

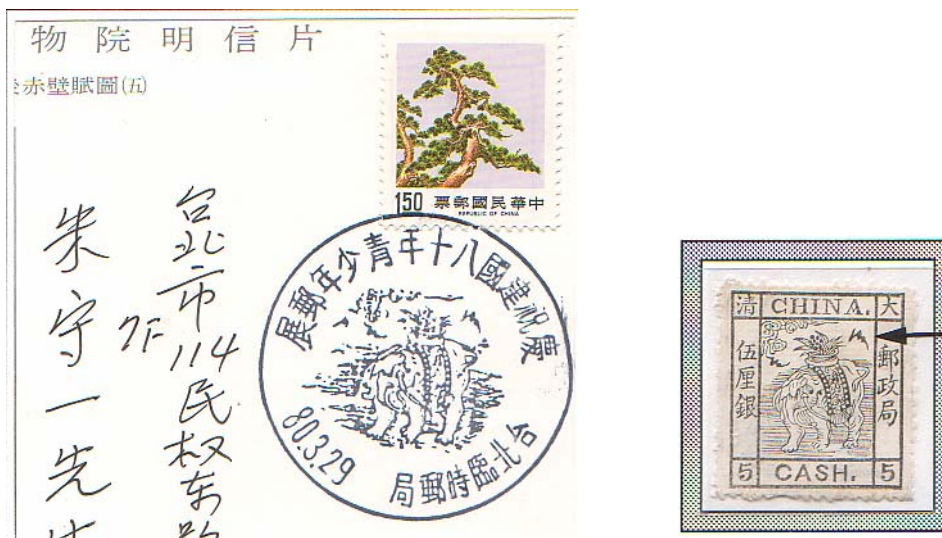
The Chinese Bat

Gazing at bats in flight is both a pleasant pastime and a traditional Chinese motif, expressive of the auspicious term "eager expectations of happiness."



1992 Booklet and stamp 2836 (Five Blessing Upon the House)

Older residents of China cherish their childhood memories of summer evenings when neighbors would sit beneath a tree in their common courtyard, enjoying a cool breeze while chatting and drinking tea. Their children ran around chasing bats that swooped and flitted overhead, some of the more mischievous flinging their shoes at the bats in hopes of catching one. The bats actually seemed to enjoy this game of catch-me-if-you-can.



Cancel with bats around the elephant and China essay for their first stamp

However, the bat has also been a controversial creature for centuries, often shrouded in mystery. One theory about how bats came into being caused them ill fame for centuries. It was believed that they evolved from rats after they ate salt or oil.

Cao Zhi, a noted poet of the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280), wrote a poem entitled "About the Bat", which reads: "The bat is born of an evil spirit, shunned by beasts and rejected by birds." In one of Aesop's Fables, during a war between birds and beasts the bat is portrayed as "two-faced," ready to ally itself with whichever of the two species became the victor. When the two entities eventually reached a peace agreement, the bat was despised and rejected by both, causing it to hide by day, coming out only at night.

Later, the bat was used as "medicine" to cure fear-induced epilepsy in children. According to ancient medical books, a 1,000-year-old bat is snow-white, and drinking a solution made with it in it, after it had been dried and ground into fine powder, may lengthen ones life span up to 10,000 years. Thankfully, there has never been confirmation anywhere in the world that longevity or any miracle cure can be obtained by eating a bat, or bats would long-since have become extinct.



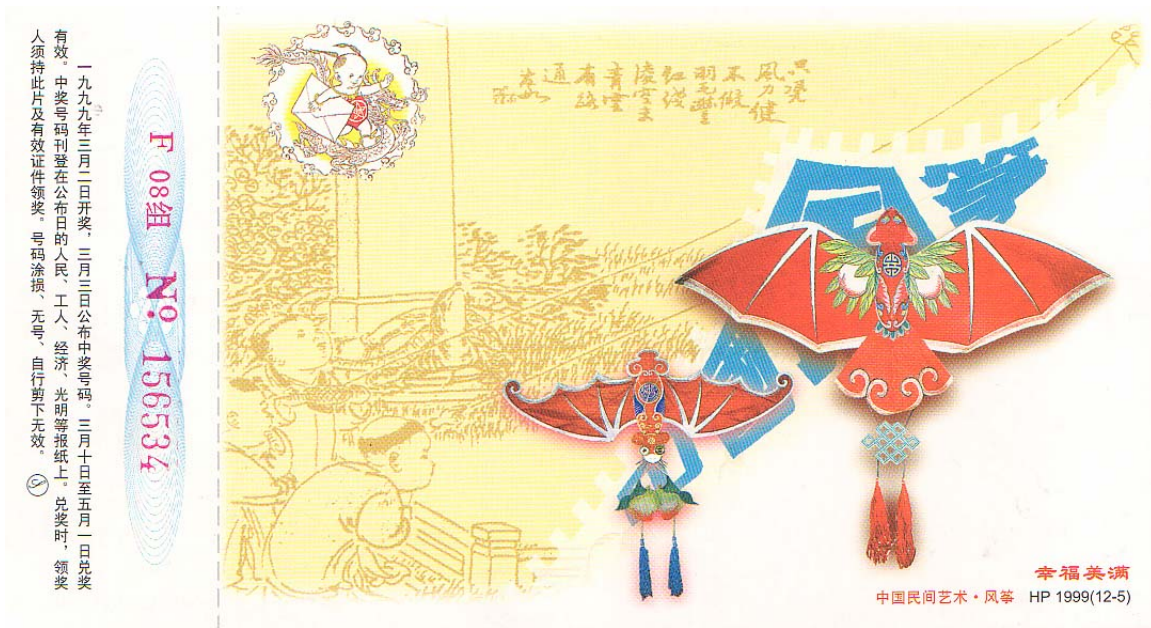
PRC Scott 1604 Bat Kite



Scott 2848 Bat Vase

It was not until modern times it became common knowledge that the bat is neither a magic vampire nor knightly, but merely a mammal that can fly. Its echolocation, rather than its eyes, help it to navigate safely at night, and gave credence to the phrase "blind as a bat".

After thousands of years of being detested and feared by humankind, a few centuries ago bats experienced a positive change in overall attitude towards them. The Chinese word for bat is *bianfu* -- *fu* being a homophone for happiness. By the middle and late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911,) favorable bat motifs had had become widely used on architecture, textiles, embroidery, paintings, chinaware, furniture, and brick and stone carvings as symbols of happiness. Thanks to artistic license, they were generally given a far more attractive appearance than is true in real life.



Chinese Postal Stationery – Lottery Card with Good Luck Bats

According to Chinese folklore, Zhong Kui is the god that drives away evil, captures demons, and brings good luck and happiness. Zhong Kui led by a bat is a traditional Chinese New Year picture. In such pictures, he wields a sword as a little bat flies above him, thus indicating the full extent of his powers. Another design featuring red bats is called "limitless happiness," as in the color red in Chinese is homonymous with the character hong, which means great and grand.



Scott 16



Scott 22

The five-bat Wu Fu symbol appears frequently in Chinese literature and art. The word for bat and the word for good luck have the same sound, fu. Wu is the word for five, and each of the five bats in the symbol represents one of the five elements - earth, air, fire water, metal - as well as one of the five happinesses - health, wealth, long life, good luck, tranquility. These stylized bats are commonly depicted in red, the color of joy, and surround a prosperity symbol. The common depiction of an upside-down bat symbolizes that good fortune has arrived.

The Chinese enjoy puns and word juggling in literary works, artistic pictures and even vanity license plates. The number "8", as part of a license plate, means "making a fortune". There are over a hundred patterns like this in China created by virtue of homophony and imagination.



Scott Booklet 2930b with bat

There are a great variety of ancient bat designs and patterns that are still popular today. These days' bats thankfully have much "fairer press," because we now realize mankind shares the earth with many forms of life, and to treat them in a considerate manner is bound to bring blessings upon all.