

Kite History

From China to the Rest of the World



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Kites were invented in China. They first appeared 2,000 years ago. China had all the right tools to make a kite. It had silk. Silk is very strong and very light. It had paper. It had bamboo. Bamboo is a grass. It grows very tall and gets very hard. It is very light and hollow inside. It is like wood. You can use all of these materials to make a kite. You can use silk string for kite string. You can use silk fabric to make the kite's body. You can also use paper. You can use bamboo to make the kite's frame.

Kites were popular in China. People used them for many things. They flew kites for fun. They also used them for serious purposes.

From China to the Rest of the World

In 549, the Chinese army used a paper kite to send a message. This message helped them during a rescue mission. Chinese armies began to use kites more often. They used them to measure distances. They used them to send messages.

Soon, other countries learned about kites from China. India was the first. There, kite flying became a sport. It is known as kite fighting. Kite fighting spread to nearby countries. These include Pakistan and Afghanistan.



A shop for fighter kites in India

In kite fighting, players use special string. It is called manja. It is coated with powdered glass. Manja is very sharp. It can cut your skin. You have to wear gloves when you touch it. Many kite fighters compete at one time. They all fly their kites in the sky. To win, you try to cut the other players' kites from the sky. You use your sharp manja to cut their strings. First, you wrap your string around another player's string. Then you pull. Pulling cuts through the other kite's string. This sets the other kite free. Kite runners run to catch the freed kites. The last player with a kite in the air is the winner.

From China to the Rest of the World

Kites came to Europe in the 1500s. They became a popular toy for children. Kite popularity spread further west. Adults began to use kites for scientific experiments. In 1749, Alexander Wilson attached a thermometer to a kite. He used it to measure the air temperature at 3,000 feet. Benjamin Franklin flew a kite during a lightning storm to prove that lightning was made of electricity. The Wright brothers used kites to do research when they were developing the first airplane. In the 1950s, NASA began to use kites to help with space exploration.



**Stunt kite, controlled
by two strings**

Today, kites come in all shapes and sizes. Some have one string. Some have two or more strings. Some have tails. Some are box-shaped. Some kites became so big that they can be used to fly people—these are called hang gliders. Scientists continue to use kites to test weather and climate patterns. Children continue to enjoy flying kites for fun

all over the world. Major kite-fighting festivals are still fought across India and its neighbors. But some of the most beautiful kites can only be found in China—where kite flying first began.