

Paper Cutting

Paper was invented in China 2000 years ago.

The art of paper cutting in China began during the Tang Dynasty (618-906 C.E.).

- **Paper cuts were used as decorations for gifts and especially on holidays.**
- **In old China, houses in the North had windows made of thin paper coated with tung oil to make them transparent. Red paper cutouts were pasted on the windows to add color to the home.**
- **Paper cuts were once used as stencils for pottery and as guides for wood carvers.**
- **Paper cutting was also one step in the process of embroidery.**
 - **The pattern could be cut freehand with scissors;**
 - **Sometimes several simple patterns were cut at once; however, the more complicated designs were cut one at a time.**
 - **Knives, gouges, punches and needles were used for these designs.**
 - **The cutout was then pasted onto the material (silk in old China) and embroidered over.**

- **Traditional subjects were flowers, mythical and real animals, characters which meant "Good Luck" or "Happiness" or Scenes from a folk tale.**
- **Modern motifs include subjects of social significance-minority people, health care and education as well as the more traditional themes.**
- **The process has remained the same throughout the centuries and people in China today continue to enjoy colorful paper cuts.**

Making a Paper Cut:

There are two ways to cut your design:

1. **One is to cut with the paper folded in half; this will give you a symmetrical pattern. Two examples of designs cut using this method are found below.**
2. **The other method is to draw a rough sketch of the figure on the back of the paper and to then cut it out without any folding. An example of this is below also.**

Important: every design must be cut in one unbroken, continuous piece.

Instructions:

- 1. Look at the patterns below or at reference books and examples on the Web get ideas for a theme. (*Try Google Images: “Paper Cutting” for examples of beautiful images.*)**
- 2. Decide which method you will use (the paper folded or unfolded).**
- 3. Draw a simple design on the back of your paper.**
- 4. Cut out your design.**

Further Ideas:

- Paste different colored tissue behind the open parts of your design. For example, if you had a cat you might put green tissue behind the eye openings.**
- Use your design as a embroidery pattern.**
- Use your paper cut as a guide for a woodblock print.**
- Display your class's design on the windows of your school room.**



A pair of fish: symbol of conjugal felicity (happiness in marriage).

**It is an example of a design cut by folding the paper in half lengthwise.
This design was also used as an embroidery pattern.**



Flower



Scepter: Contentment, Prosperity

This is an example of a design cut by folding paper in half top to bottom.

¹ Reference:

Carter, Michael. *Crafts of China*. Doubleday and Co, Inc. N.Y.1977

Hawley, W. M. *Chinese Folk Designs*. Dover Publications, Inc. N.Y.1971

Menten, Theodore. *Chinese Cut-Paper Designs*. Dover Publications, Inc. N.Y. 1975.

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