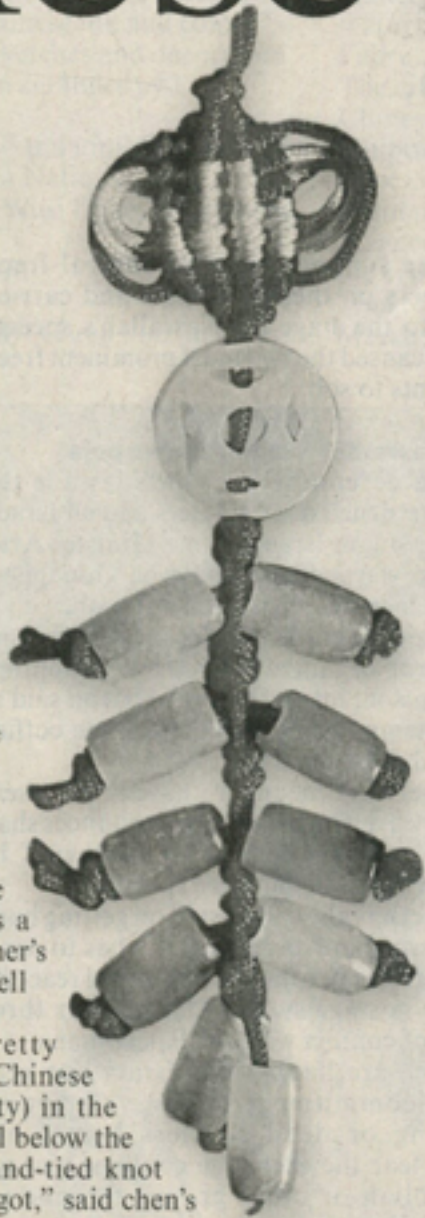


# Chinese Knots back in chic

The traditional craft of tying Chinese Knots, with a history of over 1,000 years, is making a strong comeback and delivers blessings of happiness, prosperity, love and good luck to Chinese people, as Yu Nan discovers



It took three evenings for 21-year-old college student Chen Xing to make a delicate red Chinese Knot (zhongguojie) as a special gift for her mother's 50th birthday, which fell during Spring Festival.

Incorporating a pretty circle, a figure of the Chinese word "shou" (longevity) in the middle and a long tassel below the circle, the beautiful hand-tied knot is "the best gift I ever got," said Chen's mother, Wang Haijing.

Wang, a Chinese Knot lover, hangs a new one in her house every Spring Festival.

"It's an auspicious symbol for a new year," Wang explained.

A traditional craft dating back at least 1,000 years, the Chinese Knot has regained wide popularity in urban areas in recent years.

Like Christmas trees and wreaths in the West, the Chinese Knot is the most favoured ornament for most Chinese families during the Lunar New Year celebration.

Almost every shopping mall in Beijing has a special counter to sell Chinese Knots of various sizes, shapes and colours.

The two largest Chinese Knots for 2004 are on display at the Zhejiang Exhibition Hall in Hangzhou, in East China's Zhejiang Province. It took about 30 craft people from across the country a full month to complete the knots. Each has a radius of 18 metres and weighs 630 kilograms.

No matter how different the knots are, the messages the ancient craft delivers are similar, offering blessings of happiness, prosperity, love and good luck.

#### Long history

The long history of the Chinese Knot dates back to ancient times when no characters existed, said Xiong Dadi, a noted designer of the Chinese Knot.

According to Xiong, people first used knots for fastening, wrapping, hunting and fishing.

The knot was developed into an art form during the Tang (AD 618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties and fully flourished in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

The precious folk art experienced a decline in the last century, but since the late 1990s, along with embroidery and tangzhuang (traditional Chinese dress), the Chinese Knot has made a strong comeback, Xiong said.

Now recognized as more than a fashionable ornament for festivals, the art element of the Chinese Knot has been widely used in necklaces, bracelets, hair ornaments, classic coat buttons and even hangings for cars or mobile phones, added Xiong.

#### Diverse choices

The major characteristic of the Chinese Knot is that every one is tied from a single thread (at least one-metre long) but looks the same from both the front and back, Xiong said.

A typical Chinese Knot is red, but it can also be gold, green, blue or black, she added.

Flower, bird, dragon, phoenix, fish and shoes are the most common patterns used in the Chinese Knot.

"The most welcomed patterns are those in fish and shoes," said a seller in Cuiwei Plaza in downtown Beijing. "Fish demonstrates good luck in fortune and the knot made in a shoe figure is a wish to exorcise evil spirits."

The seller, who declined to give her name, said she sold at least 200 Chinese Knots per day during the week before Spring Festival.

People are drawn to traditional Chinese Knots for different reasons, explained Xiong.

"The Chinese word jie (knot) is similar to ji (auspicious), the latter bears numerous positive meanings, such as blessing, longevity, fortune, good health and safety."

#### Make one yourself

Xiong Dadi, in her 40s, said she was keen on weaving and knotting since childhood. She started to study the techniques and history of the Chinese Knot in the early 1980s.

She has published several books introducing the Chinese Knot and she was also invited to make self-help videos on the topic.

"With no exaggeration, 90 per cent of professional craftsmen nowadays who take the Chinese Knot as a career were once my students," she said.

Xiong said although some Chinese Knots look complicated and elaborate in pattern and design, the techniques to make them are fixed—they are just a combination of less than 20 basic techniques of tying them.

But new materials are being used in making the knots more decorative, such as wood and soft pottery.

Chen, the college student, said: "It's very interesting and challenging to make a Chinese Knot and when you finish it, the beauty it bears makes all the hard work worthwhile."

Without reading books or watching videos, Chen learned the complicated technique via the Internet.

"I have two favourite websites, www.myknots.com and www.chineseknot.com," she said. "I found good samples and pictures there and I could solve the problems I encountered as well as get new ideas for design on the bulletin boards with hundreds of other Chinese Knot fans."



The largest cement decoration in the shape of Chinese Knot in East China's Zhejiang Province can be found in the city of Taizhou.

WANG HUABIN



A citizen from the city of Linfen in Shanxi Province stands at the Pingyang Square and displays a 8.1-metre-tall and 1.5-metre-wide Chinese Knot that he crafted.

ZHANG