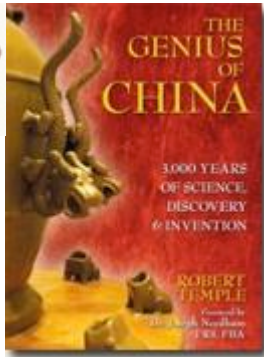




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curled up  
with a  
good book



### *The Genius of China by Robert Temple*

It's often suggested in the West that so-called Oriental peoples are copiers rather than innovators. Then someone will mention, for instance, gunpowder, paper, or the printing press, three major inventions of the Chinese, and the Western naysayer will assert that although the Chinese may have invented a few things, they didn't progress and follow through with their inventions as did inventors and entrepreneurs in Europe and America. Robert Temple is an English professor with an arm's length of degrees, memberships and fellowships to his credit. He is notably a visiting professor of history and philosophy of science at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He has compiled this large, satisfyingly attractive and fact-filled book to respond to such negative impressions of the Chinese, who, it turns out, not only invented the aforementioned items but were the first people to heat with natural gas and make extensive use of the first plastic (enamel).

Cleverly, the Chinese did not initially use paper, made from compressed hemp, to write on but for wrapping, nose-blowing and "personal hygiene." Good on them. They also used paper for clothing, even employing a thickened version for military armor.

In the first century A.D., the Chinese were building suspension bridges. In the ninth century, they famously invented gunpowder, using it to ignite rockets, and by the tenth century they had advanced its use to set off a fuse for a nasty flame-thrower that "sprayed enemies with burning gasoline" (reminiscent of a much later Western killing device, napalm spray). They fashioned bombs, mines and guns, even repeating guns, centuries before these notions of warfare occurred to Americans or Europeans.

The Chinese were also years ahead of us in the development of medicines. Sometimes their diagnostic techniques were astonishingly accurate, though some were based on mere superstition. They identified symptoms of diabetes mellitus, correctly associating it with sugar in the urine; this was as early as 655 or before. They used thyroid extracts to treat goiter and reputedly possessed the secret of smallpox inoculation by around the year 1000 .D. The Chinese contribution to mathematics includes negative numbers, decimal fractions, algebra and geometry, as well as "Pascal's Triangle" - obviously assumed to have been the creation of a European, but demonstrably in use in China as early as 1303 A.D. by one Chu Shih-Chieh and then referred to as "The Old Method." By report, the Chinese had mastered the art of manufacturing phosphorescent paint 700 years or so before the first appearance of such a substance in the West, when it was named "Canton's phosphorus" for its inventor.

This is a book that impresses with the wealth of its information. It contains a handy timeline demonstrating the approximate lag of years between each Chinese invention and its Western counterpart. There are color photographs throughout along with older black and white ones and relevant drawings. These days, we Americans would do well to understand the Chinese as thoroughly as we can; this book is a good starting point in beginning to understand that before "we" "discovered" the Orient, it was doing fine without us and our primitive technologies.

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