

Basics about Chinese Papercutting

Chinese papercutting originated from the ancient worship of ancestors and gods and is a traditional part of Chinese culture. According to archaeological records, it originated in the 6th century, although some believe that its history could be traced as far back as the Warring States Period (around 3 BC), long before paper was invented. At that time, people used other thin materials, like leaves, silver foil, silk and even leather, to carve hollowed patterns. Since Cai Lun created papermaking skill in the year 105, which was during the Eastern Han Dynasty in China, this material was easy to discard, and paper became the major material for this type of artwork. In the Tang dynasty (618–907), papercutting skills became more mature, which was not only a kind of handcraft, but also a piece of artwork, as it could express ideas through patterns. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1912), papercutting reached its peak. The art is still very popular in China, especially in the north-western region. The exquisite cut-outs are good presents to the newlyweds from old generation.



Papercutting spread to other parts of the world, with different regions adopting their own cultural styles. Today, papercutting is used for decoration, and is regarded as an artistic activity with joy. It can stimulate one's creativity and gives a sense of accomplishment. Cut-outs liven up walls, windows, doors, columns, mirrors, lamps and lanterns in homes and are also used on presents or are given as gifts themselves.

Chinese paper cuttings are usually symmetrical. There are basic cut-outs, consisting of a single image, and symmetrical designs. They are usually created by some folding over a proportioned crease, and then cutting a shape, so that when unfolded, it forms a symmetrical design. The basic folds of the paper are two, five and six - c.f. two folds for the above fish cutting and six folds for the flower pattern at right.

