you see, nobody knows who invented chopsticks. One person just took two twigs and started to eat food with it. We thought it was a good idea and soon, we started to use them. We assume that they dated over a thousand years ago as we are progressing so fast.” The chef added proudly. Jade wanted to say that now, in 2024, things are much better, but decided not to destroy the chef’s mood.

Wanting to start her assignment as she had learnt so many facts about chopsticks, she started to wonder how she would get home. Making her way back to the stable, deep in thought, she came across the emperor’s chamber, fiddling with his chopsticks. Jade took a quick glance at it and left. She strained her memory and saw that it was actually made of jade! Going back to the stable, she started to write her essay on the wall with a stick so she would remember the next day. Hours passed and Jade finally managed to carve her essay on the wall. Starting to feel tired, she decided to end the day. She gathered some hay from the horses and made a small bed, laid on the rough hay and dozed off.

“Jade, wake up! I know it’s the weekend, but it doesn’t mean you can sleep in!” Jade heard her mother’s voice and got out of bed. She stumbled across the hall, rubbing her eyes as she walked into the living room. There, she heard the TV playing the news.

“Next up, is some exciting archaeological news. They’ve found a piece of wood that contained a 500 word essay in China! Who knew, maybe Chinese people secretly learned English? Well, that piece of wood is now displayed in the National History Museum of China where you can admire it. Stay tuned, folks! After a quick ad break, we’ll be reading the weather report...” said the news reporter. Hearing this, Jade became wide awake and noticed the TV. She was home!

“Quite odd for someone to carve an entire essay on a piece of wood, isn’t it? That reminds me...have you done your assignment yet, Jade?” asked Jade’s father.

“Nope, but I finally know how to write it!” exclaimed Jade. She quickly ran into her room to grab her pencil and a piece of paper, writing about Ancient China’s chopsticks.

## The Dream of Paper

*Pui Ching Primary School, Yam, Po Sing Matthew – 11*

In ancient China, there were two kinds of paper: bamboo slips and silk. Bamboo slips are small thin bamboo stripes that are linked together by strings. They are very cheap but too heavy, and you can only write about a few hundred words on the bamboo strips. Silk is very light and easy to write on but too expensive. A piece of silk costs about 700 to 1000 Wuzhu (Currency back then)! This problem has been a huge problem for Emperors.

Professor Nolan Davison, Bryon Bell’s teacher, has just invented a time machine. It lets you dream a historical dream and whoever dreams back in time must be awakened by another person to wake up. He had the chance to see the piece of paper that changed the world with Professor Bell...

Professor Bryon Bell was at an archaeological site in China. A gigantic smile appeared on his face. He could not suppress his excitement. He was about to see the first paper in the world getting unearthed! However, there were some gibberish words written across this mysterious artifact. Professor Bell frowned and started to read the words. Just like magic, some purple particles formed a sphere. Professor Bell was surprised. He had never seen these incoherent words, not to mention the weird particles. He just can’t wait to research this paper. In the blink of an eye, he was sucked into a strange tunnel full of images of Chinese people. Suddenly, the only thing he could see was blackness...

When he woke up, the surroundings were poles apart from nowadays. Everyone was wearing loose clothes and had a small piece of jade hanging around their waist. Everyone was riding in chariots. There were no skyscrapers; only single-story houses. He has travelled back in time! He was transported to the palace, dressing like a servant. Phew! Luckily, I was dressed like a servant. Unless the Emperor might punish me, or even chop my head! Professor Bell thought.

“Cai Lun.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“I have been worried about the problem of bamboo slips and clothes. Bamboo slips are not quite expensive but very heavy. On the other hand, clothes are light but very expensive. Can you think of a way to help the civilians?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. I’ll do my best.”

Professor Bell was transferred to Cai Lun’s house. This time, he was dressed as an entourage and his clothes magically changed. Cai Lun’s house was a huge villa with a big garden and a huge balcony to observe the civilian life so that he could improve their life. He was sitting on the balcony and sighed, “I shouldn’t be accepting this huge mission. What a huge problem! How can I make new material to write on?”

Professor Bell spoke unconsciously, “Why don’t you go to the village and get some inspiration?”

“That’s a great idea! Tell the servants to get the sedan chair.”

“Yes.” Professor Bell spoke.

A few moments later.

“Hey! What are you doing with that white, thin stuff?” Cai Lun shouted to the women he saw across the river.

“We are people that do sericulture. We are getting silk from silkworms. These are the silk that failed the quality test. We usually use them to fix broken windows or wrap something up. My husband even uses them to practice calligraphy.”

It must be very light. If I can improve it, I might make new writing material! Cai Lun thought. He couldn't wait to go back and test it. “Return and try to make it from these silkworms.”

“Yes.”

Cai Lun got a few silkworms from those women and went back. Professor Bell was again sent forward to the future half an hour later. Now, he was a bush in the garden. He saw Cai Lun was collecting silk from silkworms. They collected the bad-quality silk intentionally. He mixed them with some waste wood and bamboo. He put it on a wooden frame with a cloth inside of it. When this mixture was dried, he found out that this material was very unstable: sometimes it was very fragile, and sometimes it was too tensile to write on. Sometimes it was not even writeable! After countless trials and errors, he finally found the perfect recipe: he used withered flowers, skins of trees and broken fishnets to mix with water, then boiled it, and put it on the wooden frame.

Cai Lun reported this to the Emperor. He tried calligraphy on it and it was perfect! It was just like an even cheaper and lighter version of bamboo slips, or a way cheaper version of silk. The Emperor decided to give Cai Lun a great reward. Cai Lun named this material “paper”.

Professor Bell noted all the history of the paper carefully, but he still couldn't go back to the present. Suddenly, he remembered the effect that whoever went back in time must be awakened by another person to come back to the present.

“ARGH! Please someone wake me up!” He screamed at the top of his lungs.

About a minute later, he saw the strange tunnel. He was travelling back in time. He woke up, back to reality.

“How was the experience? Did you see Cai Lun? A piece of paper accidentally slipped into the machine. That's why you dreamed about the history of paper. Sorry!” Prof. Nolan Davison said. “Oh, can I have a look at your notes?”

Professor Bell searched in his pocket. “I... I lost it!”

The next day.

“Archaeologists had unearthed an ancient notebook written with the details of Cai Lun's papermaking technology. It is estimated the time Cai Lun had discovered papermaking technology. Archaeologists are still discovering why there was a notebook at that time. That's all for News Today. Thanks for watching. Have a good night.”

How? Why is my notebook right there? Could it be... the dream really happened? Professor Bell was shocked.

## New Tales of China's Inventions

*St. Eugene de Mazenod Oblate Primary School, Wong, Trek – 11*

“Ring! Ring!” Fa's smartphone yelled at 8 o'clock in a peaceful morning. Sew and Fa, the renowned superpower cats, were boiling tomato soup, based on the special recipe of Fa's late mum. Fa grabbed her smartphone. There was a call from a hospital.

“Your father was stuck in a mine shaft. He was rescued right after the massive rock was blasted by dynamite. He is now with bandages all around his body. He wants to see you.” The nurse said in a worried tone.

Fa blurted. “Oh Dad! Here I come.”

Dynamite was invented by China in the late 19th century. Chinese are peacemakers who make firecrackers to scare the imaginary monster ‘Year’ and bless the villagers all year long. It is generally used for breaking apart rocks and demolishing buildings. Its contribution to urban planning and reconstruction cannot be underestimated.

Sew said, “Let's go as soon as possible!”

They left home in their pyjamas and dashed towards the city centre as fast as gales.

“How do we get there?” panted Sew.

“I don't know. Let's check the Internet.” Fa forced herself to be calm and decisive.

Charles K. Kao, a great Chinese scientist, contributed to the spread of the Internet. He devoted his whole life to the research of fibre optics which speed up the global connection. He sent optics technology as a precious gift to the whole world. Almost all knowledge and information can be obtained by just one click. No one can live without the Internet nowadays.

The phone chimed. Fa exclaimed, “The long-distance bus journey will take about four hours!”

Sew reassured hopefully. “Fret not! Let's take the high-speed train. The journey can be compressed to one hour.” Sew jerked to a stop and dragged Fa to the station.

Maglev technology enables train speed up to 400km/h. China created a faultless network covering almost the whole country. It increases labour mobility by creating many one-hour living circles in all First-tier Cities.

Sew heard an embarrassing grumble from her tummy. Sweet Fa was considerate of Sew, “I'm starving to death. Let's grab a thousand hotdogs there before we board the train!”

At the hotdog booth, the mouth-wateringly scrumptious hotdogs waved to them. Fa found desperately that she had left her purse at home. Sew jumped up. “Why don't we use WeChat Pay?” After scanning the QR code, feeling a soft vibration of the phone, they devoured all the hotdogs in front of them.

Wechat, which is described as the ‘app of everything’, became the world's largest standalone mobile app in 2018. Around 943 million users now send text and voice messages, play games, share videos as well as complete touchless mobile payments which saved many lives in the outbreak of COVID-19.

After one hour, they arrived at the hospital. Shockingly, they spotted Fa's father groaning in a ward with hundreds of tubings attached to his body. They bursted into tears and rushed towards him in no time.

“Dad! What is going on?” Shivered Fa. “I am sorry. Your father's wound is infected by an unknown virus. We are still figuring out how to help him.” The doctor explained.

Dad softly said, “My girl, it is too good to see you one last time,” He smiled. “I am so grateful to have you and your mum in my life. I miss her and will see her soon in heaven. One of the sweetest memories we shared was the tomato soup made by your mum.” “My boiling soup!” Gaspd Fa. She choked like the apocalypse came.

Sew pressed Fa’s shoulders firmly. “No mission is impossible in China.” Sew kept working on the phone and taking videos.

Suddenly, the familiar aroma of soup filled the air and Fa’s father was energised. A man wearing a jacket with the logo of ‘SF Express’ carried a box of ‘Alibaba’. Fa’s lips were quivering, “How can it be?”

Sew chuckled. “I turned off the stove and unlocked the door with smart home systems. I asked Kin, our blind neighbour who is one of the Alibaba suppliers, to send the soup and make a personalised delivery by SF Express. With Angeleye, the smart glasses, which allows blind people to navigate their world through the use of AI and sensors. They help Kin to detect objects, recognize money bank notes and read text messages. He now can overcome darkness and live like a normal person.”

Haier Smart Home came top of the Global Smart Home Invention Patent Rankings since 2020.

Alibaba contributed the next. It set up effective online trade and delivery systems. It runs warehouses with high technology robots. A man in Foshan received his package 13 minutes after he placed the order on Alibaba’s shopping site on 11th November, the most popular shopping festival in China!

Fa’s father was delighted with the soup. He whispered afterwards, “It’s my time to see your mum.” Fa sobbed, “No! Please don’t leave me.”

“Clack! Clack!” There was then an awkward silence after the sound of high heels. Here came a crew of professionals.

“We’ve watched your video on Tiktok. Millions of people were touched by your heartbreaking scene. They urged all the best doctors to work on the virus.” A doctor comforted Fa sympathetically.

TikTok was launched by Zhang Yiming and spread the personalised videos to 1 billion users worldwide.

A doctor extracted fluid from father’s wound and whispered, “Chinese medicine, like acupuncture and herbal medicine, has gained acceptance worldwide. China has invented three kinds of Covid-19 vaccine, including inactivated, mRNA and Cepharanthine-based vaccine which is plant-based and was found to have excellent anti-Covid-19 activity. We integrated Chinese and Western medicine with high technology and established a plant-based vaccine which is proven to be more powerful than Cepharanthine. Do you want to try?’ Fa’s father nodded confidently.

The bed was pushed into the surgery room. Fa and Sew saw a glimmer of hope shining from the door crack. China’s inventions are creating tales of hope and love for the next generation.