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CHINESE KITEMAKING AT THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE

by Dr. Elmer Friedman

Friends and relatives who visited the Chinese Craft Exhibit at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia raved about it. One of the features at the show was a kite making demonstration, so my wife Lillian and I finally decided to visit this unique show.

The drive from Dresher, PA to Ben Franklin Parkway and the Franklin Institute was uneventful. There were no break-ins or emergency bathrooms stops; we were luckier than some others who journeyed to Washington D.C. a little while ago (*ed. note: see Mike Dallmer's article about his Smithsonian odyssey in WindWriters #15*). Of course, we had to mortgage the house to pay for the parking fee!

We arrived on the scene eager and as ready to fly as a bowed Eddy. We observed how paper was made from bamboo pulp, woodcut printmaking, paper cutting designs, egg painting, ceramics and other ancient crafts and arts demonstrated at the exhibit. We breezed through it all, deciding to return to the more interesting activities when we were finished with our original quest: a visit to the kitemaker.

A beautiful oriental kite tail, 100-feet in length, attracted us to the kitemaking area. We watched as a young

man, working at a small desk, delicately colored pieces of a dragon tail to be added to the larger work. He used light, pastel water colors and silk as his media. Spars and spines were all bamboo, which he expertly split, shaved and shaped using a special blade. Joints were bound by 30# twine and glued. The cut edges of the fabric were also glued to prevent fraying.

The kite maker's name was Wang Ning and his experience and apprenticeship came out of the School of Ha in Beijing, mainland China. I started to speak to him and discovered that he couldn't understand a word I said. He hastily called an older Chinese man to assist him. The man introduced himself as Steve, "the interrupter." I noticed his grin and the tongue in the cheek and the sparkle in the eye, so we both enjoyed a light moment from his dry humor.

Steve explained that the bamboo strips needed to be soaked before they would be ready to careful shaping, forming the "bones" of the kite. He showed us a small bird form, completely shaped and bound with single bamboo strips intricately meshed with impressive results. He then pointed out several other examples of oriental kites. There were dragonflies, butterflies, fish, hawks, birds and peacocks, all exquisitely colored with beautiful tomes. Much of the artistry lay in the mixing of watercolors and the array of different brushes being utilized. He pointed over-



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