

# Kite History

## From China to the Rest of the World



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Kites were invented in China about 2,000 years ago. China had all the right materials for building a kite. It had silk. Silk is a fabric. It is made from the thread of the silkworm. Silk is very strong and very light. China also made paper from wood pulp. Bamboo grows in China. 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 became popular all over China. People began to use kites for many things. People flew kites for fun. They also used them for serious purposes.

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The first recorded use of a kite in China was in the year 549. A paper kite was used to send a message during a rescue mission. Later, armies used kites for different reasons. They used them to measure distances. They used them to send messages.

As kites became popular in China, their popularity spread to other countries. The joy of kite flying spread to India. There, kite flying became a sport. It is known as kite fighting. Kite fighting spread to nearby countries. These include Pakistan and Afghanistan.



By Janraj11 via Wikimedia Commons

**A shop for fighter kites in India**

In kite fighting, players use special string called manja. The string is covered in glue. Then it is coated with powdered glass. Manja is very sharp. You have to use special gloves to protect your fingers from it. Usually, many kite fighters play at one time. They all fly their kites in the sky. Each player tries to cut the other players' kites from the sky. To cut another player's kite loose, you need to wrap your kite's string around your opponent's and pull. By pulling, you use your sharp string to cut through that of your opponent's. This sets his or her kite free. The last player with a kite in the air is the winner. As each kite is cut loose, kite runners run to catch them.

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By the 1500s, kites appeared in Europe. 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 could 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.