

# Winning Entries

## HONG KONG YOUNG WRITER OF THE YEAR

### Fiction – Group 5 Winner

## Stories of a Kite 战国时代

*ESF King George V School, Zhao, Rou – 16*

There is two years worth of work chiselled painstakingly into the bird the philosopher crafts carefully out of silk and painted wood. He stands on the crest of a hill and holds it between the palms of his hands so that his long fingers make steeples above its featherless head. There is a flying line made of silk, unravelled carefully from thumb-sized cocoons the philosopher finds on mulberry leaves a little ways past his yard. He wraps this around one fist and holds the wooden bird in another.

It seems impossible that the thing of wood could take flight into the sky but the philosopher holds on tightly to the promise of hope. The flying line tethers the creature to his fist like an umbilical cord and when he finally thrusts it from the palm of his open hand, he can't help but close his eyes, a little scared of what the wind might do.

The prototype is ready and wrapped up in white fabric precisely one year after. With his son hoisted securely on his back, the philosopher prepares to make the long trek up to the mountaintop. He pictures the very moment the boy realises he is able to make things fly, and bites down on his bottom lip to prevent himself from smiling too hard. The lame boy stays as still as he can and can't help but think it is times like this he wishes more than ever he was born with the ability to walk. He barely breathes and wonders faintly about the contents of the bundle held tightly against his chest.

When the father sets his son down on the crest of the hill, he unravels the tightly wound fabric and the child's first thought is that the wooden bird is beautiful. He doesn't think of much else as he watches the philosopher start to twine the flying line around his palm. You must move your arm in a specific way to push the bird into flight and the philosopher shows this to his son. He is eventually satisfied enough to place the creature gently in the child's open hand and urge him to throw it into the sky.

Should the wind cast the wooden creature too far, the boy is afraid that he won't be able to catch it in time. He spreads his body out like a starfish, as wide as he possibly can and when the philosopher tells him to toss it into the sky, the son is obedient and does as his father says. The strength of his throw pushes the bird far, and the boy cranes his neck to watch. It begins to tip gradually into its descent and he half-wonders again, for the purpose of the entire procedure.

The boy almost misses it the very moment the wind catches the bird. There is the barest resistance from the silk line and like a compass needle that laboriously tugs itself towards true north, the wooden creature rights its course all of a sudden in a motion so imperceptible you could only notice it if you were watching closely. The bird begins ascending drunkenly into the blue, open sky as if unaware it had just performed a miracle.

The crippled boy stares upwards, and it is a look so wondering you could have mistaken it for reverence. Every subtle shift of the morning breeze sets off a new change in its path so the bird is in constant motion like the flame of a flickering candle. Yet the wind is only able to sustain it for so long until gravity begins gradually, to reel it back down to earth. The silk line guides it into the palm of his hands and the boy doesn't hesitate before he releases it back into the sky. He, with the useless leg, is captivated because it reminds him stirringly of everything that he is not. It is unbound and it is free so it is beautiful.

In time, it becomes so that it is always the boy and the wooden bird that crown the crest of the hill. The villagers notice and start to wonder to themselves how the philosopher's son has managed to capture a bird. It seems almost like a cruel joke – the lame boy and the wooden bird that could fly.

He is just happy to have a playmate.

It is only much later that the father decides to unveil finally, what gifted such a creation with flight. It is much later after that does it catch the eye of the emperor, and it is ultimately given a name. He is just a philosopher, not an inventor, and his wish was only ever to see to his lonely boy having a companion. He continues to care for his lame son and perhaps he will never find out how much he changed the world. He will go down in time though, forever as the father of the kite.

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Some centuries later, some hundred miles away, a band of kites are carried by a wayward gust of wind. Times have long changed, and these are decidedly lighter than the ones from the past. Though inspired still, by the legend of the philosopher and the wooden bird, these are crafted meticulously from paper and strong bamboo.

They drift idly, a dozen Chinese kites guided by hands of a ragtag band of soldiers. These are good men, unfortunate enough to be born in such a time so troubling. Sent out by generals, it is a desperate attempt to silence the dissent of incensed families that have lost their sons to the Mongols. These are mothers and these are fathers with the manic hope that their children are still alive; fortunate enough to be locked away as hostages only, behind the unbreachable walls of the Mongol prisoner-of-war camp. The rescue mission is sent out then, as a small squadron of martyrs that march themselves bravely to their deaths. They are doomed by command from exhausted generals, issued nevertheless, as if they were Gods.

The men have sent their kites out for days now, skywards far enough to remain undetected as they shift idly between the clouds. When the wind picks up its pace, the flying line begins to unravel faster and faster until it appears so far away it is scraping against the underbelly of the sky. The first soldier whispers a prayer and reaches out to snap the silk lines between his two fingers. Whatever control he has had up to the very point is relinquished instantly; what comes next is decided entirely by the wind. It must guide the paper kites down from where they perch, high up in the sky, waving madly and mounting the currents of the fluctuating breeze. It relies unreasonably on the negligence of the Mongol guards; additionally, the timing and velocity of the hot desert wind so that it is able to deliver the sky-

blue kites down upon the prisoner-of-war camp below. The superstitious soldiers watch from afar and think to themselves that it rests in the hands of fate; perhaps it is a little bit of both.

The first person to catch a kite is a little boy. He stops at what he is doing and looks up to the sky with eyes filled with wonder. The guards do not notice the emaciated boy and the strange shape that bulges out from under his shirt. He takes it proudly to his father and shows him the Chinese characters inked across its paper surface. An orphan finds the other, and a general the next. Each kite is scooped up prudently and it is unclear today, the message of the blue paper kites, but it is true that there was a riot on the very same night.

Perhaps the kites were missives sent out to notify the prisoners that help was coming gallantly on its way. Perhaps it was a message that became a moving remembrance of their human character and the people that they were capable of being. For a heaven-sent message to be delivered in such a way, perhaps it is none of this, and perhaps it is simply a belief; devoted and whole-hearted into the existence and benevolence of the gods.

The riot is so large that it will make its way down through Ancient Chinese history; there is a mass prison break by dawn. The prisoners lift their paper kites high up into the sky and make a mad dash for the timbered gates as if bamboo and paper is enough to fend off arrow and spear. It is not, and so there are many good men who die on that fateful night but there are plenty more who are fortunate enough to escape with their lives. You reach a culmination then, when there are far too many desperate people rushing towards you, that helplessness becomes nothing but a necessity. The teeming crowd ploughs the Mongol guards down like a flood in a field of rice. They do not lose their vigour until the sun has made its way high up into the morning sky.

They follow the trail of broken kites, these are the ones that did not survive the journey. It is then, a massacre of torn fabric and mangled Chinese characters that smash themselves at odd intervals against the desert sand. It is on the second day that the prisoners of war reunite miraculously with the rescue troop, they say that it is a miracle. There is a little, fatherless boy at the front of the group who carries a blue kite he holds tightly to his chest.

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Some centuries later, some hundred miles away, a squadron of soldiers crawl in a ditch. The sun has lowered itself into the horizon and takes with it, some of the frenzied clamour of war. Here is a time where resources have begun to dwindle and morale has taken a crippling blow. Whether the land is taken over that night will surely dictate the remaining course of the war, this is what the general knows.

A few thousand metres to the west lies the enemy encampment. Over time, the squadron has succeeded in pushing the enemy forces back; they have been advancing slowly now, one tedious step at a time. It is with the absence of light that the plan begins to take shape – they will crawl across the final stretch of land under the cover of night. The general assures his soldiers with confidence that the win would surely be an easy one.

It is the sort of task you could not do on your own – at least there are stars that night. The religious soldiers take these and pray desperately upon them in hopes of reaching their celestial deities. There is the silence of graveyards when the first line of soldiers begin to advance. It means shifting the entirety of your body's weight between your hands and your knees, so that it is your thighs first, then your shoulders that begin to ache unbearably. The soldiers crawl blindly through the rotting corpses that are friend and foe, and it is also a deep loneliness that is impossible to put into words.

It is a long time after that the soldiers are able to pick up on the faint flicker of motion, transient and vague in the distance, not so far away. It is even longer after this does the general decide to signal for the soldiers to prepare for the final rush ahead. They will never know because there is a wail then, that explodes itself into life. It drifts madly in the way that it is bodiless; a ghoulish whistle you could mistake for a shadow in its furious pursuit. It hurtles and you could not tell left from right, up from down. When your world is thrown off-kilter and your limbs are dripping with the blood from victims of yesterday's war, the soldiers do not know what else to do but to run.

It is only in the morning, under the watery sunlight that they realise it is kites, just kites. A field of corpses, paper and thread, a few thousand metres to the west lies the enemy encampment. *The demons are not angry with us*, someone says with relief. It is true that the demons are not here today, because it is only hollowed wood. They have been attached painstakingly to paper kites and perhaps they wail when the wind passes through them.

The general stands off to one side and observes the wreckage with a calm expression. He turns back to his soldiers and there is a smile on his face that is sad. The soldiers begin to laugh uneasily amongst themselves because they have become fools to such trickery. The general will wait until tomorrow then, before he tells them that the war has already been lost.

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Some millenia later, some thousand miles away, a father buys a kite from a vendor and gives it to his son. The boy indulges him long enough to give it a perfunctory whirl in the sky. It is beautiful, briefly, but the child loses attention quickly and it is not long before the kite becomes ensnared in a tree.

He is a little bored and he is a little tired so he takes out his phone. Perhaps he will take a few pictures and tell his friends the next day, of how his father insisted on buying him a kite, and how the massive tree caught it in its arms. Perhaps the anecdote will receive a brief chuckle, the kind reserved for something that is notable but not humorous. Then perhaps they will move on to talk about more important things.

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The kite is a tethered craft with wing surfaces that react against air to create lift and drag forces. Consisting of wings, tethers, anchors and a tail, it is designed so that wind is able to lift it effortlessly into the air. Taken from Ancient China, each of the short stories are based loosely on true events.

## Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

### Memoir of a Kite

*Stamford American School Hong Kong, Nie Anxin Alice – 9*

Hello! It's me, the kite! Your entertaining old friend! Do you want to know why am I so popular? Ok, here's my story. Hold my string, fly me to the sky, and let's travel all the way back to Warring States Period (475 – 221 B.C), the time I was born.

I was made by a carpenter Lu Ban and a philosopher/war artist Mozi. Lu Ban and Mozi had been best friends since they were kids. Mozi & Lu Ban was a great team. But back then they failed for years to just make me. Not until the Early Warring States Period, I was finally born. They said to me, "*You made us confident in making our next invention. Many great things shall start from you!*"

Wee!!! Now I'm flying in the sky. As I fly, I realize I was created to fly hundreds of meters above the ground. But is there a limit? The wind blows, and I'm flying up, up, and higher! Just when I think I can fly even higher, I hear a SNAP! The string was broken, and I was free. Where is the wind going to take me? I wonder.

I thought of my first time in the sky. It was NOT fun. I was used in military missions. I was even used to carrying military weapons. Later, I was used to pass information and as a warning signal of enemies coming. During peaceful times, people started to decorate me with colors and patterns, and I finally had my debut in celebrations. Since then, I travelled to many countries such as Korea, Japan, India, and many others. I was thrilled that I no longer worked for the war department.

Years and centuries went by, I gained huge affection from children around the world. I was always among the first toys they had. I created a lot of loving memories because my string was always passed from a dad or a mom's hand to their child. Since the 6th century, I've grown extremely popular. Today, I'm nearly 3,000 years old!

Wait, where am I now? Am I in the kite paradise? I see a dragon soaring high up in the air. *What are you doing here?* I ask. There's no response. It's a kite! I see a huge camel flying in the air, and it's a kite! I see a High-Speed Rail zooming by, and it's a kite! I even see my creators Lu Ban and Mozi waving at me, and they're all kites! Suddenly, I realize I am in Weifang, China, my hometown. The people there are celebrating ME! They are having a kite festival! My heart is full, and I feel I can fly to the moon.

The wind starts to get gentle, slowly, I glide down to the ground. A little girl picks me up, she smiles at me and she carefully holds me in her hands. My story will go on, probably for another 3,000 years...

## Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

### Zhang Heng and Seismoscope

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Sze, Chun Ho – 8*

Once upon a time, in ancient China, there lived a brilliant scientist named Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng had a great love for numbers and books, and he was always filled with curiosity about earthquakes.

As Zhang Heng grew older, he started inventing things of his own. One of his most famous creations was called a seismoscope. This special device could help people know which direction an earthquake was coming from. The seismoscope was made using a strong metal called bronze. It had eight dragons hanging in different directions, and under each dragon, there was a small ball hanging down. There were also eight toads positioned below the dragons.

One fine day, something extraordinary happened. One of the balls suddenly dropped from the dragon pointing towards the west and landed right into the mouth of a toad under the dragon. Zhang Heng immediately understood the importance and what would happen later on, and rushed to the village in the west to warn the people about the earthquake that will soon come towards them. However, when Zhang Heng arrived, everything appeared normal where everyone was just doing their daily tasks, and the villagers found it hard to believe his warning about the big danger they were in. They thought their village was immune to earthquakes and did not take Zhang Heng's warnings seriously.

Despite no one believing him in his statement, Zhang Heng was determined to keep the citizens of the village safe and protect them. He tried to approach the mayor, hoping to convince him of the danger his entire village was in. Unfortunately, the mayor, too, found it difficult to accept Zhang Heng's claims, ignoring his statements and not believing him, the same way the citizens of the village did towards Zhang Heng. With a heavy heart, Zhang Heng returned to his own village, feeling disappointed but still hopeful that his invention would prove its worth. Little did he know that the very next day when he woke up in the morning, news would spread of a devastating earthquake that had struck the village in the west. Mountains had crumbled, causing huge destruction. The villagers, now realising the accuracy of Zhang Heng's seismoscope, expressed their gratitude and admiration for his help towards the villages. They praised him for his remarkable creation and rewarded him with a generous amount of money.

From that day forward, Zhang Heng's seismoscope became a trusted tool in the villages, serving as an early warning system for earthquakes. It was one of the most powerful and ground-breaking devices in ancient China and now has a great impact on the field of seismology up until today.

## Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

### Eternal Flames of Love

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chow, Cherlin – 12*

Panting, Li Qing trembled as beads of sweat dripped down her forehead, mingling with the dirt and grime. Surrounding her were steep cliffs and jagged mountains, their weathered faces marked by time. Within her, a fierce determination burned like a stubborn flame as she climbed.

In her exhausted state, the whispering wind took on her mother's weakened voice; "Daughter, it is almost time for me to go..." Qing knew her mother's life hung by a thread, yet she clung to a sliver of hope. She would exhaust all means to save her mother, who had brought her up on her own, enduring all the hardships along the way. The aid of Master Wang, a renowned alchemist, became her last resort. Eccentric and reclusive, Master Wang lived in a hidden mountain cave, almost unreachable. Still, she believed that he could help Mother; for that, she persevered.

Hauling herself up over the final cliff, Qing arrived at the mouth of the cave. Carved delicately onto a gnarled rock were the words "Temple of Alchemy". Despite the excitement of this discovery, weariness enveloped her. Stumbling, Qing crossed the dimly lit threshold.

Inside, melting candles lined the walls, emitting a dull but warm glow. A dark-clothed apprentice walked out, his face solemn. "Who are you?" Falling to her knees, Qing half-wept as she stuttered, "My mother is dying, and only Master Wang's Immortality Panacea can help her! I have travelled for weeks to—" The apprentice's face grew cold. "Women are not allowed in this sacred place. Leave." Qing hung her head in despair. For a moment, her resolve wavered. When she lifted her head, her jaw was set, and so was her mind. She turned and walked out of the cave with a plan.

As night fell like a veil over the valley, Qing snuck back into the temple. She slipped behind a rock and observed with bated breath as Master Wang meticulously measured ingredients with a practiced grace. Seizing the opportunity when a gust of wind made the candles flicker, Qing reached out and pocketed a small amount of the grounded powders: saltpetre, sulphur, and charcoal. With Master Wang's back turned, Qing slipped away into the night, arriving at the village before dawn broke over the trees. Working quickly under the cover of darkness and drawing on her memories of Master Wang's methods, she concocted the mixture that she believed would save her mother's life.

As it simmered, the air was infused with an intoxicating blend of medicine and powder. A sudden pop made Qing whirl around, knocking the cauldron over. The mixture frothed and effervesced, echoing the fear that bubbled up in her stomach. Instinct kicked in, and she swiftly jumped out the window, scrambling to safety. Inside, the concoction had spilt into the roaring fire. With a loud *BANG*, it exploded, engulfing the house in flames that threatened

to lick the sky. Fear, desperation, and terror tore at her heart. Moments later, she fainted as the house crumbled before her eyes.

As the first rays of dawn kissed the horizon, a shivering Qing, lying in a pile of tangled mess, was discovered by villagers drawn to the now-smouldering house. The villagers chimed in enthusiastically, “It looked like thunder—no! Lightning that set the house on fire!” and, “That foreign girl was behind this!” while pointing accusingly at Qing. A hush fell over the crowd as Lee Wen – a rather fierce and clever military commander – strolled authoritatively onto the site. He prowled the ruins, his keen eyes taking in the damage. What had caught his attention was the sheer, destructive power of the explosion.

Stopping abruptly in front of a cowering Qing, his eyes gleamed as he saw in her the potential for making a weapon to be used against the country’s enemies. Then, by force, Lee Wen brought Qing to the Imperial Court. Numb from the night’s events, Qing followed silently. But in her heart and soul, all she could think about was her dying mother.

How surprised was she, when instead of being thrown into a cell, she was asked to bow at the Emperor’s feet? Little had she known that the Emperor, after learning of the explosion created by Qing, wanted her to work with Lee Wen to develop a powerful weapon in exchange for her freedom.

Qing laboured for months on end, running one experiment after the next. In time, she and Lee Wen discovered the precise combination of three thoroughly blended ingredients that was needed. This explosive mixture could then be used to fire cannonballs at their enemies with great force and over large distances. Qing smiled, hope filling her soul. Her work here was finally done.

As Qing presented her ground-breaking discovery to the Emperor, she heard the praise in his voice, cool as a mountain stream. “Li Qing, I name you the very first woman military officer. You have created gunpowder, the most important discovery in human history. What might I give you in exchange? Gold? Land?” The Emperor asked. “Emperor, I wish to return home to my mother,” Qing whispered, quietly. Thus, with a benevolent smile, her simple wish was granted.

When Qing finally returned home, she found only her mother’s ashes. Fearing contagion, the villagers had cremated her upon death. Seeing the small urn where her mother’s ashes lay, Qing’s heart shattered, and tears cascaded down her cheeks.

Her hands trembling, she reached into her pocket and found a small paper tube of gunpowder. Placing them in her mother’s urn, she threw in a lit match. Fireworks exploded in the night sky, reaching to the heavens. Tears glistened on Qing’s cheeks; she had fulfilled her mother’s dying wish—being sent to the heavens.

“Forgive me, Mother, for time has slipped from my grasp. But know that you will forever remain the radiant star that illuminates my darkest nights; the fireworks that paint my sky. I love you, Mother.”

## Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

### New Tales of China’s Inventions

*Alliance Primary School Kowloon Tong, Ho, Hiu Lam – 12*

Once again, another tedious night of endless studying for Yinshi. The sound of pages flipping and the clock hands moving were echoing in the room, and the dim light coming from the lamp was barely lightening the pitch-dark room. A few frustrated groans and sighs escaped from her mouth, as she ran her fingers through her hair. Exams were arriving, and she was great at all subjects... Except for Chinese History.

The truth is, she had never found any kind of history interesting – whether it was Chinese or Western, or any kind of history. To her, it was all the same. Inventions that were a big impact to humanity, important figures that died, or famous incidents in the past – it all sounded like a sweet, melodious lullaby to put someone to sleep, at least Yinshi thought so.

Two highlighters in one hand, and a blue pen about to run out of ink in another, Yinshi took a huge sip of black coffee and a deep breath, and continued to write down notes, highlight important information and write every single detail next to every incident in her Chinese History textbook. Opium Wars, the history of paper making, gunpowder... Every single word spun around in her mind. Was Zhang Qian involved in the Opium Wars? That doesn’t seem too right. Oh, he was involved in the history of the Silk Road.

“I’ve had enough! I wish there was a time machine to transport me to the time after the exams, and I could finally relax,” Yinshi groaned and buried her head into the pages of her textbook. The caffeine was slowly wearing off, and she dozed off a few times. As she was about to start studying again, the fatigue did not allow her to and made her so tired that she couldn’t move a single limb.

“I...can’t fall asleep now.”

Darkness.

Then light.

The bustling noises of a market?

Yinshi’s eyes slowly widened.

She looked around frantically, and everyone wore hanfu.

“Young miss, please don’t block the road.” A grumpy and stern voice pierced through her train of thought, causing her to quickly apologize, move out the way, and run off to somewhere quiet.

She leaned against a tree, and looked at herself, only now realising she was also wearing a traditional hanfu. She stared in awe, as she noticed the details on it. The left side of the bodice was wrapped over the right one, making a “y” neckline, the dress had a relaxed fit, top to bottom, with a wide hem.

“Why am I in this place?” She murmured, but there seemed to be another voice saying the same.

“Who’s there?” A young boy, probably the same age as Yinshi, appeared in front of her out of the blue.

Yinshi squealed, before taking a closer look at him.

She states, “You look kind of familiar.”

He replies, “I think I’ve met you somewhere before. Anyways, my name’s Gaoshan.”

“I’m Yinshi. Nice to meet you. Are we’re both dreaming?”

“You too?” He replied, shocked. He looked relieved, even happy to see that there were others that were in this situation. “How about we explore this place for a while? Looks like ancient China to me.”

She nodded, and they both walked around the market for a while. There were horses passing by, and men carrying items that would be sold at the market.

Out of the blue, a strong wind blew towards the two teenagers, and when they opened their eyes, they were in an entirely different place.

“Where are we?!” Gaoshan yelled out, and Yinshi immediately smacked him to keep him quiet.

“Shush!”

They both look down at themselves. They were now wearing clothing that was like their previous hanfu, but much plainer, and looked like a servant’s clothes.

“Servants! Come!” A loud voice rang throughout the room. Assuming the person was referring to them, Yinshi and Gaoshan quickly arrived to the command. They bowed down, and Yinshi nervously asked,

“What would you like us to do, erm Master?”

She eyed the name plate on his table that read, ‘Cai Lun’.

“Bring me tree bark and fishnets,” He ordered. “I’m planning to improve papermaking.”

“Right away, Master!” The two yelled out and excused themselves out of the room.

Yinshi gathered the tree bark that Cai Lun needed, and Gaoshan clumsily grabbed some fishnets from the fishermen.

Yinshi whispered, “Isn’t that the inventor of papermaking? He’s involved in China’s Four Great Inventions!”

He replied, “I was studying this before I slept.”

They scurried back to Cai Lun and handed him the materials.

“Servants. Do you know why I’m doing this? It is because bamboo and wood slips are inconvenient, and other alternatives are too expensive. No matter how many years, or decades it takes, I will never give up.”

First, he ordered Yinshi and Gaoshan to look for more materials like hemp, old silk cocoons, and cloth. Once they came back with everything, Yinshi chopped all the ingredients finely and Gaoshan boiled everything in a pot.

Cai Lun pounded the result into a starchy mixture and dissolved it in water before adding another type of starch. With many failed attempts, they had finally succeeded after a long period.

When this mixture was lifted out of the water, it separated into fine layers of fabric. Once dried for a few days, they became sheets of paper.

“Good job to all of us! The emperor has approved of our paper!”

The teenagers made a high five, and Yinshi suddenly jolted up.

Back to real life.

Her face was slightly sore from sleeping on the table, and she stumbled to the bathroom.

After freshening up, she changed into her uniform, and went to the bus station alone as usual.

Yinshi was still thinking about her dream.

She got on the bus.

A familiar-looking boy went up to her.

Gaoshan?

She faces him, opens her mouth, and he does the same.

“Hey, did we have the same dream?”

“Did you have the same dream?”

## Fiction – Group 3 WINNER

### Timeless

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheah, Zu Zheng Christopher – 12

Standing at the back of a brightly lit hall deep within a mountain research facility, I listen intently as Jeff Bezos paces the stage, addressing the sea of guests before him. Behind him looms an illuminated screen, casting his figure in a radiant glow.

*10,000 Year Mechanical Clock - Opening Ceremony  
23:30, December 31st, 2027 - Sierra Diablo Mountain, Texas, USA  
Website: www.10000yearclock.net*

“Our quest was to create a clock that transcends our finite lifespans,” explains Bezos, “one that embodies the relativity of time itself.”

The mastery of time. Seamlessly elusive, out of reach of humanity’s most desperate grasps. Out of reach even for me, an expert horologist.

Beamed onto the screen, the next slide displays the website’s homepage quotation.

*And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

*T.S. Eliot*

“For twenty years, we endeavoured – yet faltered – to create our 10,000 year clock. Then this year, a revelation. Within a Chinese mountain, archaeologists unearthed the very first mechanical clock, dated 725 AD, invented by Chinese inventor Yi Xing. As T.S. Eliot stated, *we arrive where we started*, the first mechanical clock, for answers to craft our very own timepiece,” Bezos reveals.

“To my right, this ancient relic intriguingly *still ticks on, once per minute*, without any power. I now present to you, this *living* piece of history.”

As the cover lifts, my eyes flutter toward the ancient device. Intricate rusty bronze rings and precise metal gears orchestrate a symphony of clockwork, bequeathing scientific rhapsodies, ethereal complexities, all nested within a towering wooden edifice quadruple the size of a man.

I know the clock intimately, having overseen its extraction in China and been its guardian ever since.

*Tock. A minute passes by.*

“Now to my left,” as Bezos strides towards it, “is our clock that will last 10,000 years.”

As the spotlights shine on the modern, monumental creation, gasps ripple through the audience, echoes of wonderment sweeping through the hall before fading into awed silence. Three storeys high, its sophisticated gears gleam, shimmering with a spectrum of scientific breakthroughs.

“As Einstein once observed, time is not absolute, but varies with perspective. At midnight tonight, we celebrate the dawn of a new era with the first chime of the 10,000 year clock. It will chime only once every year, *a slower rhythm of time.*”

A slower rhythm delays aging. It is the closest we can reach to slowing – though not halting – the unyielding progression of time. Much like how a tree, the epitome of a slower rhythm, can live thousands of years.

*Tick. Another minute passes by.*

“This concludes our presentation. Kindly make your way to the new clock for its first chime at midnight, when we celebrate the new year.”

Staggering applause.

I gaze deeply at the old clock.

Something’s not right.

*Tock. Five minutes to midnight.*

The ancient clock seems to cry out, alone.

Only I am by its side.

This clock was my purpose, my companion. I tended to it, maintained its brilliance, understood what it was, who it was. No one else heard poetry in the clicks and the sighs, the hisses and whirs. When researchers dissected and analysed it, its once-steady melodic cadence grew delicate and faltered, and I seemed to grow more exhausted, more fragile.

As the clock consumed me, I started to recall less about my past. Flickers of a time in hospital, searing headaches at the age of 44, then nothing. Amnesia, probably, from working too hard.

*Tick. Four minutes to midnight.*

As the limelight shifts to the new clock, I dread the feeling of ever parting from my vintage timepiece, the nearest thing to a friend I’ve ever known.

My tears well up.

Tonight, a new glass wall enclosure separates me from it. A spotlight glints off the glass, refracting into my blurred reflection. My gaze travels along the beams of luminance, my face slowly sharpening into focus.

The clear reflection reveals a 65-year-old man, fleeting glimmers of a once joyful life flickering in his eyes.

I look down on the descriptive plaque embedded in the glass.

*World’s First Mechanical Clock, 725 AD.  
Invented by Yi Xing - Chinese astronomer and mathematician.  
Born 683 AD. Died 727 AD.*

My heart races.

The calculations flow unbidden – the inventor’s age of death: 44 years. That same age when agony gripped me, piercing headaches that reduced me to helpless frailty in a hospital bed.

*Tock. Three minutes to midnight.*

A memory ambushes me.

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So vibrant, so vivid within my mind, I see the sun dipping below the Tiantai mountain horizon, a shade of gold bleeding through silk curtains. Outside, the laughter of children cascades through the air, their voices tinged with olden Zhejiang dialects. Such beauty. Such a familiar tapestry of sight and sound.

My workshop is ancient, brimming with inventions perfected during the progressive Tang dynasty: celestial maps of the spherical bird's eye view of the heavens, a compass, an abacus, and scrolls of paper spiralling with equations. Porcelain cups lie scattered, the rich aroma of green tea permeating the air, palpable and rich.

In the centre stands an astronomical orrery and colossal clockwork, with Chinese characters etched on its outer wooden structure.

*Inventor: Yi Xing*

A pool of water lies dormant beside the clock. I step towards it, slowly, steadily. Staring at its surface, my reflection meets my gaze. The eyes staring back are alight with passion, untouched by time, radiant with the brilliance of stars.

But as the moment lingers, reality begins to dissolve, slipping through my fingers like fine sand. I reach out, desperate to hold on.

But I can't.

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*Tick.* Two minutes to midnight.

As my memory fades, I gaze at my image in the glass. The same face. The same intense, spirited eyes aglow with dreams of celestial exploration.

Despite being ravaged by time, I am, still me.

I know who I am.

It explains so much – my love for tinkering, for traversing, for thinking. The uncanny familiarity when examining the workings of my mechanical clock. The inexplicable sense of nostalgia when gazing upon its inner mechanisms.

I am the one who invented the world's first mechanical clock.

I am *Yi Xing*.

But how can this be? Yi Xing's life ended in 727 AD, only 44 years allotted. Yet now, in 2027, I stand alive – 1300 years have passed, while I've added merely 21 years to my age.

*A slower rhythm of time*, entwined to the tick of my clock, only once every 60 seconds.

*I must be aging slower than everyone else*: 60 years pass for others, merely a single year for me.

Horror grasps my being as I shout out desperately to the crowd.

No one hears me.

Then I thrust my fist at the glass enclosure, but my knuckles meet only air, the smooth surface somehow intangible. I stumble forward, unsteady as my entire being phases through the unbroken pane.

"No, it can't be," I gasp inside the enclosure, shocked, not wanting to accept an inevitable truth.

I know *what* I am.

*A spirit.*

*A spirit that ages slowly, one heartbeat per minute.*

*Tock.* One minute to midnight.

I ache, I want to *live*.

I close my eyes, tears leaking behind my eyelids. Oh God. How long until everything's alright, until life's in perfect synchrony again? I'm not ready to let go, to fade. But I feel a countdown to the end coming, time's grip slowly tightening.

*Time*, your march I cannot halt, nor can I turn you back. Oh, I wish to dwell beyond your bounds, to be *timeless*.

My tears cascade. My heart aches from the agony of leaving my only friend. "Thank you," I quiver to the clock, "for your everlasting presence, my silent companion."

But now its ticks have the same fragility of my fading heartbeat. In time, I have to confront reality: the clock, unable to exist separately from its maker, has served as my imaginary friend, a presence I sustained to soothe my solitude.

In truth, my only real companion has been, simply, myself.

I have nothing more to cling to.

Nothing to leave behind.

And now, I will finally let go.

Easing into the embrace of my approaching end, I find solace in final whispers of eternal hope:

*Timeless, free from the bounds of time.*

*As with life comes death, but with death comes life,*

*As with darkness comes light, and with day comes night.*

*With the end, a new beginning.*

*Old becomes new,*

*And a new era shall be known for the first time.*

\*\*\*

"Three...Two...One," the audience counts to the new year.

The wearied, devoted gears of Yi Xing's clock are finally set free, and the clock stops: becoming truly time-less. *Timeless, free from the bounds of time.*

A single teardrop emerges, gently splashing atop the first mechanical clock.

The new 10,000 year clock chimes for the first time.

## Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 3 WINNER

# When the Human Bird Takes Flight

*Hong Kong Taoist Association Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School, Huang, Sheung Yu – 14*

Pale light from the television sprayed the monochrome room, painting me dozing on the cozy sofa. It was a quarter to one in the morning. The launch of Shenzhou 1 rocket was live. Fatigue cramped my entire body as I forced myself to stand up to the messy kitchen for a cup of soothing coffee. Eyelids heavy and legs wobbling, I was suddenly pressed to the ground, tumbling and swirling, into infinite blackness.....

Nothing but void. I blinked. A bird's tweet. I blinked again. A warm spring gale brushed my face gently. A sudden beam of light broke through the darkness. I squeezed my eyes. Fragments of opaque dancing colors gushed in through the crack, twisting and twirling, as I gradually opened my eyes. Branches in diverse hues of green grew overhead into the cloudless blue sky, caressing the glowing sun. It suddenly occurred to me that I was on one of the tallest branches. I shrieked.

'Tweet. Tweet!'

I froze, fear possessing my tiny body. My voice had transformed into a sweet tweet. Desperately looking down, I tweeted in immense fright as I identified my beige feathers, trembling wings, and my claws. Before I even got time to acknowledge my new identity as a bird, the sound of pitapat echoed towards the trees. My peers strived to take flight. I hopped awkwardly among the branches, rushing for a shroud, and running for my life until.....

A step loosed.

My heart chilled as I plunged head down. A fierce wind whipped my body and overturned all my feathers. Hard sharp pain stamped my face hard and traveled like bolts of lightning as I crashed onto the wet grass. The sweetness and freshness of the earth slipped in through my nostrils. Feeling numb, I struggled to stand up but failed. Then, I was enclosed in warm softness. Air tugging my feathers, I felt myself being picked up. I whispered a silent goodbye and squeezed my eyes shut.

'Oh, my little bird, how I wish I could fly in the sky like you.' A coarse voice said. I forced my eyes open and looked up. A vague outline of a face manifested under the dazzling sunlight. Though the beams swallowed half of the man's face, some features of his stood out in the ambiguity. His beard was thick and filthy, stretching and twining like branches all the way to his pointed chin. His oversize brown eyes embedded in the sunken orbit twinkled in wonder and intelligence. Playful wrinkles meandered on his face as he smiled. All his features displayed a prodigy's eccentricity and lunatics. Somehow, I felt as if his glare could pierce my body. Worrying, I tensely waited for his next movement.

'I am Wan Hu. People called me "the mad one", but I literally don't care,' The man murmured in a low but soothing voice, fingertips gently stroking my face. I shivered at

the touch and at his name. Wan Hu? The guy who tried to invent a rocket in the bedtime story? His painful story came back to me like tides of waves crashing onshore. What he next said authenticated my guess. 'No one in the village is supportive of my dream to invent a rocket. Even my friends and family lost their interest when I failed the second time,' Wan Hu chuckled as if laughing at his own failure, 'The first time I broke my arm, and the second time I burnt my house. I give you my word that I'll never give up. I am going to have another experiment today. Oh, my bird, there are no pioneers in flying. When shall the human bird take flight?' He raised me to his eye level, tightening his grip. A feeling of suffocation surged as he compressed my tiny body.

Wan Hu's ending rehashed in my mind: The determined Wan Hu, tied to a chair with firecrackers as the engine around the chair, would be torn into pieces in the explosion as his chair zoomed into the infinite blueness.

Desperate, I searched his face for any signs of forsaking. However, as our eyes met, I saw and only saw determination flaring like flames in the sea of amber.

I felt so helpless.

I couldn't stop a man from killing himself, but I felt obliged to do so. As Wan Hu softly placed me back onto the grass, I shrieked and pecked his fingers, screaming and begging for him to stop and reconsider his decision. Wan Hu, however, wasn't concerned about my rejections. His eyes, now glassy and misty, were in the distance, as if he was trying to foresee his own fate. His beautiful amber eyes lit up. Then, he turned and walked, steadily and determinedly, to his hut.

Oh! How I hope that I succeeded at that moment. But reality was cold and cruel.

A chair was taken out. Wan Hu sat on it to test its stability, smiling like an avaricious gambler that had the pluck to risk it all. I shrieked. No response.

Firecrackers were being tied to the chair. Wan Hu checked whether they were tight enough, laughing heartedly like an audacious and naive child. I shrieked harder for his attention, but to no avail.

It suddenly hit me.

No one could ever hold Wan Hu back from the precipice. He was an innate untrainable horse doomed to jump over the edge. He had the gambler and the child in him. He had chosen this path despite being aware of the ramifications and wouldn't abjure it no matter what. His dream, though being rejected and looked down on, had ceaselessly kept him going further onto this irreversible path of death. His courage of embracing the worst-case scenarios and death carried him on from the overwhelming wave of laughter and disappointment. His injuries from previous trials had only strengthened his desire to spread the wings of the human bird. He was determined to leave his mark in the ever-flowing history, and to leave his dream for descendants to follow.

I ceased my useless protest and peacefully looked at Wan Hu, who was already tying himself to the chair. He was tall and skinny, with ragged oversized clothes barely covering his body. His black hair, as rough as his beard, intertwined and fell onto his crooked shoulders like flaring flames. To me, he looked much more like an eccentric than a prodigy. As he continued tying himself, the rough ropes pinned into the flesh of the dying man who was still unaware of his fate like sharp daggers.

'You are lucky. You are born to explore the vastness of the sky,' Wan Hu addressed me as he was putting the finishing touches on his instrument, 'I shall take the first hopping step for the human bird, but when shall it take flight?' He sighed, looking worrisomely into the distance again, holding the burning match. The glow from the flame lit up his resolved face.

Oh! How I wish that you know, Wan Hu. The human bird has already learned to ride the tides and has beheld its first glimpse of the idyllic sunrise, I whispered silently. Thank you, Wan Hu, I thought. Thank you for your courage and resolve. I sadly shut my eyes, not daring to behold the upcoming tragedy.

Boom!

Burning. Everything was burning to ashes. The firecrackers exploded with a deafening boom, as if it were mourning for the death of Wan Hu. The boom also marked the first step the human bird soaring in the sky. The strong force of the explosion pressed me into the earth, as I went swirling and twirling.....

Three! Two! One!

I woke up on the sofa. My shirt was soaked in sweat. I watched in great awe as Shenzhou 1 rocket was launched on the television. The vigorous flames of the rocket recalled my transient journey with Wan Hu. My heart was pounding as memories gushed in.

Wan Hu, can you see it? The human bird has already begun its exploration of the infinity of the universe.

## Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

### Conversations with Èrláng

*ESF Sha Tin College, Szeto, Millie – 14*

I met the War God in a parking lot on a rainy day. He was having a smoke. The glass-green liquid sleet outside blew in like breath.

I took a seat on his left, my jeans melting into the sodden curb.

He sliced the air with the rustling of a newspaper, ink characters illuminated only by his winking cigarette cherry. Two of his eyes were stagnant, but the third, elevated, scanned the page like a darting fish.

*Èrláng, I said. I ask of you a question. In all your infinite justice and heavenly righteousness, could you grant me an answer?*

*Fire away, he said.*

*How's the cigarette?*

He turned the page over.

**Genocide in Sudan. Hundreds of thousands dead.** More on the way.

And yet here sat a War God with a steaming brand.

*Don't you get embarrassed? I said. We - our countrymen invented gunpowder, after all.*

A phantom shake of the head, perhaps. Or the breeze. Either way, something made his long ears swing by his shoulders.

*We use it for war, I said for emphasis.*

*What else would you use it for? The lone eye snapped to attention.*

I shrugged. *Those Tang dynasty alchemists made it by accident, right? It was such an innocuous invention. They'd probably be bummed if they saw what it was being used for right now.*

The third eye rolled backwards in his head til all I could see was an ivory slit. *Every invention is innocuous until it's not. We are an old civilization, so we are responsible for everything that comes after. We are an origin of fault.*

*Do you suppose anything good came out of it?*

White wisps circled about his smoking mouth. *In their quest for immortality, they found the opposite. Gunpowder poisoned the human race. You lose the intimacy of killing another human being when it's all point and click-click-bang. He said. As long as man has free will he is free to hurt all those that he likes. But if he slits another man's throat he feels the warmth of the blood trickle down his skin; the knife feels heavy in his hand, its belly full with the blood of another. Even without a tool man is free to bash in the brains of those who irritate him, but he must first raise his fist with intent. You break their skull and feel it crunch - you feel the fragility of a human life and you feel responsible for it. Now you point a pea-shooter at babes and wives and mow them all down like grass. It's guns all the way down. You don't even have to look. You can cross your legs and press a button that sets the world on fire. There's not a single shield I own that can stop a nuclear bomb.*

*Artillery can be used to defend, I objected not so much in true opposition as to kill the silence. Defend against what? I couldn't speak. You don't shoot at snakes and dogs. You don't drop a bomb on tornadoes. But you are War, I said lamely. He scoffed. You are mistaken. I am not War. I am no horseman. I flushed in shame and averted my gaze. When I looked again, he was gone, leaving a light where he'd been sitting. I didn't think about stamping it out.*

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The next time I met him was outside a convenience store. He had a smoke and the paper like last time.  
*It's you again, I remarked. Is the smoke good? It is as good as it can be. So, War God. How much of everything around the world do you see? The third eye winked, but the rest of his face remained unchanging. I see everything. How does the human race look? I asked. Ugly? He sighed. One of exasperation or satisfaction, I didn't know. Man is an animal that learned to dream. You are all quite hopeless. We are not hopeless! I protested. We've come so far! We have invented paper and compasses and porcelain. Our hands turn the world. And yet the world turns without you, he said. We have made myths and folktales and monuments! Ones like yours! He whistled through his teeth. Then you love to lay waste to your beauty. We discovered fire - The fire that warmed Ying Zhèng as he burned book after book. After some silence, I said - I wonder why is it that old Chinese poems don't mention love. It's all the moon. The moon, snow, and sometimes alcohol. You are silly. A mother sits with her son rubbing his back from yè bàn to jī míng because he is afraid to go to war when the sun crowns the sky and you say we know nothing of love. He spat out a string of smoke. Hòu Yì would not ascend without his wife and yet - My mistake. I meant that - I stopped to think. I suppose then that it is modern mankind that lacks love? He rolled his eyes, first the regular two and then the all-seeing third. I was shocked at the sight, how human he seemed then. A milkless mother suckles a half-blind babe in a torrent of shrapnel. Make no mistake, man. If anything, love is all that will save you. It is all that you have. It is the antithesis of modern warfare - that and diplomacy. Lots and lots of diplomacy. I suppose it's true that the history of man is the history of war. It is the history of all sorts of things, he said comfortingly. Man makes conflict, I muttered, a newly turned cynic. Man makes everything. Man makes dancing, paper lanterns and silk baby shoes. Man makes a card for his mother and a tie for his father and kisses them both on the cheek. Man makes a pretty porcelain bowl and a magic coin that tells sailors the way. Man makes names for colors that don't need them. Man digs a grave for a goldfish. Man makes love to his spouse, stories for his kids and laughs all the time, all*

*night and morning long. Man makes a nuclear bomb that makes the sky go dark. Man smiles and kills and loves and rapes and makes and destroys.*

*No gods out there? I asked, hoping for something. You make your own and kill the others. I slumped. Humans are their best and worst invention, he said. What's second best? I asked, noticing that his eyes were glassing over. He tapped his chin thoughtfully. Tea. Not tobacco? He snorted smoke tendrils like a dragon. Hardly. I have a question again, I admitted. He puffed in response. If you aren't a War God, what are you? His mouth worked around the cigarette. I think you may have a fundamental lack of understanding on the difference between a 'war god' and a 'warrior god'. What do you mean? I did not wish to embarrass myself, although I probably had already, and had been doing this entire time. A war god is the embodiment of war. A warrior god is a god that just so happens to have waged war. The cigarette spark flicked up and down in the gloom, springing ash that fell, as snowflakes do, down to the ground. I understand. I didn't. His third eye flitted thoughtfully. I haven't been at war in a thousand years. What sort of warrior god are you? More snowflakes. I'm all sorts of things. In the next second, he was gone. His cigarette sizzled, burning a black hole in the asphalt. I was afraid to smother it.*

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I met him in the same parking lot as before. It was 11 at night on a cold New Year's Eve. I knew it was him when I saw the signature flare dancing in the wet air, clenched between his teeth. I took off my raincoat, newly glossy from the shower outside, and went towards him. He nodded as I approached. *The cigarette is good, he said. I was pleasantly shocked. You answered before I could ask! You ask the same question every time. I have another one for you, I said. Are we properly, truly done for? He hesitated. Mankind is stupid and contradictory, he said. You are both the salvo and the salve. Oh, wordplay! I exclaimed. You must think you're so clever - you make it sound so simple. It is not, he admitted. All the beautiful things you have made are crying. Man invents himself. Your creativity will be your demise. We could all let each other be so happy, I mourned. But we don't want to. That is the fundamental incorrectness of the human race. He rolled up his sleeve to check his watch. As the seconds hand made its constant revolvment, it made a sound like a river. The thin ringing of a bell sounded within. Sū Sòng's water clock came to mind.*

*What are our countrymen doing these days?* He asked.  
*We... We are making no-carbon factories. Solar panels.*  
 He closed his eyes. How nice. *Won't you save as much as you can?*  
 I hugged my knees to my chest. *I will not be idle as the world breaks. We should not forget what we lose when we destroy each other. We are too beautiful to not remember.*  
 All three of his eyes turned misty. *Humans do so like to be remembered. Look now, the fireworks are starting.*  
 Lotus bloomed on the horizon, enlightening the darkness.  
*Happy New Year, Èrláng.*  
 I turned to him. Nothing but a rolled up newspaper, death toll after another, and a still-orange cigarette stub. I took a puff of it.  
 "Guns all the way down."  
 Rwanda, Sudan, Palestine.  
 "Won't you save as much as you can?"  
 Nanking. Yemen.  
 I stood up and put out his cigarette in the snotgreen rain.

## Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

### Threads of the Earth's Song

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Shen, Bob Rulilin – 16*

The autumn air in Hong Kong was brisk, carrying a symphony of rustling leaves – a cascade of red and gold waltzing against the city's steel-grey skyline. Inside a lab that buzzed with the quiet intensity of anticipation, Dr. Tan Mei stood, her eyes reflecting the ghostly glow of computer screens. Around her, the skeletal framework of her prototype—a promise of safety against nature's caprice—hummed with potential. Despite the advanced algorithms flickering across the monitors, a gnawing gap remained, a piece of the puzzle stubbornly elusive as if it lay beyond the reach of modern technology.

The lab was her haven, a place where the whisper of an idea could grow into a roar of innovation. Yet, tonight, Mei felt the weight of solitude in her quest, a familiar echo in the vastness of her ambition. She was a maestro conducting an orchestra of data and circuits, but the harmony was incomplete.

In search of solace, she found herself drawn to the warmth of her grandfather's study, a room where time seemed to stand still amidst the shelves laden with ancient tomes and artifacts. It was here, under the watchful eye of a jade dragon that had silently observed generations of her family, that she sought a moment of respite.

As Mei ran her fingers over the leather-bound spines, one book drew her in, its cover worn by decades of scholarly hands. It wasn't research that called to her tonight but a need for connection, a whisper of the past to guide her in the present. Slowly, she withdrew the volume, a cloud of dust motes dancing in the lamplight, and settled into the embrace of her grandfather's old armchair.

A parchment, brittle with age, slipped from between the pages, floating to the floor with a grace that belied its years. Mei picked it up with reverence, her pulse quickening as she unfolded it to reveal a poem in classical Chinese script. Her breath caught—the author was Zhang Heng, known to her as the inventor of the first seismoscope, not as a poet. Yet here, in her hands, was a piece of his soul.

The poem read:

*In the dragon's core, where secrets are kept,  
 In silence, it guards; in darkness, it slept.  
 Metal's embrace and jade's whispered lore,  
 Together they listen—earth's heart at the core.*

*A sphere gently stirs, an omen foretold,  
 In the dance of the deep, where futures unfold.*

*A sentinel's duty, cast in ancient light,  
To watch over the living, through day and through night.*

The characters, elegant and sure, spoke of the earth's heartbeat, of a unity between the heavens and the human spirit. Dr. Tan Mei, with her life's work laid out in silicon and code, felt a sudden kinship with this ancient scholar. Zhang Heng's quest was her own: to understand the earth's most intimate whispers before they turned into roars of calamity.

As the night deepened around her, the poem offered not just historical insight but a reflection of her own yearning—to protect, to serve, to connect with the tremulous song of the earth. In the quietude of her grandfather's study, surrounded by the wisdom of ages, Dr. Tan Mei found the silent melody of inspiration calling to her once more.

Pause, to go further

Weeks melded into an indistinguishable blur as Mei delved deeper into the poem's mysteries. The ancient script was a labyrinth of symbolism, each character a riddle wrapped in the enigma of antiquity. The translations she had at her disposal felt hollow, stripped of the poem's soulful essence. Her breakthrough danced just beyond reach, a shadow flickering at the edge of understanding, and her frustration grew like a storm on the horizon.

The lab, once a crucible of innovation, had become a prison of dead ends. In a rare moment of surrender to her human limits, Mei stepped away from the relentless pursuit. The streets of Hong Kong called to her, their vibrant pulse a stark contrast to the sterile hum of her technological haven.

As if guided by the unseen hand of fate, she found herself navigating the labyrinth of a local flea market. Here, the past and present coexisted; every trinket and relic whispered stories of bygone eras. The air was thick with the scent of aged paper and history, a perfume that settled into her senses, offering an odd comfort.

It was amid this cacophony of the forgotten that she stumbled upon a relic that seemed to hum with significance. An old scroll, nestled between jade figurines and brass compasses, called to her with an almost magnetic pull.

The stall owner, his eyes crinkled with the wisdom of years, watched her with a knowing smile. "It belonged to a scholar, many centuries ago. He was a dreamer, an inventor, and a poet," he said, his voice a bridge to the past.

With hands that trembled with reverence and possibility, Mei unfurled the scroll. The script within was delicate, the ink faded but the words alive, dancing before her as if imbued with the very breath of the ages. And then, a name leapt from the page to imprint itself upon her heart: Zhang Heng. This was no mere historical artifact; it was a fragment of the seismologist poet's soul, a continuation of the poem that had become her obsession.

*Spring, 86 AD - Birth*

The gentle whisper of Xi'e's winds, entwined with the rustle of bamboo, has often been my companion, as familiar as the shade of the ancient banyan under which I sit. Here, amidst the symphony of the natural world, my thoughts find their rhythm, harmonizing with the lifeblood of the earth itself.

Today, as I pondered the silent dance of the earth, my father approached. I saw in his eyes the reflection of the azure sky and a curiosity that mirrored my own. "The earth speaks in a language few can hear," he mused, recalling the words of the scholars and poets he so often read to me during the long evenings.

"I wish to understand that language," I replied, the thought taking root in my heart. "To anticipate its silent turns and to know its gentlest murmurs."

In the quiet that followed, a vision began to unfold within me—a dream not just of comprehension but of creation. A dream where the whispers of the earth could be translated for all to hear. It was here, in the embrace of the banyan's ancient wisdom, that the seed of my life's work was planted.

The sun dipped low, casting long shadows across the land of my birth. In the twilight, I knew that my journey had begun, as a seeker of the earth's hidden songs. This day marked not just the passage of another season but the awakening of the dreamer within, the birth of one who would listen to the earth with a scholar's mind and a poet's heart.

*Autumn, 89 AD - Mission*

A day like any other was torn asunder by the earth's lament, a roar so profound it seemed to come from the very depths of creation. The land heaved in sorrow, and the pillars of our human endeavors crumbled like the fleeting dreams they were. The air was thick with dust and despair, as cries of the afflicted rose to the heavens.

My father stood beside me, his composure a fragile bulwark against the chaos. "An earthquake," he whispered, the words barely a ripple in the torrent of nature's outpouring. "The earth's formidable voice speaks."

Those words struck a chord deep within my soul, not merely as a son but as a member of this trembling society. I saw the fear etched on the faces around us, the helplessness that gripped tight at every heart, and felt it echo in my own.

Yet, amidst the wreckage, where lives had been unmoored and the illusion of control lay shattered, a resolute flame was kindled in my spirit. "Father," I found myself saying, "what if we could come to understand this fearsome language? To not merely endure but to anticipate, to prepare?"

The days that followed were filled with reflection as I wandered amid the ruins, my heart heavy with the suffering etched into the very earth. The people of Xi'e, with hands calloused and spirits tested, set about rebuilding, their resilience a testament to the enduring human spirit.

It was in the quiet moments, sitting amidst the remnants of our fragility, that my true mission took root. It was not enough to stand in awe of nature's might; I was compelled to stand in service to humanity. To turn this devastation into a wellspring of knowledge that might one day spare my fellow beings from the grip of such sudden ruin.

The earthquake, a formidable beast that had shaken us to our core, became more than a harbinger of destruction. It was a clarion call to action, to seek out the secrets held close by the earth, and to forge from this calamity a beacon of hope.

In the annals of time, let it be said that from the ruins of Xi'e, a mission was born—a mission of compassion, of understanding, and of an unyielding commitment to safeguard the dance of life upon this unpredictable stage.

*Winter, 92 AD - Enlightenment*

The winter's embrace had stilled Xi'e, the land lying in repose as if to recover from the season's earlier tumult. The remnants of the earthquake were like scars upon the earth, covered in a shroud of snow, whispering memories of the upheaval.

One evening, as a minor tremor coursed through our village, a subtle but unmistakable reminder of the earth's unrest, my mother's voice found me. I saw her silhouette against the hearth, the dance of the flames casting a tableau of the past year's chaos on the walls of our home.

“Heng,” she said, a tremble in her voice mirroring the tremor that had just passed, “the earth’s dance was violent. Must we always live in fear of its next step?”

Her question hung in the air, mingling with the scent of burning cedarwood. “We are not powerless, Mother,” I replied, the idea crystallizing like ice upon a branch. “We may not command the earth’s movements, but we can strive to understand its signals, its patterns. In knowledge, there is forewarning.”

A spark of something akin to hope flickered in her eyes, a fragile flame against the encroaching darkness of doubt. “Is such a thing within our grasp, Heng?” she asked, her words carrying the weight of a community still reeling from nature’s blow.

My response came from a place of deep conviction, fuelled by the unspoken resolve that had taken root within me. “I believe so,” I affirmed. “The pursuit of knowledge is itself a lantern in the dark. I will seek out this understanding, Mother, not just as a balm for our fears but as a beacon for all.”

As the winter deepened, so too did my commitment. I immersed myself in study, surrounded by scrolls and texts, the voices of ancient scholars and my companions in the quietude. The dreamer in me, once content with mere reflection, now sought the mantle of a scholar. It was a path lined with the unknown, but I stepped forward with a heart fortified by purpose. The earthquake had been a harbinger of destruction; now, it was to become a catalyst for enlightenment.

#### *Spring, 102 AD - Struggle*

In the stillness of the library, where the dust motes danced like silent specters in the shafts of light, I found myself besieged by a sea of ancient texts. Each one was a beacon that had guided me here, to Luoyang, away from the nurturing boughs of Xi’e’s banyan and into the heart of the empire’s grandeur—a memory that flickered like a candle in the recesses of my mind.

I recalled the morning of my departure, now five years ago, the firm grip of my father’s hand on my shoulder, a silent bastion against the uncertainty of the path I had chosen. “Seek the knowledge that eludes us,” his voice had echoed, a mantra that now resonated in every beat of my heart.

The capital had been a crucible of sounds and sights, a maelstrom of life where every face held a story, every story a lesson. My tutor’s words whispered to me across the years, a gentle reminder that wisdom was not solely the province of the scholar, but of every soul that walked the thoroughfares of Chang’an.

Yet now, as I faced the scholars of this esteemed city, their skepticism was a gale that threatened to extinguish the flame I had carried all this way. “A seismoscope?” they would murmur among themselves, the word tinged with irony. “Young Heng chases shadows.”

But shadows were merely a sign that light was present, and it was this light that I sought—relentlessly, resolutely. Each dismissal, each patronizing glance, I stored away not as tokens of defeat, but as the chaff which would eventually separate from the wheat of triumph.

As the chill of winter seeped into the bones of the library, I felt the weight of all I had left behind—the comfort of my mother’s embrace, the steadfastness of my father’s belief, the serene beauty of my hometown. These were the talismans I clung to in moments of doubt, each a reminder of the dream that had set me upon this journey.

In the solitude of my struggle, I was a solitary figure etching out a new path—one that others could not yet see. But with each stroke of my brush, each line of inquiry I pursued,

the path cleared, leading me ever onwards. For in the heart of this struggle lay not just the promise of enlightenment, but the hope of a future where the earth’s violent dance could be anticipated, and the lives of those like the citizens of Xi’e could be spared from nature’s fury.

#### *Autumn, 105 AD - Success!*

The workshop was silent save for the scraping of metal on metal, the soft flutter of parchment, and my steady breaths—each one a quiet testament to years of relentless pursuit. Before me lay the culmination of a journey that had spanned the breadth of this vast empire, a device wrought from copper and ingenuity, poised on the edge of awakening.

I recalled the disdainful smirks of my peers, the weighty expectation in my father’s eyes, the gentle encouragement of my mother’s touch—all distant now, as I stood on the precipice of revelation.

The first tremor was subtle, a whisper of movement that might have been dismissed by any other. But to me, it was as thunderous as the roar that once shattered the tranquility of Xi’e. The seismoscope, my silent sentinel, responded. The dragon within stirred, its metal heart resonating with the earth’s hidden dance.

In that moment, time was a river stopped at its source. The sphere within the dragon’s grasp shifted, rolling with purposeful grace to point its accusing finger toward the west. My heart thundered in my chest, a counterpart to the silent song of the earth that only I, in that instant, could hear.

When the confirmation came—a messenger, breathless and wide-eyed, speaking of tremors felt in the distant regions—it was not just validation for me, but a vindication for all who dare to dream beyond the veil of the known.

The scholars’ eyes, once narrow with skepticism, now widened with the dawning of understanding. Their murmurs, once derisive, turned to contemplations of the implications of my work. I felt not triumph in their capitulation, but a serene affirmation of the mission that had chosen me as much as I had chosen it.

#### Understanding

In the silence of her lab, Dr. Tan Mei held the scroll delicately between her fingers, as if the fragile paper was a bridge across time, connecting her to Zhang Heng—a man whose ancient dreams now whispered to her across the centuries.

She had been captivated by the narrative of his life, the meticulous detail he poured into his work, and the poetic depth of his aspirations. His words, though from a distant past, held a resonance that was profoundly personal and immediate. In the dance of his calligraphy, she found echoes of her own heartbeat, her own dreams.

The fusion of Zhang Heng’s lyrical legacy with the stark functionality of her modern research lab created a harmony of purpose. The heart of the dragon—the core of the earth which he had sought to understand—now beat in sync with the pulse of her seismic warning system. Mei saw not just the spirit of metal and the breath of jade as materials, but as metaphors for the resilience and adaptability required to face nature’s might.

As she read, the seams of the past unwound, revealing the timeless pattern of human ingenuity. Mei’s vision for her seismic warning system crystallized further, inspired by the balance Zhang Heng had struck between strength and flexibility, tradition and innovation.

With every line of Zhang Heng’s diary, Mei felt the walls between their worlds thinning. Mei’s work, once confined to algorithms and data, now took on a new dimension—it was a

narrative, a story of humanity's resilience and the enduring quest to protect life. Zhang Heng had reached across the ages to remind her that at the heart of all technology, all discovery, were the lives of the people it served.

In the soft glow of her monitors, Dr. Tan Mei no longer felt alone in her quest. She was part of a continuum, a lineage of dreamers and doers who listened to the earth's rhythms and sought to harmonize with them. Her hands, steady and sure, resumed their work with a renewed sense of purpose. For in her heart now danced the spirit of Zhang Heng, and together, they were composing the future's song—one of hope, protection, and the unending dialogue between humanity and the earth.

## Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 5 WINNER

### The Looking Glass

*The Church of Christ in China Ming Yin College, Choy, Siu Long – 17*

#### *Reflections of a Murky Sky*

Along a long and desolate road I walked, monochrome structures entering my retina and fading as I absentmindedly passed them one by one. As I watched my boots clack, a gray puddle came into my view, though nothing could be seen besides lines like bleeding ink forming my face. Impenetrable clouds block any hope of light seeping through, enveloping the Capital in an ominous air. Eventually, I started seeing people – or more so – figures. Figures formed by lines vaguely representing people were queued up, telling me I was heading to the right place.

At last, I reached the only source of colour, a massive screen displayed on a towering structure, and its many speakers echo their broadcast into my skull.

*Are you lost, unable to find a meaning for yourself?*

*Are you not content, grasping at straws for your future?*

*Do not fear, my friend. With Tomorrow's Vision, you will find your purpose in life.*

*Let us guide you, to a tomorrow built by your perfect self.*

Tomorrow's Vision – a recently patented technology, if I recall. A machine capable of calculating one's abilities and possibilities, then outputting "the Perfect Job". An anchor for misguided souls, and a compass for lost lambs. At least, that's what they say.

Suddenly, I felt a touch on my shoulder, and heard an unfamiliar voice.

"Here you are!"

I turned to see an actual face, coloured and everything. Seeing my surprised face, the man thought for a moment, before seemingly realizing something. He quickly scrolled through his watch, and with a tap, my senses overloaded as the world returned to colour, and figures faces.

"Sorry about that, Mister Chailyn! A clerk must have forgotten to whitelist your name on our Perception Blocker System. As the CEO of Tomorrow's Vision, I sincerely apologize. We shouldn't have made this mistake when we were the ones inviting you here!" The man scratched his head, awkwardly smiling.

"Don't worry about it, I found the experience riveting. Truly magnificent – blocking out defining traits to enforce anonymity and security is a system I would've never thought of," I said, looking around. "Congratulations on claiming a seat as the Four Great Inventions."

"Ha ha, I'm grateful for being equals to legends like you, Mister! I'm more than proud of Tomorrow's Vision, but I couldn't have imagined it making me a District Keeper."

"Tomorrow's Vision – ", I pulled the conversation back on track, "A supercomputer that decides a person's future for them, a 'compass', you could say. But, do I have it right when..."

*Let us be your compass, friend.*

“...Tomorrow’s Vision is a compass for the city?”

“You’re amazing, Mister! It is as you have said, Tomorrow’s Vision determines the needs of the city, and allocates the people by their potential. With this technology, we can guide the city to a brighter tomorrow!”

*Built on the blood of the desperate, huh.*

“Yeah.” I agreed.

#### *Dragon’s Rest*

In the city was a grandiose tower in red and gold, and atop laid Dragon’s Rest, a space reserved for myself. I rested silently in my chair, blankly staring at the ceiling expanse. While my assessment on the new Great Inventor had no problems, I admit the results had been worthless. I had expected Tomorrow’s Vision to be nothing good, but for it to have been to this extent was demoralising. I looked online to see if anything notable had happened.

‘Tomorrow’s Vision estimated to raise labour production by 40%’

‘Mantle CORE announces new technology “Combustion Down”’

‘Riot in District 3 suppressed in 20 minutes’

‘Zones in District 2 to be repurposed for Research Complexes’

*I wasn’t informed about this.*

I left Dragon’s Rest, and headed to the R&D branch under my jurisdiction. I entered the white lab and greeted me as usual was my head researcher.

“Good day, Sir. What brings you here today?”

“Justine, why haven’t I been notified on the repurposing of the Residential Zone?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean what’s on the news.”

Justine looked at the screen on her wrist as an article appears. She looks at other pieces of information before she concluded, “There had been a direct command from the Authority, merely hours ago, when you were over at District 4. I apologize for not informing you as soon as you have returned.”

“It’s fine. How’s the progress?”

We discussed the development of a new technology, a possibility born from what made me Great Inventor, among other things. Due to my status, I was by extension District Keeper. However, my subordinates were really those who managed the area. If not for them, I would not have the freedom to roam the city nor explore new ideas. In truth, I am grateful to them, but I suppose the City seldom has time for expressing and receiving sincerity. Nevertheless, I tried to show my appreciation to them.

“The prototype is still too unstable for safe usage. Unfortunately, it will be quite some time before anything concrete can be announced.”

“Thanks. You’re the best, Justine.”

When I returned to my office, I passed my seat and stood on my balcony, a deck bounded in glass walls – would one call it a balcony, or an observation deck? Artificial lights hung on the tower illuminated my view, yet below was a city dark and void of warmth. I was reminded of the sight I saw in the invitation to Tomorrow’s Vision, people on the concrete ground, omitted from the world created by the Perception Blocker. Where were they now?

#### *Premonition*

A monotonous day like any other would have been fine, but today had been unsettling. I followed my routine, stopping by R&D and walking through the district, albeit more cautiously.

Nothing out of the ordinary had I seen, yet in my gut there was a sinking feeling. An eerily cold breeze grazed the streets, sweeping up withered leaves and torn fliers. I hastily returned to the tower, unable to shake off the ominous air.

In my office I kept an eye on the security system, screens showing the surrounding areas of the tower. And then, I spotted it –

– the mural of an eye, etched onto a surface.

The eye was painted in black, its ink leaking down to the floor like tears. Immediately, I turned to contact my staff –

“There’s graffiti on the building. Can it be removed as soon as possible?”

“Right... Um, Sir, where is it?”

I turned to the screen.

“The outer wall, on the ground floor, there’s –”

Nothing.

*What?*

“Sir? We’re looking at the cameras, but we don’t see anything...”

“Can you dispatch a team to patrol the tower, in and out?”

“Yes, Sir.”

As the call ended, I turned back to the screen, trying to comprehend what had happened. I was sure I saw a mural of an eye, and the mess it made. But now, it was gone, as if it had never been there. Was it my imagination?

In an attempt to focus, I left the office to take a breather. Going down, I reached the Arboretum, an open green space with a variety of plants I’ve come to gather since becoming District Keeper. I have never been fond of the stale city streets, so I constructed this place, as well as to remind me of my roots. I rested on the grass, gazing at the cloudy sky – if only it had been a sunnier day.

The wind blew, and a flier landed next to me.

**WE KNOW**

And blotted on the paper, was an eye, its ink seeping across the page.

And I understood at once.

#### *Blotted In Eyes*

I rushed towards my office, quickly contacting my staff. Fearing for the worst, I ordered them to evacuate the premises. At best, this could be merely be a child’s prank.

At worst, it’s a district takeover.

When I finally reached my office, what greeted me was not a sunny balcony behind a cozy desk. The entire glass pane enveloping the observation deck had been covered by fliers and posters, all of which had inked eyes staring into my soul. Stray lines of WE KNOW appeared behind the eyes instead of rays of light, putting my office in total darkness. What I had feared appeared to be true.

Taking up the mantle of “Printing” among the Great Inventions was Projectionist’s Ink, an invention I had always found eerie. Printing in the Old Ages utilized ink, usually with the assistance of machine. Yet, anything using Projectionist’s Ink was *etched*, as if it had been there all along. With this technology, graffiti became rampant in areas wealthy enough to afford it, so commercial use had been strictly prohibited. However, the sight I was seeing can only mean two things: either regulations became lousy, or, this was an act backed up by authorities.

In my confusion, I heard a voice, coming out of the bleeding ink, and after, a foot appeared from the void covering my office walls. I observed cautiously, as a refined man stepped out from the ink, one whom I had known.

“Cassius.”

“How’ve you been doing, my friend?” he said nonchalantly, fixing his gray suit and tie.

“Why is the head of Projectionist’s Ink here, entering my office brazenly and without notice? Even if you are a Great Inventor, I’m not available whenever.” I questioned.

“I have an opportunity for you, you know, relax. Have a seat, would you?” Cassius rested on the guest seat, as cool as ever. “So as you may have already known, you’re one stubborn man. Why have you refused to share your invention with the team, Chailyn?”

A familiar question I was asked. It was not the first time the Great Inventors asked for my collaboration.

“I would the instant the City finally decides to use their inventions for good.”

“And what does that mean?”

“All I’ve ever seen in the City are golden trophies held by bloodied hands. It would be my greatest wish to see it realized.”

“You know, that Tomorrow-Visions-thing, it’s being used to give everyone a job. People who had to live on the streets can now work to get off their feet.”

“You speak of those jobs like they aren’t dead ends.”

“What if they were?”

“The City gives people false hope. People put everything on the line to reach their hope, only to find out the stars they dreamed of were on a fabricated sky. And we gain from each shattered dream.”

“So? Our technologies are a force of good. The city benefits from each invention, and the people live better lives. We only take what we need, and the people get the rest.”

“Don’t speak of ‘good’ byproducts as if they were equal to genuine forces of good!” having felt every cut of his twisted morals, I finally had enough.

“...I see we won’t see eye to eye,” Cassius sighed, “the Looking Glass is something *special*, you know?”

He stood up from his seat with a regretful exhale, and fixed his tie.

“The Authority has ordered your retirement, Chailyn. Thank you for your invention, but we’ll take it from here. Sorry it has to be like this, but not really.”

Cassius melted into a puddle of ink, and that’s when I realized the Projectionist’s Ink had seeped into my office, and I found my desk melting into the floor.

### *The Looking Glass*

In my final moments in the office I would never be in again, I witnessed the room collapsing into itself like melted metal, and ink splattering onto each and every surface. I know the Ink can etch onto things, but I didn’t know it could destroy them.

*In other words, I don’t know what it is I’m facing.*

I ran into a hallway, where the Ink slowly bled into. The evacuation system had sounded the Third Trumpet, the alarms ringing through the walls illuminated in red. I reached the Arboretum, where I had an emergency escape, leading me far off to another District. But when I opened the hatchet, all I was greeted with was an overflowing flood of Ink, surging up to my face. Before it could have peeled my skin off, I managed to throw myself on the dirt. A tiny drop of Ink landed on my wrist, and it melted through my skin, and cauterized it just as soon. Yet I felt no pain.

With my mistake, the Ink had surrounded me, and approaching still. Out of options, I pulled out the fragment of a mirror, and thought of an escape route.

And then, I dropped through the ground under me, and fell onto the floor below.

“There it is! Took you long enough, Chailyn.”

Cassius emerged from the Ink once more, a satisfied grin on his face.

That’s why I didn’t want to use it.

“The Looking Glass, in all of its glory,” he looked in admiration, “A technology capable of capturing the imagination, and manifesting it into reality. Imagine what you could do with all that power!” he continued. “The commercial version is so heavily encrypted. Honestly, we could not crack it for our lives! The City very much welcomes your intelligence, you know. Imagine what we together can do! We can mold the city from the ground up, and make whatever we desire reality!”

“Truth be told, what I wish for will never coincide with yours.”

“Your definition of ‘good’? What good is it to the people, huh? Who would dare to dream of flying when they can’t even stand? You, no, WE have the power to change that! WE are the people who will overcome anything the City stands against!”

... Now I see.

“The Projectionist’s Ink, embodies ‘Domination,’” I concluded.

“The Ink can be etched onto things, as if it had always been there. And things stained by the Ink, will eventually be amalgamated into the Ink, as if it had always been the case. It is the complete assimilation of others, am I right?”

“What took you so long, huh? We will guide the City to a brighter tomorrow, and the people will carry the ark! What is more noble than that?” Cassius shouted, as the Arboretum roof gave in, gushing Ink through the hole, and I phased out of the collapsing garden. Only one goal remained in my mind.

### *The Distant Dream*

I made it to the main lobby, where the Ink had only just started dripping into. I ran out, only to see Dragon’s Rest enveloped in a barrier.

*It has to be technology from Mantle CORE.*

The mantle of “Gunpowder” has always been unstable. Technological advances made each and every weapon more dangerous than before. In this age, continent-leveling weapons were nothing rare. This resulted in the most powerful weapons company being shield manufacturers counter-intuitively. Their shields, normally, were nigh impenetrable. However, the Looking Glass can phase me to the other side. I ran, and ran, to the laboratory, where I would make my last stand.

The white laboratory had long since been evacuated, leaving only the sirens echoing in the facility. I ran to the prototype development room, where on the pedestal I put my Looking Glass into.

“This is it, Chailyn!” Cassius’ sound emerged from afar. My time was up, but it wasn’t over.

“Whatever may this be?” he snickered, looking at my terrible state.

“I’ve just upgraded my Looking Glass. The prototype expands my influence to a district-wide scale,” I heaved, trying to regain my breath. “If you value anything, anything at all, leave. Now!”

“Hah, hahahahaha! Do you truly think you are in control now?” Cassius laughed.

The Projectionist’s Ink melted through the walls, exposing a clear sight to Dragon’s Rest, now covered in Ink.

“A test trial for ‘Combustion Down’ has just been approved. Mantle CORE sends their regards.”

In the blink of an eye, the tower was enveloped in bright red, like a fiery fabric had covered the Ink-stained building. And a moment later, sounds like fireworks popped and I watched in shock, as the tower crumbled to dust, leaving only trails of ashes.

“Their barriers have improved quite a lot. They said it would’ve wiped the district if not for their shield. So what now, hmm?”

I could not give a reply.

Because I understood now.

How powerless I was.

“You might be wondering why I came knowing the dangers of your technology. It’s all thanks to Tomorrow’s Vision, you know? It all but guaranteed that you would surrender the Looking Glass. So would you kindly hand it over?” Cassius said.

Ah, so all the Great Inventors were against me. Ha ha hah, I never did stand a chance.

“You’re just another cog in the system, Chailyn.”

I wanted to reject all of this.

“It’s just that we stood out more than the others that the City bothered to polish us. What you do doesn’t matter; what you provide matters.”

I wanted to break out of the City’s chains.

“You understand? You don’t matter.”

“ENOUGH!” I screamed from the bottom of my lungs, as if every breath led up to this moment.

“It doesn’t matter if everything was in vain. My every scream, my desperate attempts, trying to find meaning in this barren hell, mean something.”

I held the Looking Glass tightly, and raised it up high,

“Witness my meaningless struggle, hear my pathetic cries, my only prove that I existed.”

And stabbed it into my heart.

*And then was heard no more*

So this was what the Looking Glass truly was.

On a peaceful sea, I floated.

Gentle waves carried me to thought after thought.

They came and went, fluttering into the horizon.

In a yellow hued workshop I rested,

tinkering with concepts unknown.

Inventions no longer held worth in me.

Instead, what filled me was a foreign yet familiar dream.

A child’s curiosity.

Blissful, and pure.

## Fiction – Group 7 WINNER

### The Exploding Firework

*Korean International School – Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 18*

It was a cold wintery New Year’s Eve in Shanghai. Linshitang, Linlien, Linbotsang, Lantsairu, and Lintaisheng were all celebrating the new year by watching fireworks. Linshitang is a passionate and organized safety officer. He always helps make sure that everything is safe from the fire in a building. In one of his fire safety inspections, there was a group of stubborn Shanghainese citizens who understood fire safety. They thought the fire safety was wasting money and time and it was unnecessary for the building. Linlien and Linbotsang’s job are working at a clothing store. They would usually work at Uniqlo everyday, especially during the weekends and public holidays. Lantsairu and Lintaisheng have retired from work and they usually like to play Golf during their spare time.

During the firework show, many people enjoyed the Chinese and Western music and loved to listen to the music with lyrics. There was especially a group of Shanghainese citizens chatting about how gunpowder is made and how it is used in fireworks. A lot of colorful fireworks were exploding across the Huangpu River. Some fireworks had special shapes like hearts, smiley faces, and the numerals of the new year. They even exploded from the top of buildings! Everyone cheered with their greatest shouts of joy.

However, one of the most tragic parts of the New Year firework show was when one of the buildings caught on fire when the special effects of the fireworks accidentally hit the building. The fireworks suddenly halted. Many people were shocked about the incident. Therefore, Linshitang and the firemen went to the building to deal with the fire situation. Linshitang and the firemen educated Shanghainese citizens about fire safety. Linshitang taught them how to survive from fire incidents such as escaping from the building and not using the lifts. After teaching, Linshitang and the firemen ensured all fire exits, stairwells, corridors, and entrances were free from obstacles.

To solve the problem, Linshitang and the firefighters helped put out the fire in the building that was caught during the firework show. The Shanghainese citizens in the building didn’t revise the fire safety and precaution rules. As a result, some citizens were sent to the hospital. They even didn’t want to spend their money on the fire safety equipment because they want to use their money for regular businesses.

At the end, the firework show returned to normal and the people who were involved in the fire incident were relieved. The fireworks ended peacefully with the biggest firework launching out of the building!

## Fiction – Group 7

### WINNER

# The External Journey of Invention and Legacy

*Korean International School – Springboard, Tang, Sze Chai Adrienne – 19*

In ancient China, there was a talented young inventor named Tang who had a deep passion for creating and a strong connection to her country's past. Every morning, before the sun rose, Tang always recalled her family's wish that passed from their ancestors, whereas their neighbors never believed Tang's family could do it. No matter how much discouragement from her neighborhood, Tang aimed to develop something that would bring pride to her ancestors and leave a lasting impact on the world.

She dedicated multiple nights to trying out different techniques in order to unveil the mysteries surrounding China's most significant creations. Eventually, she stumbled upon fascinating information in ancient texts, revealing the origins of notable inventions such as the compass, gunpowder, paper, and printing.

Tang was motivated by these impressive accomplishments and wanted to incorporate them into a single remarkable creation. She believed that by combining these innovative ideas, she could produce something extraordinary.

As some of the villagers lived so far away, it was very challenging for them to communicate in a timely manner. This was too dangerous when one of the villages was attacked by the outsiders who liked to rob their food and valuable belongings. Tang decided to create an innovative device that could also help the villagers. Tang brainstormed several ideas about the innovative device day and night without stopping: To use the gunpowder to give a very bright signal up high in the sky so the villagers could signal the other villagers who lived far away; To print the instructions of using this innovative device on a paper so the villagers would know how to use it; This device could help the villagers navigated the bright signal accurately so it would function like a compass.

Day after day, Tang eventually combined the technologies of the compass and the gunpowder into one innovative device. She decided to use the compass to give directions of the firework to give signals, so the villagers can see things far away clearly. Tang implemented the compass, using ancient writings and printing to make it accurate, which greatly aided the villagers to understand how the innovative device worked. This allowed the effective sharing of information by allowing for the rapid reproduction of texts and data.

Under a scary night, a few villagers and Tang noticed a few sneaky outsiders were trying to climb the wall in the village. "Let's come with me to carry my super device to the tower," whispered Tang. Tang and other two villagers brought the super device to the top of the tower and successfully shot the bright signal to the sky. The sneaky outsiders were frightened

and the other allied villagers brought some equipment and ran over to protect Tang and villagers. Tang's neighborhood was so proud of her innovation and how it spared them from the assault. Word spread rapidly all through the whole nation, almost Tang's imaginative gadget, and before long, pioneers from distinctive districts started looking for her mastery to ensure their possessed towns.

As Tang's notoriety developed, she was welcomed to the majestic royal residence to exhibit her innovation to the head herself. The head was intrigued by Tang's brilliance and saw the potential of her gadget in reinforcing the kingdom's defense. He designated Tang as the Illustrious Innovator, entrusting her with making strides the gadget encouraged and executing it over the kingdom.

With the assets and support from the royal residence, Tang proceeded to refine her gadget. She tested with distinctive shapes of black powder to make indeed brighter and more unmistakable signals. She collaborated with talented skilled workers to upgrade the printing preparation and make it more productive. Tang's devotion and energy for her development were faithful.

Beneath Tang's direction, the gadget advanced into an advanced framework of communication, joining numerous towers over the kingdom. These towns were deliberately set to guarantee that no locale was cleared out helplessly. The communication arranged not as it made a difference in times of assaults but too encouraged exchange, instruction, and the dispersal of data among the town.

## Non-Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

# New Tales of China's Inventions

*Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School,  
Lau, Ho Yeung Avery – 9*

The Invention of Gunpowder in China Gunpowder is one of the four greatest inventions of ancient China, alongside the compass, papermaking, and printing. This impactful innovation was developed by Chinese alchemists in the 9th century. Its accidental discovery shaped the course of human history. In this report we are going to talk about the origins and impacts of this powerful invention. In China, gunpowder is referred to as huoyao, translating to “flaming medicine”.

Unlike papermaking and printing, the discovery of gunpowder was serendipitous. Alchemists, in their quest to concoct an elixir of immortality, stumbled upon a mixture of sulfur, saltpeter, and charcoal that produced explosive reactions. This new substance was initially used for creating fireworks to celebrate festivals and other significant events.

By the end of the Tang Dynasty, gunpowder began to see military applications. The Song and Yuan Dynasties' frequent wars accelerated the development of cannons and fire-arrows, launched from bamboo tubes. By the 12th and 13th centuries, gunpowder technology had spread to Arab countries, Greece, and other European regions, eventually reaching every corner of the globe. This invention profoundly influenced Chinese civilization and had far-reaching global impacts.

The effects of gunpowder invention can be observed from ancient times to the present day. Gunpowder revolutionized warfare. It led to the creation of powerful new weapons such as cannons, muskets, and other firearms. Consequently, military strategies evolved, and the effectiveness of castles and fortresses diminished. Gunpowder technology spread from China to the rest of the world via trade routes like the Silk Road, fostering cultural exchange and economic growth. The production and trade of gunpowder and firearms became pivotal industries, stimulating global economies. In contemporary times, gunpowder's impact is still significant, but its applications have diversified. Modern firearms and explosives, rooted in gunpowder technology, have reshaped the conduct of wars and influenced military strategies.

The widespread use of guns has affected the outcomes of conflicts and shaped the world's political landscape. Apart from warfare, gunpowder is used in several essential areas. It's employed in mining, construction, and the creation of fireworks and special effects. Controlled explosions using gunpowder aid in mining operations and building demolitions, while adding excitement to celebrations and cultural events.

While gunpowder has many uses, the availability and misuse of firearms pose significant challenges. It's crucial to establish regulations and laws to ensure public safety. Debates surrounding gun ownership rights and preventing illegal trade constitute a global issue.

Gunpowder's influence on the world throughout history is significant. It has revolutionized warfare, shaped technology, and impacted global trade. Today, it continues to influence military strategies, contribute to various industries, and raise safety concerns.

As the saying goes, “Knowledge is like gunpowder; it can be used to build or destroy, depending on how it is wielded.” Understanding the history and current impact of gunpowder helps appreciate its importance and the dialogues surrounding its use in our modern world.

## Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

# One of China's Inventions—Paper

*Kowloon Rhenish School, Yu, Ho Hin Devyn – 8*

Everybody knows China has a rich history of inventions that have had a significant impact on the world. Some of the most well-known inventions from China include paper, printing, gunpowder and the compass. These inventions revolutionized various fields and had a profound influence on the development of human civilization.

I would like to talk about one of the most interesting tales of China's invention is the story of paper. Two thousands years ago, when paper was not invented. People in China used some materials like animals bones, silk, and bamboo strips to record. However, these materials were expensive and not easily available,

1. Oracle bones: Need to take a lone time to carve a sentence.
2. Bamboo strips: It's heavy to lift from a place to place.
3. Silk: Very expensive materials, just can buy only a small amount of lots of money. Always only rich people can afford it.

Therefore, mostly people in China had a big problem when writing.

Cai Lun, a government official in the Han Dynasty. He was inspired by the wasps building their nests using fibres. He observed that the wasps collected fibres from plants and mixed them with their saliva to create a strong and flexible material. This observation sparked his curiosity and led him to experiment with different materials to create a similar substance.

He began his experiments by collecting various plant fibres, including mulberry bark, hemp, old rags and old fishing nets. He realized that these fibres could be beaten into a pulp and mixed with water to form a paste-like substance. This paste could then be poured onto a screen or mesh and spread evenly to create a thin layer. Once the layer was formed, Cai Lun would drain the excess water and press the remaining pulp to remove any remaining moisture. This pressed pulp was then dried, resulting in a solid sheet of paper.

This invention was super cool. Cai Lun's papermaking process revolutioned the way to recorded, transmitted and communication, as it was much more convenient, easier to storage and easier to produce than other writing materials. Also, it was much much cheaper!

The invention of paper had a big impact on the development of Chinese culture and society. Writing became more popular and easier, also printing and packaging. Cai Lun's invention of paper revolutionized the way to record, trasmitted, storage. And It played a vey important role in the development of civilization, enable the spread of knowledge, culture and creative as a significant milestone in human history.

Today, most people use computers to replace some paper use, for examples, bills, contracts, receipts... But, paper is still widely used in various industries and remains an essential part of our daily lives. Like painting, paper could not be replaced. Like packaging

deliveries, we must need papers to pack... For me, I would like to hold the comics in hands to see than better to see in IPad.

China's invention of paper is just one example of the country's rich history of innovation. There are many other super amazing tales of inventions of China, besides mentioned before that gunpowder, silk, compass, there are abacus, binary, hemp ropes making etc. These inventions have shaped the world we live in today and continue to inspire new innovations and discoveries.

## Non-Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

# New Tales of China's Inventions

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Chan, Tin Lun Andres – 11*

The future of the Chinese economy lies in innovation. In ancient times, there are Four Great Chinese Inventions – printing, paper making, the compass, and gunpowder. However, the core of China is to be ever-changing in which the four great new inventions of China in modern times are transformed to electronic-payment, high-technology, scientific research, and bike-sharing.

Firstly, e-payment “Alipay” is a China’s version of PayPal which is the first third-party payment platform in China. People in China can use digital money as wallet instead of cash in most shops nowadays. There are about 270 million active users in Alipay. Other than providing payment facility, money savings and transfers, the Alipay app’s user can enjoy many lifestyle services such as: paying credit card debts, bills, buy bus or train tickets, online shopping and even reserve hotel room services. From high-end luxury shops to wet markets, customers can simply present the QR code and pay through a cell phone. Besides, online shopping become a lifestyle for most Chinese people after Jack Ma created the first online shopping platform, Alibaba, and its subsidiary Taobao in China. Alibaba’s Alipay and Tencent’s WeChat Pay are leading the change toward a cashless society.

Secondly, there are many high-technology projects which have been implemented in China. For example, high-speed rail, electric car, and 6G. China has the world’s largest high-speed rail network which covers most of its major cities. Travelers can save time and money by travelling among different cities in China. It has advanced technologies and comfortable facilities to travelers in the train in which you can book tickets and meal by online payment beforehand. Besides, Chinese Electric car brands are the world’s largest automobile market. China’s government would like to be a global leader in electric vehicle implementation, marketing, and sales all in one stop. Up to now, China has more than 60 electric car models on the market. Other than electric car, China also kicked off its 6G public experimental verification platform since 2019. China Unicom expects to complete technical research and explore early application scenarios for 6G technology by 2025, said Liu Liehong, the chairman of China Unicom. The launch of 6G will be commercially available around 2030 in China.

Thirdly, scientific research on aerospace science and technology is one of the most advanced projects in the world. China pioneers its first biological experiment to the outer layer of the space back to 1964. In 1975, China introduces its first remote-sensing satellite that rotate the planet and back to Earth. A breakthrough in 1999 that China initiates an uncrewed spacecraft, Shenzhou 1, a key success of sending the country’s astronauts into orbit. The first Chinese astronaut, Yang Liwei, aboard on Shenzhou 5 in 2003. Until recently in 2022, Shenzhou 15 carrying three Chinese astronauts toward the finalized Tiangong space station

which begin the permanent habitation by astronauts in the space. I have no hesitation to tell you that living in another planet will be happened in near future. The aerospace industry is a big project to be further explored by China.

Lastly, although European cities have implemented bike-sharing programs many years ago, but China has successfully transformed the access of the bike by a smartphone app everywhere anytime. The creation and innovation of shared bike concept developing drastically from China have been widely spread around the world. Of course, bike-sharing programs might not be the only way, but the concept can be transformed to other areas like vehicles. This is a good question to think of. Or even a vehicle without a physical driver which is replaced by AI driver when you get aboard to the shared vehicle.

The breakthrough of China is presented with major opportunities for green growth, technological innovations, as well as a booming AI economy through COVID recovery gradually. Chinese citizens do enjoy efficiency and convenience on their livelihood through the well-developed revolution on both industrial and technology areas. According to China, Beijing targets to elevate its high-end equipment with advanced manufacturing improvement starting in 2024. The key missions are application of 5G technology, 6G pre-research and development on AI. China aims to further develop humanoid robots and biomedicines to raise its economic growth.

In conclusion, never underestimate a manpower which can influence a country especially there are high populations of 1.4 billion in China. There are still many possibilities to be explored and not yet found in future. New innovations and creation will continuously be the top priority in China. Maybe you will be the next creator to implement a fabulous product or project which never exist in the past. Do not limit the talent you have in mind. We are looking forward to our better life in China.

## Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

# Drilling for Humanity

*St. Francis of Assisi's English Primary School, Kwok, Cheuk Hei – 10*

Paper. Umbrella. Chess. Ketchup. What do they have in common?  
They're all Chinese.

China is famous for inventing many extraordinary and amazing inventions that shaped the world into what it is now. Without these inventions, the world would be very different. Do away with paper, we would still be carving our homework in stone. Without an umbrella, we would be drenched in rain for the better part of autumn. Had chess not been invented, generations of people would have been utterly tormented by boredom and idleness; and military strategists would have been deprived of some of their best strategies in battlefield. Eating French fries without ketchup is almost as unimaginable as breathing without air. These are just a few of the multitude of inventions that are rightfully credited to China. If you ask someone to name some of China's inventions, it would be incredible if they could not name at least five. Looking at all the ingenious inventions over its 5,000 year history, one could scarcely contain the profound feelings of wonder, amazement and pride welling up in our minds.

However, there is one invention that has quietly, but profoundly, revolutionised the world. Its impact reverberates farther than the explosive power of gunpowder; its scope more transcendent than the mystifying accuracy of the compass; and its nature more pervasive than the universality of paper.

It is the seed drill.

Readers are understandably shocked by this choice, which is why it is important to write about it in detail, for fear it might disappear as a footnote history.

The seed drill is a very innovative machine that was invented in the 2nd century BCE, which is a very long time ago. Existing at a time where there was no electricity or transportation, this invention was life-changing for the people who lived in the past, especially for farmers. Even 2200 years ago, it was miles ahead of its time.

A seed drill, or to use its Chinese name "Lou-che", is a vehicle that is animal powered, consisting of an ox and a carriage behind it. The carriage at the back had three feet, thus the name "Three-legged Lou-che". Though it was certainly quite primitive by modern standards, it is hard to overemphasise how impressive it was at that time. Although this may look like an ordinary vehicle consisting of an animal at the front and a carriage for the operator at the back, this vehicle was specially designed. But how is it special? Well, those three legs were very useful as the three legs had ditch diggers under it for sowing purposes. The ditch diggers digs a ditch in the flattened soil, sows the seeds, covers the soil, and presses the land flat all within one rotation. This machine can also toss a handful of seeds on fresh soil. Although in the beginning, only 4 to 5 of 30 seeds successfully developed, this problem was quickly solved

as farming techniques improved dramatically. The machine was proven to be convenient, effective and efficient.

So, who was the ingenious inventor who had the intellect to conceptualise this machine and the will to execute his vision to fruition. This machine was invented by a Chinese agronomist named Zhao Gao, who was an official in charge of agricultural production during the reign of Han Wudi in the Han dynasty. His job was to plan, organise and control the operation of the system of farms over time through the use of economics and science. You might think that this is an easy job and that there is no stress involved. After all, China has long established itself as an agricultural powerhouse. But, the reality is that the job was extremely challenging, as it was imperative that the country maintained high agricultural productivity, which is a key part of food security. Millions of people depended on his plans to succeed. If the agricultural output is low, that means the food prices will skyrocket and become overpriced, which is not ideal for anyone.

If not for the existence of this device, the farmers would have had to plant the seeds by hand, which is extremely labour-intensive and tiresome, and results in high levels of wastage and uneven growth. It would be next to impossible to maintain a consistent and reliable food supply for one of the most populous and advanced civilisations on Earth. Countless generations of farmers have Zhao Gao to thank for their abundant haul every year. Although much is still not unknown about the past, it is quite amazing how China manages to invent these game-changing machines and things.

Three thousand years later, the fire still burns.

## Non-Fiction – Group 3 WINNER

# Unearthing China's Hidden Gems of Inventions

*Marymount Secondary School, Ip, Agnes Nga Chi – 13*

From culinary delicacies to groundbreaking advancements in technology and infrastructure, China has a rich history of creativity, innovation, and originality. The Four Great Inventions of China are rather well-known, but there is more and it makes for a rich tapestry of imagination and ingenuity that transcends time. Chinese creations stand as a testament to the nation's resourceful and delicate civilisations. Join me today on an enthralling journey as we unravel the lesser-known stories of Chinese inventions, past, present, and future, which have shaped our modern lives.

Unbeknownst to most, nail polish, a staple of beauty routines today, finds its origins in ancient China. Dating back over 500 years, it was a symbol of status. Red, black, and yellow were very popular colours as they symbolised prosperity, affluence, and status. The technique later travelled across India, Africa, and the Middle East, where they continued to inspire in their new forms of nail polish. Fast forward to the present, nail polish has evolved into a global industry, inspiring countless brands, trends, and techniques. Evolving from a symbol of status to a form of self-expression, the development of nail polish owes its origins to the nail adornment that began in ancient China and spread across the world.

Another Chinese invention that most might not know about is the mechanical clock of the Song Dynasty, which revolutionised timekeeping. The first clocks were driven by water mechanisms, introducing the idea of accurate time measurement. Soon, its precision influenced the development of contemporary technologies in the growth of timekeeping devices worldwide. Today, the mechanisms of these ancient Chinese inventions continue to shape timekeeping in an expansive array of industries, helping people across the globe connect through time. The synchronisation of time across various devices and networks is an essential aspect of modern technology, and its roots are indebted to the Chinese invention of the mechanical clock.

The origins of flamethrowers can be traced back to ancient China. The early form of it was known as the 'Fire Lance' around the 10th-12th century. It utilised a bamboo tube filled with gunpowder and ignited projectiles, projecting flames toward enemy forces. Today, flamethrowers have found applications in different aspects of our daily lives, for example, in weed control. By directing it towards unwanted vegetation, farmers can remove weeds without using any chemicals. Therefore, this minimises the environmental impact. This technology can also be applied in entertainment. In events such as circus shows or performances, they add a visual element and create dramatic effects, captivating adults and children alike.

Football, the most popular sport on the planet, actually originates from ancient China. While the ancient Chinese version, cuju, is a bit different from the modern one we know today, its influence can be seen in a vast array of aspects. Its roots were set in the early Han Dynasty and served as a recreational activity, as well as military training. The ancient Chinese football game laid the foundation for modern football and has driven sports technology to advance, popularising it throughout the world. Now, it has spread even further to the most secluded countries in the world with variations of it ranging from Australian football to rugby, showing its dominance in the sports society.

Chinese history is rich with remarkable inventors who excelled in creativity, and two have made significant contributions to their respective fields. Empress Leizu, known as the Silk Empress, discovered the secret of silk production. She observed how silkworms spun their cocoons, realised that their silk could be woven into fine fabric, then experimented with different techniques to refine the silk production process and even developed methods to raise silkworms in controlled environments. Her invention not only revolutionised the textile industry but also brought immense wealth to China since it was traded along the Silk Road which connects the East and West. The silk fabrics have captivated the world and spread Chinese culture and craftsmanship far and wide. Even today, the legacy of the Empress continues as China remains one of the largest producers of silk, and Chinese silk is still admired for its quality and beauty.

Another great Chinese inventor was a skilled architect and engineer, Lu Ban, who was named the Father of Chinese Carpentry. He created tools through his innovative designs and construction techniques and revolutionised the field of carpentry and construction. One of his notable creations was the Lu Ban lock. This wooden lock was a mechanical puzzle designed to secure doors and chests. The lock consists of multiple interlocking pieces, which can only be disassembled in a specific sequence. His work serves as a practical way of securing value and has become a source of intellectual challenge and entertainment. The lock's popularity spread throughout China and beyond, even the Rubik's Cube shares a similar rotating layer and interdependent movements.

The legacy of Lu Ban and Empress Leizu can still be seen in ancient temples, palaces, and traditional homes that continue to stand as testaments to their skills and vision, demonstrating the problem-solving abilities and adaptability of Chinese inventors. The inventions not only transformed their respective fields but also had far-reaching impacts on Chinese society and the world.

Nowadays, we use technology to do everyday things. From transport to education, it has transcended our lives. Notable inventions from the past have contributed to the development of technology over the past few years. For one, the innovation and experimentation behind nail polish reflect early human creativity and problem-solving skills. These skills are fundamental to the development of AI, as it involves complex problem-solving and creative thinking. The process of inventing flamethrowers can be seen as a distant ancestor to the principles of engineering and technology innovation that underpin AI development with its creative and strategic ways. Therefore, the past is within us even if we do not carefully see it.

I believe that education and the environment are the two areas that hold promise for future development, two that have yet to overextend throughout our time. Currently, in the education industry, AI advancements enable personalised learning experiences by analysing vast amounts of data. By tailoring the learning experience, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies can create immersive and interactive learning environments, enhancing engagement and knowledge retention. Moreover, AI-powered tutoring systems can provide customised feedback and adaptive learning paths, fostering student progress and achievement.

In the environmental sector, there have been breakthroughs in addressing sustainability challenges. AI-powered systems can examine complex environmental data, helping to monitor and manage ecosystems, predict natural disasters, and optimise resource allocation. Machine learning algorithms can assist in the development of renewable energy solutions, improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon footprints. It can develop smart systems for water management, monitoring air quality, and waste reduction, leading to more sustainable practices. With these new and modern inventions, China will be able to rapidly rise in the technology industry and influence foreign countries with them. They can give both convenience and efficiency to people across the world, and create a path for the next generation of inventors. However, these future inventions also come with challenges that need to be addressed.

Of course, with new inventions come new problems. It is vital to safeguard data and ensure compliance with privacy regulations to protect the rights and well-being of them. We also need to strike a balance between AI and human interaction as it is essential to maintain the role of teachers as mentors. Furthermore, we need to ensure that the calculations used in environmental research are free from biases. To avoid unintended consequences and ensure responsible environmental protection, we need to balance the benefits of AI-driven solutions with human judgement and ethical considerations.

Overall, China's history is marked by a rich tapestry of creativity and originality. From the iconic four great inventions to the lesser-known everyday items, they have shaped and influenced various aspects of our modern lives. These innovations have transformed our lives, and have greatly impacted the world for the better. The inventions have dominated the global industry, inspiring young minds around the globe, and further contributing to China's flourishing empire.

Looking towards the future, the fields of education and environment hold significant promise for Chinese inventors. Advancements in technology, particularly in artificial intelligence can focus on enhancing overall academic achievement, sustainable solutions, and environmental conservation. Nevertheless, we need to address the challenges and potential issues that come with these future inventions.

As China continues to innovate and push the boundaries of technological advancement, it is important to foster and cultivate a culture of responsible innovation. By embracing critical thinking and considering the broader implications of new inventions, China can continue to shape the world in transformative ways. The legacy of Chinese inventors, both the past and present, stands as a testament to our nation's remarkable resourcefulness, ingenuity, and enduring impact on a global scale.

## Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 3 WINNER

### The Brilliant Inventor and the Light of Civilization - Zhuge Liang

*Macau Pui Ching Middle School, Liu, Kai Yan Eric – 18*

When it comes to famous figures in ancient China, Zhuge Liang, who lived in the Three Kingdoms period, has left an indelible mark on Chinese history. Because of his brilliant talents in the military and politics, he is renowned at home and abroad and has already been an enduring legend. It is in the work *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that he distinguished himself, and people know him well because of it. However, in addition to being a sophisticated politician and military strategist, he also has another status that is rarely known by people - he is also a daring and outstanding inventor in Chinese history.

#### Steamed buns

Zhuce Liang invented steamed buns when he led his army across the Lu River south. While they were preparing to cross the river, suddenly a gust of wind blew up and the sky was soon covered with dark clouds. According to the words from an old man who had lived in the local area for a long time, Zhuge Liang learned that these strange phenomena were because the souls of the soldiers who died on the battlefield could not rest in peace, and forty-nine heads needed to be sacrificed. Instead of killing innocent people, Zhuge Liang made a brilliant decision by ordering his soldiers to slaughter cattle and sheep, chop them into meat fillings, wrap them in flour, and make them into round shapes that looked like skulls. Zhuge Liang named them "Steamed Buns" because in ancient times, southern barbarians called Man Tribe were often killed to be offered to God as sacrifices, and the Chinese pronunciation of steamed buns is similar to "Man". Now steamed buns have become one of the indispensable staple foods on the Chinese table.

#### Sky lantern

Kongming lanterns, also known as sky lanterns, have been used as lanterns to make vows to God in Chinese traditional festivals. It is a lantern made of paper with a candle or torch inside that can be lit and taken off into the air.

The origin of the creation of Kongming lanterns can be traced back to the Three Kingdoms period when Zhuge Liang, also known as Kongming, the prime minister of the Shu Kingdom, resisted the attack of the enemy the Cao Wei Kingdom. During the war, the Shu army was in great trouble and very close to losing. In order to boost the morale of the soldiers, Zhuge Liang asked the soldiers to make a batch of special lanterns. The lanterns were

made of paper with torches inside. Then, at night, Zhuge Liang ordered all the soldiers to light lanterns together and then release them into the sky together.

When these lanterns rose into the sky, they created a beautiful light and magnificent scene in the night sky which inspired the soldiers greatly. They believed that these lanterns would convey their wishes to God, bringing good luck and victory. In the end, the Shu army successfully defeated the enemy's attack. What a remarkable invention Zhuge Liang made! Since then, the Kongming Lantern has become a symbol of good luck, good wishes and victory, and people have begun to fly the Kongming Lantern in some special festivals and celebrations.

### **Three great inventions in the military**

In the military, Zhuge Liang is best known for his three major inventions: the Eight Formations, the Wooden Ox and the Flowing Horse, and the Zhuge repeating crossbows. So how powerful are these three great inventions?

Let's talk about the Eight Formation Diagram first. This is a formation method improved by Zhuge Liang. It is a battle formation and troop deployment diagram in ancient wars. Because of the invention of the Eight Formation Diagram, the wars directed by Zhuge Liang never failed. Zhuge Liang's Eight Formation Diagram also played an essential role in the later generations. For instance, during the Western Jin Dynasty, the famous general Ma Long made a sidecar based on Zhuge Liang's Eight Formation Diagram. In the end, he defeated tens of thousands of the Xianbei army with only 3,500 people. It is said that the famous Tang Dynasty general Li Jing also created the "Liuhua Formation" based on Zhuge's Formation. Until the Northern Song Dynasty, many generals were still studying Zhuge Liang's Eight Formations.

Next comes Zhuge Liang's invention of the wooden cow and the horse. It is a transport cart improved by Zhuge Liang. Before his invention, an ordinary transport cart during the Han Dynasty could carry 10,000 kilograms of grain with six people to push it. During Zhuge Liang's Northern Expedition, when transporting grain through the plank road, it was impossible for six people to push the cart together because the plank road was too narrow and easy to collapse. Therefore, Zhuge Liang improved the transport cart by reducing its size. Although its carrying capacity was only 2,000 kilograms, only one person was needed when moving it, making it more convenient and safer to transport grain. Zhuge Liang's improvement reflects his philosophy of not pursuing the biggest, but the most suitable.

Last but not least, let's talk about the Zhuge repeating crossbows. Compared with ordinary crossbows, the Zhuge repeating crossbows can shoot ten arrows at a time, whose force was much like a gun in ancient society. The Zhuge repeating crossbows had always been popular in ancient China. In the Ming Dynasty, some people imitated Zhuge Liang's design and developed the Zhuge Wuhou Crossbow. The Zhuge repeating crossbows are also very famous abroad even nowadays. For example, the Chinese army in the game "Age of Empires 3" uses the Zhuge repeating crossbows as weapons.

Zhuce Liang's inventions are far more than the above five, as well as the improvement of fire wells, tube-sleeved armor, Dongshui fields and other astonishing inventions. The famous Chinese writer Lu Xun once commented on the character Zhuge Liang in the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*: "His intelligence is too extraordinary as a human, almost like a supernatural being." This remark reflects that the image of Zhuge Liang in historical novels is unreal and divorced from reality, but the real Zhuge Liang in history, as a military

strategist, politician, and most importantly, outstanding inventor, is rooted in human beings. In real history, he was not a supernatural being who lived high above. Instead, he was greatly concerned about the desirable needs of the common people and his soldiers, making every effort to achieve them. It is this kind of Zhuge Liang that can be passed down through the ages. The extraordinary wisdom he showed in his inventions has been shining from ancient times to the present and will last forever.

## Non-fiction – Group 4 WINNER

# The Railway Dream: The High-Speed Railway of China

*International College, Hong Kong, Chan, Raphael – 14*

Ever since COVID-19, I have been confined to my home or my mask for days on end, being stuck in the same place sometimes makes me feel slightly sick (feeling slightly like the white room torture method). But after Hong Kong opened up its borders when COVID-19 passed, my family started going to places all over China with various types of transport. One of those types of transport that I adore most is the Chinese Modern High-Speed Railway, which I have taken. I remember sitting in my passenger seat, looking at the speedometer being displayed rising from a steady 10 km/h to a sudden 300 km/h, I remember thinking: “How could they do that? How can a train that I already have at home go faster than a plane?” The surprise that I felt was mostly because of my inexperience, it grew my love for the incredible High-Speed Railway, and I wondered: how did it come to be?

The Chinese High-Speed Railway is a set of railways that branch throughout the entirety of China. The railway is approximately 40,000 kilometers long, which is about the entire circumference of planet Earth, and China is also planning on adding 2,500 more kilometers to the already existing railroad. On this highway, there are 33,221 high-speed trains, all the trains can reach an average maximum speed of 200–300 km/h on lines that are dedicated to passengers, with the fastest train being the Shanghai Maglev track, reaching a maximum of around 430 km/h. Each High-Speed train consists of 16 railcars made of sheets made of an alloy made of aluminum, most railcars are used to store passengers, but one special railcar is used to store and sell food and drink, such as milk tea, or packets of chips. And in between each railcar are spaces that can store suitcases or a bathroom.

And how we got the High-Speed Railway that we have now, we need to look back at the history of China’s transportation industry. Because China is a country hugely dependent on its transportation, it has quite some feats in the transportation district. As seen with Qin Chi Wang (Emperor of the Qin dynasty), who gave rise to the rule that all chariot wheels should be the same diameter to fit in the roads (475 BC), or the introduction of pulled rickshaws (1874), China has quite a history with transportation, with the origins of the Chinese High-speed Rail trace back to the first Chinese steam locomotive, the Asian Express, being operated from 1934–1943 in Japanese-controlled Chinese territory. Then, the Chinese High-Speed Railway idea came from Deng Xiaoping during the 1990s. He wanted the railway to connect Beijing and Shanghai, and his dream eventually came true, when X 2000 Sweden-imported electric trains increased the speed of railway travel to 200 km/h. Afterward, the Shanghai Maglev track (using Maglev technology) was developed in 2004, and the first few

commercial High-Speed Rails were officially opened in 2006, with high-speed rail trains (said to be able to reach 300–350 km/h) being produced in 2007. Railway projects were slowed due to political corruption, railway incidents, and a financial slowdown between 2011 and 2012. Fortunately, because of financial recovery and huge booms in railway expansion, the Chinese High-Speed Railway eventually regained its fame, finally arriving here today.

Being one of the most effective forms of public transport in China (next to taxi cabs and public buses), The High-Speed Railway greatly impacted China’s development. Because of its record-breaking speeds, the High-speed rail can get people to their workplaces, which is extremely helpful for people who live far from their workplaces. It is also extremely beneficial to help workers visit their family members more quickly as Chinese people usually work remotely from their homes. A lot of regions of China are rocky, steep, and extreme landscapes that might be too dangerous to traverse. The high-speed rail changes that because it runs on tracks, which can either be built on railways to go through mountains (Via tunnels) or pass huge ravines (Via bridges). One example is the Hong Kong to Guizhou line since the Guizhou region is an extremely rocky hillscape, with tons of jagged peaks and unsafe roads that test the best pilots and drivers. GuiZhou is extremely difficult to leave or enter. But, with the aid of the High-Speed Rail, the people who live in the Guizhou region can safely get to their workplace or back home to visit their families, without losing speed or suffering from transportation accidents.

But, all this progression comes at a huge cost. By replacing the natural environment with railways, trees will get destroyed, which would mean that there would be more greenhouse gasses being built up, and more animal species would be threatened by extinction. Humans (being an animal species themselves) would also get threatened, with the removal of homes and villages being a huge threat to them. Not only that but using electrical-powered trains would also mean that fossil fuels like coal or oil would have to be burnt to produce the electricity that powers those trains, which will increase the number of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and make the earth warmer, causing disastrous effects of climate change.

Even though the stats of the Chinese High-Speed Rail aren’t as impressive as other countries or other forms of transport, it still reigns supreme for some specific reasons. One of the railways that many deem more impressive than the Chinese High-speed rail is the Japanese bullet train, the fastest train in the world. The Japanese bullet train (the Shinkansen) can reach 443 km/h in one of the recorded test runs, 30 km/h more than the ShangHai maglev line of the Chinese High-Speed Rail. But what the Shinkansen lines lack is the length of the railroads, being just 2830 km compared to the Chinese High-Speed Rail, which is a total of 40,000 km. The extra length allows you to get through the large country of China a lot easier, even if the speed of the train is not the fastest. The extra railroad length lets you get to a more precise location without having to walk all the time (which is how transportation is supposed to be used, as a way to decrease the amount of commute time and increase efficiency).

Another competitor of the High-Speed Rail in the transport department is the airplane. Being one of the most famous and memorable (and one of the most interesting) forms of transport, it is no surprise why many people pick plane travel over using the railway. But taking the railway can be more price-efficient. For instance, to get from Hong Kong to Xian, taking an airplane costs an average of 1500 HKD (about 192 USD), in contrast, the High-speed rail costs an average of 975 HKD (about 124 USD). The High-Speed rail costs 35% less than flying. This is good for people who can’t afford expensive modes of travel because it allows them to afford transportation so they can go to visit other locations in the country without either spending lots of money or wasting time walking.

What awaits for the future of the High-Speed Rail? We don't entirely know for sure, but we can only speculate for the time being. Some might say they would keep going faster, and that might be true as the Chinese government might be planning to add more Maglev lines (or technology that might surpass the Maglev), and maybe one day, we might be able to reach speeds faster than sound or light. Others might say that they would continue adding and expanding the current railway. Currently, the high-speed rail branches to regions all over Chinese territory, from Harbin in the northern regions of China to Urumqi in the north-eastern regions. The government might continue the expansion of this railway, predicting that it would connect every large and medium city by 2035. That is not an easy task, as it requires the current High-speed rail to be expanded by 30,000 kilometers within 11 years.

In conclusion, the Chinese High-Speed Rail is a piece of transport that is extremely effective as a system of transport. Being able to transport a large number of people at high speeds through dangerous terrain, this is the reason why it resides in a special corner in my heart as one of the most memorable forms of transport.

## Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

### From Palace Servants to Unsung Innovators

*HKCCCU Logos Academy, Liu, Yu Yui Ruby – 16*

The invention of paper in the Eastern Han dynasty is a well-known tale among Chinese households. It goes something like this:

Imperial official Cai Lun was frustrated by the quality of writing material. Back in those days, one either had to write on smooth but expensive silk or heavy bamboo slips. Neither of these were very accessible or convenient, especially for commoners. Wishing to improve the efficiency of writing, he proposed a method to create a parchment with tree bark, fishing nets, and rags. This improvement in the papermaking method was a great step towards the recording and dissemination of information and knowledge in ancient China.

That is how the story is usually told. The mass production of cheap paper was a great step towards increased literacy and cultural power. Everyone knows that paper is a great invention, hence why it's listed among the four great inventions of ancient China. But what's often left out, either absent-mindedly or to make the story more suitable for children, is that Cai Lun was not just another run-of-the-mill bureaucrat. He was a eunuch.

What is the significance of this identity? It becomes quite interesting when you take a closer look at eunuchs in Chinese history as a whole. Historically, they were shunned by more "righteous" male officials, who often had conflicting interests with the eunuchs and held patriarchal views that discriminated against them. Cai Lun very impressively overcame this common stereotype. He also had access to resources and funding to support his innovations, and was incentivized to do so by the imperial family. According to historian Yu Huaqing, the positive contributions of eunuchs were rarely recorded in the historical canon written by officials. Even now, it is rare to see people be sympathetic towards eunuchs, let alone praise them.

However, there likely isn't any grand conspiracy trying to erase the efforts of eunuchs in Chinese history. Rather, it's more possible that their contributions to cultural and technological progress have been outshined by their less glorious reputation for scheming and corruption. Judgments towards historical eunuchs can be very inaccurate, especially considering the social norms at the time denied them a fair trial. As a matter of fact, Cai Lun's eunuch identity is rarely brought up, except in cases when he and Zheng He are paired together as examples of "the good ones" or to condemn him further for his behavior as an official.

Even the "good eunuchs" had a side that was rife with controversy. Cai Lun himself had dabbled in corruption, participating in a scheme that culminated in the execution of the mother of a royal and her son. Today, his wrongdoings are outshined by his undoubtedly

significant inventions that left a great legacy. However, inventing paper didn't prevent his eventual coerced suicide when his crimes were revealed and new eunuchs fell into favor.

These new eunuchs, known as the Ten Attendants, receive a mention in one of the four classic Chinese novels. *The Romance of The Three Kingdoms* attributes the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty to the incompetence of the Huan and Ling emperors and, more relevantly, the Ten Attendants' misconduct and corruption in their posts. This background is crucial in understanding that there is a lesser-known tale of an invention whose origins can be traced back to this period. In particular, the attendants Zhang Rang and Bi Lan are the key figures.

Zhang Rang was a high-ranking official in the courts of Emperor Ling. He felt that the infrastructure of their capital, Luoyang, was in dire need of improvement — it was so expensive for the citizens to clean the streets by sprinkling, and the palace didn't even have running water! And so he ordered Bi Lan, a skilled craftsman and fellow eunuch, to build something called a *fan che*, what we now know as the chain pump. It could pump water, sand and earth upwards, improving the transportation of these resources and making access to them much more convenient. Bi Lan also made the *ke wu*, which were thin tubes that could transfer water from container to container until the volume was level in both, putting the siphon principle into practice nearly two-thousand years ago. Bi Lan's constructions brought much more than what was requested of him from Zhang Rang; not only did Luoyang have running water but in the years to come, they would revolutionize China's irrigation system, improving productivity in the agricultural sector and living standards for peasants.

While this is only a highly simplified, semi-fictional reconstruction of events, it is true that one of the first records of the utilization of improved water transportation equipment was found in the late Eastern Han dynasty. While the exact origins of these inventions are still controversial among historians, certain authoritative sources such as the book *A History of China's Agricultural Science and Technology* attribute their invention or significant innovation to Bi Lan. It is greatly inspiring how a eunuch-bureaucrat at the time was able to construct such intricate devices by harnessing the principles of physics, and how his inventions improved the lives of not only the inhabitants of the capital but also many Chinese farmers in the centuries to come.

Seeing that the chain pump was still in use centuries later for irrigation, draining, supplying water and other engineering purposes, it proves to be quite a consequential invention, even if it doesn't have the lasting popularity Cai Lun's paper does. After all, it's much easier to explain the importance of paper than obscure ancient agricultural machinery. However, there was an interesting pattern in the sources recording the history of Eastern Han eunuchs.

Many Chinese biographies omitted the section about the construction of the *fan che* and the *ke wu*. They mostly describe Zhang Rang's crimes; how he accepted bribes and used his wealth and power to exempt himself from punishment, and how he persecuted just officials who dared to take a stand against him. Bi Lan's inventions are mentioned in passing as a part of Zhang Rang's tale, but in many biographies of Zhang there is no mention of Bi Lan. When it comes to information on these specific inventions, many materials simply refer to the inventors as "the ancient Chinese", without specifying identity or status. They claim that by creating such useful devices, the anonymous inventors brought prosperity and joy to the masses. This is great, but seems to contradict the narrative that eunuchs were only self-centered corrupt bureaucrats who paid no mind to the well-being of the common people. Another text took Bi Lan into account, but purported that specifically because Zhang Rang and Bi Lan were evil eunuchs, they could not have invented such technology. To be clear, there is a case to be made about who is the actual inventor of the *fan che* and the *ke wu*.

However, it is questionable whether being a corrupt eunuch disqualifies one from being an inventor. As mentioned above, Cai Lun's track record wasn't all that clean either, and he was still mostly revered as a great man with a lasting legacy. Eunuch inventors aren't perfect, but at the same time, no one is.

The treatment this lesser-known tale of invention receives is very indicative of how eunuch inventors are viewed in the collective psyche. It brings to mind how when Cai Lun's eunuch identity is brought up, it is nearly always meant as a shocking revelation of a beloved inventor secretly being an evil villain. The truth is that Cai Lun's identity as a eunuch is very crucial in understanding him, but it should not lead to the assumption that he was inherently malevolent, or that it makes his contributions any less significant. The same can be said for Bi Lan. Eunuchs historically have been very creative, but the full picture is rarely shown.

Most inventions in Chinese history are by anonymous grassroots inventors or created by the collective population over a span of time. Eunuch inventors are outliers in that there is traceable evidence of their actions in the form of recorded history. These actions may be overlooked, or in some cases become a source of scrutiny. It's true that the Eastern Han dynasty was plagued by a corrupt bureaucracy, which eunuchs were a part of, but they deserve a fair evaluation in their legacy and contributions. Pitfalls such as excessive speculation and buying into aged stereotypes should not hinder proper assessment of the origins of important breakthroughs and the context behind their invention. Whether the eunuchs fit the stereotypes or not, it does not take away from the unquestionably positive impact of their inventions. Being more aware of the inventors behind the inventions also allows further insight to be made regarding the social climate of the time and how innovation was incentivized for eunuchs. Perhaps most importantly, it is one step closer to a new, more impartial representation of these unsung inventors.

It is spring in the Eastern Han dynasty. Cai Lun finds the best craftsmen in his department to create a material for writing that is both cheap and convenient so they can offer it to the emperor. It is spring in the Eastern Han dynasty. Zhang Rang thinks of his colleague Bi Lan as he checks the official ledger. They likely did not think about what would happen two thousand years later. Most people do not think about them a lot.

## Non-fiction – Group 5 WINNER

# The Roads to the Heavens

*International Christian School, Chan, Yan Kiu Sherise – 16*

Deep in the contoured woodlands of Chongqing, China, is a staircase totaling six thousand, two hundred and eight steps, connecting the old Village of Contentment to the outside world.

The staircase, is not a product of natural erosion by the wind and rain, as seen in many hiking trails today; nor was it a project costing hundreds and thousands by the Chinese government, as seen in their recent efforts to mitigate poverty in isolated, rural areas; but rather, simply an act of love and affection, from Liu Guo-Jiang to his wife Xu Chao-Qing, spanning fifty years, with his bare hands and over twenty shovels. This staircase is now known as the Stairway to Heaven.

It is a considerable thought, that this is not a story unique to Mr. and Mrs. Liu, but rather the story of Chinese inventions over centuries of perseverance, iterations across generations of wisdom. The people of China look to the heavens as they take slow, but steady steps along the road of the cultural exchange of innovations — first with their bare feet, then on rickshaws and camelback, and finally speeding over magnetic levitation, soaring towards the skies they once only dreamed of voyaging towards.

— *In the beginning, the Chinese discovered the heavens.*

As superstitious as the Chinese may seem, the observations on precision placement of constellations in the sky took historical precedence over star signs annotated elaborately on a calendar. First setting their gaze on the heavens in 3000 BC, the first Chinese records of astronomy located circumpolar stars as reference points for what they could identify as ‘heavens’ in the boundless sky.

Astronomical inventions were instrumental to the work of Chinese astronomers, likely due to the precision required of them in their work — one mistake easily led to consequences as severe as getting beheaded. Among the Chinese, the armillary sphere earns its spot as one of the most remarkable of many notable precision instruments, leaving a legacy that traces a rewind in time into the Han Dynasties. Astronomer and financial secretary Geng Shou-Chang is known to be the brain behind the most primitive version of the sphere in Chinese history, the primarily bronze sphere having been birthed in the Western Han Dynasty. Zhang Heng from the Eastern Han Dynasty later became the recipient of the baton in the astronomy relay, taking his place as the creator of a water-powered version of the armillary sphere, known to reflect the astronomical observations with an unmatched precision. In the absence of modern technology such as electricity, satellites and wireless networks, Zhang’s sphere utilized hydropower in a system of gears that shifted the sphere on a weekly rotation, its technicalities truly ahead of its time.

Despite the astounding precision of ancient Chinese astronomers, who could develop entirely original measurements and iterations of these calculations in the absence of modern-day technology, their demanding work remained limited to their scope of discovery. The Chinese had long made the split between astronomy and astrology, whereas the latter was frequently consulted before an Emperor made important decisions and events based on superstitious inferences. It would be many centuries until these highly intelligent scientists’ work could be properly unraveled and recognized; so long that even these astronomers themselves would not have expected their field of study to grow into a fundamental feature of the country’s advancements.

— *In the beginning, the Chinese roamed the earth.*

The Chinese’s shots for the stars did not mean they ceased to roam the earth — not even conquest put an end to these discoveries. The Yuan Dynasty brought about not only a great shift in political power, but also technological breakthroughs amongst cultural exchange. A continuation of a project from the Song Dynasty, Mongol leaders pushed for the establishment of a grand canal stretching across Beijing, the Mongol Capital, to southern regions such as Hangzhou and the Yangtze Basin, purposed for transportation of commodities such as staple crops from locations rich in agricultural harvest to drier lands up north.

There never seemed to be an end to Chinese trade — the Mongol conquests did not put their footsteps on hold, nor did the cyclic rise and fall of every empire. Strongly flowing, travesty from a miniscule, stream-like desire into a river of ideas and trysts, then meeting the sea of endless possibilities under its establishment, trade was integral not only to the economic sustainability of the civilizations, but also their innovations that stemmed from the imperfections, and a will to nurture their communities into prosperity.

Under the short-lived Yuan dynasty, papermaking and printing works sprung up across the country, particularly in trade cities such as Samarkand. Initially purposed to foster an emergence of Buddhism and religious merit within by spreading concrete copies of sacred texts, the paper-and-print industry rapidly expanded itself to greater purposes. The production of paper money became the first banknotes, designed for convenient trade in place of heavy coins, where each piece of metal only weighed up to a miniscule value compared to the bulk-buy luxuries merchants tended to purchase. The basic technique of ink on paper had its own specialty against fraud — a myriad of elaborate patterns carved on the print. As this leap in economic development brought about flourishing in the trading of numerous unique cultural goods, it unintentionally planted a side effect not even considered in the slightest before money became no longer scarce — inflation, speeding up the dynasty towards its eventual decline.

The prosperous trade networks established by China and its innovations come at a cost — its commute. For the average merchant living through the age of an absence of electricity, or any form of power remotely related to fossil fuel, the world felt much, much larger than it already was. Despite acknowledging the heightened harm of fatigue, or simply, the dangers of having to face nature’s hurdles with the limits of the human body, merchants who were unable to resort to a camel or a horse, could only do so with their own body, with no alternative to better withstand the challenges of traveling.

Little did they know, they would be far from this obstacle if only they were born as a Chinese merchant centuries later.

— *The sky is not the limit.*

It would be no surprise that the Chinese share a sentiment for outer space, but what if I say that outer space too, embraces the Chinese?

2021 marked the fruitful harvests of Chinese launch missions since 2016, where the thriving Long March carrier rocket series renewed themselves to a next level of non-toxic and pollution free launches in accommodation to the many launch attempts conducted. Stepping out from the study of the stars from a purely observational approach, China now branches astronomy into seven fields, calling for a shift from astronomy itself in theory, to practicalities that merge the ever-growing discipline with other sciences, including, yet not limited to engineering, information technology and physics. The modernization of Chinese society turned innovation over onto a new leaf of inventions, encompassing the branches of concentrated space exploration, navigation, and even environmental governance within space technology.

In a way, the Chinese continue their conquests — for knowledge beyond their comfort zones of what is known on Earth. As the International Space Station retires in 2024, China will become the only country with a permanent space station, Tiangong, meaning sky palace. They have, indeed, conquered for themselves places beyond the Earth; a home in space, a journey to the far side of the moon, (more than) a few exquisite collections of manned and unmanned spacecraft, their names reflecting an originality and perseverance unique to their culture.

This may seem like history repeating itself in a different font — the conquest of the Mongols in the Yuan Dynasty, meeting its rapid decline from an uneven distribution — their excellent abilities to conquer, but unpolished skills in governance. Notwithstanding, the trope feels like a similar song, but there is a wild difference that sets the plots far apart: the Mongols were nomads, whereas the Chinese had rooted themselves in their heritage with a profoundness traversing the history books. In fact, the Chinese never ceased to overlook their existing progress throughout astronomy advancements. Establishing a strong satellite network, the Chinese broadcasting services have been one of the most sturdy and self-reliant, expanding its television and mobile service scope to the widest it has ever been for civilians within and beyond the country. These installations layer citizens' wellbeing with comfort and the contentment of accessing entertainment, building upon the firm foundations of China's meteorological satellites, designed to bring security through monitoring weather and natural disaster with precision, accelerating the acute responses to mitigate and relieve disaster efforts in the event of unexpected catastrophes.

It is as if the stars too, have seen the grit in this civilization's efforts to journey from only seeing them from far below, yet being able to learn about them with precision, to eventually, slowly but surely, on their way to reach them. The Great Wall of China is not the only thing that can be seen from space — the blood, sweat and tears behind the walls hold no voice, yet speak their deafening volumes.

— *Meandering, Gallivanting*

Past the bolstering pace in developments of the industrial revolution, the Chinese have long since journeyed everywhere with more than their feet, but rather developed a variety of vehicles designed to bring us to and fro between destinations far and near.

Present-day urban Chinese infrastructure accounts for routes and paths specifically designed for scooters and bicycles in place of heading between locations by foot, as well as being one of the leading countries to successfully facilitate shared transportation in the form of rental bicycles and scooters, often conveniently set at public parking spaces for these alternative vehicles, that take up less space and are often more eco-friendly than fossil-fueled cars. Across the rooster-shaped map encompassing China's many large provinces, China first developed its high-speed rail in 2008 between Beijing and Tianjin. Closely following the establishment, the Shanghai Maglev makes use of magnetic levitation rather than traditional

track, giving itself the name of the world's fastest commercially operated train at a top speed of 431 kilometers per hour. China's railroads have continued to expand rapidly since then, currently possessing a network spanning over 40,000 kilometers, with the ambitions to reach 200,000 kilometers in 2035.

Over time, China has purposed its advancements in technological inventions to highlight an increase in efficiency, most notably seen through the amount of time each accelerated innovation saves. Within the commercial world, not only have the Chinese strived to close the distance between lands to shorten the amount of time in commute, but also reduce complex or repetitive procedures for purchases and trade. The rise of Alipay, the digital wallet, moves the country away from banknotes and their long-standing history to an economic ecosystem where scan-to-see, tap-and-pay becomes the epitome of urban transactions. Alipay's biggest competitor, WeChat Pay, pushes the all-in-one narrative further — set as merely one function in the multipurpose application, many Chinese civilians can simply install a single software in their phones — WeChat, and possess a multitude of functions such as reels, blogs, chats, games, online magazines, health declarations, and many more.

Believe it or not, the bar for the merchant industry has since lowered over centuries, as the risks have too. As a merchant throughout the Chinese Dynasties, one would have to endure the physical challenges of simply getting around to the most profitable spots within and beyond the country, having to painstakingly abandon their family for extended periods of time in the process. But the times have changed. Commerce is no longer the no-go cautioned against, leaving its reputation of being reserved for the ambitious in the dust. The strands of the web of Chinese innovation from astronomy continue to leave its lasting impacts on the country's internal developments, an immensely secure satellite network laying down the solid groundwork for trade to shift from real life to the internet, merchants now not even having to set foot beyond the comfort of their own homes in the extreme, a yield from the establishment of vast online shopping and payment platforms facilitated by China's very own satellite network.

Perhaps the merchants from the ages set in stone (bamboo, and the printing press too) would have chosen to reincarnate as a merchant today, simply to opt for a taste of the joys in the smooth exchange the Chinese have since brought themselves upon.

— *What next?*

The Chinese have long since progressed along the stairway to heaven with their leaps and bounds in innovation. In just a few thousand words, we have witnessed a marathon in which they may fall, down or behind; they may be put on hold entirely; they may be sighing in exhaustion of this long, uneasy run. Yet we see much more, of their stamina, their unceasing efforts to pass the spirit along with the slap of a palm, and most of all the epiphanies in smothering the cervices of imperfections that do none, but become the drive for them to rise after each fall, to pass finish line after finish line, and still run its course to achieve the impossible, as a river would flood each step of a staircase to the skies with its currents.

As part of human history, we have come so far; we have only come so far. And so, we proceed to ask ourselves; *where*, are the heavens we are trying to reach? *Which*, are the roads we are trying to plow through? *How*, should we tread, or sprint, or climb, or soar along our paths to the ever-changing, ever-renewing, ever-vast world of innovation? We are certainly not the first to do so, nor will we be the last — these are questions the intelligent Chinese also pose.

In fact, it is a common assumption to define a causal relationship between the Chinese and their inventions, rooted in the belief that it is only through continuous, repeated

attempts and mere grit to achieve a certain technological advancement that spins the wheels of human history and its development. This extensive legend says otherwise — gallant with the revelation that it is in fact, reciprocal between themselves; as water does so with the light: they flow freely, determined to renew themselves in a better form; they soar towards the heavens, the birth of a new transformative invention; and they fall — not with resignation, but with pride and joy, freely back again, into the flow which soon drives them to yet another peak of new discovery. They are the dewdrops upon a spiderweb of interconnected innovations within society. They are the oasis of rest and regeneration amidst a desert of ageing ideas in which freshness fades faster than ever before. Over centuries, the Chinese have built a fountain from tears of tediousness that springs the sweat of success.

An accident at home escorted 87-year-old Liu Guo-Jiang to his last breath, departing from the world where his wife remains with the Stairway to Heaven. Nevertheless, his love remains within each of the six thousand, two hundred and eight steps in Chongqing. Chinese inventors too, have since paved their road to the heavens, a steeply long-winding road stretching across space and time. Likewise, their achievements fade not over the passage of time and the shift of runners in the marathon, droplets in the currents, but remain in the passion and love they hold for each novel creation from their culture. Divergently, the steps they climb never cease; the roads to the heavens are ever changing and growing, with every path they build with their own hands.

## Poetry – Group 1 WINNER

### The Inventions that Changed the World

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Lui, Joelle – 8*

Do you love to write?  
Paper was never white.  
It was made out of hemp and tree bark.  
I love doodling in the park.  
Papermaking brought us literacy, knowledge and enjoyment.

Do you want to wipe your bottom with your bare hands?  
Toilet paper saved our two hands.  
But it hurts our butts.  
As it was made from rice straw that was very rough.  
Toilet paper brought us hygiene, sanitation and prevention.

Do you love licking ketchup off your fries?  
Ketchup is the best sauce in disguise.  
Ketchup was made with fish sauce and soybeans.  
It was a saviour for long voyages and submarines.  
Ketchup brought us indulgence, flavours and pleasure.

Do you enjoy watching the crackling flames from fireworks?  
Gunpowder was an accidental curse.  
Longevity medicine was the original plan,  
'Smoke flowers' were turned into cannons and bombs for clans.  
Fireworks brought us hope, happiness and celebrations.

Do you ever feel tired from copying?  
Movable type printing was a lot of carving.  
Thousands of iron plates,  
Millions of books and scholars graduate.  
Printing brought us equality in education, scholars and news updates.

Do you find carrying coins cumbersome and jangly?  
Strings of copper coins were heavy to carry.  
Paper money was later called 'flying money',  
It is so light that it can slip out of our hands like a little bunny.  
Paper money brought us convenience, trading and wealth.

Can we go on a time machine?  
To see what other amazing inventions that the Chinese made.  
Silk, wheelbarrow, crossbow, compass, seismograph and more.  
Today's high speed trains, fiber optics and the world's longest cable bridge.  
The Chinese were the ones who thought of it all.  
Cai Lun, Bi Sheng, and Li Tian were the great inventors.  
Will you be next?

## Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 1 WINNER

### A Magical Substance

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Kwong, Ching Hei Colin – 7*

Gunpowder, powerful and bold,  
A spark of fire, a story unfolds.  
Sulfur, charcoal, and saltpeter's blend,  
Unleashing its power to the greatest extent.  
With fiery might, it shapes history's course,  
From ancient battles to modern force.  
From cannons' roar to fireworks' glow,  
Gunpowder's magic, a dazzling show.  
On the bright side, it helps build tunnels and roads,  
Yet many lives could be lost in one shot, oh no!  
So let us use it with mindful care,  
Respecting its power, aware and aware.

## Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

### Pitter-Patter Pitter-Patter

*St. Joseph's Primary School, Ting, Yi Hang – 9*

Rain down the lane  
Cheerful children rushed together  
Stepping in puddles and avoiding the drain  
Under the eave they were all soaked in laughter

Rain down the pond  
Frolic froggies leaped into the air  
Singing their best a capella afar and beyond  
On lotus leaves they held the most joyous funfair

Rain down the willow  
Lu Ban the Carpenter frowned deeply  
'What if I make a moving pavilion, how wonderful!'  
Under the tree he wondered curiously

Rain down the windowpane  
Lu Ban's wife rummaged about  
With a big cloth, some bamboo sticks and a long cane  
From the house she dashed out

Rain down the meadow  
The couple crafted the first umbrella  
At the end of the rainbow  
Casting sheep's eyes at each other  
Saying, 'I love you so!'

Rain down the river  
Lu Ban raised his newly made umbrella  
Sitting with his wife on his cloud ladder  
Toasting their success of old and new inventions in shower

Rain down the umbrella  
However loud the rain roars  
Raindrops kiss me tender like no one ever  
With an umbrella I fear no more when it pours

## Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

### New Tales of China's Inventions

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chong, Ching Yan Claribel – 10*

Have you seen the compass,  
An astounding Chinese invention?  
Made in the Han Dynasty by Shen Kuo,  
The compass grabbed plenty of attention.  
Before the Chinese compass was invented,  
People used the North Star to find the way.  
When the night came, they looked up,  
In the sky where the North Star laid.  
More than two thousand years ago,  
The first Chinese compass was made.  
In the early Warring States Period,  
People used it for war and trade.  
The compass has an interesting look:  
With a wooden frame that's spherical,  
And a spoon-like object on top.  
What is it? A steel needle!  
"The South Pointing Fish" was what  
Ancient citizens called a compass usually.  
Since a "fish" came out of the compass,  
This name for the compass fits perfectly.  
The "fish" was actually a lodestone piece,  
In the water, the "fish" pointed south.  
After that amazing discovery,  
The compass was given this title.  
The compass was then used for navigation  
When the Song Dynasty came.  
Now that this invention has a new purpose,  
The compass is full of fame.  
The magnetised compass we use nowadays  
Wasn't invented until Medieval Europe arrived.  
It's always wonderful to know  
That our invention has survived.

Compasses are very useful  
In both ancient and modern days.  
With the technological advances,  
Would people still think of compasses in the future days?

## Poetry – Group 3 WINNER

### Illuminations of the Skies

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wong, Prima – 13*

I remember when my eyes were full of stars.  
As the night sky exploded with color.  
I take in the chill that warms my heart.

When the sun has set,  
And left only the somber quiet of the evening,  
It pierces my ears.  
The glow of the moon reigned over the heavens above,  
And the stars scattered, watching over.

Suddenly, a cry  
Not of pain, but wonder, of amaze.  
A series of warm glows pierced through the dusky sky,  
Dancing across my face

Flickers and bursts.  
Left darkness in the wake.  
Yet bring the promise of hope  
To look away, I tried  
But I could not bear to lose the sight  
Descrying the great tapestry  
It casted a spell of empyreal radiance,  
On my soul that night.  
A way to set the stars alight.  
Condensed for mine own delight.

Under the weight of the sky,  
In the cold of the harbour I stand.  
Even in the darkest of times.

Every night I dream of the stars.  
I marvel at the sight.  
And each time I close my eyes, they fill with colours too bright to be true.  
They take me back to that night.

## Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 3 WINNER

### Dragon's Dreams: A Tapestry of Chinese Ingenuity

*Ling Liang Church E Wun Secondary School, Kaur, Sukhveer – 13*

In the land where the dragon's breath warmed the forge,  
Where wisdom wove silk threads through history's gorge,  
A nation arose, cradling invention's seed,  
In the heart of the Middle Kingdom, ingenuity's creed.

From the compass that danced with the Earth's silent song,  
To the paper that carried ancient wisdom along,  
The printing press inked with scholarly might,  
China's mind blossomed in the scholar's dim light.

But let us dream further, past the Great Wall's embrace,  
To a realm of new tales, both of time and of space,  
Where the bamboo shoots upwards, reaching for stars,  
And the mind's eye envisions, no borders, no bars.

Behold, the Cloud Loom, weaving mist into silk,  
A fabric so fine, it's akin to warm milk,  
Drifting down from the heavens, dressing emperors anew,  
In garments that shimmer with the dawn's early dew.

Imagine the Jade Flute, playing tunes that can heal,  
Its melodies flowing like a river's soft peal,  
Each note a balm for the weary soul's cries,  
A symphony of peace, under the endless skies.

There, the Iron Phoenix spreads its grand, fiery wings,  
A marvel of flight, defying the strings,  
Of gravity's pull, soaring through time,  
Uniting the heavens and earth in one climb.

With brushes that paint not just colors, but thoughts,  
 Capturing dreams, untangling knots,  
 The Canvas of Echoes reflects what is true,  
 A portrait of moments, in red, black, or blue.

The Seed of Shennong, a botanical wonder,  
 Sprouting crops in a day, without plow, without thunder,  
 A bounty for all, from just one tiny grain,  
 Ending hunger and strife, no more famine's chain.

And the Dragon's Gate, a portal to traverse,  
 Through dimensions and realms, the universe's diverse,  
 Network of galaxies, in one blink crossed,  
 By the spirit of wanderers, never to be lost.

Let us not forget the Chariot of Light,  
 A carriage that travels faster than sight,  
 Through fields of rice, over mountains and streams,  
 Carrying dreams in the blink of moonbeams.

These are the tales of what might yet come to be,  
 In the land of the dragon, where thoughts swim free,  
 A testament to a culture so bold and so bright,  
 Where the future is waiting, just out of sight.

In the heart of China, where the old meets the new,  
 The spirit of invention always rings true,  
 With each story that's told, and each idea that unfurls,  
 The Middle Kingdom inspires.

## Poetry – Group 4 WINNER

### The Needle-Wielder's Song

*Diocesan Girls' School, Yiu, Hong Ching Katelyn – 15*

Gossamer tendrils swirling in whispered waltz;  
 Smoky spirits beckoning travelers halt.  
 For a symphony of scents fascinating,  
 unearthly tranquility captivating.

Weary souls who the crimson corner lift,  
 Emerge ecstatic, their recovery swift.  
 Yet lips forbidden to preview  
 The secrets which the cave conceals.

Zephyrs spread rumors of divinity,  
 But Asclepius' gift to humanity,  
 Though philanthropic, though altruistic,  
 This healer stands mortal without mistake.

The routes she trekked no esplanade:  
 Passage of Drake, Cliff Palisade.  
 From archaic inscriptions she heard the hum,  
 Concord with Nature, synthesis come.

Before barred gates of sages illustrious,  
 She earned her title as ingenious.  
 Delicate needles meridians lubricate;  
 Moxa fumes anatomical points stimulate.

On joss sticks protruding from tender flesh,  
 Patients beseech hope for vigor refreshed.  
 Chronic aches dissipate, stress alleviate;  
 lames prance, mutes chant, blinds glimpse changed fate.

Embered tongues set her fame ablaze:  
 Some relish the warmth, some plot her glow erased.  
 Gammons bitter, who fear talent untethered,  
 Labeled her monster, banished forever.

From city center, where rites, rituals faltered,  
The emperor's paroxysmal splutter  
Unfurled anxiety, demanded remedy.  
Nathless, archiaters failed incessantly.

Officials her cavern saw as last fanal,  
To her door hurtled, begged her meteoric travel.  
Such proved unneeded, sheer mention of illness  
Had her astride, only query terminus.

Curtains gave way to resplendent light,  
Wind against face, palace's silhouette soon sight.  
Before the moribund dragon reverently knelt,  
Brows furrowed, his pulse cautiously felt.

On scalp and chest needles administered,  
Redirecting Qi to astral rills mirror.  
On soles smoldering mugwort circled,  
Invoking response from inmost torso

Where scarlet tides via convulsions rise,  
Iron blossoms from lips materialized.  
Bloodcurdling shriek assassin hollered,  
Still, she sat at bed end unbothered.

Purple-robed figures flooded into chamber,  
Stared agape as their ruler's eyelids flickered,  
Cheeks found color, aroused from slumber.  
Cheers erupted, louder than ever.

Gentle eyes cognized this new art's healing power,  
Tender smile grateful to its inventor.  
Offered priceless treasures or vassal manor,  
regardless she chose her true mission honor.

From village to village her journey embarked,  
humanistic love recognized trademark.  
To ardent apprentices her wisdom shared,  
In esoteric scripture tonic skills bared.

Her curative legacy hereby deliver;  
Revamped medic care lives ready to alter.  
Inventions a wonder, this unnamed messiah  
Undeniable pride and joy of China.

## Wine (Let Us Raise A Glass To History)

*St. Paul's Convent School, Ho, Yan Kiu Antares – 15*

when thine graced my lips  
i passed away into a  
fairy realm  
where people walked on skies  
and the land towered above us  
where history came alive  
and doomsday was but a myth

and in my inebriation  
i wrote:

today  
i heard the teacher ask  
boys and girls, what's a thing  
of chinese descent  
history would not exist  
without?  
xia said paper  
fang said the compass  
wu said printing  
ah—wei, the rebellious one  
he said gunpowder  
(i'm not one to judge but hey  
he's actin' like a warmonger)

but...  
it's the littlest of things that  
thaw into our day and night  
of each century and decade that  
tell tales as old as time;  
they fuel our daydreams as we  
sketch poetry and  
create dynasties that  
break us and fix us and

(i cleared my throat)  
guys, you're not wrong but

what about,  
what about you?

you, with your  
iridescent waters you  
flood the land and  
drown the strong and the  
mighty; but you  
give life to the parched and the  
afraid  
oh, what a paradox  
but it's true (so true)

you, that day at the  
feast at swan goose gate  
were you not the one who  
served courage  
to a little man (fan zeng, his name was)  
who defended his master's honour  
in the face of a beast?  
when he plunged his sword into  
the flesh of the tyrant's offering  
and downed his glass in one go  
were you,  
were you not trembling with  
pride and glee?

“i do not fear death” fan zeng said  
and in those couple of minutes  
with you on his side  
he was the strongest man alive

oh you spirit  
oh you liquid fire and  
molten lava stone  
you make the world  
psychedelic, truly; where

they dream, and they dream, and they dream  
of ones they shouldn't see  
(ones their souls call for  
but are not here physically)  
and don't you make them  
leave ghosts of touches  
kissing their bare skin?

and you could make a grown man cry  
when his mama comes to  
kiss him good night  
(good Lord he's almost eighty-three  
and he lost his mama at twenty!)

and don't you remember?  
one autumn eventide when  
li bai raised the barrel to his lips  
and together you  
sang love sonnets to the moon;  
the shadow was his friend  
but you  
you saved his solitude  
you became his salvation  
(and his ruin)

and you, who forgave our sins and  
burnt love down our throats  
(no matter what we did wrong  
you were omnibenevolent)

don't you reminisce how  
you sat in a jug lovingly held by  
Jesus Christ  
as he poured you and broke bread  
for all twelve of his disciples?  
when you witnessed the  
betrayal of judas  
did you not shed a tear  
and trickle down a drunken face  
or two?

and  
are you not aware of the thousands of  
thousands of  
thousands of years that were poured into  
your making?  
blessed was your modest firstborn found in

yellow river valley more than  
nine-thousand years ago  
(almost a decamillennium!)  
to luxurious beverages hidden in  
wine cellars and favelas at  
present;  
are you not aware of the tears and  
sweat and  
blood that dripped as you thrived  
from a simple grape vine?

and don't you know that  
when i taste you i taste  
centuries of rich, rich history?  
our dark and our gritty;  
our lustre and our virtue  
and  
i see  
great men who drank themselves  
into nothingness  
as they wept and wept and wept  
for God's forgiveness

and don't you recall?  
the day the conqueror xiang yu  
bid farewell to  
his beloved concubine  
(and his will to live)  
he drank and drank  
until he was lost in a trance and  
he had slurred "you look like  
an angel, my dear"  
and so she smiled and  
took her life before him with  
his own sword; and for days he  
griefed and pleaded for mercy as he was  
incompetent; before he met his own  
end

and thus was the rise of  
the han dynasty  
(oh, how great you are indeed  
to cause such great falls and rises)

but don't you realise?  
you are a blunt needle  
whose purpose served but to heal

and the flesh that was punctured;  
how could it  
bleed more than the tear?  
(that's funny but again it's true)  
and so fools seek you, praise you  
and they  
beg with their grubby lips  
and their plump little fingers:

please  
i just want to feel again!

(and unknowingly drown  
in their feral greed)

and you see, those  
failed scholars and half-dead knights  
with their broken ambitions  
and deceased families and such;  
they were  
wallowing in purdah and fear;  
and they just wanted eternal peace  
(but there's no such thing innit)  
and ha! you were their escape indeed  
so you sent them to sleep  
(and stole their hope  
when they awoke)

but now

what about now?  
what about you in the present?  
indeed you were history  
you were the convex and the concave of  
those little puzzle pieces  
that stuck together and formed us:  
a wall; whole  
or perhaps you were more like  
the twinkle of the evening star  
that was there like a  
lurking presence or maybe

well  
you were just there

but what about today, loved one,  
where history proves to be but a ladder

to worth and flair? today  
do you stand with the sober  
or the weak?  
(without you the ladder  
would crumble, wouldn't it?  
without you we'd all

fall  
fall  
fall)

well, whatever  
(i closed my journal)

i raise my glass and  
greet nirvana  
to tales you've ruined and  
tales you've written  
and under the glow of the silver moon  
you were the colour of  
blood  
but i did not drink like  
yue fei did when he drank  
the blood of his enemies

i drank like  
i was drinking history

## Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 4 WINNER

### Shadow is The Queen Of Colours

*GT (Ellen Yeung) College, Tam, Arnold – 18*

pure ink is the defiance of  
white; trying to be hypocritical inside a tuxedo suit  
too many shades of grey are there  
for the widower, the man to choose

blurring and fading strokes are flowers  
blossoming within a monochrome, nostalgic film  
“do you recognise me?” said the melancholic man  
with a sorrowful voice of grim

feud between the black and the white  
like the excerpts in a fugue, hard to disguise  
which, at last, had to compromise

as the silhouette of mankind hides  
within the margins of the paper and brush  
is where the poets and artists lie

### Flying Cash

*Shanghai High School International Division, Huang, Yi Ting – 15*

So the story goes –  
to end suffering is to end desire.

But as I look within  
inky irises  
I see temptation drawing its roots  
tendons slipping surrounding me  
what if? just a little  
because if I were to be trusted,  
does that mean I am to be trusted?

Because wealth is fleeting  
but so is life; I supposed I  
didn't want to waste my life away without  
basking in its glory and so  
bartering – what I do best, a  
twist of words here and there lands me with  
fleeting paper

(a touch would bestow to it  
what I bestowed to them  
a breath of wind sighing down would  
disregard the sweat of labor and the blood  
that churns)

Because I assigned them meaning –  
mere pieces of scrap before I birthed it  
new life – and suddenly  
cash flowed  
and flew up in midst the gods  
golden hues reflected across my irises  
whilst I reaped the fields  
of endless golden.

## Poetry – Group 5 WINNER

# Silkwork's Requiem

Chinese International School, Li, Adele – 16

*Legend has it that the Yellow Emperor lived through several dynasties before he transcended to the heavens, escorted by a phoenix and a kirin. But before he was the hero we know, he was a boy in love.*

*It is rumoured that his first wife, Léi zǐ, was the true inventor of sericulture and silk; villagers insist that they saw her, in the shadows of a mulberry tree one afternoon, catch a falling silkworm cocoon in her tea-cup, which the heat of the Sun unravelled into silk, as if by magic. The two married as teenagers, and shared a delicate sort of love that ended tragically upon Léi zǐ's early death. Every night, the villagers would see the Emperor walking through the necropolis, laying hand-written poems over her tomb, listening intently to the night's crooning as if hoping to hear a human voice.*

*In the moments before he rises from man to God,  
he writes to her one last time.*

Léi ǐr,

I have not slept since the night you left. Sleep spites me mercifully;  
it is in the shore that separates wake from slumber that I feel your  
presence most; in a sea so vague, I might pretend you are hiding in a  
cove, skirts gathered in your arms, waiting. But I've lived in perpetual  
expectancy, and now I must forget you, moult our memories away in  
the same way a phoenix husks itself into resurrection.

You have consumed me, and I cannot go before I tell you  
how I have remembered you in the centuries past,  
how history has told your story.

It is daytime now, and I am sitting under the mulberry tree you  
so loved. Let my shadow be yours for a second, let it be that you're  
next to me, a porcelain cup of tea in your hand. This is a story you  
know. You must remember it - the cocoon falls into your cup, the  
silkworm, fat and dazed, it's white cloud of a tail.

The world stops  
spinning and the cicadas fall silent in their hidden chambers, the  
wind a whisper. *Liven the larva, pulp the pulpa, cull the cocoon into  
silk, it murmurs. Feed thread through spindles and wheels, plunge  
fabric in dye. Then, rinse. Repeat.*

It was enchanting, the way you led your troops, those nimble-fingered  
girls with dreams to reap. I admit I did a poor job at masking the shame  
that I could barely say the same for my men. You pulled them into the  
orbit of your spool, doomed them to a life of spinning, swirling...  
and you slipped away like silk. Oh how I wanted to stop the wheel,  
quiet the wind, lure the moon out of its cycle; but, alas, I haven't  
the same command over the world as you.

And then, you found me. Or did I find you? I can't remember.  
It was the day of the Qixi Festival, and the elders had been  
pestering me all day.

*It's the day of love and reunion, they cooed, step out,  
come with us. The women outside are praying to Zhi nǚ, the men  
to Niú láng - come, let us help you cross the heavenly river. The  
magpies have built a bridge just for you.*

We travelled south, through *Jīn nán* and *Chéng dū*, ended up  
in *Kūn míng*, some village with nothing but a pagoda and a  
little man in dusty red *cháng pào*: a fortune teller.  
My palms said I was bound to forget you. The tea-leaves said I'd find  
someone new. So this was the other side of the river, then:  
a life of never knowing how it might feel to grow old with you.

But then the sun caught a glinting... thing. Something bright,  
prismatic. A tapestry! No, not just any tapestry... a *kè sī*!  
On the wall, a silk landscape, unmissable... a reminder of you.

And just like that; so clearly could I see the spinning wheels,  
the girls on stools, spools of silk retching out colors, fibres,  
hours, days, labour burgeoning itself into *creation* under  
your instruction; the white of your skin, the red of your  
blood, spun together, inextricable, holding each other with  
the desperation of an old man and his single last memory.

There you were, in the river's breath; waters rippling in envy  
at your eternalization. You, an unanticipated nomad racing it  
to the edge of the word, coursing through the bloodlines of history.

From that day on, *Léi ěr*, I saw you everywhere I went.  
I could barely walk through the palace without seeing  
you from the corner of my eye, in the *yuán lǐng páo*  
boasting their drooping sleeves, in the *shàn zǐ* of the  
bashful dancer. I commanded that ribbons be draped over  
the chariot, woven into the saddle, and whenever the steeds  
trotted through the village, peasants and men in lonely  
outposts looked on in longing, the few little cowry shells  
jostling around in their bone-grey sacks, wishing to touch,  
to feel, those fabrics of your blood and skin.

A millennium later and silk has replaced cowry shells,  
each length worth a thousand: a symbol of the nobleman's  
largesse. I dare not say that your girls have outdone you,  
but the threads get finer and finer, hundreds of thousands  
of strands tightly packed into the length of a silkworm's  
crawl. Books, papers, shoes of silk. Did you know that  
would happen, that day under the tree?

*Léi ěr*, China alone was not large enough to contain you. The  
yellow-haired rulers were fascinated by silk, and, I must say,  
terribly conspicuous with their espionage, their hawk-eyes and  
thieving hands. They took you to Byzantium, Persia, India. Egypt,  
Greece, Rome, places you never knew and yet places you dwell,  
planted the mulberry seeds and coaxed the worms into coition.

The Goddess of sericulture, they call you now. Goddess!  
*Léi ěr*, did you ever foresee that?

Two millennia later and there is a snake that trails its way  
from the East to the West, *Cháng' ān* to Constantinople, carrying  
men and camels on its back, slithering through the marshes to the  
men with empty baskets waiting on the other side. They call it the  
*Silk Road*, and round and round it goes, on land and sea,  
a carousel for your creation. It outlives every animal, watches us  
through amber eyes, the rise and fall of kingdoms, for a thousand years.

And when the snake stopped, thrashed itself to death, China  
could only bear your absence for so long: four millenniums  
later and your road is our way to industrial success, co-operation  
among nations; *One Belt One Road*, they call it.

So, the yellow and black-haired  
children could press their stub-noses into store windows,  
peer at the silk dresses on the mannequins, and think of you,  
silkworms, and spinning wheels, of which they learned about  
from their mothers before bedtime, over a thimble of camomile  
or jasmine tea. For you have been pressed in storybooks like  
the mulberry's leaves, *Léi ěr*. Your name, kept forever in print.

Sometimes I can't help but question the futility of it all:  
the worms falling into the hole's they'd eaten, the graves they'd  
dug, speaking in tufts of spun silk, little bodies spent. To hibernate,  
siphon all its energy, just to plunder through those white walls, fly  
off in pursuit of a warm leaf to die on, harrow its eggs with the same  
life of falling and spinning and lying fallow; silk:  
the only evidence of its life.

*Egg, silkworm, cocoon, pupa, moth, the wind whispers,  
before carrying away those limp bodies. Liven the larva, pulp the  
pulpa, cull the cocoon into silk, it murmurs. Feed thread through  
spindles and wheels, plunge fabric in dye. You know the rest.*

So, is this what it means to be the inventor?  
To recognise the brevity of life,  
to immortalise oneself in the invention?  
To be the girl on the stool  
to keep the wheel spinning?  
To be the silkworm,  
for the sake of the silk?

If life starts as a worm, a wiggly thing,  
then it ends with the silks you dye, the dresses you sew.  
Starts again when the dress, moth-eaten, falls apart,  
ends with the *qí páo* we laid you to rest in.

The silkworm dies, but the silk persists.  
And *love*... love is everything life leaves behind.

Do not be sad that I am leaving, my dear,  
for there is still so much to be said.

- *Xuān yuán*

## Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 5 WINNER

### Whispers of Ingenuity: Epochs Entwined

*Macau Pui Ching Middle School, Lam, Kam Him – 17*

In the ancient dynasties' subtle glow,  
Through scrolls of silk, and time's slow flow,  
Chinese inventors, in their prime,  
Crafted wonders, ahead of time.

In the forge of thought, they cast,  
Ideas that centuries would outlast.  
Gunpowder's whisper, compass true,  
Paper's rustle, printing's debut.

Their hands wove the timeless tale,  
Of innovation, beyond the pale.  
Porcelain sky, silk road's embrace,  
Crafting history, with delicate grace.

Yet, in the dreams of today's bright dawn,  
Lies the future, yet unborn.  
Innovations that dance in digital streams,  
Gadgets and wonders, beyond our dreams.

Quantum leaps in the fabric of space,  
AI companions, with a human face.  
Clean energy painting skies so clear,  
Biotech secrets, life's frontiers to peer.

From past's deep wells to future's high flight,  
Inventors' minds, a beacon of light.  
In every era, their visions soar,  
Crafting tomorrow, forevermore.

## Poetry – Group 6 WINNER

### Paper

*Hong Kong Red Cross Princess Alexandra School, Lam, Tsz Ki Jason – 13*

Paper was invented in China by  
A man who had  
Power in the  
Earth, by having a beautiful  
Rainbow.

### TikTok

*Hong Kong Red Cross Princess Alexandra School, Chen, Ho Wai Victor – 11*

This app  
Is a video app, people need to  
Know how to use this app.  
TikTok: you can watch videos  
On your phone. I think all people  
Know this app.

## Poetry – Group 7 WINNER

### Paper

*Korean International School – Springboard, Choi, Mattea Abbey – 15*

Possibly made to write or draw onto,  
Also used for printing something.  
People used it in different ways,  
Especially in crafts, wrapping presents, etc.  
Really popular invention that originated from China.

### Rockets

*Korean International School – Springboard, Chor, Damien – 16*

Rockets were invented in 228.A.D.  
Only used torches attached to arrows to guard  
Chinese people  
Kaboom!  
Experimental accident  
Tang Fu the father of the rockets  
Shoots up into the sky

### Umbrella

*Korean International School – Springboard, Yeo, Darren Jeon – 15*

Unique  
Material or tool  
Being  
Remembered  
Either rain or shine what a,  
Lovely invention created by chinese that is,  
Light and useful to  
All..

## Chinese Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

### 牙齿的朋友

YK Pao School, 王际茹 – 9

我是一颗小牙齿，  
牙刷天天来我家。  
你知道牙刷的来历吗？  
听我来给你讲一下。

最早它就是手指，  
常来和我一起玩耍。  
后又变成杨柳枝，  
咬碎枝头作刷头，  
只是刷头有点扎，  
样子就像小拖把。  
最后成为植毛牙刷，  
价值不菲实在太贵，  
王侯将相才能用它。  
经过千年的变化，  
它才飞入百姓家。

这就是我的朋友牙刷，  
爱牙护牙全靠它。  
它是我们的大功臣，  
一定要好好感谢它。

## Chinese Poetry – Group 3 WINNER

### 《最好的礼物》

YK Pao School, Wu, Peitong Alissa 吴沛桐 – 12

它记录着流传千古的文章，  
书写着悠久而深远的历史。  
它承载着好友之间的话语，  
传达相隔万里的关心思念。  
它见证了无数立下的誓言，  
保障了无数的契约与合同。  
它肩负着书法文化的传承，  
实现了全世界的思想沟通。  
它是给世界最美好的礼物。  
它是中国造纸术。

## 《二十二行诗》

YK Pao School, Zhao, Chen Yu Sally 赵晨毓 - 14

华夏先贤奇思妙，  
求索之道启文明。

司南针指航海路，  
星辰辅航踏波涛。  
活字印刷书声响，  
火药烟花彰喜祥。

驼铃声响沙中行，  
丝绫饶玉传西域。  
陶瓷杯盏倾翠茶，  
诗意山水入汤瓶。

百家争鸣光照世，  
儒道墨法谈风尘。  
书仙画圣挥墨迹，  
骚人喟叹抒情怀。

科技飞跃赋新颜。  
铁路纵横贯东西，  
火箭升空改天势，  
网络通途世相联。

古人智慧开天地，  
现代科技耀乾坤。  
创璀璨，绚星辰。  
发明创造续华章。

## Chinese Poetry – Group 4 WINNER

### New Tales of China's Inventions: “Gunpowder” 「火藥」

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Huang, Andy 黃嗣為 - 15

端重恢宏朝廷裡，  
一排排的煉金術士，  
在大鼎旁手忙腳亂地攪拌著，  
燃燒赤紅的丹藥，

硝石、硃砂、硫磺，  
爭先恐後地在滾燙的鼎裡，  
狂躁地奔跑著，  
猶如傑驚不馴的野獸。

隨著一聲大地震顛的巨響，  
那是金屬爆破的聲音，  
那是兩千年前開啟的篇章，  
那是無意間鋪墊未來的發明。  
古老的智慧蘊藏著火花，  
在中國的土地上綻放。  
糾纏的煙霧與奔騰的火焰，  
揭開了火藥的神秘面紗。

一千年前的中國，  
火藥在寶鼎中沸騰誕生。  
他是一把人類文明的火炬，  
用他光芒四射的軀體，  
引領著中國的日新月異。

在火藥的記憶中，  
他是驅魔避邪的聲音，  
每逢冬至春來，  
都向人類送上隆重賀歲，  
迎接萬物復甦的春季。  
一幕幕中國紅在空中  
綻放花蕊，  
宛若春天白花齊放。  
遠方的煙火，  
在黯淡無光的天空中曇花一現，  
添上了姘紫嫣紅的顏色。  
美妙世界的創作，  
來源如此。

在火藥的記憶中，  
美妙世界，  
始終無法維持。  
唐末五代之天下大亂，  
兵燹四起，  
戰火持續，  
只要烈火點燃，  
火藥就成為了絕世武器，  
火砲、火箭，  
猶如豐功偉績的戰士，  
一往無前，  
攻破敵人的防線。

煙霧蘊藏了他毀滅所有的威脅。  
光芒四射的身影後，  
他隱藏了死亡的殘酷，  
人性的無情。

一聲聲士兵的慘死哀叫，  
被一聲聲火藥的轟然爆裂  
淹沒，  
而寂靜。  
煙霧繚繞，  
被染紅的戰場上，  
撲滿著一具具橄欖綠。

一千年後的中國，  
穿越時空的壁障，  
火藥的煙花再次綻放在天際，  
繪上色彩繽紛的圖案，  
照亮懷抱夢想的人群。  
我們思緒如瀑布奔騰，  
怒放心靈的澎湃，  
將希望與和平傳遞，  
跨越語言的隔閡，  
連結世界的彼岸。

讓我們珍惜這份力量的恩賜，  
繼續用他點燃時代的火炬。  
時光荏苒，  
我們如今擁抱和平，  
追求智慧的光輝，  
讓火藥成為美好世界的警鐘。

火藥啊，你是歷史的見證，  
你是世界文明發展的一部分。  
願你的光芒永遠閃耀著，  
永遠，  
在黯淡無光的夜空中，  
綻放我們心中渴望，  
和平的煙火。