

SNAPSHOTS



CHINESE KITE MAKER KEEPS A LOST ART FLYING

KITE FLYING has a history of more than 2,000 years in China. PHOTOS BY LIU BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Craftsman's expertise has turned traditional masterpieces into airborne works

By **YUAN QUAN**
For *China Daily*

Liu Bin, who owns a small kite shop in downtown Beijing, said his kites, all of which sell for more than 200 yuan (\$29), or about 10 times the price of his online rivals, deserve their higher price tags.

"A kite is more than a flying toy. It is made with rich Chinese culture and a craftsman's wisdom," he said, adding that it takes about 20 days to make one kite.

Most of the kites in his shop, in shapes including swallows, goldfish, dragons, the Monkey King and Peking Opera masks, are handmade. Some are tiny enough to fit in the palm of your hand, others cover an entire wall.

Kite flying, which has a history of more than 2,000 years in China, is thought to have begun as a means of passing military information in war. It gradually became a popular pastime in springtime.

Liu's great-grandfather was a craftsman in the Forbidden City in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and was in charge of making lanterns, fans and kites. Liu recalls the day his grandfather flew a 130-meter-long dragon kite train in Tian'anmen Square in 1982. Liu, then 5, watched as people thronged to the square, cheering the flying "dragon".

Liu assembled his first kite at the age of 10. His parents found he had a flair for designing and crafting kites, so they decided to cultivate him as an inheritor.

"I want to elevate the kite from a toy to a work of art," he said.



THE KITE-MAKING process involves pasting the frame on the painted sail, trimming away the excess and gluing the margin to the frame. PHOTOS BY ZHAO JIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



THIS CYCLIST KITE can twirl around with the wind when it flies, as if it were a man riding a bicycle in the air.



LIU BIN'S shop, San Shi Zhai Kites in Di'anmen Street in downtown Beijing.