



Lucky Bat

There is a fascination with the bat in folklore from both East and West, but while Western folklore associates the bat with vampires, crypts and Halloween, Asian mythology makes no such fearful associations.

The Chinese term for bat is *fu i*, which translates as “embracing wings”. However, *fu* is a homonym for “luck”, so the phrase *fu i* can also be interpreted as “embracing luck”. In that context, the bat becomes an emblem of happiness and good fortune. With such an association, the bat has been a popular Chinese decorative motif widely used throughout history, but it is frequently so ornate that the design may be mistaken for a butterfly.

Throughout much of Asian history, the power and dominance of the Chinese empire was so pervasive that many of China’s neighbors adopted elements of Chinese culture in much the same way that Roman culture had an influence throughout Europe. Reflecting one small part of that process, the use of the bat as a luck symbol spread into the artistic vocabulary of neighboring countries, particularly Korea, parts of Southeast Asia and to a lesser extent Japan.

Designs are often constructed using multiple bats to form a larger motif. Using a pair of bat images within a design implies doubling of happiness and good fortune, while another popular practice uses a cluster of five bat images, each in a different color to denotes five blessings: *Good Luck, Prosperity, Longevity, Happiness and Wealth*.