

JIǎNZHǐ

The earliest evidence of ‘paper cuttings’ (剪紙 *jiǎnzhǐ*) of Chinese tradition (pierced circular motifs, and silhouettes of horses and monkeys) found in the 新疆 *Xīnjiāng* region, dates back to the 南北 *Nánběi* period (317-589), where they were used in funerary rites as substitutes for ceremonial offerings.

In fact, as early as the 汉 *Hàn* period (206 BCE-220 CE), it is attested the custom of women cutting coloured papers with floral and bird motifs to adorn their hairstyles and to paste them onto ancestral altars during ritual ceremonies.

During the 隋 *Suí* (581-618), 唐 *Táng* (618-906), and 宋 *Sòng* (960-1279) periods, the use of paper cuttings spread for decorative purposes, in the layered workmanship of lacquer objects and in the polychrome or overlaid decoration of ceramics, *celadon*, and porcelain.

From this point, ‘paper cuttings’ gradually evolved into an independent decorative art, with themes and characteristics belonging to the popular imagination: ‘good-luck dolls’, ‘figures to recall the soul’, ‘to stop demons’, ‘to ward off illness’, ‘children of the five roads’, ‘paper men’...

Widely used to decorate both the interiors and exteriors of houses, according to regional styles and traditions, they were employed on the occasion of significant events in daily life, to dispel negative influences, as auspicious symbols for healing and prosperity, to protect the home and family, as wishes for fertility, to avert natural calamities such as droughts and torrential rains, to encourage a good harvest, and, in particular, during the celebrations of the Spring Festival (春節 *Chūnjié*).